

Managing Change at the United Nations: Lessons from Recent Initiatives

FRANCESCO MANCINI



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

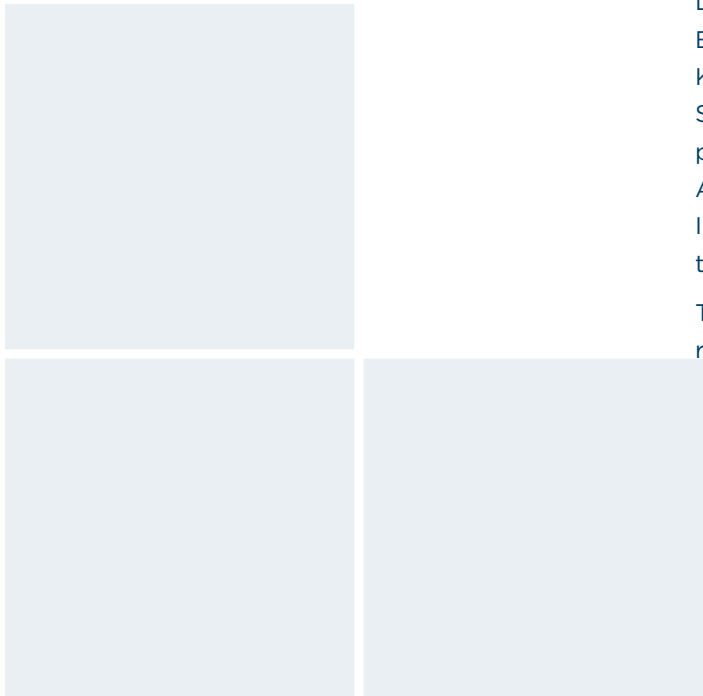
FRANCESCO MANCINI is a non-resident Senior Adviser at the International Peace Institute and Adjunct Associate Professor at Columbia University and the National University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

Email: mancini@ipinst.org

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Executive Summary

As the United Nations celebrates its seventieth anniversary this year, the organization faces growing systemic stresses placed on it by emerging global challenges and rapidly shifting political and security dynamics. Such challenges have sparked a renewed interest in reform.

This report examines past initiatives for change within the UN, as well as obstacles to reforms and their implementation. The report illustrates examples of successful processes of institutional transformation and highlights six waves of UN reform that have occurred since the end of the Cold War, including Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Change Plan of 2011.

By exploring how reforms were managed in the past and the reasons for their success or failure, the report detects the challenges and opportunities for effectively managing change at the UN. This is particularly relevant at a time when the system has undergone a series of major policy reviews that have produced a host of recommendations for reform. The report argues for a model of continuous improvement, rather than one specific institutional change or new process, and offers a number of recommendations to manage reform effectively at the UN:

1. **Clarify the vision for the Secretariat:** Change requires a clearly articulated strategic vision from the secretary-general. The vast majority of reforms have been initiated by the Secretariat, and even when the secretary-general is mandated by member states, he/she needs to lead the Secretariat with a clear vision.
2. **Encourage support from member states:** It is important for the secretary-general and other senior officials to engage member states in building a rationale for reform, as well as in developing concrete proposals. Different representatives of member states will have different interests, and this will always be variable, but tracking and making use of these interests can help the Secretariat push a reform agenda. While outreach to the New York-based permanent missions is a natural and necessary step for the Secretariat, the secretary-general and his senior officials must also engage in capitals, including both ministries of foreign affairs and finance (particularly in Geneva

Group countries). The Secretariat should not bypass the permanent missions; however, consultations with capitals can help to overcome impasses in New York and go beyond political hurdles that assume peculiar dynamics at UN headquarters.

3. **Involve the General Assembly:** The General Assembly, through its president, should be an ally of the Secretariat in building consensus among member states, given the critical role of the Fifth Committee. For this reason, reforms should also be timed to leverage the abilities of a consensus-building president of the General Assembly. "Groups of friends" (regionally balanced selections of champions from member states), organized in thematic working groups or informal committees, can be useful in advancing important changes and can be effective to guarantee continuity across successive terms of General Assembly presidents.
4. **Establish buy-in of the Secretariat:** For reforms to be implemented, the buy-in of the Secretariat is needed from the early stages of conception. Mobilizing senior management is important but not in itself sufficient, since director and working-level staff are key to implementing changes. Since the Secretariat does not have an established mechanism to drive the process of change forward, "agents" of change need to be identified, supported, and made responsible for implementation. While there are dynamic change agents across the bureaucracy, inertia and resistance to change is strong. It is therefore important to identify accountable focal points for change within the Secretariat both at the senior and middle management levels to ensure the implementation of reforms, while also providing peer support to encourage progress across the board. Providing a supportive environment for these change agents is key, as fighting bureaucracy cannot be accomplished alone.
5. **Engage staff unions:** Engagement of the various staff unions, particularly at the beginning stage of reforms, is important—as they have direct lines to member states and are given a voice in committee sessions on issues that involve staff (such as mobility and flexible working arrangements). Building credibility and trust with these elected representatives of

staff can go a long way to building trust with member states, and the reverse is also true.

6. **Ground high-level panels in political realities:** In times of disunity and uncertainty, blue-ribbon panels composed of former statespersons and experts can help generate new ideas and break logjams, as was the case with the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change in 2004. At the same time, these panels need to consider the political context in which they operate, to avoid producing a wish list that cannot obtain consensus regarding national interests and the politics among member states.
7. **Test ideas and launch trial balloons:** The use of unofficial white papers and speeches by both the secretary-general and other senior officials have proven to be a successful means of testing ideas with member states. These may need to be used more often and more dynamically. Using the “third UN” of think tanks, academic institutions, and civil society fora to float ideas should also be tried more often. Official papers and documents that get tied up in the formal committee structure of the General Assembly tend to be counterproductive, especially in the early stages of developing a vision.
8. **Create legislative hooks:** Specific mandates that respond to the General Assembly’s role in the oversight of the management and administration of the organization are helpful, and should be exploited—most ideas worth pursuing have already been suggested, and many have even been mandated. Reforms come in waves because evolution from concept to implementation must follow the appropriate legislative process, which takes time. Trying to circumvent this is counterproductive—so five- and ten-year plans, aligned with the General Assembly’s own budget cycles, are preferable to short-term rhetorical statements that set high expectations but then yield little in the short term.
9. **Work through the debates in the Fifth Committee:** The Fifth Committee should only receive proposals once they have been fully authorized by a relevant General Assembly resolution. Leaving substantive details for the Fifth Committee to iron out is a recipe for disaster in non-administrative matters. This was a major issue for the Change Plan, which contained ideas for both the administrative and policy sides of the Secretariat, without having the ideas on the policy side (for example on learning and training) vetted and approved by the appropriate General Assembly committees.
10. **Target the focus for member states:** Broad packages of reforms can have a strong rationale, but member states like to pick and choose. It may be better to promote ideas that make sense in their own right and then actively push for them, rather than trying to lump too many dissimilar changes together. This is another clear lesson emerging from the Change Plan, which was very heterogeneous in its recommendations. Not all elements of a comprehensive reform package are equally ripe or politically acceptable at one given point in time. Therefore, a targeted focus may be preferable, but this becomes a judgement call for the senior leadership team.
11. **Avoid the term “reform”:** The word reform is overused and politically charged at the UN. Of course, it depends on the particular historical moment, but today it is probably better to talk about strengthening, enhancing, streamlining, or adapting the UN toward the non-mutually exclusive aims of providing more “value for the money,” “more impact on the ground,” and/or “more effective support to member states and their people.”
12. **Manage expectations:** Decades of UN reform have shown that modest and incremental results are achievable. The UN has navigated through decades of geopolitical changes, because it is ultimately a highly adaptive organization. However, some changes, particularly those that directly upset old power balances or national interests of groups of states, are difficult to make happen. It is advisable to keep expectations realistic. To be successful in sensitive reforms will require dedicated and patient senior-level attention and some degree of “management jiu-jitsu” where flexibility and re-directing opposing forces are paramount.
13. **Message for change:** The value of internal and external communication is often under-

estimated and under-resourced. It is better to avoid trumpeting problems for which there are no reasonable answers but to focus, instead, on solutions that can garner general agreement, if not consensus. Consistent support and exchange with the spokesperson's office and the Department of Public Information for internal communications is certainly warranted, and dedicated communications strategies for staff, member states, NGOs, the press, and key public influencers need to be prepared, updated, and frequently used.

Introduction

"I have no doubt that forty years from now we shall be engaged in the same pursuit. How could we expect otherwise? World organization is still a new adventure in human history."

Dag Hammarskjöld, 1956

Seventy years after the founding of the United Nations (UN), the world is still talking about its reform. With Ban Ki-moon's second term approaching its end in 2016, the questions of how the new UN secretary-general will be selected and what his or her agenda should be in the first few years are receiving greater attention.¹ This report focuses on how reforms were managed in the past, with a particular focus on the 2011–2013 period, which was important as it straddled Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's first and second terms, a time when he, like previous secretaries-general before him, had the opportunity to propose new approaches to global problems, buttressed by critical institutional and personnel changes to modernize the way the UN acts in a rapidly changing international system.

The report explores improvements in the way the Secretariat is working, successful initiatives, and a few setbacks. The lessons of how things were done and why they succeeded or failed are worth learning, particularly as the current secretary-general looks to implement some of the recommendations from the various review

processes conducted in 2015, such as the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, and before the next wave of innovations are launched in January 2017, with the start of a new UN secretary-general's term and another chance to get "world organization" right.

