

Windows of opportunity for UN reform: historical insights for the next Secretary-General

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The year 2015 was a headline moment for multilateral norms, with the adoption of the Paris climate change agreement and of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹ It was also notable for a different multilateral genre—UN reform proposals: comprehensive ones from outsiders, the Independent Commission on Multilateralism and the Commission on Global Security, Justice and Governance;² and three blockbuster insider reviews of UN peace operations and architecture, the High-level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations (HIPPO), the Advisory Group of Experts on Peacebuilding (AGE) and the UN Global Study on Women, Peace and Security.³ The bottom line was clear: dramatic changes are imperative both at headquarters and in the field if the world organization is to respond to the twenty-first century's complex threats.

The stage was set for 2016, when for only the second time—the first was in 1996—the campaigns for the US presidency and the UN secretary-generalship ran in parallel. Both were protracted. The UN version produced a slate of 13 nominees—seven of whom were women, against a maximum of three in the previous seven decades—who pursued their respective campaigns in person and through lobbyists. Member states, nudged along by the '1-for-7-billion' civil society campaign, made the selection process somewhat open and transparent, although only an inveterate optimist would have hoped entirely to exclude back-room politics in favour of consideration of qualifications for the UN's top job.⁴

In the event, the front-runner for several months and winner of five straw polls in the usually divided Security Council, António Guterres, secured the Council's recommendation and was selected by acclamation in the General Assembly early in October 2016 as the ninth secretary-general (SG). Having previously served for two

¹ *Paris agreement on climate change*, UN document FCCC/CP/2015/L.9, 12 Dec. 2015; *Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development*, General Assembly Resolution 70/1, 25 Sept. 2015.

² Details available at <https://www.icm2016.org/> and at <http://www.stimson.org/content/report-commission-global-security-justice-governance>. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 18 Nov. 2016.)

³ *Report of the High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, UN document A/70/95-S/2015/446, 17 June 2015; Advisory Group of Experts for the 2015 Review of United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture, *The challenge of sustaining peace*, 29 June 2015, http://www.un.org/pga/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/07/300615_The-Challenge-of-Sustaining-Peace.pdf; UN Women, *Preventing conflict, transforming justice, securing the peace* (New York, 2015).

⁴ United Nations Association-United Kingdom (UNA-UK), 'Make the UN great again', special issue of *New World*, 2-2016, <https://www.una.org.uk/magazine>.

successful terms as prime minister of Portugal and as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, he is the first socialist former head of government to hold the top UN post. Although he was not the favourite of the *Wall Street Journal*,⁵ his distinguished government and UN management experience, together with his evident energy and diplomatic finesse, made him the best of the declared candidates for the job.

The choice of Guterres overcame both lowest-common-denominator dynamics and political correctness: considerations of geography suggested that it was the turn of an east European to fill the top job, of gender that after seven decades it was time for a woman to lead. The General Assembly gathered for two-hour hearings with each candidate from April to September 2016, along with an open public event for all of them; these governmental gatherings were complemented by civil society debates in New York and London.⁶ Curricula vitae were available online for public scrutiny. Candidates were asked to circulate 'vision' statements, some of which contained thoughts about how to reshape the unwieldy UN family and make more of its 80,000 international civil servants and 120,000 soldiers and civilians in peace operations.

In short, the selection process no longer resembled a papal conclave. The equivalent of white smoke from the Vatican was replaced by General Assembly hearings and public conversations in which Guterres and other candidates participated. Arguably, he would not have emerged and been elected under the old rules; and the outgoing Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon would not have been elected under the new ones. Perhaps these welcome, albeit modest, steps into a more merit-based and transparent process will have knock-on effects for other senior UN positions and indeed for other intergovernmental organizations, including the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, whose top jobs have long been reserved for US and European nationals.

What will change beginning on 1 January 2017? If the immediate past is any harbinger, not much; if older pasts are considered, much could happen in the initial months of the Guterres administration. The world's most visible advocate and manager of an essential institution for today's world order is more crucial than many observers believe. Aside from his quiet diplomacy on climate change, however, outgoing Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is a model of how *not* to do the job. Ban's jaw-dropping self-description as 'invisible' coincided with *The Economist's* withering evaluation: 'the dullest—and among the worst'.⁷

When the long campaign is over and the champagne flutes are back in their boxes, Guterres is likely to benefit from a residue of member states' goodwill during a 'honeymoon' period when there will be opportunity for significant change.⁸ The length of this honeymoon varies; former Deputy Secretary-General

⁵ 'Who will run the UN?', *Wall Street Journal*, 23 Sept. 2016.

⁶ See e.g. 'Tickets selling fast for London debate with UN Secretary-General candidates', *UNA-UK*, 29 April 2016, <https://www.una.org.uk/news/tickets-selling-fast-london-debate-un-secretary-general-candidates>; 'Selecting the next Secretary-General: UN to hold townhall meeting with candidates', UN News Centre, 12 July 2016, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=54443#.WBPhwZMrLjE>.

⁷ 'Master, mistress or mouse?', *The Economist*, 21 May 2016.

⁸ This conclusion appeared in abbreviated form in Thomas G. Weiss and Tatiana Carayannis, 'January 1, 2017: let the honeymoon for UN reform begin', *IPI Global Observatory*, 19 Sept. 2016, <https://theglobalobservatory>.

Mark Malloch-Brown argues that the ‘first 100 days must lay the seeds for the 117 months that are likely to follow’.⁹ This is one of two such moments, the other being the end of the mandate, when concerns with legacy often foster initiatives.

Many signature reforms by SGs have occurred at the outset of new mandates. The opening months provide the chance to embark in new directions, to put a stake in the ground. Those in senior leadership positions (that is, under- and assistant secretaries-general, USGs and ASGs) customarily tender resignations, providing the chance to make rapid adjustments—whether through new blood, reappointments or elimination of posts altogether. That being said, Ban failed to seize that opportunity to the same extent as his two immediate predecessors, who instituted sweeping staffing and management reforms in 1992, 1997 and 2002. Not as photogenic and charismatic a leader as Kofi Annan nor as abrasive as Boutros Boutros-Ghali, nonetheless Guterres should articulate a reform vision as well as aim to emulate them and Dag Hammarskjöld—usually at the top of everyone’s list of secretaries-general who made a difference.

