

Vision 2020: Towards Better Global Governance

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*There is nothing more difficult to carry out,
nor more doubtful of success,
nor more dangerous to handle,
than to initiate a new order of things.*

— **Niccolo Machiavelli**

This essay sets a rather arrogant goal for itself: To define a vision of what the international organizational architecture should look like in the year 2020; to be innovative, but realistic, in this enterprise; and to push the envelope of the feasible well beyond the merely probable, but not out of reach of the actually possible.

The goal is arrogant not only because it implies that one can actually undertake a task of such intellectual enormity, but even more so because it assumes that whatever attributes we assign to our ‘best of all worlds’ are likely to be shared by the rest of the world. It is quite evident that, beyond the level of general platitudes, there is no meaningful consensus on what a ‘good’ world might actually look like; nor are we likely to reach such consensus anytime soon. On the other hand, such a consensus is probably not entirely necessary and arguably not even desirable.

The above notwithstanding, and arrogant as it might be, the challenge that this paper responds to is worthwhile nonetheless. It is worthwhile not because there is any danger of our dream-world coming true; but because in imagining a ‘world that could be’, we just might stumble upon realities of the ‘world that is’ which we otherwise refuse to confront. (Besides, playing czar of the international system is bound to be fun!).

We begin, in the next section, by taking a quick snapshot of what the world of 2020 might look like given the trends of the past and indications of the present. This is not an exercise in prediction as much as one of establishing the key assumptions about the future we are designing for. In the following section we set for ourselves a set of key parameters that should guide us both in designing our program for organizational change in the international system, and in evaluating any such proposal. We then outline a vision for what the international system should look like in 2020, both in terms of the broader structural reform that needs to be put into place and some exemplars of the organizations changes this might entail.

Some unflattering confessions about the future

GLENDOWER: “I can call spirits from the dusty deep”

HOTSPUR: “Why so can I, or so can any man;

But will they come when you do call for them?”
— **William Shakespeare (Henry IV)**

Trying to predict, project, propose and sometimes preempt the trajectories of the planet’s future has become somewhat of a growth industry. Tarot-card readers, astrologers and palmists have been joined by a whole army of scholars and academics who claim expertise in being able to read the signs of the stars—or certainly the data spreadsheets—to tell us not only where the planet is heading, but where it should be going instead, and how to get there. While some future-mongers do indeed border on the absurd, there is also significant work in this genre that is not only sensible but absolutely essential. The utility and relevance of such scholarship tends to be directly proportional to the rootedness of one’s projections in an understanding of the constraints and the predicaments we face today as much as in their talent from conjuring up new opportunities for tomorrow. It is in this sense that this essay seeks to focus on the near future. Presenting a comprehensive picture of what the world is likely to look like in the year 2020 is neither the goal nor the mandate of this paper. However, outlining some sense of our key assumptions in this regard seems necessary as context for the discussion that is to follow.

- **Demographically**, the inbuilt population momentum will ensure that despite falling growth rates, the planet will be home to considerably more people; possibly a billion more. The impact of these people will be a function not only of how many there are but of who they are and where they live. Economically, they will be mostly poor; socio-culturally, they will be nearly entirely non-white (i.e., non-Western); and politically; they will mostly be in the South (i.e., developing countries). In essence, they are likely to compound rather than sooth the existing faultlines in today’s global society.
- **Economically**, there are fair grounds for optimism that the world as a whole will be a richer and more prosperous planet (as measured by global GDP). Trends indicate that markets will, indeed, expand. One might safely predict that at least some corporations that do not even exist today will be global giants in products that have not even been conceived yet. However, in economic terms, ours will remain a horribly fractured planet. The world—despite its net prosperity—is likely to be as, or more, unequal in 2020 as it was in 2000. While the rich will most likely be richer, the number of poor will nearly certainly be more. The distance between the richest and the poorest—measured nationally and internationally—would have increased. There may, indeed, be changes in the actual composition of the rich, but the essential feature of a widening gulf between the gluttonous affluent and the barely surviving would most likely increase; and so would the attendant social and political pathologies that go with gross inequity.
- **Technologically**, immense advancements are nearly certain in terms of gadgetry and are more than likely in the sciences. It is likely that technology would have solved, or made redundant, a number of the technological challenges that we face today. One would like to believe that the greatest of these advancements would be in health related technologies. It is equally likely that it would have created possibly an equal number of equally daunting new challenges that we possibly cannot imagine today. It is nearly certain that the benefits of technology will remain as unevenly distributed as ever. In the health domain, for example, the persistent misery of millions was entirely and affordably avoidable in the last twenty years, and will remain so in the next. The ‘global’ challenge in terms of technology is not about the providing opportunities for technological advancement; that will happen of its own accord, without need of

assistance from the international system. The challenge relates to the creation of political and social will so that technology and its benefits are shared wide and equitably.