The international system is evolving rapidly, and in addition to global vehicles for multinational collaboration to address global problems, regional and thematic organizations are playing increasingly important roles. This experiment in global collaboration around meeting tables rather than on battlefields dates back only about 100 years to the early days of the League of Nations. Yet today, among this chorus of actors, the UN has become a necessary, but not always in itself sufficient, actor—one of the best fora open to international policy-makers, given its universal membership, its charter (which is, in essence, an intergovernmental treaty that binds its member states under international law), its global brand, and its credibility with many of "we the peoples." At the same time, as the UN marks its seventieth birthday, soul-searching questions remain unanswered. The Security Council, often incapable of delivering solutions to major crises, is increasingly less representative of an evolving geopolitical context. Peacekeeping is overstretched, but its budget and number of troops have been ballooning over the years. Issues of accountability, impact, and efficiency damage the world body's reputation and prevent it from serving both the interests of its member states and their people.

To ensure that the UN is fit for purpose for the new generation of challenges, decision makers in capitals and in New York need to apply a model of continual change, equipping the organization and its governing bodies with more flexibility to adapt, grow, and reform over time. Doing so will permit the organization, its staff, and its constituents to be better prepared to address emerging challenges, political change, and shifting security threats—partnering with thematic and regional organizations and other actors where appropriate, and guaranteeing that the Secretariat and the organization it serves evolve.

¹ On selection of the secretary-general, see, for example, the 1 for 7 Billion Campaign, or The Elders' Stronger UN Initiative. On recently proposed reform agendas, see for example, the International Peace Institute's Independent Commission on Multilateralism, available at www.icm2016.org, The Hague Institute for Global Justice and The Stimson Center's Commission on Global Security, Justice & Governance, or the Ralph Bunche Institute's Future of the UN Development System.

The argument posited here favors a culture of change and flexibility—accepting more trial and error, moving the organization forward by growing and shedding staff and programs as the needs merit.² These goals are ends in themselves and can lead to success in the face of specific challenges. As the organization and its member states cannot know what “black swan” is descending over the horizon, a model of continuous improvement at the UN is the best model, so that it can tack and change course when the conditions warrant. Regular programmatic and functional reviews of the UN’s main organs and offices can be a means of accomplishing this over a prolonged time.

Nevertheless, managing change will be one of the defining challenges for the organization in the twenty-first century. The organization has demonstrated it can adapt with the support of member states and staff, and now all of the UN’s constituencies need to allow the organization to continue to grow, shed, and re-organize to be at its most effective.

This report begins by outlining briefly what managing change means in the UN Secretariat, stressing the complexity of a reform process, with its multiple stakeholders, intricate politics, and bureaucratic turfs. Subsequently, it briefly reviews the early efforts of change in the Secretariat before the end of the Cold War, and then presents five separate waves of reforms between 1992 and 2007. It later addresses, for the first time, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Change Plan, which was initiated in 2011. It reviews both the drafting of the change proposals, as well as the process used to implement them. The paper concludes with thirteen lessons learned from the recent history of UN reform, which the author hopes can inform future attempts in adapting the world body to continuing shifts in global power dynamics, changing political and security environments, and emerging global challenges.

Change at the UN

For the UN Secretariat, change is not a single event. It is instead a process that requires concerted efforts to align conflicting interests of nearly 200 stakeholders (its member states) and a large,

multinational bureaucracy, spread across four global headquarters, five regional economic commissions, and roughly thirty field-based peacekeeping and political missions. Including UN agencies, funds, and programs in this dynamic adds another layer of complexity. As their influence in international affairs grows, civil society, academic institutions, think tanks, and philanthropic organizations—the so-called “third UN”—also need to be taken into consideration.

Given this complicated landscape, the “how” of change is as important as the “what.” Unless a process is carefully designed, executed, and tracked, reform proposals risk remaining only on paper. In fact, the road to the cemetery of UN reform is paved with reports. The excitement triggered by blue-ribbon panels and civil society leaders quickly dissipates, as ideas for reform need to sift through the national interests represented in the General Assembly, and its Fifth Committee, which is responsible for all administrative and budgetary issues governing the UN Secretariat. Here, government delegates, organized into voting blocs (i.e., Group of 77; European Union; Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (CANZ); Russia; USA; Japan), trade proposals until they reach an acceptable result, stripped of some faults and virtues, that finally gets gavelled by a succession of exhausted ambassadors chairing the Fifth Committee and then by the General Assembly.

The importance of the financial element should not be underestimated. Every reform process has to contend with budget battles over modest sums of money (when compared to what states spend on their own militaries, for example), serving as a proxy for political fights between the developing countries that dominate the General Assembly and the large contributors that tend to dominate the Security Council and the Secretariat. Mastering this dynamic has been elusive, resulting in repeated financial crises throughout UN history.

This rather haphazard process of change, driven by diverging national interests, diplomatic compromises, and financial politics, has little time for data and analysis of what works and what does not. It should not come as a surprise that the results of diplomatic and political compromises often turn

² Studying how software and technology companies innovate and succeed (while often failing) can be helpful for the UN in this regard.

out to be suboptimal when measured for effect, leaving the Secretariat exposed to claims of incompetence.

While UN Charter amendments are very rare and difficult to achieve, the UN is not frozen in time.³ It has proven remarkably adaptable, surviving innumerable crises, geopolitical shifts, and hostile political contexts. Since the end of the Cold War, scores of high-level panels, governmental studies, and individual scholars have put forward hundreds of proposals. Successive secretaries-general have engaged in frequent bouts of self-examination, offering their own reform agendas.⁴ Some have produced significant changes in organizational terms, including several changes of the UN Secretariat structure and the creation of new bodies such as the Peacebuilding Support Office, the Ombudsman and Mediation Services, the Ethics Office, and the Secretary-General's Policy and Management committees. Others have produced significant changes in doctrinal and normative terms, as in the case of implementing the "responsibility to protect" principle or the protection of civilians. New administrative procedures have also been introduced, including a new internal justice system in the Office of Administration of Justice to streamline internal dispute resolution, the adoption of international accounting standards to make UN budgets easier to understand and compare to other public sector entities, more transparent procurement procedures, a framework for staff mobility, and new resource-planning tools.

In 2011, the Secretary-General's Change Management Team undertook a study of previous reform processes and concluded that 70 percent of the proposals made by secretaries-general since 1992 have been implemented to varying degrees, a fairly positive success ratio for an organization of the size and complexity of the UN.⁵

Within this basic understanding of what constitutes change at the UN Secretariat, there have been

at least five major waves of reform since the end of the Cold War, where "major" refers to cross-sectoral changes, not limited to one or two thematic or management areas. Several other reforms in particular areas, such as peacekeeping, peacebuilding, human rights, human resources, procurement, or information technology, have been implemented as part of these broader waves of reform, many of them stemming from the 1997 reform proposals discussed in the next section.

Waves of Reform

PRE-COLD WAR REFORM INITIATIVES

Although this report focuses on the period since 1992, significant changes were made to the Secretariat by each secretary-general before the end of the Cold War. Secretaries-general have generally used their first months and years to reform the Secretariat to meet their management styles, political windows of opportunity, and substantive demands by member states. Thant Myint-U and Amy Scott wrote an excellent brief history of Secretariat reform from 1945 to 2006.⁶ Much of the overview in this section is taken from their work.

The first secretary-general, Trygve Lie (1946–1952), had to establish the location, the building, and the first complement of staffing. In 1950, he had laid out an ambitious *Twenty-Year Programme for Achieving Peace through the United Nations*,⁷ but the Korean War heightened Cold War tensions and made his plans moot. His Secretariat had eight administrative and substantive departments, headed by assistant secretaries-general. The focus of the organization at the time was on collective security, as member states recognized that specialized agencies, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) would concentrate on more technical and functional areas

3 A charter amendment must be adopted by a vote of two thirds of the General Assembly and ratified in accordance with their respective national constitutional processes by two thirds of the member states, including the P5 (Article 108). It has been used on three occasions only: twice in 1963 to increase the size of the memberships of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and a third time to further increase the membership of ECOSOC in 1973.

4 For a comprehensive and concise review of UN reform, see Edward C. Luck, *Reforming the United Nations: Lessons from a History in Progress* (Academic Council on the UN System, 2003).

5 "Compilation of Reform Proposals, 1992–2011," internal, unpublished study by the UN Secretary-General's Change Management Team. The study was limited to proposals from previous secretaries-general. Harvard Business School professor John Kotter claimed (in 1996) that nearly 70 percent of large-scale change programs do not meet their goals. See John Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996).

6 Thant Myint-U and Amy Scott, *The UN Secretariat: A Brief History (1945–2006)*, New York: International Peace Academy, 2007.

7 United Nations General Assembly, *Twenty-Year Programme for Achieving Peace through the United Nations*, UN Doc. A/1304, July 26, 1950.

of international cooperation. However, the role of the Secretariat had already started to be confused in these areas given its secretariat role for the Economic and Social Council, which wanted detailed and technical reporting on such issues as transport, refugees, and human rights. All this was further compounded by the introduction of the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance (the pre-cursor of the UN Development Programme) and the first regional economic commissions. In terms of senior appointments, Lie sought to bring the views of the five permanent members of the Security Council (the P5) in-house by appointing senior nationals of those countries to his group of eight assistant secretaries-general, especially important at the time when there were no permanent missions in New York.