The position remains what the first secretary-general Trygve Lie glumly called ‘the most impossible job in the world’, but the post-Cold War era has provided SGs with more possibilities for institutional housecleaning. And history provides lessons for 2016’s successful candidate.¹⁰ Many recall Hammarskjöld’s first year as an unparalleled struggle for institutional reform,¹¹ but Cold War SGs were less able quickly to shake up the world organization’s machinery than their post-Cold War counterparts.

How the SG opts to use the first window of opportunity is as important as the window’s being open. As history shows, not all honeymoon reforms are the right ones at the right time. Even the best conceived, if implemented at the wrong moment, can overwhelm the system. Calls for drastic revamping of the UN’s architecture, of course, are hardly new. In the late 1960s, for instance, Robert Jackson was tasked to imagine restructuring the development system, but this UN mover-and-shaker gave up on what he dubbed a ‘pre-historic monster’.¹² Countless unsuccessful attempts have been tabled since that 1969 *Capacity study*, which Jackson’s collaborator and former USG Margaret Joan Anstee described as ‘the “Bible” of UN reform because its precepts are lauded by everyone but put into effect by no one’.¹³

In looking to the next five years, it is illuminating to examine how the last four UN secretaries-general pursued institutional change, and when they were effective

org/2016/09/united-nations-secretary-general-hippo-ban-ki-moon/.

⁹ Mark Malloch-Brown, ‘The Secretary-General’s first 100 days’, *New World*, no. 2, 2016, p. 8.

¹⁰ Useful sources are: Simon Chesterman, ed., *Secretary or general? The UN secretary-general in world politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Leon Gordenker, *The UN secretary-general and secretariat*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2010); Thant Myint-U and Amy Scott, *The UN Secretariat: a brief history (1945–2006)* (New York: International Peace Academy, 2007). Excerpts of interviews with secretaries-general are in Thomas G. Weiss, Tatiana Carayannis, Louis Emmerij and Richard Jolly, *UN voices: the struggle for development and social justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

¹¹ Brian Urquhart, *Hammarskjöld* (New York: Norton, 1994).

¹² UN, *A capacity study of the United Nations development system*, UN document DP/5 (Geneva, 1969), p. iii.

¹³ Margaret Joan Anstee, *UN reform: top of the agenda for the next SG?*, Future United Nations Development System, briefing no. 24, Dec. 2014, p. 4, <http://www.futureun.org/en/Publications-Surveys/Article?newsid=60>.

in altering structures and staffing. The brief history presented below indicates that the chances for conceiving significant change and starting out on the arduous path towards implementation are enhanced in the beginning and twilight of an SG's mandate. The former offers the advantage of soaring expectations; the latter of the scramble to complete unfinished business and ensure a legacy. This article begins with a chronological overview of efforts to implement structural modifications made by the last four UN heads—with relatively more attention given to the latter two because many of their proposals remain under consideration—before offering our conclusions for 2017 and beyond.

Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, January 1982 to December 1991

The fifth secretary-general was the last candidate to be appointed to the office who did not actively campaign; he believed that the 'first requirement of a successful incumbency' was not to incur debts with member states, which are often paid in the form of promised plum appointments.¹⁴ This tactic undoubtedly proved advantageous at the helm during his second mandate, a most remarkable half-decade in UN history, which entailed navigating the political shoals during the thawing and end of the Cold War. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, a former Peruvian diplomat and USG, became the first Latin American to occupy the top floor at the UN's headquarters in Manhattan. His election followed China's insistence on someone from the global South and multiple vetoes of a third term for Kurt Waldheim.

Financial pressures greeted his first term, but predominated in the second. With both Moscow's and Washington's support for his re-election,¹⁵ in the spring of the first year of his second mandate Pérez de Cuéllar took advantage of the General Assembly's December 1985 call in Resolution 40/237 for a 'review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial function of the United Nations'. He mobilized a knowledgeable group of experts, the 'Group of 18', and suggested a concentration on budget reform, staff reductions and scale of assessments for obligatory contributions.¹⁶

In the late autumn of that year, the symbolically important undertaking began with 'the 'Halloween Massacre': the dismissal of eleven USGs and ASGs.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the long-felt need for an independent analytical capacity within the Secretariat prompted Pérez de Cuéllar to establish the Office for Research and the Collection of Information (ORCI), a semi-clandestine effort to support the Secretary-General's peacemaking efforts by drawing good people into a talent pool. However, member states feared an autonomous 'intelligence-gathering' capacity, and parts of the UN bureaucracy dragged their collective feet. While a modest

¹⁴ Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for peace: a Secretary-General's memoir* (New York: St Martin's, 1997), p. 26.

¹⁵ Cameron Hume, *The United Nations, Iran, and Iraq: how peacemaking changed* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

¹⁶ *Report of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to review the efficiency of the administrative and financial function of the United Nations*, UN document A/41/49, Aug. 1986.

¹⁷ Elaine Sciolino, 'UN cutting back top staff positions', *New York Times*, 4 Nov. 1986, <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/11/04/world/un-cutting-back-top-staff-positions.html>.

early-warning capacity developed, ORCI was marginalized and consigned essentially to producing useful background notes and draft speeches; it disappeared with a stroke of the next SG's pen.

In terms of specialization, a further delineation of responsibilities placed human rights in Geneva and parts of social policy in Vienna. But the essence of the Group of 18's recommendations was buried in a special commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).¹⁸ Painful shortcomings remained in the development system and were publicly lamented by Pérez de Cuéllar in his annual reports on the work of the organization.¹⁹ He continued the post of director-general for development and international economic cooperation—above agency heads and USGs—that began under his predecessor, but without the authority or the results originally intended.

His second term coincided with Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika (restructuring), glasnost (openness), and *novoye mneniya* (new thinking) in the Soviet Union, which facilitated a burst of UN activity. With the superpowers no longer at loggerheads, many observers spoke of a 'renaissance' as the Security Council finally began to function as its founders had hoped. In Gorbachev's final days in office as President of the USSR, the Soviet Union imploded. With no sign of political resistance and with the assistance of US permanent representative Thomas Pickering, Pérez de Cuéllar shepherded Russia into the council seat specifically assigned to the Soviet Union in the UN Charter. On his last day in office, he witnessed the signing of the ceasefire agreement for El Salvador, having presided over the unprecedented expansion of peacekeeping and mediation in Iran–Iraq, Afghanistan, Namibia, Kampuchea and Central America, in addition to the Chapter VII operation in the Persian Gulf War, the first since Korea in the 1950s.