- **Environmentally**, twenty years is too short a period for planetary changes. However, catastrophe can always strike suddenly and trends tend to exacerbate over time. The world would not have become a greenhouse, just yet; biodiversity would not have all gone extinct; the forest cover would not have been all cleared. However, each of these and other vital ecological systems would most likely have gone somewhat worse even though technological and policy interventions may well make some minor headway in certain areas. However, the two most important environmental tests for the near future relate not to ‘environmental’ indices but to political and social choices. First, would the leadership of the world—North and South—have mustered the political will to meaningfully respond to these and such challenges? Second, would the affluent classes—North and South, but obviously more in the former—be willing to change their excessive-consumptive lifestyles? Much as one would be like to wrong, there is little evidence to suggest that, absent a major ecological crisis, either of those questions could be answered in the affirmative in the year 2020.
- **Politically**, neither war, nor violence, nor authoritarianism, nor the abject use of power (military, political or economic) in the pursuit of self-interest is likely to go out of currency. The essential nature of the North-South distinction will remain relevant in global politics, although minor changes in the particular makeup of each might take place. Southern unity (i.e., the G77) is unlikely to disappear despite internal differences. If anything, Northern solidarity will face mounting stress. Nations will be no more willing to cede on sovereignty; the powerful will be no less inclined to impose their clout; and the weak will be as wary as ever of the motivations of the powerful. A most significant change, which is at least in the realm of the probable, is likely to be in the evolution of civil society rather than of the state. It is not clear how the increasing ‘north-south’ tensions within the ranks of the global civil society will eventually manifest themselves; however, this might well be the most important political change of the next twenty years.

Bleak as it might sound, the above assessment is based on past trends and current indications. It suggests that the world of 2020 is likely to be vastly different in the specifics not only from our world today but also from any world we can imagine today. Yet, in terms of broader aspects, it is likely to be a world that is strikingly similar to our own. Just as the basic pathologies of the planet have not changed at all significantly in the last twenty years; they are also unlikely to change dramatically in the next twenty. Sure enough, there will be innumerable changes—many of them positive—in the gadgets and gizmos some of us would be using, or the brands and products that would be holding sway, or the nature and means of interpersonal communications. But the fundamental questions that the international system will be faced with are unlikely to be at all different from what they are today: **How do we establish global governance, in the absence of a global government, which can lead to economic well-being for all, global social justice, human development, and meaningful world peace?** The central challenge to the international system, then as today, is not about how best to cope with emerging issues, but how to tackle the enduring fundamental problems. Indeed, the key lesson of this little exercise only reinforces the lesson of the last fifty years of global change and international organization—the more things change, the more they remain the same!

A design brief for the year 2020

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”
“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.
“I don’t much care where...” said Alice.
“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the Cat.
“...so long as I get somewhere,” Alice added as an explanation.
“Oh, you’re sure to do that,” said the Cat, “if you only walk long enough.”
— *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

Although the previous section raises doubt about our ability, or even the desirability, of predicting a comprehensive picture of the future, it does not undermine the considerable value of envisioning alternative futures. Indeed, it serves to underscore the urgency of thinking in terms of tomorrow which, if left unattended, is likely to mimic—and possibly magnify—the fundamental challenges of today. More importantly, it helps make the case that our visions of what the international system should look like in the future should be based not on fancies about exciting new issues that might (or might not) emerge at some later date, but should be focused on how the key burdens that the international system is already saddled with can be eased between now and then. The nature of the challenge, of course, becomes very different. The focus moves away from predicting emergent and yet unknown issues, and towards designing for resolving known and persistent problems.

In responding to this challenge, it seems useful to begin by outlining the key design parameters that define our vision of change. What are the rules, constraints and goals that our design effort will respond to? It is proposed that the following parameters should guide us both in designing our program for organizational change in the international system, and in evaluating any such proposal.

#1. Reality must be respected, but never feared. One must begin with the somewhat painful recognition that a number of reform proposals that are extremely desirable may not be worth pursuing because they are not entirely feasible. Pursuing ideas that have little prospect of realization, worthwhile as they might well be, can also spell doom for those other elements of the reform agenda that might otherwise stand a chance. For example, the current structure of the Security Council (based on the principle that ‘all animals are born equal, but some more equal than others’) is a blatant disgrace not only to the international system, but also to the permanent members themselves. Any proposal to strip the shameful veto powers of the P5 is conceptually desirable but politically impossible because those who can implement such a proposal have every reason not to. The reality of politics, therefore, has to be always kept in mind and feasibility has to be a prime criteria for design. Having said that, it is equally important not to confuse feasibility with ‘ease’. Existing reality must not become an excuse for inertia. To be meaningful, the reform agenda has to be bold in its vision as well as execution. While it should steer away from that which is obviously impossible, it must never shy from the merely difficult.