Dag Hammarskjöld (1953–1961) focused his first months on reorganizing the Secretariat, and replaced most of the eight assistant secretaries-general he inherited from Lie. He was personally involved in reform efforts, drafting many of the papers himself, presenting a report on the “Organization of the Secretariat” at the end of 1953 that called for a freer hand by the secretary-general for the recruitment and termination of staff. Much of his report was approved by the General Assembly. Hammarskjöld reorganized the senior echelons of the Secretariat, appointing six under-secretaries-general, while centralizing administrative and financial authority (legal, treasury, personnel) in his office. The idea of peacekeeping started under Hammarskjöld, with the first UN Emergency Force (UNEF I) authorized in 1956 following the Suez Crisis, and later the UN Operation in the Congo (UNOC). Opposition by France and the Soviet Union to the growing UN operation in the Congo led to severe financial crises as the budget for that mission skyrocketed and the two P5 members refused to pay their shares. By 1959, there was a growing feeling that Hammarskjöld had centralized too much authority, and the General Assembly called for a review of the organization of the Secretariat.

U Thant (1961–1971) met the same pressures as Lie and Hammarskjöld to appoint senior staff from the P5. He agreed to appoint eight principal advisers

at the level of under-secretary-general, who came from the USA, the Soviet Union, Brazil, Czechoslovakia, France, India, Nigeria, and the United Arab Republic (the name of the country formed from the brief union of Egypt and Syria). This group met monthly with the secretary-general, but for a year or so only. As the first secretary-general from a non-Western country, Thant championed a robust development agenda, but by the late 1960s the growth in functions had resulted in more than thirty-four senior staff around the world. Thant proposed reducing these to eleven under-secretaries-general reporting directly to him, who would serve as a cabinet with an overview of the UN’s activities, while there would be more assistant secretaries-general, focused on departmental responsibilities only. He also pushed the administration and finance functions out of his office and over to an under-secretary-general for finance and administration, reversing Hammarskjöld’s effort to centralize these functions. The General Assembly approved these changes.

Kurt Waldheim (1972–1981) hired the first woman at the assistant secretary-general level, and also recognized the need for younger staff, submitting the first long-term recruitment plan, including proposals for the first National Competitive Recruitment Exam that set a certain benchmark for incoming staff and has effectively led to greater geographic diversity. On the economic and social side, Waldheim was asked by the General Assembly in 1974 to commission a group of experts to recommend structural changes to enhance UN effectiveness in economic cooperation—this group called for the consolidation of all funds for technical assistance into a single development entity. Although this initiative was not successful due to divisions in the membership, it did lead to the appointment of a director-general for development and international economic cooperation, who was supposed to be senior to the agency heads and the other under-secretaries-general. Waldheim “remained lukewarm” to this idea and, as a result, the actual impact on coherence was marginal.⁸ Also occurring during the 1970s was the first wave of major international conferences on the environment (1972), population (1974), women (1975),

⁸ See Myint-U and Scott, *The UN Secretariat*, p. 67.

human settlements (1976), and employment (1976).

Javier Pérez de Cuellar (1982–1991) tried at the beginning of his first term to gain control of personnel decisions and depoliticize the Secretariat. However, his first months were crippled by a financial crisis. A General Assembly panel of eighteen countries recommended sweeping changes including reforms of the budget process, the introduction of the Committee on Programme Coordination and a 25 percent cut in the number of assistant secretaries-general and under-secretaries-general.⁹ He appointed a career UN official as a special coordinator for reform in September, 1986, then in November, he fired eleven under-secretaries-general and assistant secretaries-general, which created space for new blood at the top. Human rights responsibilities were transferred to Geneva, and the Department of Public Information was significantly streamlined. Pérez de Cuellar also attempted to strengthen the UN's analytical capacity by establishing an Office for Research and Collection of Information (ORCI). This initiative failed, as no attempt was made to bring in new capacities to this office, instead serving Secretariat staff were expected to deliver on challenging new responsibilities.

POST-COLD WAR WAVES OF REFORM

Wave I: An Agenda for Peace and a More Action-Oriented Approach

The most radical change in the Secretariat's organization since the times of Dag Hammarskjöld happened during the first two years of Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's term in 1992 and 1993. In the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War and bipolarity in the international system, the Security Council met in January 1992 for the first time at the level of heads of state and government. It adopted a chairman's statement inviting the newly appointed secretary-general to prepare "analysis and recommendations on ways of strengthening [...] the capacity of the United Nations for preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, and peace-keeping."¹⁰ In record time, Boutros-Ghali issued the "Agenda for Peace" in

June, an agenda-setting document for the UN's role in the maintenance of international peace and security.¹¹ UN member states spent months debating the Agenda, and the General Assembly adopted many of its recommendations. The Agenda defined the concept of "post-conflict peacebuilding," made reference to Chapter VII of the UN Charter to justify the use of force without consent of the parties involved, and emphasized the role of early warning, preventive diplomacy, and peacemaking. Boutros-Ghali also produced an "Agenda for Development" in 1994, a "Supplement to an Agenda for Peace" in 1995, and a more controversial "Agenda for Democratization" weeks before the end of his term as secretary-general in 1996.¹² None of these documents, however, were as influential as his Agenda for Peace.

The General Assembly adopted many of the suggested actions of the Agenda for Peace in Resolution 47/120 that was discussed over 1992 and 1993, and passed in two parts during separate sessions on December 18, 1992, and September 20, 1993.¹³

With relative harmony reigning at the Security Council, Resolution 47/120 led to significant improvements in the way the UN's peace and security architecture worked, and emboldened a new generation of international civil servants to be more action-oriented in their approach to peacemaking.

In the Secretariat, Boutros-Ghali again attempted to streamline the senior ranks. He had twenty-eight under-secretaries-general reporting to him when he first arrived but unilaterally abolished eighteen posts, including the director-general for Development and International Economic Cooperation originally created by the General Assembly under Waldheim's tenure. He placed all under-secretaries-general and assistant secretaries-general on one-year contracts to ensure compliance with his instructions and some degree of accountability.

Organizationally, the three departments of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Political Affairs (DPA), and Peacekeeping Operations

⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁰ United Nations Security Council, *Note by the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/23500, January 31, 1992.

¹¹ United Nations, *An Agenda for Peace*, UN Doc. A/47/277, June 17, 1992.

¹² United Nations, *An Agenda for Development*, UN Doc. A/48/935, May 6, 1994; United Nations, *Supplement to an Agenda for Peace*, UN Doc. A/50/60, January 3, 1995; United Nations, *An Agenda for Democratization*, UN Doc. A/51/761, December 20, 1996.

¹³ UN General Assembly Resolution 47/120 (December 18, 1992, and September 20, 1993), UN Doc. A/RES/47/120.

Table 1: Main issues tackled by Resolution 47/120

On peaceful settlement of disputes	<i>“Decides to explore ways and means for a full utilization of the provisions of the Charter whereby the General Assembly may recommend measures for the peaceful adjustment of any situation, regardless of origin, which is deemed likely to impair the general welfare or friendly relations among nations.”</i>
On early warning and fact-finding	<i>“Recognizing the need to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations for early-warning, collection of information and analysis [...]. Encourages the Secretary-General to set up an adequate early-warning mechanism for situations which are likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security. [...] Invites the Secretary-General to strengthen the capacity of the Secretariat for the collection of information and analysis to serve better the early-warning needs of the Organization [...]. Encourages the Secretary-General to continue, in accordance with Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations, to bring to the attention of the Security Council, at his discretion, any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security, together with his recommendations thereon [...]. Recommends to the Secretary-General that he should continue to utilize the services of eminent and qualified experts in fact-finding.”</i>
On preventive deployment	<i>“Acknowledges the importance of considering, on a case-by-case basis, the use of preventive deployment.”</i>
On postconflict peacebuilding	<i>“Acknowledges the usefulness of the proposals of the Secretary-General contained in paragraphs 55 to 59 of his report entitled “An Agenda for Peace,” particularly in relation to the range of activities for post-conflict peace-building; Emphasizes that post-conflict peace-building should be carried out in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, in particular the principles of sovereign equality and political independence of States, territorial integrity, and non-intervention in matters that are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State.”</i>

(DPKO) were created out of several smaller offices and programs, essentially creating organizational silos. DPA was seen as the political and strategic office, while DPKO was seen as operational. DPKO submitted papers to the secretary-general's office through DPA for a time, although this later changed. DPKO's role was focused on specific countries and achieving specific goals in each, while DPA's role of conflict prevention was more amorphous.

The demise of the Cold War generated considerable exuberance as several new missions were launched to end conflicts in places previously off-limits to the UN because of great power rivalry (e.g., the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia [UNTAC], the UN Protection Force [UNPROFOR] in the Balkans, the UN Operation in Mozambique [UNUMOZ], and the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda [UNAMIR]). Three times more peace agreements were negotiated and signed during the 1990s than in the previous three decades combined, and the UN was

starting to play a significant role in implementing these agreements.

More important than the change in structures was the change in attitude and culture—the UN Secretariat was being increasingly charged with substantive responsibilities for conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding, which engendered a more action-oriented working culture, particularly in DPKO. For example, given the difficulty in getting headquarters-focused administrators to move human and material resources over continents in short time frames, field support and field personnel units were moved directly into DPKO, bringing operational and substantive issues under a single leader, thereby accelerating decision making and deployments.

Even with these changes, multiple, often simultaneous deployments, some successful and others less so, started to show the inherent problems of a headquarters-based organization more familiar with organizing and servicing conferences than urgently deploying troops, police, and civilians to

several far-flung war-torn regions of the globe. More dramatically, the genocide in Rwanda and the massacres in Srebrenica, both of which occurred while blue helmets were deployed in theater, resulted in much soul-searching particularly on how the UN responds politically, operationally, and militarily to peace and security challenges.