In his final report on the work of the organization, Pérez de Cuéllar referred back to his pleas five years earlier for the Security Council to find ways of working collectively to address issues that remained agenda items for years. With satisfaction, he noted that a 'remarkable coordination has developed between the work of the Security Council and the Secretary-General'. The adoption of a plan for the termination of the war between Iran and Iraq, the conclusion of the Geneva Accords followed by the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, and the supervision of Namibian independence were among the fruits of the UN's rejuvenation. Moreover, he noted that more operations had been launched between 1988 and 1991 than in the previous four decades, involving a second generation of peacekeepers with mandates and operational capabilities that were unthinkable for their traditional predecessors. And 'all these operations, in one way or another, relate to the implementation of plans negotiated in detail with the parties concerned with the active participation of the Secretary-General'.²⁰

The SG's role had assumed increasing importance and yielded verifiable results—but the UN's finances were massively in deficit: by the end of Pérez

¹⁸ UN, press release, ECOSOC/4964, March 1987.

¹⁹ See e.g. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, *Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the organization*, UN document A/42/1, 9 Sept. 1987.

²⁰ Reproduced in Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, *Anarchy or order: annual reports 1982–1991* (New York: UN, 1991), p. 329.

de Cuéllar's second mandate, to the tune of over a billion dollars, half from the assessed and half from the peacekeeping budgets. Meanwhile, in November 1991, a spokesman for the union reported that staff morale was at its 'lowest ebb ever'.²¹ The US Ambassador, Vernon Walters, was both unkind and laudatory—because self-effacement was not necessarily a bad thing for relations with the major powers—in commenting that the meek Pérez de Cuéllar 'couldn't make a splash if he fell out of a boat'.²² The world organization was ready for a changing of the guard and a more visible head.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali, January 1992 to December 1996

The sixth secretary-general was an Egyptian, not only the first SG from Africa but also the first to campaign openly for the UN's top job. Boutros Boutros-Ghali made the transition from the deputy foreign minister's office in Cairo to the 38th floor on First Avenue. He was the first SG since Lie to assume his mandate in a mood of multilateral optimism, which by the end of his term had evaporated completely. And like Lie (who incurred Moscow's anger and veto over Korea), Boutros-Ghali was denied a second term after an unsuccessful battle to overcome Washington's anger and veto.²³

His initial month in office coincided with the first ever Security Council summit of heads of state and government. Although delegates showered praise on his predecessor's low-key approach, Boutros-Ghali immediately set out to test the limits of setting an ambitious agenda. By June 1992 a seasoned team of insiders had helped craft *An agenda for peace*, a blueprint for the UN's role in preventing, managing and ending armed conflicts in the post-Cold War era.²⁴ As a former professor of law, Boutros-Ghali's temperament predisposed him to push the world body's intellectual role, and this document in many ways still defines the parameters of operational efforts in peacekeeping, peacemaking, peacebuilding and peace enforcement.

The report led to regular efforts to ensure better communications between the Secretariat and troop contributors, along with investments in New York headquarters for better planning and coordination with those working in the field. After the bloom was off the rose—following UN failures in a variety of countries from Somalia and Rwanda to the Balkans—the 1995 *Supplement to 'An agenda for peace'* articulated a retreat from the SG's bullish earlier stance. Boutros-Ghali also issued other agendas on development and democratization, but none had the impact of his 1992 treatise, published within six months of taking office.²⁵

²¹ Ron Hewson, head of the Staff Committee, *Secretariat News*, Nov. 1991, quoted by Rodolfo A. Windhausen, 'Perez de Cuellar's legacy at the UN', *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 Jan. 1992, <http://m.csmonitor.com/1992/0107/071991.html>.

²² Quoted by James Traub, 'The Secretary-General's political space', in Chesterman, ed., *Secretary or general?*, p. 189.

²³ Craig Turner, 'US vetoes 2nd term for Boutros-Ghali', *Los Angeles Times*, 20 Nov. 1996, http://articles.latimes.com/1996-11-20/news/mn-976_1_boutros-ghali.

²⁴ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An agenda for peace* (New York: UN, 1992).

²⁵ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Supplement to 'An agenda for peace'* (New York: UN, 1995); *An agenda for development* (New York: UN, 1994); *An agenda for democratization* (New York: UN, 1996).

Beginning with radical change and earning the nickname of ‘pharaoh’ for his autocratic style, Boutros-Ghali indicated in an interview that ‘the way to deal with bureaucrats is stealth and sudden violence’.²⁶ He began with a ready-made plan for administrative reforms in the socio-economic domain, which included streamlining and consolidating the Secretariat’s activities concerning transnational corporations, private investment, and science and technology. Within a self-imposed deadline of two months from taking office he had cut some 1,800 posts, including 18 senior positions—the post of director-general among them—and put all USGs and ASGs on the short leash of a one-year contract.²⁷ He eliminated the Centre for Transnational Corporations and ORCI, and split the former Department of Special Political Affairs into the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Political Affairs (DPA)—a dramatic change, albeit without the clear distinctions between ‘operational’ and ‘political’ implied by their titles. And, following a General Assembly decision from the preceding December reflecting a general dissatisfaction with UN performance in meeting the growing demand for emergency relief, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) became the third operational component of peace operations.²⁸

Boutros-Ghali’s slash-and-burn independence angered some governments when he disregarded regional balance for senior appointments by giving half of the USG posts in the inner circle to individuals from countries among the five permanent members of the Security Council (P5) and four more to other Europeans. A divide emerged between headquarters and field staff because personnel policies worked against movements back and forth despite the growing demands for a field-based organization.²⁹

His memoirs are replete with instances of member-state and bureaucratic obstruction, especially by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, which impeded still more drastic reductions.³⁰ Even on his way out, Boutros-Ghali was reiterating the necessity for more reform. He criticized the United States in particular and the Security Council in general for micromanagement; and he pleaded for increased resources and autonomy to hire better staff for mediation and peacekeeping in his *Supplement to ‘An agenda for peace’*. However, Boutros-Ghali’s take-no-prisoners approach partially succeeded, facilitated by debates outside the world organization and a raft of independent publications that formed part of a new cottage industry of UN studies that yearned for dramatic reform.³¹

²⁶ Quoted by Elaine Sciolino and Paul Lewis, ‘Mission in Somalia: Secretary-General besieged’, *New York Times*, 16 Oct. 1993.

²⁷ Thant and Scott, *The UN Secretariat*, pp. 87–92.

²⁸ Lucia Mouat, ‘UN struggle to keep politics out of relief’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 Jan. 1993, <http://www.csmonitor.com/1993/0107/07031.html>.