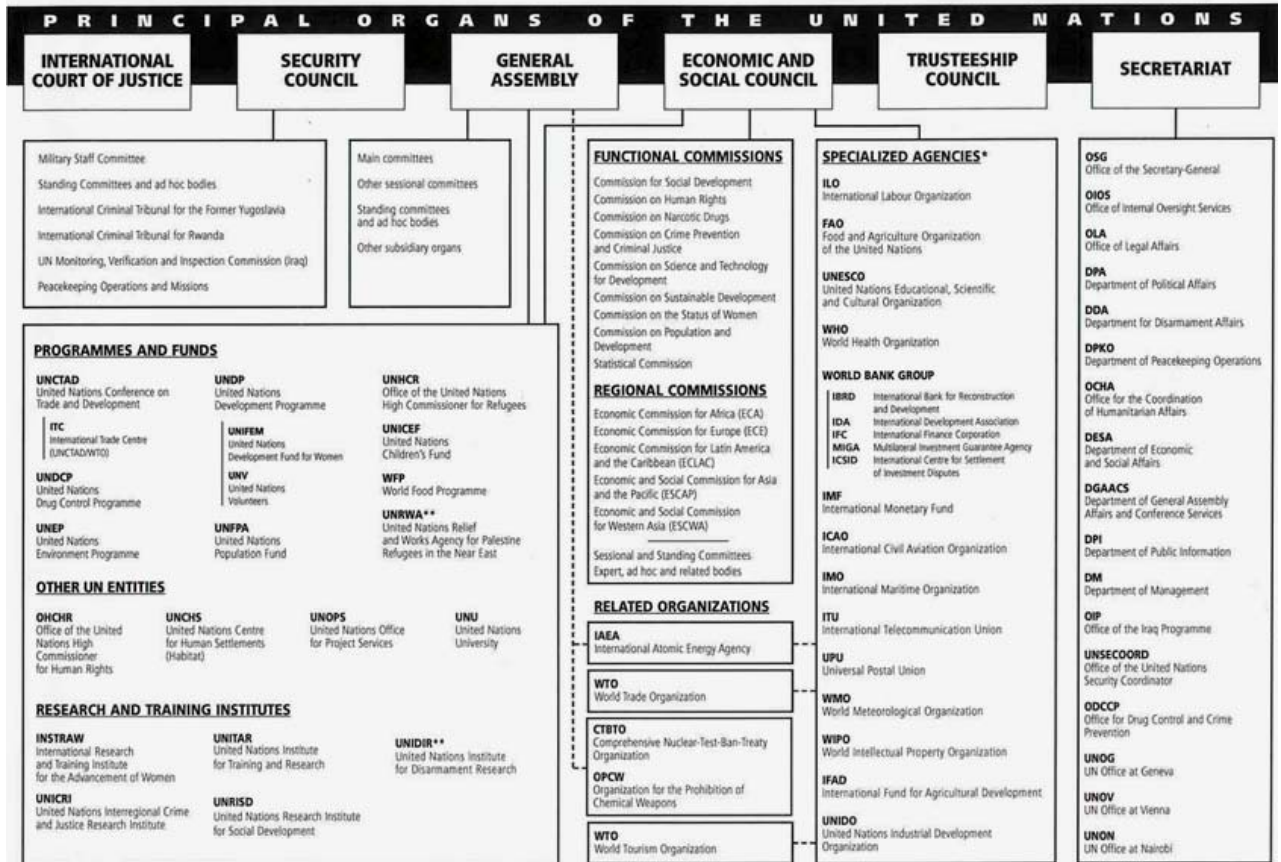
#2. The status quo is not worth sustaining. There is a prevailing undertone in most proposals for international reform which assumes that the basic structure of the international system is generally sound and the task of global governance is to maintain and sustain the status quo but providing some minimal safety net to those left out or adversely affected by the status quo. The

dialogue on reforming the international system is, therefore, intrinsically conservative. Yet, it seeks to conserve something that is not only outdated today but was outdated 50 years ago. The reason that the United Nations does not seem to fit in our times is that it was never designed for our times. A most telling example is that the international system is designed to preserve and maintain a global power balance that might have been real in the first few years after World War II, but has not reflected the true state of international relations for most of the last half century. The status quo in the international system is not worth sustaining not only because it is grossly out of step with the realities of today but, as the previous section argued, because it has failed persistently. While throwing out the international system, as we know it, is obviously in the realm of the unfeasible, meaningful initiatives for reforming the international system should be willing, if not eager, to embrace proposals that will ultimately challenge the status quo in its fundamental design. In practical terms, this element of our design brief assumes an openness to proposals that call for systematic reform in the UN Charter. This is not a call for revolution; it is a call for evolution.