Wave II: Institutional Change

In his first term as secretary-general, Kofi Annan, a career UN staffer and the former head of both human resources and peacekeeping, commissioned a set of extensive reforms beginning in 1997. Having served as the secretary-general's representative to the former Yugoslavia, Annan was very sensitive to the contradictions and challenges the UN Secretariat faced. He commissioned Maurice Strong, former secretary-general of the successful UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992, as executive coordinator for UN reform. Strong chaired a steering committee of senior officials to develop and implement proposals and monitor progress.

Proposals were tabled in June and July 1997 in two parts; the first dealt with administrative and management reforms, and the second involved more wide-reaching policy and institutional reforms.¹⁴

The secretary-general suggested to the president of the General Assembly that these reforms should proceed along two tracks, the first implemented under the authority of the secretary-general, while the second would require a longer-term program of reform to be guided and ultimately decided by member states. He presented the reforms personally to the General Assembly in July, to allow for enough time for delegations to respond through their statements in the September General Debate. He made a case under the new General Assembly agenda item 168, "United Nations Reform: Measures and Proposals," for considering the reforms in an integrated manner, given the interconnected nature of his proposals.¹⁵

In its resolutions from November and December

1997, the General Assembly adopted several of the secretary-general's proposals, including those related to

- the creation of a new deputy secretary-general position,
- the designation of a UN humanitarian assistance coordinator,
- the creation of the Development Account, and
- a revolving credit facility to improve cash flow.¹⁶

Outstanding issues on the secretary-general's reform agenda were referred to General Assembly committees, in particular the Fifth Committee.

Wave III: The Millennium Declaration, the Brahimi Report, and the Challenges of Globalization

At the end of March 2000, Secretary-General Kofi Annan released a non-paper "We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century."¹⁷ Prepared ahead of the Millennium Summit, the special designation of the fifty-fifth session of the UN General Assembly (September 6–8, 2000), the report outlined a vision for the UN in the age of globalization. In it, the secretary-general offered an action plan to make globalization work more justly, and the report contained numerous specific program initiatives. The concept of the Millennium Development Goals was introduced here, drawn from the various commitments made through the focused UN summits and conferences of the 1990s. These initiatives were coupled with administrative and management reforms at the UN itself to strengthen the bureaucracy's ability to implement against revitalized mandates. The secretary-general also introduced the idea of "sunset provisions" on mandates, and challenged member states to conduct a thorough mandate review process to eliminate dated mandates so the deck could be cleared for new challenges.

At about the same time, Secretary-General Annan commissioned a panel, chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi, to take a comprehensive look at the gaps in peacekeeping. The panel's report, known as the Brahimi Report, in August 2000 offered a number

¹⁴ UN General Assembly Resolution 51/231 (June 13, 1997), UN Doc. A/RES/51/231, and UN General Assembly Resolution 51/239 A (June 17, 1997), UN Doc. A/RES/51/239 A, were subsequently bundled under United Nations, *Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform*, UN Doc. A/51/950, July 14, 1997.

¹⁵ United Nations, *Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform*, UN Doc. A/51/950, July 14, 1997.

¹⁶ UN General Assembly Resolution 52/12 A (November 12, 1997), UN Doc. A/RES/52/12 A; and UN General Assembly Resolution 52/12 B (December 19, 1997), UN Doc. A/RES/52/12 B.

¹⁷ Kofi Annan, *We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century*, New York: UN Department of Public Information, 2000.

of recommendations to further advance the goals originally set out by Annan's predecessor in an "Agenda for Peace," addressing some of the issues the world body had confronted during the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the 1995 Srebrenica massacre.¹⁸

The UN Millennium Declaration, which was the outcome document of the Millennium Summit in September 2000, took up many of the recommendations and acknowledged member states' collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality, and equity.¹⁹ The declaration validated the Brahimi Report and called on the General Assembly to consider it expeditiously. It also set in train certain quantitative benchmarks in such areas as poverty eradication, primary schooling, HIV prevention, maternal health, gender equality, and sustainable development that would ultimately become the Millennium Development Goals.

The secretary-general followed up on the Millennium Declaration with a road map to support its implementation, which proposed strategies to meet the goals established in the declaration, bringing together best practice from both member states and the UN system.²⁰ In the section on "Peace, Security, and Disarmament," the report proposed strengthening rule of law and promoted the rapid entry into force of the Rome Statute, the treaty that established the International Criminal Court. It also sought to replace the culture of reaction with one of prevention. On the development side, the Millennium Development Goals were introduced in an accompanying annex as a means to bundle the various commitments under the development agenda. Environmental conservation, protection of the vulnerable, human rights, and governance issues were also included in the road map with specific initiatives.

This road map led to two General Assembly resolutions in 2002 and 2003,²¹ which essentially

endorsed the proposals and asked for regular reporting—this was the most that probably could have been expected from the Assembly given that, at the same time, the politics in the General Assembly and the Security Council were getting more complex in the wake of the US-led operations in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003).

Wave IV: The World Summit Outcome Document and a Move toward Long-Term Reform

Seeing it as his last attempt at comprehensive reform, in the aftermath of the managerial and ethical issues raised by the Volcker Report on the "oil-for-food" program and the invasion of Iraq, Secretary-General Annan commissioned a panel of eminent experts, the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, which published its report in December 2004 with a comprehensive set of ideas for UN reform.²² The secretary-general responded to the panel's recommendations with his report, "In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All," published on March 21, 2005.²³ This report provided the basis for wide-ranging debates over the summer, ultimately leading to the World Summit Outcome Document, published on October 24, 2005.²⁴

While effectively establishing such innovative structures as the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council, and a new norm, the "responsibility to protect," the Outcome Document, which was agreed to by all 191 member states at the time, also asked the secretary-general to come back to the Assembly for further consideration of the conditions and measures necessary for him to carry out his managerial responsibilities effectively. Member states also committed to a review of all mandates older than five years, triggering an extensive, multiyear mandate review process in the General Assembly, which benefitted from an in-depth analysis by the Secretariat.²⁵

18 United Nations, *Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations*, UN Doc. A/55/305-S/2000/809, August 21, 2000.

19 United Nations, *UN Millennium Declaration*, UN Doc. A/55/2, September 8, 2000.

20 United Nations Secretary-General, *Road Map Towards the Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration*, UN Doc. A/56/326, September 6, 2001.

21 UN General Assembly Resolution 56/95 (January 30, 2002), UN Doc. A/RES/56/95; and UN General Assembly Resolution 57/144 (February 26, 2003), UN Doc. A/RES/57/144.

22 United Nations, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, UN Doc. A/59/565, December 2, 2004.

23 United Nations, *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*, UN Doc. A/59/2005, March 21, 2005.

24 UN General Assembly Resolution 60/1 (October 24, 2005), UN Doc. A/RES/60/1.

25 Ibid., para. 163(b).

The secretary-general responded with his report, “Investing in the UN,” where he laid out measures to “...enable future Secretaries-General to carry out their managerial responsibilities effectively, as well as measures to enable the Organization as a whole to make better use of its managerial and human resources.”²⁶ The report sought to “...combine then on-going reviews of oversight systems and internal justice...with major reforms in six other broad areas....” The twenty-three proposals covered human resource reform (including proposals on harmonizing contracts and staff mobility), leadership, information and communications technology, service delivery (i.e., outsourcing), budget and finance, governance, and change management. The change management proposals included proposals for a staff buy-out to fully reinvigorate the Secretariat.

The secretary-general’s report was met with some scepticism and a fair bit of alarmist language, reflecting the divisions in the General Assembly. Nevertheless, the resolution established a “legislative hook” for accountability and did ask for further reports and data in a number of the areas that the secretary-general was trying to advance—effectively launching a decade of activity in all these important areas.²⁷ Subsequent, more technical, resolutions on program planning, human resources reform, procurement reform, and other issues continued along these new tracks.

Wave V: The Strengthening of Peacekeeping, Political Affairs, and Development Agendas

At the time of Ban Ki-moon’s appointment as secretary-general in 2007, nine new peacekeeping operations had been approved in three years with nearly three-quarters of the UN’s assessed budget dedicated to peacekeeping and managed by one under-secretary-general. Recognizing this managerial overstretch and the budget imbalance, Secretary-General Ban proposed splitting the political, rule of law, and military elements from the administrative and logistical elements in

DPKO, creating a Department of Field Support.

This concept was supported by the General Assembly,²⁸ which then called for a detailed report that was tabled on April 13, 2007.²⁹ This report was fairly bold, requesting an additional 495 posts under the peacekeeping support account budget over the previous year, in order to reset the ratio of headquarters to field personnel at 1:100, considered a manageable ratio in the Brahimi Report to ensure oversight, lessons learned, and effective management.

The report proposed the establishment of a second regional division for Africa and seven Integrated Operational Teams (IOTs), to improve coordination among the Office of Operations, Field Support, Military, and Police divisions—equipping the Office of Operations to carry out its role of integrator, representing “...a major step forward towards the ‘matrix-management’ approach to mission planning and management recommended in the 2000 Brahimi Report.”³⁰ Through the regular budget, several new senior posts were established, including a new under-secretary-general for Field Support (reporting to the under-secretary-general for DPKO, a unique arrangement) and new assistant secretaries-general for the Office of Military Affairs and for the Rule of Law Unit. In its resolution, the General Assembly broadly accepted the proposals.³¹

At the same time, the secretary-general sought to strengthen DPA by merging disarmament and peacebuilding into its structure. However, this effort was rejected vociferously by member states. The Group of 77 (G-77) was adamant about keeping Disarmament Affairs as an independent entity, and middle powers, which had fought hard to establish a stand-alone peacebuilding architecture to coordinate the activities of major UN departments and the international financial institutions, were loath to see it folded into one of the departments it was supposed to coordinate. The secretary-general instead proposed having the Department for Disarmament Affairs become the Office for Disarmament Affairs, headed by a high

26 United Nations Secretary-General, *Investing in the UN*, UN Doc. A/60/692, March 7, 2006.

27 UN General Assembly Resolution 60/260 (May 16, 2006), UN Doc. A/RES/60/260.

28 UN General Assembly Resolution 61/256 (March 22, 2007), UN Doc. A/RES/61/256.

29 United Nations, UN Doc. A/61/858, April 13, 2007.

30 United Nations, A/55/305-S/2000/809, paras. 198-217 describe the Integrated Mission Task Force (IMTF) concept, which later became the IOTs, essentially introducing a matrix style of management into DPKO.