²⁹ Thant and Scott, *The UN Secretariat*, pp. 87–92.

³⁰ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Unvanquished: a US–UN saga* (New York: Random House, 1999), p. 22.

³¹ See e.g. Erskine Childers and Brian Urquhart, *A world in need of leadership: tomorrow’s United Nations* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1990); Nordic UN Project, *The United Nations in development: reform issues in the economic and social fields, a Nordic perspective* (Stockholm: Nordic UN Project, 1991).

Kofi Annan, January 1997 to December 2006

Reflecting the precedent of regional rotation with at least two mandates for each region—indeed, three west Europeans had previously served four full and two partial terms, while the combative African Boutros-Ghali had had only one—Ghana's Kofi Annan became the seventh secretary-general. Having started towards the bottom of the UN's professional ladder after graduate studies, he was the only SG who had spent his entire career within the UN system.³² He knew more about the UN system—warts and all—than any of his predecessors; he was fully familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of the First UN of member states and the Second UN of staff members and their bureaucracies; and later he mobilized the Third UN of civil society and the private sector.³³ In addition to understanding the world body's nuts and bolts (among other jobs, he had been the head of human resources), he also had the tenacity and energy to pursue his original vision step by step and displayed an unusual ability to generate widespread public support. Announcing reform is one thing; but seeing through internal negotiations, dealing with the staff union and bargaining with member states are also essential components of successful management reform. Like many other things at the UN, reform is a marathon and not a sprint.

Annan began with the advantage of Washington's firm backing and the promised reimbursement of accumulated US arrears of some US\$1 billion—an initial payment of US\$100 million was the carrot, with an appropriation for another US\$900 million contingent on performance. Annan fully capitalized on the honeymoon period. In February 1997, he made the first of several judicious decisions about 'reformers' when he placed the veteran UN hand Maurice Strong in charge of a forced-pace march to formulate a plan by July. Annan first announced his comprehensive strategy in March 1997 with his *Management and organizational measures*,³⁴ and the final details appeared that July as *Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform*.³⁵

The March strategy proposed the creation of a cabinet-like body to assist the SG and the grouping of the UN's activities into four core missions. The final document emphasized such issues as lowering administrative and staffing costs as well as reaching out for inputs from the private sector and civil society. Annan also advocated an improved capacity for rapid deployment in peace operations, a clearer division of labour between the General Assembly and the Office of the Secretary-General (OSG), and a better allocation of programme funds.

With an eye on Washington's budgetary concerns, Annan's plan also stressed cost-effectiveness and called for reductions in staff and trimming of budgets through 550 'efficiency programmes' that had already begun. Annan emphasized reviewing old mandates and phasing out irrelevant or defunct ones; he also

³² Kofi Annan with Nader Mousavizadeh, *Interventions: a life in war and peace* (New York: Penguin, 2012); Kofi Annan with Edward Mortimer, eds, *We the peoples: a UN for the 21st century* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2014).

³³ Thomas G. Weiss, Tatiana Carayannis and Richard Jolly, 'The "Third" United Nations', *Global Governance* 15: 1, 2009, pp. 123–42.

³⁴ Kofi Annan, *Management and organizational measures*, UN document A/51/829, 17 March 1997.

³⁵ Kofi Annan, *Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform*, UN document A/51/950, 14 July 1997.

recommended 'sunset provisions' to prevent outdated mandates from clogging up the future agenda.³⁶ Annan also eliminated many of the approximately 1,000 posts that were standing vacant when he took office. These provisions had the cumulative effect of slowing the growth of budget expenditures in 1998 and 1999 without cutting essential programmes, and the budget increased at a faster pace later in his tenure.³⁷

Annan capitalized fully on the honeymoon period and was the first SG to have a vision for all aspects of the UN's work, including development. By November and December of his first year in office, the plan had secured the General Assembly's blessing in Resolutions 52/12A and 52/12B. Three management innovations were noteworthy. The first was the post of deputy secretary-general whose job description focused on issues cutting across the boundaries between departments of the Secretariat. The second was a group of four executive committees to coordinate system-wide operational activities under the rubrics of peace and security; economic and social affairs; humanitarian action; and sustainable development. Within the Secretariat, twelve entities were reduced to five, with the most significant consolidation in the area with most redundancy, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Third, the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) sought to pull together in the same room at the same time the 'UN team'—the various UN funds, programmes, specialized agencies, departments and OSG—with operational projects in the global South. Other approved measures encompassed streamlining the work of the Disarmament Commission and the General Assembly's First Committee, eliminating the High-level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development, integrating responsibility for emergency natural disaster relief in the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and establishing an ECOSOC humanitarian affairs segment.

In Geneva, the Centre for Human Rights was folded into the fledgling Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which became poised to act as a pillar of burgeoning UN activity, its work cutting across the four executive committees. A substantial failed initiative resulted by merely renaming the DHA as the OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) rather than, as had been proposed, by creating a second deputy post and a consolidated UN humanitarian agency (combining UNHCR [UN High Commissioner for Refugees] with the emergency parts of UNICEF [UN International Children's Emergency Fund], WFP [the World Food Programme] and UNDP).³⁸

The dawn of the new century appeared symbolically important for agenda-setting. Thus, 2000 provided an unusual 'hook' on which to hang both the peace and the development agendas. Annan commissioned a panel led by the Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi to produce a long-overdue review of burgeoning UN peace operations. In response to the roller-coaster ride of the 1990s, with that decade's perceived failures and overreach, the Brahimi report recommended

³⁶ James Traub, *The best intentions: Kofi Annan and the UN in the era of American world power* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2006), p. 70.

³⁷ Thant and Scott, *The UN Secretariat*, p. 102.

³⁸ Thomas G. Weiss, 'Humanitarian shell games: whither UN reform?', *Security Dialogue* 29: 1, 1998, pp. 9–23.

sweeping changes in doctrine, operations and strategy, including strengthening the UN's capacity for strategic analysis.³⁹ However, the General Assembly refused to accept many key provisions for the overhaul of the Executive Committee on Peace and Security (ECPS), the creation of Integrated Mission Task Forces, and the allocation to the DPA of responsibilities for post-conflict peacebuilding. The report recommended a new information-gathering and analysis unit to support the ECPS on conflict prevention and strategy, which was established in 2000 but not by consolidating internal units as initially proposed. Given the system's turf wars, slow responses and lack of connections to relevant knowledge networks, the Secretary-General gave his blessing to the creation of an independent unit outside the UN—the Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum at the Social Science Research Council.