#3. Zero tolerance for imposing the costs of reform on the already underserved. Most recent changes in the international structure have imposed direct or indirect costs on the already underserved countries and populations. A good example is the rapid development of international environmental governance since the 1972 Stockholm conference, but particularly since the 1992 Rio Conference. In and of themselves, these have been generally positive developments. However, it is now quite clear that the emerging system of global environmental governance has not only imposed significant direct implementation costs on developing countries but is a manifestation of the North's environmental agenda and a realization of the North's environmental priorities. This has come at the cost of the South's agenda for sustainable development, which has either been ignored or turned into mere rhetoric. The development of international trade law under the auspices of what is now the World Trade Organization (WTO) has followed a very similar and even more stark trajectory—the poorest countries and communities have been consistently and systematically forced to accept changes that provide immediate benefits to the richest countries and corporations, in lieu of vague promises that their concerns would be addressed at some later (often unspecified date). In case after case, the tendency to focus immediate attention on the concerns of the richest countries and corporations serves to not only distract attention from the immediate (and often survival) agendas of the most vulnerable countries and communities but also diverts and dilutes resources away from the concerns of the already underserved. Prioritization is a key task before any reform agenda; this element of our design brief implies that proposals that directly address the needs of the already underserved—i.e., issues relating to global justice, sustainable development, and human dignity—must always take precedence. In practical terms, this means that in designing a future organizational chart of the international system any one activity should not be judged on its own terms alone, but in terms of its priority in terms of other competing activities. For example, while it is easy to argue that establishing a world organization for intellectual property is a good thing, it is not intuitively obvious that it is a 'better' thing than investing the same resources into, say, malaria eradication. This is not a case of mixing software with apples; it is a question of determining whether the future of the planet is better served by cracking down on those who sell fake software or by providing an apple a day to undernourished children.



The UNITED NATIONS system



* Autonomous organizations working with the United Nations and each other through the coordinating machinery of the Economic and Social Council.
 ** Report only to the General Assembly.

#4. The international system must not be allowed to become any more messy or cluttered than it already is. The international system—particularly the United Nations—has been remarkably good about expanding its mandate to tackle new and emerging challenges. Its failure lies principally in its inability to resolve the existing challenges. While this expansion of effort makes full sense in principle, its practical effect has been to dilute the attention (and proportional resources) invested in the most persistent and chronic challenges faced by global society. Since actually ‘reforming’ any given element of the international system at any moment in time is immensely more difficult than creating a new organization or program, past reformers have taken the easy route and left us a trail of generally haphazard, often overlapping, sometimes redundant, and nearly always poorly integrated organizations. Whether done with well-meaning intentions or for self-serving reasons, this has contributed to making the international system ever more mushy and ever less coherent. As a result, organizational fiefdoms have proliferated and issue balkanization is rampant. Thirty years ago, Australian diplomat Sir Robert Jackson likened the UN to ‘some prehistoric monster incapable of intelligently controlling itself. This is not because it lacks intelligence and capable officials, but because it is so organized that managerial direction is impossible.’ The United Nations system is plagued by overlapping and duplicative programs, with various departments and agencies competing for resources or authority. To be at all considered a success, any reform initiative must leave the international system as less messy and

less cluttered than it is today. The organizational effort over the next twenty years should focus on consolidating, streamlining, and strengthening existing international organization. Only under very rare and very special circumstances should we even consider setting up new agencies, organizations or programs; indeed, an explicit goal for 2020 should be to have a much less cluttered organizational chart for the international system than we have today.

#5. Reform must be designed and evaluated for its system-wide impacts. Unfortunately, the sum of a number of ‘good’ organizations need not necessarily amount to a ‘good’ organizational system. On the other hand, it is unlikely to have a ‘good’ system that is composed of component organizations that are less than good. It is not enough, therefore, to focus on creating organizations that are good at what they are supposed to be doing. Explicit attention must be focused on ensuring that they add up to a system that is coherent, integrated, and coordinated. Indeed, the existing international system has a whole host of component organizations that perform at remarkably high levels of competence, or have done so at various points in their history (e.g., WHO, FAO, UNEP, UPU, ILO). Yet, the individual performance of these organizations often fails to gain momentum because the system as a whole is not conducive to creating a synergous organizational environment. Organizational reform initiatives should, therefore, keep an eye not only on specific problems and how they are addressed by specific organizations (new or old) but also on how these organizations relate to other elements of the international system. Indeed, the key to bringing about meaningful change in an organization can often lie outside that organization; for example, improving the performance of UNEP is less likely to be a function of structural changes within UNEP and more related to the attitude and behavior of the UN General Assembly towards UNEP.

Towards an improved organizational architecture

*We shall not cease from exploration,
And the end of all our exploring,
Will be to arrive where we started,
And know the place for the first time.*

— **T.S. Eliot**

There have been so many failed efforts to reform the international system that the UN is said to suffer from ‘re-structuring fatigue.’ Box 1 presents an incomplete sampling of just a few of the many reports on UN reform that have been written over the years. What is striking in pursuing these reports is that the problems that they identify as well as the solutions they propose have really not changed much in over half a century. It is not that the definition of problems or the identification of solutions was misplaced. It was the political will to change that has consistently, and insistently, been absent in the member states of the United Nations, and particularly in the Permanent Five of the Security Council. There is, of course, no simple recipe to conjure up such will. However, the recent rise of public demonstrations at any event seen as advancing the cause of globalization—including recent G8 meetings—should serve as a wakeup call to the industrialized powerhouses of the world. There is a disturbing and deep-seated resentment about and distrust of the international system growing amongst ordinary people and civil society forces all over the world. Whether there grievances are well-founded or not, it is now clear that they are not going to disappear simply because world leaders try to shoo away these concerns as they recently did in Italy, or try to hide deep in the forest—far away from the protesters—as they plan to do next year in Canada.