31 UN General Assembly Resolution 61/279 (August 1, 2007), UN Doc. A/RES/61/279.

representative for disarmament, and leaving the Peacebuilding Support Office as it was established in 2005.³²

A separate effort was launched later in 2008 to strengthen DPA, focusing the membership on the importance of the prevention of violent armed conflict; this was realized over 2008 and 2009, with the addition of forty-nine new “regular budget” posts and the establishment of two new units, the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force and a Policy and Mediation Division. In addition, two large regional divisions (Asia-Pacific, and Europe and Latin America) were split into four (Europe, Latin America, Asia-Pacific, and Middle East and West Asia).

On the peacekeeping side, the reform strategies titled “Peace Operations 2010” and the “New Horizon” initiative addressed outstanding issues from the Brahimi Report, which had itself enabled a five-fold increase in operations since 2000. The “New Horizon” initiative was tabled as a non-paper in 2009 with a focus on political strategy, mission planning, faster deployments, role clarity, crisis management, and improved field support.³³ The Global Field Support Strategy (GFSS) was one element to develop from this policy agenda and was actively discussed with member states via the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C34) and the Fifth Committee.

In the area of development, Ban implemented the “Delivering as One” report, which aimed to increase coordination in the development, humanitarian, and environmental areas in the field. Eight countries started as pilots in 2007. By March of 2014, the Delivering as One model had expanded to more than thirty-five countries and was widely considered as a new operating procedure for coordination. The establishment of UN Women in 2011 was another important structural reform that enjoyed the strong support of the secretary-general and member states, consolidating four bodies (the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, the Division for the Advancement of Women, the UN Development Fund for Women, and the UN International Research and Training Institute for the

Advancement of Women) into a single organization led by an under-secretary-general.

Ethics reform also continued under Ban, who took an active role in financial disclosures and senior management compacts and reviews. Growth of the Ombudsman’s Office and the review of the Administration of Justice also took place during this period.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Change Plan

Beside the reforms mentioned above from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s first year in office in 2007, the Secretariat acted cautiously on further proposals, having experienced first-hand the “reform fatigue” that had set in among the membership. A widespread feeling existed in the Secretariat that, after a particularly active decade of reforms, the UN system needed some time to absorb and digest the changes—to urge anything revolutionary during the first term would be counterproductive. The membership was also divided in the wake of the oil-for-food scandal and the subsequent reports, investigations, and reforms. Under the circumstances, it felt a need to let individual yet important reform efforts, such as on ethics, enterprise resource planning, and human resources, move forward without trying to propose yet another comprehensive round.

Nevertheless, the global challenges the UN was facing were growing increasingly complex and intertwined. While coping with the repercussions of the 2008 financial crisis, and successive failed rounds of international trade and climate change negotiations, the secretary-general was confronting crises in Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gaza, Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia, and Sri Lanka. This was further compounded by the humanitarian consequences of natural disasters, such as Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, and the earthquake in Haiti, where the terrible suffering of the local population weighed heavily, as did the loss of 102 UN staff from the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Terrorist attacks on the UN compounds in Algiers and Abuja resulting in

32 UN General Assembly Resolution 61/257 (March 22, 2007), UN Doc. A/RES/61/257.

33 UN DPKO and DFS, *A New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping*, July 2009.

significant UN losses further complicated the situation. The secretary-general and his team moved from crisis to crisis, trying to extinguish fires, not able to focus on strategic planning or new comprehensive reform efforts.

But effective long-term planning and strategic approaches were required to deal proactively with the challenges before the UN. New approaches were needed on multiple fronts, from sustainable development and climate change, to conflict prevention and humanitarian assistance. The recurrence of conflict was of particular concern, with 90 percent of the civil wars since 2000 occurring in countries that had experienced a civil war in the previous thirty years.³⁴ UN interventions, rather than being sequential by moving from mediation of a peace agreement to peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and early development, often had to include all of the above in different configurations. At the same time, the aftermath of the Arab Spring created a new wave of countries in need of support for their political and economic transitions.

Through the first term, there was a realization that the immensity of the challenges required a re-invigorated UN. However, the secretary-general needed partners among key member states to launch a meaningful reform process, and the international system was itself in the midst of seismic shifts. The rise of Brazil, Russia, India, and China (the so-called BRIC countries) and emerging powers such as Turkey, Indonesia, and Mexico meant a more diverse group of actors and a wider range of interests to be aligned as US unipolarity waned. As the American and European economies started to plummet in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, prominent scholars and experts started to speak of multiple poles of authority and a regionalization of power that could make the very centralized UN irrelevant. The return of Russia as a counterweight to Western Europe and the US was also significant, starting in Georgia in 2008, but followed by periodic vetoes and heated Security Council discussions over Myanmar, Libya, Syria, and more recently, Ukraine. Still, on less heated crises, Council unanimity was possible, as seen in

Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, and the Central African Republic.³⁵

Demonstrating the fluidity of today's geopolitical landscape, these trends seem to have reversed somewhat over the course of Ban's tenure, with an ongoing economic recovery in the US and its energy self-sufficiency, the relative economic slowdown of emerging powers, and the chilling of political transitions in the Arab world. To this complex and volatile new world disorder, the UN has learned that it needs to adapt.

As often happens, crisis presents opportunities for change. While the 2008 financial crisis increased the pressure on the Secretariat for budget cuts by some large donors, two specific crises may have encouraged more strategic thinking: first, the mass atrocities in Sri Lanka, as the government was bringing to conclusion a two-decade-long civil war with a military victory in 2008/2009; and, second, the upheavals in Tunisia, which started the so-called Arab Spring at the end of 2010.

In the case of Sri Lanka, the question that predominated was how the UN Secretariat and other organs such as the Security Council failed to act in the wake of the unfurling disaster, where thousands of civilians were killed at the hand of their own democratically elected government. In the case of the Arab Spring, the UN was markedly out of touch. As the then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, pointed out later in 2012,

Even as events were unfolding, we read...that Tunisia showed 'remarkable progress on equitable growth, fighting poverty, and achieving good social indicators,' that it was '...on track to achieve the MDGs...' was '...far ahead in terms of governance, effectiveness, rule of law, control of corruption and regulatory quality...' was '...one of the most equitable societies...' 'a top reformer,' and that '...the development model that Tunisia has pursued over the past two decades has served the country well.'³⁶

THE FIVE-YEAR ACTION AGENDA

All of these interconnected challenges, coupled with the secretary-general's own bid to secure re-election, led to a concerted effort to bring together

³⁴ World Bank, *2011 World Development Report* (Washington, DC, 2011), p. 2.

³⁵ On Security Council dynamics and the continued possibility of unanimity, see Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone, and Bruno Stagno Ugarte, "Conclusion: The Security Council and a World in Crisis," in *The UN Security Council in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone, and Bruno Stagno Ugarte (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2015), p. 830.

³⁶ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Address by the High-Commissioner for Human Rights at the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights," 2012, available at www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=11807&LangID=e.

various reform streams into a coherent narrative. The process, which ultimately produced the Five-Year Action Agenda,³⁷ was initiated by the secretary-general, under the direction of Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Strategic Planning Robert Orr.

In support of this action agenda, a joint policy and management committee meeting was held on April 2011 launching a change management process to deliver a strengthened organization that serves its member states and beneficiaries more effectively and efficiently. The process was divided into six categories: Programme Effectiveness, Human Resources, Information and Communications Technology, Procurement and Common Services, Innovation in Business Processes and Governing Body Processes. The process drew from previous legislative mandates, engagement with member states, senior management, and staff.

The secretary-general first spoke of five generational opportunities in September 2011, including (a) achieving sustainable development, “connecting the dots” among climate change, the food crisis, water scarcity, energy shortages, women’s empowerment, and global health issues; (b) preventing and/or mitigating the effects of man-made and natural disasters; (c) making the world a safer and more secure place; (d) supporting countries in transition, ensuring that human rights and basic dignities are fully respected; and (e) empowering women and youth.

These goals, together with proposals for reform under each of them, were presented to member states in a non-paper in January 2012, which also outlined two enablers, partnerships and a strengthened UN.³⁸ Strengthening the UN included five specific initiatives: (a) ensuring the more effective delivery of mandates and doing more within recognized resource constraints through innovation and change management initiatives; (b) building a modern workforce supported by a global Secretariat; (c) making the UN more open, flexible, and accountable; (d) launching a second generation of “Delivering as One”; and (e) enhancing the safety and security of UN staff.

THE CHANGE PLAN

Following the April 2011 joint meeting of the management and policy committees, the secretary-general charged Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro with change management, giving her broad responsibilities for management and administration. Atul Khare, a former Indian diplomat, special-representative to the secretary-general, and DPKO senior official, was asked to lead a seconded Change Management Team (CMT) through the end of 2011, reporting to the deputy secretary-general. He requested secondments from all departments and received staff from the Department of Management, Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), DPA, DESA, DPKO, the Department of Field Support (DFS), and the Department of Public Information.