More successful was the Millennium Declaration emanating from the Millennium Summit, signed by over 150 heads of state and government in the autumn preceding the final year of Annan's first term.⁴⁰ Perhaps even more significant was the clever repackaging by a handful of key staff of agreed international aims into eight specific and time-bound Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which for the first time aligned the UN system with the Washington-based international financial institutions in aiming at the same 18 targets.

His reappointment in summer 2001—the earliest renewal up to that point—and receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in the autumn should have paved the way for even more robust initiatives during Annan's second mandate. However, his efforts to re-engage a conservative George W. Bush administration in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks cast a pall over his administration among many countries in the global South; and his problems were exacerbated by the financial and management scandals associated with the Oil-for-Food Programme.⁴¹

The next window of opportunity came with preparations for the UN's 60th anniversary. While 2005 was not the 'San Francisco moment' that Annan sought, the gathering did nonetheless offer the chance to rethink the UN's role in a world distinctly different from that of 1945. In preparation for the September summit, Annan established the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, whose 2004 report, *A more secure world*,⁴² included a host of recommendations linked to structures and staffing, many of which were the basis for Annan's own 2005 clarion call, *In larger freedom*.⁴³

The heads of state and government gathered in New York in September approved the World Summit outcome document, which was agreed after last-minute brinkmanship.⁴⁴ 'A once-in-a-generation opportunity to reform and

³⁹ UN, *Report of the panel on United Nations peace operations*, UN document A/55/305, 21 Aug. 2000.

⁴⁰ United Nations Millennium Declaration, General Assembly Resolution 55/2, A/RES/55/2, 8 Sept. 2000.

⁴¹ Paul A. Volcker, Richard J. Goldstone and Mark Pieth, *The management of the Oil-for-Food Programme*, 4 vols, 7 Sept. 2005, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/8D5BE817FC3D260D492570AE000D9A1D-iic-irq-7sepv4.pdf>.

⁴² UN, *A more secure world: our shared responsibility*, Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (New York, 2004).

⁴³ Kofi Annan, *In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all*, UN document A/59/2005, 21 March 2005.

⁴⁴ 2005 *World Summit outcome*, UN document A/60/L.1, 15 Sept. 2005.

revive the United Nations has been squandered,⁴⁵ lamented the lead editorial in the *New York Times*. Anticipated as a rare opportunity to re-envision the United Nations in the light of the vast changes in world politics since the San Francisco conference of 1945, the negotiations instead exposed many of the debilitating political and bureaucratic conflicts that regularly paralyse the organization. The results failed by a considerable margin to respond to Annan's plea that 'the UN must undergo the most sweeping overhaul in its 60-year history'.⁴⁶

While criticism centred on the glaring failure to agree on a reformed Security Council—admittedly an impossible task—or even on a definition of terrorism, three important recommendations do stand as entries on Annan's asset ledger. The General Assembly and Security Council agreed to establish two new and essential institutions—the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and the Human Rights Council (HRC)—as well as endorsing the norm of 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P), which in part reflected Annan's contested speeches on humanitarian intervention as well as the report by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty.⁴⁷

His final year in office witnessed the actual creation of the PBC and HRC; and, looking to the future, Annan pushed two final reform agendas. One concerned management, 'investing in the United Nations, for a stronger organization worldwide',⁴⁸ and addressed such issues as 'staffing, leadership, information and communications technology, efficiency in service delivery, budget and finance, and governance mechanisms'. The second concerned Annan's last major panel, whose recommendations remain pertinent but have only slowly been implemented: the reform blueprint *Delivering as one* (DaO) from the High-Level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence.⁴⁹ The report recommended that the UN system act as a unit. While not achieving one leader, one programme, one fund and one office in more than a handful of countries, UN organizations have once again been put on notice for fragmentation and counterproductive competition.

Ban Ki-moon, January 2007 to December 2016

The former South Korean foreign minister Ban Ki-Moon became the eighth secretary-general, the second Asian to occupy the office. He had a hard act to follow, coming immediately after an articulate and media-savvy Nobel laureate. Ban emerged in October 2006 with no red ballots (indicating a permanent member's veto) in a Security Council straw poll; he was then appointed by the General Assembly and enjoyed the longest transition period for an incoming secretary-general. The UN was facing huge budgetary shortfalls and accusations

⁴⁵ 'The lost UN summit meeting', *New York Times*, 14 Sept. 2005.

⁴⁶ Kofi A. Annan, 'In larger freedom: decision time at the UN', *Foreign Affairs* 84: 3, May–June 2005, p. 66.

⁴⁷ Thomas G. Weiss and Barbara Crossette, 'The United Nations: the post-summit outlook', in Foreign Policy Association, ed., *Great decisions 2006* (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 2006), pp. 9–20.

⁴⁸ Kofi Annan, *Investing in the United Nations, for a stronger organization worldwide*, UN document A/60/692, 12 May 2006.

⁴⁹ UN, *Delivering as one* (New York, 2006).

from Washington of being bloated and inefficient.⁵⁰ Ban enjoyed US support and appeared to share the Bush administration's judgement about the UN's inefficiency. The then US permanent representative, John Bolton, summarized: 'We find an organization that is deeply troubled by bad management, by sex and corruption and by a growing lack of confidence in its ability to carry out missions that are given to them.'⁵¹ A few days earlier, the conservative firebrand had been even more categorical in calling for 'a wholesale change' in the way that many agencies and entities operate within the UN system. He went on to note that because the United States was the largest contributor—22 per cent to the regular budget and 27 per cent to the peacekeeping costs—it was paying for one-quarter of 'every case of fraud, waste, and abuse'.⁵²

Upon assuming the job, Ban held open meetings with all departments. He demanded USGs and ASGs resign and reapply for their jobs, a departure from standard practice because senior leadership posts are typically extended automatically for at least three months after the arrival of a new SG. His initial focus was almost exclusively on the DPKO, because peace operations had doubled in the previous half decade in size and funding. Those present at the meetings recalled Ban's conveying the sense that the DPKO was mismanaged and inefficient.