A very first recommendation, therefore, would be to convene a world conference on reforming the international system with active participation from civil society and a stated upfront commitment for reform from the world powers. Given the momentum of prevailing civil society sentiment, it is to be hoped that holding such a conference today might actually force the hands of governments who would be less able to turn it into the mere talk-shop that previous attempts have turned into.

Box 1: Reforming the international system—A rich legacy of proposals

- Carnegie Endowment. *The Budget of the United Nations*. United Nations Studies, 1. New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1947.
- Grifalconi, John Weik. *What kind of Revision? A Liberal Program for U. N. Charter Reform*. Cincinnati: American Federation of World Citizens, 1955.
- Martin, Andrew. *The Changing Charter: A Study in the Reform of the United Nations*. London: Sylvan Press, 1955.
- Salter, Arthur, Baron. *The United Nations: Reform, Replace, or Supplement?* London: David Davies Memorial Institute of International Studies, 1957.
- Logue, John. *The Great Debate on Charter Reform: Proposal for a Stronger United Nations*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1958.
- Louis B. Sohn (chairman), et al. *The United Nations: The Next Twenty-Five Years*. Report of the Commission to Study the Organization of Peace. New York: United Nations, 1969.
- Villanova University. *United Nations Reform and Restructure: The proceedings of the Mid-Atlantic Conference on President Carter's Report on the Reform and Restructure of the UN System, held at Villanova University, November 10-12, 1978*. Villanova, PA: Common Heritage Institute, 1978.
- Newcombe, Hanna. *Reform of the UN Security Council*. Dundas, Ontario: Peace Research Institute, 1979.
- Renninger, John P. *ECOSOC, Options for Reform*. New York: United Nations Institute for Training and Research, 1981.
- Beigbeder, Yves. *Management Problems in United Nations Organizations: Reform or Decline?* London: F. Pinter, 1987.
- Formuth, Peter (editors). *A Successor Vision: The United Nations of Tomorrow*. Lanham, MD: United Nations Association of the United States of America, 1988.
- Ashby, Lowell D. *The United Nations' Economic Institutions and the Need for Restructuring*. Washington, D.C.: The Center for UN Reform Education, 1991.
- Nordic UN Project. *The United Nations in Development: Reform Issues in the Economic and Social Fields: A Nordic perspective*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1991.
- South Commission. *The United Nations at a Critical Crossroads: Time for the South to Act*. Geneva, Switzerland: South, 1992.
- Muller, Joachim W. *The Reform of the United Nations (in two volumes)*. New York: Oceana Publications, 1992.
- Jakobson, Max. *The United Nations in the 1990s: A Second Chance?* New York: UNITAR/Twentieth Century Fund, 1993.
- Thornburg, Robert. *Reforming the United Nations: A Report to the Secretary General*. New York: United Nations, 1993.
- Erskine Childers with Brian Urquhart. *Renewing the United Nations System*. Uppsala, Sweden: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 1994.
- The Commission on Global Governance. *Our Global Neighborhood*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

However, conferences alone are not enough to turn around unwieldy organizational systems. To be meaningful and sustainable, reform must take place both at the level of the system and of its component organizations. The following subsections will sketch out some key elements of our vision in both domains.

Structural Reform: The Big Picture

System-wide reform, although more difficult, is a prerequisite for the success of reform in specific organizations. Nearly all that has to be said for structural reform in the international system, and particularly the UN system, has already been said. However, little has actually been done. This is partly because of the already mentioned lack of political will on the part of the UN's custodians (key member states) and partly because creating new institutions is both easier and more self-aggrandizing than actually reforming and reviving existing institutions. One result of this abject neglect is the disfiguringly cluttered international organizational chart that we are now saddled with. More importantly, in the absence of meaningful structural reform, whatever organizational tinkering has taken place has been unable to live up to its potential; most often, the net impact has been little more than that of rearranging the chairs on the deck of the Titanic.

Three areas of structural reform are generally considered to be of particular salience and urgency: Security Council reform, UN Secretary General, and UN financing. Meaningful progress on the first remains unlikely since the 'great' powers of our time remain adamantly unwilling to entertain the notions of democracy in international governance. While progress on the other two is also not likely to be easy, it is nonetheless within the realm of the possible and all effort should be made in this direction.