The deputy secretary-general convened a change management senior advisory group of assistant secretary-generals (ASGs), including the ASG for Strategic Planning, the deputy chef de cabinet, and ASGs from DFS, the Office of Human Resource Management, the Controller’s Office, DPA, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNDP, and the Chief Information Technology Officer, and wrote to all department heads immediately after the April 2011 meeting, asking for recommendations on potential change initiatives.

Departments canvassed their staff and sent back a number of ideas. By keeping the request open to all ideas, most departments’ responses pointed to the left or the right, suggesting fundamental changes in other departments or areas while hoping their own work would be left undisturbed. One of the most popular suggestions was over human resources reform, from other departments directed at the Department of Management. Other popular suggestions included streamlining budget procedures, improving IT functionality, properly applying existing and expanded flexible work arrangements, and reducing bureaucracy generally through new, collaborative working methods.

The call for submissions yielded several hundred ideas, and each was vetted by the Change

37 United Nations, *The Secretary-General’s Five-Year Action Agenda*, January 25, 2012.

38 Ibid.

Table 2: Twelve fast-track change initiatives approved by the secretary-general in November, 2011

Fast-Track Initiative	Status
1. Establishment of Change Management Network	Implemented; stand-alone network fully operational as of December 31, 2011, now meeting quarterly largely on digital secretariat initiatives
2. Implementation of digital signature	Not yet implemented; new policy still under development; will be aligned to Umoja implementation
3. Evolution of PaperSmart meetings	Implemented; guide issued; online portal developed; use expanding
4. Reinvigorating the Publications Board	Implemented; Secretary-General Bulletin issued; publications being reduced
5. Increasing the use of virtual communication technologies	Implemented; internal communications issued; implementation continues under digital Secretariat initiative
6. Establishment of a new travel policy	Implemented; administrative instructions issued following approval by General Assembly; now in use
7. Establishment of online database for evaluations	Not implemented; resources could not be identified
8. Expedited recruitment for military and police	Implemented; new policy in place at end of 2012
9. Harmonization of trust fund overheads	Implemented; draft policy approved
10. Expanding flexible working arrangements	Implemented; pilot of expanded flexible working arrangements launched; use by staff is increasing
11. Revision of supplier registration process	Implemented; introduction of “Basic Registration” level to target vendors from developing countries by March 31, 2012
12. Increased procurement outreach via mobile application	Implemented; new UN Procurement Division mobile application launched

Management Team (CMT). Using a matrix assessing potential impact and capacity to implement, the CMT reviewed the proposals and determined which might be fast-tracked, which would require some additional work and the designation of a process owner, and which were unlikely to succeed. Applying a universal formula to each proposal allowed the CMT to rank each proposal and to choose those proposals that had a best chance of success. This methodology could be compared to the DICE methodology championed by some business consulting firms that assess four specific factors with regard to any change initiative to assess its potential for success.³⁹ The CMT used different variables (buy-in, ownership, and degree of difficulty) but essentially followed this methodology.

Twelve of the ideas submitted scored high through this process and were fast-tracked, submitted for feedback to the assistant secretary-general-level advisory group, and endorsed by the secretary-general in November 2011. All twelve had specific process owners. Ten of them were implemented over the course of 2012/3, while two did not receive the necessary degree of support and buy-in to become reality. One of the key fast-track initiatives was the establishment of the Change Management Focal Points Network, a group of focal points selected by their respective leaders to help present and implement ideas for improving the way the UN Secretariat worked. This forum met monthly for about two years, and now meets quarterly, focused on the implementation of a digital Secretariat initiative.

In addition to the twelve fast-track initiatives, the CMT's analysis vetted other ideas which required a little more preparation, and were ultimately bundled together with the fast-track opportunities over the autumn of 2011. The CMT worked with prospective process owners to ensure buy-in and implementation, while also developing an overarching vision for the plan.

During this same period (summer and autumn of

2011), Atul Khare visited permanent representatives of member states to explain the approach of the CMT and many of the suggested proposals. While these individual briefings were appreciated, many member states, felt that the proposals were not being duly consulted through the regular processes of the General Assembly and the Fifth Committee in charge of Administrative and Budgetary Affairs.

The draft Change Plan, containing a total of sixty-one recommendations, was presented to the deputy secretary-general and the assistant secretary-general-level change management advisory group in November 2011. After integrating comments and suggestions, the final plan was presented to the secretary-general on December 24, 2011. He endorsed the plan and asked Atul Khare to stay on to implement it, but since Khare was unable to do so, the secretary-general asked his Deputy Chef de Cabinet Kim Won-soo to take over *ad interim*, and he was later appointed as assistant secretary-general for Change Implementation.

The secretary-general shared the Change Plan with his senior management group of department and agency heads and, following their inputs, approved the final document.⁴⁰ The agreed vision was for “[a] modern, engaged and efficient Secretariat, transparent and accountable in its work, responsibly stewarding resources to deliver high-quality results, building confidence in the UN and its ideals.”⁴¹

The achievement of the vision relied on four key deliverables:

1. enhancing trust and confidence;
2. engaging staff;
3. improving working methods; and
4. rationalizing structures and functions.

The four deliverables were in line with the “Strengthening the UN” enabler of the Five-Year Action Agenda, but since they were the result of a grassroots exercise involving staff, managers, and

39 For a full description of the DICE methodology, see Harold Sirkin, Perry Keenan and Alan Jackson, “The Hard Side of Change Management,” *Harvard Business Review*, October 2005. The four factors include project duration (D), particularly the time between project reviews; performance integrity (I), or the capabilities of the dedicated project leaders and teams; the commitment (C) of both senior managers and the staff whom the change will affect the most; and the additional effort (E) required by employees who will need to cope with the change.

40 United Nations, *The Change Plan: Proposals by the Change Management Team to the Secretary-General* (New York, December 2011), available at www.un.org/sg/pdf/the-change-plan.pdf.

41 Ibid., p. 12.

member states, there were some variations, which led to confusion by concerned departments in the implementation phase. The sixty-one initiatives that were bundled under each of these four deliverables ranged considerably in scope and intended effect. The Change Plan had some concrete initiatives with process owners and implementation plans, such as those related to procurement or flexible working arrangements for staff, and others that were widely shared principles but needed further work to develop, such as the need for functional reviews or the implementation of the three signature rule.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

The process of implementing many of the recommendations in the Change Plan was more difficult than its drafting. The secretary-general wrote to all permanent representatives in February 2012, suggesting that many of the initiatives could be implemented under his authority. In defending individual proposals before the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee, experts from the Department of Management and other Secretariat officials started using the Change Plan as definitive policy, when it had no independent legislative standing, other than having been endorsed by the secretary-general and the senior management group as a type of “white paper” that was then distributed to permanent missions but never formally submitted to any of the organization’s legislative bodies for debate or endorsement.

The presumption and lack of communication around the actual status of the various change initiatives was unsettling to a number of delegations, and the financial politics that dominated the General Assembly’s Fifth Committee took over in the spring of 2012. The Geneva Group of large contributors had been pushing throughout the period for cost-saving reforms, given the pressure for financial austerity in their capitals. The G-77 was focused on the effective implementation of development-related mandates and did not see the need for cost-cutting.

Recognizing these sensitivities, the Change Team tactically narrowed its focus on program effectiveness, since no member state would argue against

better program delivery. One of the Change Plan’s recommendations also made the case for relocating staff positions from UN headquarters in New York, Geneva, and Vienna closer to the principal “clients” of UN programs in the field, but, rather than gaining the support of the G-77, this proposal upset host countries such as Switzerland.

Still, the struggle continued in the Fifth Committee, which is the purse-holder of the UN budget process. To better understand the challenges of advancing reforms at the UN, a short digression to explain the dynamics of the Fifth Committee is required.

A perennial battle in the Fifth Committee concerns the degree of the secretary-general’s authority, which began in the 1960s when the US and Europe lost majority control over the General Assembly, due to the decolonization process that led to many new member states from Africa and Asia. The Geneva Group of large UN donors supports more authority delegated to the secretary-general because they feel they have more control over him through extra-budgetary resources and other levers. The G-77 wants to see the authority of the secretary-general limited, to ensure he implements mandates issued by the General Assembly, with the appropriate accountability and oversight that their numeric majority allows.

The secretary-general’s letter to the membership and the subsequent debates over the Change Plan ran aground over these two rocky shoals. Ultimately, the Fifth Committee, in a late-night session on April 9, 2012, requested the secretary-general to submit for consideration and prior approval any proposals or measures related to twenty-nine of the sixty-one recommendations. This meant, for all intents and purposes, that the Assembly acknowledged that the other thirty-two could proceed.⁴²

This division was somewhat arbitrary, as the Change Team had recognized that many of the sixty-one recommendations would need General Assembly support, but the resolution was meant to demonstrate to the secretary-general and major contributors that they had to be more careful in asserting the authority of the secretary-general, or risk losing this authority altogether. Privately,

⁴² See the specific language in UN General Assembly Resolution 66/257 (April 12, 2012), UN Doc. A/RES/66/257, section II, para. 8.

many delegates said they wished the Secretariat would move forward on the necessary changes and report through the regular budgetary channels, rather than loading the Fifth Committee with questions of policy in substantive areas with which it was not equipped or designed to address.