The decision to split the DPKO into operations and field support and create a second USG post was made without internal consultation and was implemented within weeks of Ban's moving to the UN's top floor, surprising many in the Secretariat. The split had not been envisioned in any of the major preceding reviews, nor was it part of the ongoing capstone doctrine consultations, which reviewed the previous six decades of UN peacekeeping.⁵³ Less than two months into his first term, Ban submitted an initial proposal to the General Assembly.⁵⁴ While implementation and debate continued, the Department of Field Support (DFS) was formally established in July by General Assembly Resolution 61/279. Some 300 posts were approved, although the SG initially requested 400.⁵⁵ At the same time and as part of the original split, the DPKO was restructured to create the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI) and the Office of Military Affairs (a renaming of the Military Division), as well as Integrated Operational Teams in the Office of Operations (OO), in order to have DFS staff embedded in

⁵⁰ Volker Lehmann and Angela McCellan, 'Dialogue on globalization: financing the United Nations', Global Policy Forum fact sheet, April 2006, <https://www.globalpolicy.org/images/pdfs/04factsheet.pdf>.

⁵¹ Fox News, 25 Feb. 2006, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2006/02/25/bolton-un-riddled-with-bad-management-sex-and-corruption.html>.

⁵² 'Statement by Ambassador Bolton on US views on reforming department of peacekeeping operations procurement', 22 Feb. 2006, quoted by UN, 'Peacekeeping procurement audit found management risk of financial loss, Security Council told in briefing by Chief of Staff, Mark Malloch-Brown', Meetings Coverage and Press Release SC/8645, 22 Feb. 2006, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2006/sc8645.doc.htm>. For peacekeeping during the Bush administration, see Don Kraus, Robert A. Enholm and Amanda J. Bowen, eds, *U.S. engagement in international peacekeeping: from aspiration to implementation* (Washington DC: Citizens for Global Solutions Education Fund, 2011).

⁵³ UN, *United Nations peacekeeping operations: principles and guidelines*, Jan. 2008, http://www.challengesforum.org/Global/Reports/External%20Reports/Capstone_Doctrine_ENG.pdf?epslanguage=en.

⁵⁴ UN, *Strengthening the capacity of the organization to manage and sustain peace operations*, UN document A/61/668, 13 Feb. 2007.

⁵⁵ Alex Bellamy and Paul Williams, *Understanding peacekeeping: who are the peacekeepers?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), p. 54.

the DPKO. Moreover, joint DPKO/DFS entities such as the new Policy, Evaluation and Training Division were intended to ensure a more cohesive approach towards the management of field missions.⁵⁶ The DPKO's Under Secretary-General Jean-Marie Guéhenno initially offered to resign if Ban would leave the DPKO intact but eventually came round, perhaps putting a positive spin on the inevitable. Unhappy staff questioned the strange procedure of putting operations and field support on an equal footing, which effectively gave logistics staff a veto over deployments.⁵⁷

A significant policy change was Ban's later directive that all mandates reflect human rights concerns, in part reflecting pressure and criticism from UN inaction in Sri Lanka late in his first term. The Human Rights Up-Front Initiative was launched in December 2013, but the journey began in June 2010 when Ban appointed a panel of experts to examine 'the nature and scope of alleged violations of international humanitarian and human rights law during the final stages of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka'.⁵⁸ The panel's report was released in late March 2011 and recommended an independent investigation of the system's response; this led to the Internal Review Panel, whose report of November 2012 labelled missteps in Sri Lanka as a 'systematic failure'.⁵⁹ The Human Rights Up-Front Action Plan promoted 'cultural change to make sure that UN staff understand their prevention responsibilities and pursue them, operational change to ensure that the UN works on the basis of shared analysis, and enhanced engagement with Member States'.⁶⁰ In practice, the initiative has improved UN country teams and their links to national authorities as well as to better and earlier communications to the Security Council.

Another effort towards better engagement with human rights concerns was the establishment in 2009 of the Joint Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect. Annual interactive dialogues also began ahead of the General Assembly to take stock of R2P's progress.⁶¹

Since 2008, the UNDG begun under Annan has become one of the central pillars of the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), the highest-level coordination body. With the Secretary-General in the chair, it brings together the heads of UN organizations in an effort to provide broad guidance, coordination and strategic direction across the system. The emphasis is on pursuing inter-agency priorities and initiatives while also attempting to address the ever-present danger of independent organizational mandates—a lingering indication of the atomized system at a 'crossroads',⁶² scrambling to appear coordinated.

⁵⁶ UN, *Implementation of the recommendations of the special committee on peacekeeping operations*, Report of the UN Secretary-General, UN document A/62/627, 28 Dec. 2007.

⁵⁷ Author's interview with former DPKO senior official, 23 Aug. 2016.

⁵⁸ *Report of the Secretary-General's panel of experts on accountability in Sri Lanka*, 31 March 2011, http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Sri_Lanka/POE_Report_Full.pdf, para. i.

⁵⁹ *Report of the Secretary-General's internal review panel on United Nations Actions in Sri Lanka*, Nov. 2012, http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Sri_Lanka/The_Internal_Review_Panel_report_on_Sri_Lanka.pdf.

⁶⁰ "Human Rights Up Front" initiative ever more vital to strengthen UN's preventive work, says deputy UN chief, UN News Centre, 28 Jan. 2016, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=53115#.V8YdpD-Vp05w>.

⁶¹ For updates, see <http://www.globalr2p.org/>. See also Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian intervention*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Polity, 2016).

⁶² Bruce Jenks and Bruce Jones, *United Nations development at a crossroads* (New York: Center for International Cooperation, 2013).

Ban inherited a comprehensive blueprint for change in the development arena—in particular, DaO—but his embrace was lukewarm. His administration launched other efforts to promote coherence, but mainly built on Annan’s earlier efforts to move from a headquarters-centred to a truly global structure, in particular through the 2009 human resources management reform that aimed to give field and headquarters staff the same status and benefits.⁶³ Some business practices were harmonized. More system-wide evaluations were attempted. A cautious plan to align seven research and training entities was scuppered by their host country, Switzerland. In an attempt to bring the system together and draw more partners into UN work, Ban has launched several new ventures: Every Woman, Every Child; Sustainable Energy for All; the Global Education First Initiative; Zero Hunger Challenge; the Scaling-Up Nutrition Movement; and the Call to Action on Sanitation. These initiatives demonstrate the longstanding proclivity for accretion rather than consolidation but could encourage existing UN organizations to push forward their programmes and extend partnerships.