Former Finnish ambassador to the UN, and once himself an aspirant to the office, Max Jakobson, described the job of the UN Secretary General as being 'chained to that proverbial rack of torture, the Procrustean bed, alternately stretched beyond reason by the demands of 'we the people' in whose name the UN Charter has been written, and cruelly cut down to size by the realities of power'. Trygve Lie, the first Secretary-General of the United Nations, considered his post to be 'the most impossible job on earth' and Kurt Waldheim characterized it as being 'at the same time one of the most fascinating and one of the most frustrating jobs in the world'. The Secretary General's job is characterized by almost unlimited responsibilities, but correspondingly little practical authority; it is expected to exert immense moral influence, but is denied any real political power.¹

However, as the term of Dag Hammarskjold demonstrated, a leader with vision and initiative can achieve much while working within the existing framework. On the other hand, the career of Kurt Waldheim highlights how a Secretary General who sees himself beholden to the P5 rather than the 'peoples of the world' can not only demean the sanctity of the office but actually do lasting harm to the stature of the world organization. While placing the selection of the Secretary

¹ That the mandate of the 'most important civil servant' is comprehensive in responsibility but restricted in real authority, is not an accident. The contradiction between expectations and constraints was written into the original mandate of the office by the founding fathers. In 1945, the Big Five still believed they would jointly run the world organization and therefore wrote in the role of an office manager, not a policymaker. Franklin Roosevelt wanted the post to be called that of 'moderator' and at one point in the San Francisco discussions, it was proposed that the Secretary-General and four Deputy Secretaries-General be nationals of the five major powers, each elected for a two-year term and rotated so that within a decade each of the Big Five would be guaranteed a turn at the post.

General directly into the hands of the General Assembly through an open and transparent process and without the possibility of veto intervention from the P5 would be the obvious step to take, it may not be feasible to do so at this point. However, what is certainly feasible and certainly desirable is **to amend the tenure of the Secretary General so that it is limited to a single, longer (possibly of seven years), term in office.** This would be a first step towards providing the Secretary General with greater independence by ridding him of the necessity to appease the permanent members who can veto his reappointment.

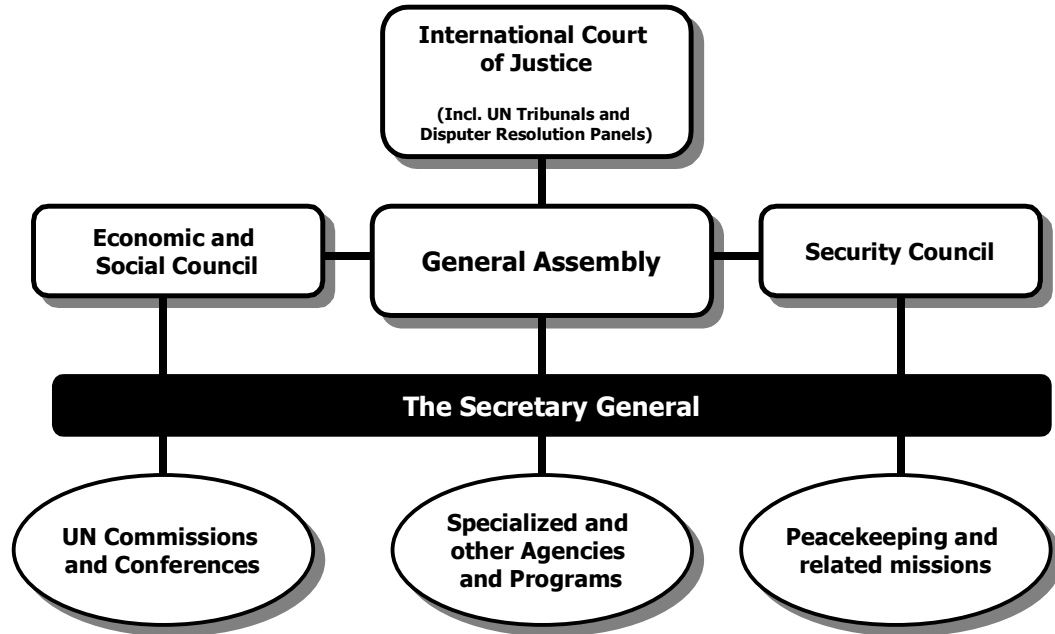
Term limit changes, however, are not enough to convert the current role of the Secretary General as the *Chief Administrative Officer* to one of the Chief Executive Officer of the international system. The situation today is compounded by a General Assembly which, for political reasons, places too much emphasis on micro-managing everyday administrative decisions. Reduced to being a mere caretaker, the Secretary-General is inundated by the number of doors that open directly into his office and is swamped by mundane administrative procedures. One proposal in this regards is to **allow each Secretary General to put in place their own management team** rather than relying mostly on career UN bureaucrats. A more important step is to **discourage the General Assembly from interfering in administrative minutia of UN administration.** The GA does so partly because it has precious else to do since it has been relegated into nothing more than a global Hyde Park. It is hoped that the expanded mandate we envisage for the General Assembly later in this paper will go some way in diverting the attention of national delegates towards more substantive issues than UN hiring and firing.