Nevertheless, the General Assembly resolution provided the secretary-general with a legislative basis or hook for moving forward on the approved change initiatives, and that allowed the Change Implementation Team, under the leadership of Assistant Secretary-General Kim Won-soo, to start working with the departments on the implementation and the tracking process. For its part, the substantive Five-Year Action Agenda was effectively mainstreamed into the secretary-general's budget proposals by including many of the aspects in the secretary-general's annual report for 2013.

The original idea of Khare and the CMT was to table a set of workable proposals that could be handed off to the new senior team to be appointed at the start of Ban's second term in January 2012, in particular to the new deputy secretary-general, the chef de cabinet, and the under-secretary-general for Management. These senior staff could have then made their own assessment of what was feasible and able to be moved to the implementation phase.

This strategy might have been effective if three conditions had been met. First, the new senior management team would have needed to be appointed at the start of Ban's second term. Regrettably, the hiring process and vetting procedures with member states took up much of 2012, paralyzing any real action for almost one year until the new management team was in place. Second, the three new senior managers were never made explicitly responsible for the implementation of the Change Plan. Two of the three (deputy secretary-general and under-secretary-general for management) were from outside the organization and were not familiar with the change process that had been underway since the start of 2011, nor with the fact that the plan had been vetted and endorsed internally by an advisory group, the senior management group, and the secretary-general himself. Third, and most importantly, the debate over the Change Plan in the General Assembly erupted in the spring of 2012, demonstrating that there was

simply no consensus or political will within the membership of the organization on change management.

Given these realities, the Change Plan was effectively re-opened for the remainder of 2012 and 2013. While the Change Implementation Team sought to keep a focus on implementing those elements under the Change Plan approved in the General Assembly Resolution 66/257, a simultaneous drafting process started involving focal points throughout the Secretariat that yielded multiple new versions of a change agenda. This drafting process involved convening experts and senior officials in six clusters: (a) peace and security; (b) human rights and international justice; (c) development; (d) administration and management; (e) learning, training, and research; and (f) partnerships.

While ultimately no final paper was published given the general lack of both political will and consensus within the membership and concern that a comprehensive push or large-scale reform drive might upset progress on specific tracks, such as staff mobility and enterprise resource planning (Umoja), the exercise of bringing together experts from various departments allowed ideas to be discussed among middle and senior managers in the Secretariat in these six areas. Among member states, an informal group in support of continuous change emerged and started meeting regularly. The Change Team was essentially dissolved in mid-2013, with seconded staff returning to their home departments, although a small cell continued tracking implementation.

According to the Change Implementation Team's most recent tracking charts, 60 to 70 percent of the Change Plan has now been implemented. This is a good score, but this internal assessment should be subjected to an external or OIOS-led evaluation to ensure an independent review. Still, forward movement on enterprise resource planning and staff mobility are just two key achievements that will have a lasting impact on the way the Secretariat works, allowing future secretaries-general to have greater visibility over all resources in real time, and more flexibility to move staff to work on emerging priorities. Mobility could also start to break down the silos that have been building since 1992, with staff moving more frequently across departments and locations.

Of course, the quest for change at the UN Secretariat continues at the time of this report's publication. Peacekeeping and special political missions are the subject of a new High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, which released its report in the summer of 2015. And the UN peacebuilding architecture has also been subjected to its own high-level review. In-depth reviews in other areas, such as women, peace, and security, are also underway. The secretary-general's synthesis report on the post-2015 agenda bundles all the work that was produced under this theme since the June 2012 conference on sustainable development, and proposes a way forward for the post-2015 agenda. Both UNDP and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights have undergone in-depth functional reviews, and many of the ideas emerging from these processes seem to be in line with those suggested in the Change Plan.

Lessons Learned from Past Reforms

As seen through this review of change initiatives in the UN Secretariat since 1992, and in particular the latest attempt by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the “how” is as important as the “what.” Words will not become deeds, unless the Secretariat gets the political process right. Financial considerations also play a pivotal role, as debates on UN reform often become a proxy for political battles among groups of member states.

In light of the experiences reviewed above, the following lessons can be drawn for those seeking to manage change effectively at the United Nations:

1. **Clarify the vision of the Secretariat:** Change requires a clearly articulated strategic vision from the secretary-general. The vast majority of reforms have been initiated by the Secretariat, and even when the secretary-general is mandated by member states, he needs to lead the Secretariat with a clear vision. The Change Plan sought to establish this vision but there was not enough time spent on bringing the key constituencies to agreement, and some member states even questioned if it was the role of the chief administrative officer to articulate such a vision, since the member states are supposed to be in charge.
2. **Encourage support from member states:** It is important for the secretary-general and other senior officials to engage member states in building a rationale for reform, as well as in developing concrete proposals—using the groupings and committees that already exist in New York, namely, the Fifth Committee, the General Assembly, the Committee for Programme and Coordination, and the regional blocs, notably the G-77, the European Union, the African Group, and JUSCANZ, as these are essentially the voting blocs that take decisions forward through the Fifth Committee. Different representatives of member states will have different interests and this will always be variable, but tracking and making use of these interests can help the Secretariat push a reform agenda. While outreach to the New York-based permanent missions is a natural and necessary step for the Secretariat, the secretary-general and his senior officials must also engage in capitals, including both ministries of foreign affairs and finance (particularly in Geneva Group countries). The Secretariat should not bypass the permanent missions; however, consultations with capitals can help to overcome impasses in New York and go beyond political hurdles that assume the peculiar dynamics at UN headquarters.
3. **Involve the General Assembly:** Gone are the days when the Security Council alone could mandate reforms (as it did for the Agenda for Peace in 1992). The General Assembly, through its president, should be an ally of the Secretariat in building consensus among member states, given the critical role of the Fifth Committee. For this reason, reforms should also be timed to leverage the abilities of a consensus-building president of the General Assembly. “Groups of friends” (regionally balanced selections of champions from member states), organized in thematic working groups or informal committees, can be useful in advancing important changes and can be effective to guarantee continuity across successive terms of General Assembly presidents.
4. **Establish buy-in of the Secretariat:** For reforms to be implemented, the buy-in of the Secretariat is needed from the early stages of conception. Mobilizing senior management is important

but not in itself sufficient, since director and working-level staff are key to implementing changes. Since the Secretariat does not have an established mechanism to drive the process of change forward, “agents” of change need to be identified, supported, and made responsible for implementation. In the latest Change Plan, when a “process-owner” was identified, the initiative had a higher chance of success. While there are dynamic change agents across the bureaucracy, inertia and resistance to change is strong. It is therefore important to identify accountable focal points for change within the Secretariat both at the senior and middle management levels to ensure the implementation of reforms, while also providing peer support to encourage progress across the board. Providing a supportive environment for these change agents is key, as fighting bureaucracy cannot be accomplished alone.

5. **Engage staff unions:** Engagement of the various staff unions, particularly at the beginning stage of reforms is important—as they have direct lines to member states and are given a voice in committee sessions on issues that involve staff (such as mobility and flexible working arrangements). Building credibility and trust with these elected representatives of staff can go a long way to building trust with member states, and the reverse is also true.
6. **Ground high-level panels in political realities:** In times of disunity and uncertainty, blue-ribbon panels composed of former statespersons and experts can help generate new ideas and break logjams, as was the case with the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change in 2004. At the same time, these panels need to consider the political context in which they operate, to avoid producing a wish list that cannot obtain consensus regarding national interests and the politics among member states.
7. **Test ideas and trial balloons:** The use of unofficial white papers and speeches by both the secretary-general and other senior officials have proven to be a successful means of testing ideas with member states. These may need to be used more often and more dynamically. Using the “third UN” of think tanks, academic institutions, and civil society fora to float ideas should also be tried more often. Official papers and documents that get tied up in the formal committee structure of the General Assembly tend to be counterproductive, especially in the early stages of developing a vision.
8. **Create legislative hooks:** Specific mandates that respond to the General Assembly’s role in the oversight of the management and administration of the organization are helpful, and should be exploited—most ideas worth pursuing have already been suggested, and many have even been mandated. Reforms come in waves because evolution from concept to implementation via the General Assembly’s Fifth Committee must follow the appropriate legislative process, which takes time. Trying to circumvent this is counterproductive—so five- and ten-year plans, aligned with the General Assembly’s own budget cycles, are preferable to short-term rhetorical statements that set high expectations but then yield little in the short term.
9. **Work through the debates in the Fifth Committee:** The Fifth Committee should only receive proposals once they have been fully authorized by a relevant General Assembly resolution. This was a major issue for the Change Plan, which contained ideas for both the administrative and policy sides of the Secretariat, without having the ideas on the policy side (for example on learning and training) vetted and approved by the appropriate General Assembly committees.
10. **Target the focus for member states:** Broad packages of reforms can have a strong rationale, but member states like to pick and choose. It may be better to promote ideas that make sense in their own right and then actively push for them, rather than trying to lump too many dissimilar changes together. This is another clear lesson emerging from the Change Plan, which was very heterogeneous in its recommendations. Not all elements of a comprehensive reform package are equally ripe or politically acceptable at one given point in time. Therefore, a targeted focus may be preferable, but this becomes a judgement call for the senior leadership team.
11. **Avoid the term “reform”:** The word reform is overused and politically charged at the UN. Of

course, it depends on the particular historical moment, but today it is probably better to talk about strengthening, enhancing, streamlining, or adapting the UN toward the non-mutually exclusive aims of providing more “value for the money,” “more impact on the ground,” and/or “more effective support to member states and their people.”

12. Manage expectations: Decades of UN reform have shown that modest and incremental results are achievable. The UN has navigated through decades of geopolitical changes, because it is ultimately a highly adaptive organization. However, some changes, particularly those that directly upset old power balances or national interests of groups of states, are difficult to make happen. It is advisable to keep expectations realistic. To be successful in sensitive reforms will require dedicated and patient senior-level attention and some degree of “management jiu-jitsu” where flexibility and re-directing opposing forces are paramount.