Another encouraging result of earlier proposals was the creation in 2010 of UN Women, the single major recommendation thus far implemented from the 2006 DaO reform blueprint.⁶⁴ The perpetual desire to avoid consolidation but instead pursue the woolly notion of ‘coordination’ typically obfuscates the extent to which UN atomization serves agencies and officials but not beneficiaries. The precedent of UN Women—the world organization has rarely eliminated major existing entities—resulted from the fusion of four separate and often competitive programmes: the Division for the Advancement of Women, the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, and the United Nations Development Fund for Women. The desperate requirement to reduce the number of entities within the UN system with more attention to comparative advantages will undoubtedly continue to challenge the next secretary-general.⁶⁵

The 2015 General Assembly summit to mark the 70th anniversary of the signing and entry into force of the UN Charter was an apt occasion on which to formulate an agenda for the following 15 years with the expiration of the MDGs that December. The path to consensus on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was distinct from that which had generated the MDGs, which were compiled by an inner circle of knowledgeable staff. Drafting the agenda for 2030 involved representatives from all member states for two years in an open working group (OWG), which ensured that all national interests were on the table. In addition, multiple lobbying groups and advocates weighed in, including every UN organization. The OWG threw up a list of no fewer than 17 goals and 169

⁶³ UN Chief Executive Board for Coordination, ‘Conclusion of the meeting of the human resources network’, UN document CEB/2009/HLCM/HR/27, 28 April 2009, https://www.unsceb.org/CEBPublicFiles/Content/Reports/REP_HRN_200903_CEB2009HLCMHR27.pdf.

⁶⁴ UN, *Independent evaluation of Delivering as One*, summary report, UN document A/66/859, June 2012.

⁶⁵ Stephen Browne and Thomas G. Weiss, eds, *Peacebuilding challenges for the UN development system* (New York: Future United Nations Development System Project, 2015).

explanatory paragraphs (with even more targets). The largest gathering ever of presidents and prime ministers at the September 2015 summit adopted the grandiloquently packaged document *Transforming our world by 2030: a new agenda for global action*.⁶⁶ Optimists called it ‘aspirational’ and ‘welcome idealism’; others were more sceptical, Bjørn Lomborg commenting: ‘Having 169 priorities is the same as having none.’⁶⁷ An unkind William Easterly suggested an alternative content for the abbreviation as ‘senseless, dreamy, garbled’.⁶⁸ How exactly the unmanageable new agenda is to be tackled, including the question of monitoring, falls to the next secretary-general.

Amid renewed calls for peacekeeping reform in the face of protracted conflicts and new threats in Africa and the Middle East, Ban appointed the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) in October 2014 to review the current state of UN peace operations. Chaired by Timor-Leste’s former president José Ramos-Horta, the panel consisted of 16 members, twice the number initially proposed after heavy lobbying from various quarters. What was initially an unrealistic three-month mandate for the task was extended threefold. The June 2015 HIPPO report made over 100 recommendations and emphasized four fundamental shifts in UN peace operations: to emphasize the primacy of politics; to think in terms of the full spectrum of peace operations; to strengthen partnerships; and to make sure operations are people-centred.

Published towards the end of his tenure, Ban’s implementation report⁶⁹ on the HIPPO recommendations reads ‘more like a showcase of how much the UN Secretariat has done ... an attempt to leave a legacy during a year of reviews, rather than a strategic and focused agenda for change ... The SG report lists no less than 40 United Nations Secretariat initiatives.’⁷⁰ For example, both the HIPPO and AGE reports identified a continuing need for better and finer context analysis in headquarters and the field, a gap that the Brahimi report had identified 15 years earlier. One of the few recommendations acted on by Ban late in 2015 was to establish an OSG planning and analysis cell to help fill this gap. Yet a year later, in the absence of an overall vision for institutional change, the office was under-resourced and struggling to establish effective working relationships with the broader system. The new SG will need to factor some of these eleventh-hour inherited proposals into his opening vision.

⁶⁶ UN, *Transforming our world by 2030: a new agenda for global action* (New York: UN, 2015). For a discussion, see Stephen Browne and Thomas G. Weiss, ‘The UN’s post-2015 development agenda: new goals, new leadership’, *Great Decisions 2016* (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 2016), pp. 63–74.

⁶⁷ Quoted by Somini Sengupta, ‘After years of negotiations, UN sets development goals to guide all countries’, *New York Times*, 26 Sept. 2015.

⁶⁸ William Easterly, ‘The SDGs should stand for senseless, dreamy, garbled’, *Foreign Policy* blog, 28 Sept. 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/28/the-sdgs-are-utopian-and-worthless-mdgs-development-rise-of-the-rest/>.

⁶⁹ Ban Ki-moon, *The future of United Nations peace operations: implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, report of the Secretary-General (New York: UN, 2015).

⁷⁰ Arthur Boutellis, ‘From HIPPO to SG legacy: what prospects for UN peace operations reform?’, *IPI Global Observatory*, 24 Sept. 2015, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2015/09/hippo-peacekeeping-peacebuilding-united-nations/>.

Conclusion

History rarely provides a template, but it can suggest a roadmap for making the most of opportunities to increase the momentum for change. Thant Myint-U and Amy Scott summarize: 'The transition from one Secretary-General to another has traditionally been an opportunity for administrative reform and reorganization.'⁷¹ In the post-Cold War era, shifts in the balance of power and in mainstream ideas about world politics and priorities—in particular, human security and human development—have not only led to increased expectations of the United Nations but also opened wider the windows of opportunity for reform at the outset and twilight of an SG's time in office.

This brief historical overview of the last four secretaries-general has sought to correct what Andrew Hurrell has labelled the 'relentless presentism' that afflicts the study of international relations and organizations.⁷² In particular, we have probed the occasions when post-Cold War SGs have challenged, sometimes successfully and sometimes not, the standard operating procedures that customarily lead to the default option for member states and staff: to resist change and opt for inertia.

The end of Javier Pérez de Cuéllar's second mandate as the first post-Cold War secretary-general led to expanding peace operations, with the groundwork laid for his successors. Both Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan instituted sweeping staffing and management changes, in 1992, 1997 and 2002; both began with detailed visions for the future. Boutros-Ghali spent much of the latter part of his single term doing battle with the United States rather than securing an organizational legacy. Annan used the end of his first term and the beginning of the new century (coinciding with the UN's 55th anniversary), and particularly the 60th anniversary, to leverage structural change. Ban Ki-moon's tenure was characterized by missed opportunities for initiatives but also by efforts to nurse along earlier proposals. He squandered his honeymoon and reform slowed; his modest legacy appears to be quiet diplomacy on climate change and a consolidation of earlier efforts, accompanied by proposals for his successor and a renewed hunger for a bolder UN leader.