One envisions that **by 2020 the Secretary General will be seen, and be able to act, as the executive head of the entire UN family.** Right now, the international system is rather medieval in its structure with each agency and organization behaving as a fiefdom that might commit nominal allegiance to the Secretary General but behaves politically independently. International organizations not only routinely duplicate each other's mandates but actively pursue opposed agendas; national governments actively contribute to this process by creating their own 'spheres of influence' and pitting international organizations against each other. The UN Secretary General needs to be given more direct authority over the component organizations of the system. This can come through **enlarging the role of the Secretary General in management and budgetary decisions of the component organizations.** **By 2020, the international organizational chart should look like a well-knit 'system' of interconnected organizations rather than the loosely put-together federation of disparate entities.**

One way to enhance the independence and performance of the Secretary General, and of the UN system, is **to provide a stable and independent source of funding for the world body.** Many variants of the so-called 'Tobin Tax' have been proposed as a means to resolve this problem. While the word 'tax' is an unfortunate choice in an environment where nations see demons of sovereignty threat around every corner, the notion of raising funds for the UN system by charging a miniscule 'user fee' for services that are truly global makes much sense—especially in a world still enamored by market-based solutions. Many variants of such schemes have been in currency. Amongst the most promising is the idea of **charging a very nominal user fee (to the tune of one US dollar per international flight) to passengers undertaking international travel.** Such a scheme would be non-regressive, would target an activity that is obviously international and benefits from international cooperation, and the charge would be so small that it would have no price impacts on the end user. However, it could generate significant amounts of money for a cash-strapped UN system. The notion that such a charge would be a breach of sovereignty is rather facetious; arguably, it is no more a breach of sovereignty than the very act of international travel itself. However, member states—even, and especially, those that regularly fail to pay their

UN dues—are likely to put up a fight to such proposals. They will do so not because it threatens their sovereignty in any real way, but because it takes away the extraordinary level of influence they now have over the world agenda by virtue of controlling the UN purse strings. The political problem of getting their support is non-trivial. However, one could begin by taking small steps. For example, if global emission trading to curb climate change is to become a reality it should be housed in the UN system (and certainly not the World Bank) and at least some of the revenue

Uncluttering the Organizational Architecture



generated from such trade can be funneled into funding relevant UN activities.

One way to reduce the confusion and clutter that now characterizes inter-organizational relationships is to revert to the original organizational chart of the United Nations as it emerged from the Dumbarton Oaks Conference. The diagram above builds on that original conception of the organizational chart but adds some modifications based on the proposals contained in this paper. Key elements to note are as follows:

- The General Assembly is placed back at the very center of the organization, as it was originally supposed to be.** The GA has been reduced to a book-keeper for the UN Secretariat because it has very few substantive decisions to take. The proposal here is to revert to it the substantive role that was originally envisaged for it. As the final custodian for the entire UN system, one envisions that by 2020 the General Assembly should be responsible for directing and approving the detailed work program of the entire UN system and would have replaced the general bodies of many, if not most, specialized and other agencies. It is envisaged that by 2020 the General Assembly will be the organ responsible for—via the office of the Secretary General—all specialized agencies, related organizations, programs and funds, other UN entities and research and training institutes (see current UN system organization diagram, above). It is also

envisaged that this would spur, or lead to, some consolidation within the UN organizational architecture. For example, it makes full sense for the United Nations University to consolidate with the various UN Research and Training Institutes (INSTRAW, UNITAR, UNIDIR, UNICRI, and UNRISD). Right now, each is so small and under-funded that none makes a significant contribution. Pooled together, they would at least have enough resources to make a meaningful contribution in some areas. Similarly, there is an obvious case to be made for merging the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), with the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

- **The Economic and Social Council will also revert to the role originally envisaged for it.** Right now it has become the most hodge-podge organ with an unwieldy membership and an unmanageable mandate. By placing the executive ownership of all specialized agencies directly under the General Assembly one hopes to free up the time and resources of the ECOSOC to play a more meaningful role as the equivalent of the Security Council in the realm of Economic and Social issues. Its task would not be to manage the ‘line agencies’ of the UN but to advance the goals laid out in the Charter and respond to new and emerging issues. As such, it would have executive ownership of all UN Commissions and Conferences. The commissions had been originally envisaged as the ‘cutting edge’ of the UN system; they have since been reduced to mere talk-shops. UN conferences have already taken on a new salience as the place where civil society meets (and pushed upon) intergovernmental organizations. As the executive owner of UN Commissions as well as UN Conferences, ECOSOC can serve as the bridge between civil and intergovernmental societies. The proposal here is to revert them to their original intent, this will hopefully be assisted by the fact that the ECOSOC could now focus exclusively on them. Once again, the hope is that by 2020 the Commissions would have been consolidated into a smaller number of more active and more influential commissions that do actually symbolize the ‘cutting edge’ of the international agenda.
- The Security Council will essentially remain as is. It will remain responsible for peacekeeping missions and related activities but the responsibility for special international criminal tribunals (even those established by the Security Council) will move to the International Court of Justice, where they logically belong.
- By 2020 the Secretary General should be operating as the chief executive of the entire UN system; and all agencies, commissions, etc. will report to the General Assembly, Security Council and ECOSOC via the Secretary General. A key task of the Secretary General will be to prepare for the General Assembly the workplans and budgets for the entire UN system so that agencies and programs are forced to coordinate their activities. This would, of course, be a far cry from the current situation where the Secretary General is a nominal moral voice of the system. The specialized agencies, which have gotten used to operating as fiefdoms, will obviously not accept such a change without a fight. To be implemented, such a policy would require a phased strategy that brings different organizations under the direct influence of the Secretary General in step with a side-by-side process of organizational consolidation. The purpose is not to move to a centralized system; but to evolve into a coherent and integrated system. While UNESCO, WHO and UNICEF should certainly continue their separate implementation programs, there is more overlap and inter-linkage in their work programs than the current level of cross-agency coordination can handle.