13. Message for change: The value of internal and external communication is often underestimated and under-resourced. It is better to avoid trumpeting problems for which there are no reasonable answers but to focus, instead, on solutions that can garner general agreement, if not consensus. Consistent support and exchange with the spokesperson’s office and the Department of Public Information for internal communications is certainly warranted, and dedicated communications strategies for staff, member states, NGOs, the press, and key public influencers need to be prepared, updated, and frequently used.

Conclusion: Ensuring the UN Secretariat Is Fit for Purpose

The year 2015 was pivotal for the UN. In addition to the previously mentioned reviews on peace operations and the peacebuilding architecture, the Secretariat was engaged in a process that

established a new global development agenda for the next fifteen years. A three-year intergovernmental process that included massive consultations with civil society, the private sector, and citizens around the globe, produced a new, universal, and comprehensive set of goals around which to focus collective efforts at the UN and in each member state. Interestingly, this new sustainable development agenda includes the promotion of “just, peaceful, and inclusive societies” across the world.

Will the UN be “fit for purpose,” and, if not, what changes will be needed? The Chief Executives Board is already looking at this question, using the 2012 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) of Operational Activities for Development to build further on the “Delivering as One” approach.⁴³ One possibility that has been raised is to merge some of the larger development agencies into a single UN Development Agency, with a single management board elected by the Economic and Social Council, although structural reforms such as this would take years. While streamlining operational costs, reducing duplication, and increasing impact in the field and accountability, some of the flexibility of the system would be lost. Arguably, the same arguments can and could be made for humanitarian agencies.

The secretary-general’s peace operations panel has explored how best to meet the challenges facing the organization’s peace and security field operations, including both peacekeeping and special political missions. The panel’s report put forward more than 100 recommendations, including the creation of an additional deputy secretary-general position for peace and security, a reasonable alternative to the issue of merger or realignment of DPA, DPKO, and the Peacebuilding Support Office.⁴⁴ This is an idea drawn directly from the 2004 High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change, and it only shows how good proposals have been around for a long time, without meeting enough political support. It seems hard to imagine that Secretary-General Ban will launch such a radical reform in his last year in office. However, the issue of departmental collaboration needs to be seriously tackled if the secretary-

⁴³ UN General Assembly Resolution 67/226 (January 22, 2013), UN Doc. A/RES/67/226.

⁴⁴ United Nations, *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace—Politics, Partnership, and People: Report of the High-level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, June 16, 2015.

general is to receive the best possible advice on political matters, given the complexity of the issues and the need for regional and global solutions that require input from many different Secretariat offices. The secretary-general released his own report in early September that picks up some politically “low-hanging” proposals to be implemented in 2016.⁴⁵ Beyond the bureaucratic fixes, the list of which has been getting longer over time, the real call of these latest reports, including the Independent Advisory Group’s peacebuilding review, is for a change in the mindset toward a more flexible and responsive world body. The very term “peace operations” is now used to indicate the full spectrum of UN responses in peace and security, from troop deployment to “light” good offices. To achieve the flexibility needed to adapt to a fast-moving and evolving world, bureaucratic and political silos will need to be broken down.

Mergers of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights with the Rule of Law Units of UNDP and DPKO into an integrated third pillar focused on human rights and governance is also being suggested by advocates of a stronger voice for both rule of law and human rights, but the work of this pillar needs to be integrated well with peace, security, and development, so once again, the issue of interconnecting the silos is paramount.

On the administrative and management side, the maintenance of two separate bureaucracies to manage headquarters versus field staffing, procurement, IT, and logistics is now redundant given staff mobility and single contracts. A merger and streamlining of the departments of Management and Field Support might be an option, creating five new technical offices, possibly led by assistant secretaries-general rather than under-secretaries-general. Global financial resources, global human resources, global IT, global procurement, and global real estate and logistics could all report directly to the secretary-general or to an empowered chief of staff or deputy secretary-general for operations, whose own office could be strengthened by the resources made available through these mergers. The assistant secretary-general of finance would also be in charge, as she is now, of all financial resources and could be charged

by member states with producing a single budget that brings together all regular, peacekeeping, and trust fund accounts into a more readable and transparent budget plan and annual report.

Offshoring the transactional elements of each of these global units to global service centers or hubs in the developing world could both lower costs and increase the investment in the organization by some emerging powers. The global field support strategy supporting DPA and DPKO field missions has pioneered the way forward on this, as have similar efforts in the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and UNDP. Aligning these efforts would yield significant benefits, but may be a step too far as it would require the adoption of common enterprise resource planning software and other common standards across the Secretariat and all the agencies, funds, and programs, which would be a monumental effort.

In the end, “where” the offices work (the structures or architecture) is probably less important than “how” they work. New IT and social media tools (i.e., internal online communities, desktop video conferencing, digital diplomacy) and a spirit of collaboration rather than competition between and among departments, agencies, funds, and programs can fundamentally alter program effectiveness. This makes standardizing technology and other platforms among these components critical, as well as incentivizing collaboration over competition in performance reviews.

The process of decision making and crisis response in the Secretariat and across agencies, funds, and programs continues to plague the organization, as the policy and management committee processes, first established in the 1990s under Kofi Annan, has started to fray given the lack of staffing and the limited bandwidth available to senior managers with overflowing agendas. The establishment of a more robust cabinet-style secretariat in the secretary-general’s office, merging all such stand-alone units, perhaps merged with the Chief Executives Board machinery, could be envisaged and may be able to reduce both the number of meetings with duplicate agendas, prioritizing both urgent and important decisions. Such

45 United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General: The Future of United Nations Peace Operations*, UN Doc. A/70/357-S/2015/682, September 2, 2015.

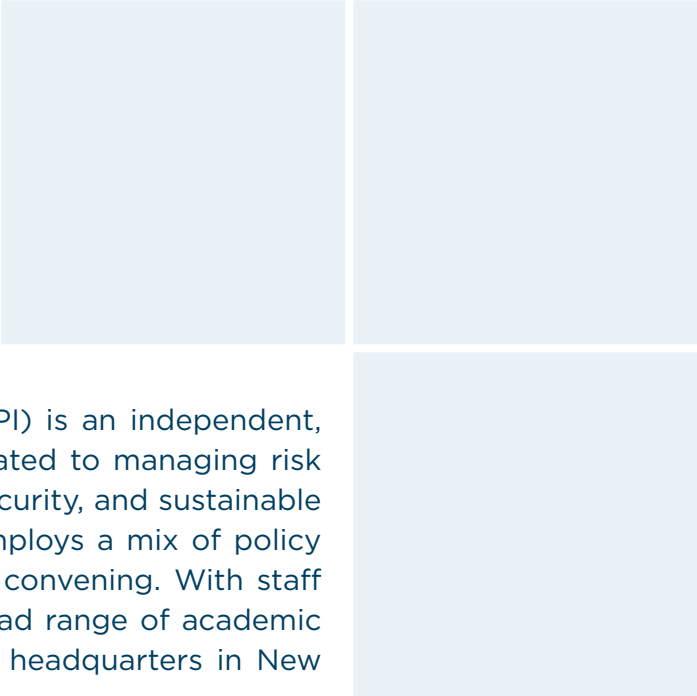
an office would also require the necessary resources to track decisions and hold senior managers accountable for implementation. Holding senior managers accountable is a key reform that simply requires more discipline, not member state approval. The Human Rights Up Front initiative is a cautious step in this effort.

Too many UN staff are based in three of the four UN headquarters in New York, Geneva, and Vienna. As the administrator is now doing at UNDP, the next secretary-general will likely need to change this ratio over time, perhaps through better use of attrition in New York, Geneva, and Vienna and re-assignment of posts to UN locations in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Beirut, Nairobi, and Santiago. The use of regional service centers could be expanded, and, ideally, countries will compete to serve as UN hubs offering incentives; this would ensure a more reliable and steady flow of talent from all these countries into the UN staff pool. In general, the ratio of administrative and support staff to substantive staff remains out of sync and will have to be addressed.

On the political front, the Secretariat will need to extend its links to those new, stable, and emerging middle powers, such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Poland, Republic of Korea, South Africa, and Turkey, both for political and financial reasons. One possibility is to hold more bilateral

political or economic consultations with these countries at the under-secretary-general level—although admittedly this could become onerous over time given the already charged travel schedules of the UN’s senior management teams. Another alternative is to fashion a type of informal “consultative council” of permanent representatives from some of these countries, as U Thant did. Today, this group might include the rotating chairs of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the African Union, the League of Arab States, the Union of South American Nations, and other regional groups to provide a counterweight to the influence exercised over the secretary-general by the P5. As Security Council reform remains a distant objective, finding a credible and meaningful way to engage with emerging powers will be fundamental to the success of the next secretary-general and the future of the UN.

Overcoming institutional silos and reaching out to emerging powers, without forgetting the UN’s traditional supporters, will help the Secretariat to forge an institution that more accurately reflects our globalized world and is more “fit for purpose.” This is in the interest of member states, as the UN has proven over the past seventy years to be a reliable lender of last resort for global public goods in the face of a turbulent and unpredictable world.



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777 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017-3521
USA
TEL +1-212-687-4300
FAX +1-212-983-8246

Freyung 3
1010 Vienna
Austria
TEL +43-1-533-8881
FAX +43-1-533-881-11

51-52 Harbour House
Bahrain Financial Harbour
P.O. Box 1467
Manama, Bahrain
TEL +973-1721-1344