The world's most visible spokesperson who is also the manager of an essential organization for today's world order is a more crucial figure than many observers believe. SGs also have more room for manoeuvre than is commonly thought, but they are products of their time: major powers have limited tolerance for autonomy, even during a honeymoon; and the status quo instincts of the Group of 77 developing countries in respect of UN reform routinely have contributed to deterring boldness on the part of SGs and bogging down the proposals made by successive incumbents. The new SG assumes his job at a particularly turbulent moment with an urgent need for innovative problem-solving, focus and priority-setting. The Security Council is deeply divided; in fact, it is ironic that, amid paralysis on every other key issue, a rare consensus led to agreement on the appointment of António Guterres. In particular, two of its western permanent

⁷¹ Thant and Scott, *The UN Secretariat*, pp. 124–5.

⁷² Andrew Hurrell, 'Foreword to the third edition', in Hedley Bull, *The anarchical society: a study of order in world politics*, 3rd edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. xiii.

members—the United States and the United Kingdom—are undergoing harshly contested leadership transitions. Two of the UN's key multilateral partners, the European Union and the African Union, are also facing massive challenges inside and outside their respective regions.

The new SG's journey begins in the wake of three major reviews of UN peace operations, the world organization's most visible activities; and action on whose myriad recommendations would substantially alter the way that the UN functions, for good or for ill. Thousands of hours of diplomatic and staff deliberation have gone into these reviews. Individual champions and ad hoc working groups have already mobilized to promote particular sets of recommendations. To open wider the window of opportunity, Guterres will need to make two early, critical assessments. First, how much room for manoeuvre actually exists? In other words, what will the market bear, both externally among member states and internally among under-resourced and overworked staff? Second, what reforms take priority at this moment, being capable of actually moving things forward rather than just displacing problems or creating new ones in the future?

In short, as the new resident of the 38th floor, Guterres requires more than anything else an overarching vision about institutional reform if he is not to waste the opportunity mainly by choosing low-hanging fruit or merely reacting to member-state initiatives. It would be preferable to identify one or two manageable and catalytic changes for the first six months rather than wreaking havoc by making dozens. Ideally, the start-up would include a visionary plan for the heavy lifting, accompanied by the tenacity to pursue institutional reforms that will come only with time and perseverance. Guterres will require the courage to say that there are some great ideas out there, but 2017 may not necessarily be the right moment for them.

Timing is essential. For example, Ban's 'mobility framework' was introduced in 2014 but implemented in his last year in office.⁷³ It was aimed at rotating staff from New York to the field; the result appears to have been a game of musical chairs that has often hindered rather than facilitated recruitment. This self-inflicted injury was a wrong reform at the wrong time and appears to have paralysed a personnel system already overtaxed by myriad crises. 'Do no harm' should be part of the new SG's Hippocratic reform oath.

Campaigning forces candidates to remain vague. What incentive exists to announce a bold agenda when pleasing the 'electoral college' of the P5 is the first order of business? However, without an overarching vision of what one ultimately hopes to achieve, reforms often can amount to sleights of hand. Disruptions are created elsewhere, and other staff arrangements are required to compensate. The idea that efficiency results from splitting a large entity into smaller units is not necessarily valid. Indeed, consolidation and centralization should not be anathema but should be considered far more often. The model for the UN over the years

⁷³ UN, 'Secretary-General says managed mobility framework will enhance staff management, after General Assembly adopts "historic decision"', press release, 9 April 2014, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sgsm15762.doc.htm>.

has been expansion by accretion, with new bodies created or new parts added to old ones for every new problem or emphasis. On the contrary, more and more moving parts with less and less synergy—as well as higher transaction costs for both governments and UN staff, but with too few results—should give way to a different vision of fewer moving parts and more concentration on comparative advantages.

The United Nations often fails in addressing the challenges and achieves less than envisioned by its Second World War founders.⁷⁴ We need only point to the misery of Syria, or central Africa where peacekeepers raped children, or the plethora of turf-conscious bureaucrats to see why confidence in the UN has eroded. Brian Urquhart was the second UN staff member recruited in 1946 after surviving combat in the war, and he recalled the ‘remarkable generation of leaders and public servants’ who headed the new body during and after the world cataclysm. These pragmatic idealists were ‘more concerned about the future of humanity than the outcome of the next election’.⁷⁵ Few in the current generation of presidents and prime ministers of major and minor powers alike have any such vision.

We must hope that António Guterres has, and is willing to move boldly and quickly. Almost half a century ago, after Kurt Waldheim’s selection, the *New York Times* saw a growing consensus that the Secretariat ‘was badly in need of a shake-up’.⁷⁶ More recently the former deputy secretary-general Mark Malloch-Brown wrote: ‘A long period of tinkering with the UN machinery may actually allow the growing gap between performance and need to increase ... The call for reform is likely to grow steadily ... the question remains when not if.’⁷⁷

Guterres’s in-box is piled high with reform ideas. An indication of his seriousness of purpose would be a lean yet representative task force that would focus for twelve months on setting priorities from among the many reform recommendations and formulating proposals to transform the Secretariat’s culture and structure. Those fighting the world’s fires cannot also be tasked with implementing reforms because impossible deadlines leave everyone exhausted and dissatisfied. That dedicated group, however, should have reform as their full-time job. One of the functions of the supporting staff would be to mount a communications campaign to alert member states and staff to the logic behind the range of priorities under consideration, as well as to organize focus groups to identify ways to implement change rather than protect turf. Part of their commitment would be to eschew future UN employment for at least two years.

The selection of a new UN secretary-general should rekindle optimism about the potential for multilateral cooperation. António Guterres appreciates the world organization’s political flaws and structural and staffing shortcomings. We must hope that he has the determination and—dare we say—the charisma and guts to undertake the Sisyphean task of reforming them.

⁷⁴ Thomas G. Weiss, ‘United Nations—before, during, and after 1945’, *International Affairs* 91: 6, Nov. 2015, pp. 1221–35.

⁷⁵ Brian Urquhart, ‘The new American century’, *New York Review of Books*, 11 Aug. 2005.

⁷⁶ Mark Tanner, ‘Security Council names Waldheim to succeed Thant’, *New York Times*, 22 Dec. 1971.

⁷⁷ Mark Malloch-Brown, *The unfinished global revolution: the pursuit of a new international politics* (New York: Penguin, 2011), p. 190.