- By 2020, the International Court of Justice should be revitalized and become the central pillar of global governance that it was originally supposed to be. Of all the organs of the UN system, the fate that has befallen the International Court of Justice is probably the saddest. Born amidst much hope and optimism, it has been relegated to a near non-entity. National governments have used spurious arguments about sovereignty to usurp from it even that authority which they themselves had given it half a century ago. Indeed, its mandate has been left so bankrupt that activities that would have ordinarily have fallen under its purview are now placed in other organizations that are ill-suited to the task. A particularly painful example is that of the World Trade Organization, which never tires of telling anyone who would listen that it is a ‘rules based’ organization. More importantly, the WTO derives a significant portion of its organizational clout from the fact that its dispute resolution panels can, in fact, impose real penalties on nation-states; something that has long been considered inappropriate for the ICJ to implement! Similarly, criminal tribunals which would have been better housed within the ICJ have evolved elsewhere in the system. A key, and immediately implementable, component of our vision for 2020 is to give back to the ICJ what has always been its due—i.e., make it the central place where inter-national disputes are resolved whether it be through court cases, dispute resolution panels, or special tribunals. In an age of international treaty proliferation, the ICJ should also become the point or arbitration for treaty non-compliance. Indeed, without a functional and functioning ICJ the ‘governance’ in global governance is a rather meaningless clause. Placing all dispute resolution functions within the ambit of the ICJ would not only strengthen the Court but, even more importantly, will contribute to easing the sense of distrust and disdain that the global citizenry now feels for the international system. For example, many critics of the WTO fault its dispute resolution panels for being shortsighted and outright biased. Placing this function within the ambit of the ICJ would not only benefit the court but also ally some of the criticism about WTO. Similarly, the International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), which is now placed within the World Bank Group, would move to the ICJ. The single most important element of this paper’s vision for the year 2020 is to make the International Court of Justice a respected arbiter of the international system where nations as well as civil society watchdogs can bring their grievances. This would involve clumping all existing dispute resolution systems into the ICJ and possibly adding new elements of dispute resolution to it such as, for example, an International Bankruptcy Tribunal, an International Regulator of Hedge Funds, an International Communication Commissioner, etc. In essence, an expanded ICJ would serve as the independent judicial arm of the international system and a safety net for global and globalizing processes.

Organizational Reform: Some Examples

It should be obvious to the reader that this essay does not intend to propose new organizations. Indeed, such band-aid organizational solutions tend to only add to the clutter in the system and often exacerbate the larger problems. We seek instead, ways by which the international organizational architecture can be streamlined and uncluttered so that it can better respond to the existing challenges of global justice and sustainable human development. However, it is obvious that the systematic change that this paper envisions will come from a culmination of many smaller reform processes within individual organizations. In particular, the vision articulated above calls for a sustained process of organizational streamlining and consolidation.

This is not the place to undertake a detailed analysis of the type of particular changes that particular organizations might need to undertake. However, we present here some examples of the types of changes that might need to be taken over the next twenty years if this vision is to be realized. It should be noted that the program of reform would have to be strategically paced. It is suggested that all the changes suggested here are, in fact, feasible but none is easy; it would not be possible to bring about these changes in one broad stroke but it is also not impossible to bring them about in a period of twenty years.

- **International Environmental Governance.** The proliferation of global environmental treaties has not only led to significant negotiation fatigue, but also to a dispersed set of organizations dealing with environmental issues. Some have called for creating a new environmental supra-organization. However, the more obvious answer is to strengthen UNEP and enable it to perform the coordination task that is already in its mandate rather than just to add to the organizational clutter. Contrary to popular misinformation, UNEP has been one of the most impressive UN organizations in terms of its actual achievements and has already been entrusted by Agenda 21 (at the Rio Earth Summit) with the task of consolidating disparate treaty secretariats, etc. While placing the Global Environmental Facility in the World Bank rather than at UNEP was a major mistake, it is a mistake that can be rectified. One would envision that by 2020, UNEP would have become what it was originally mandated to be—a global environmental coordinator and the ‘environmental conscience of the world.’ In this process, treaty proliferation could be tackled through clustering of treaty regimes and negotiation fatigue could be addressed by consolidating various treaty secretariats at one central location—preferably Nairobi—and by moving towards a more streamlined negotiation calendar.
- **International Trade Governance.** The fact that UNCTAD and WTO are both simultaneously part of the UN family can be explained by the tortured political histories of both these organizations. It is, nonetheless, a painful—and wasteful—coexistence. The good news, however, is that consolidation seems on the card as WTO, which was born out of the very non-UN-like GATT, is turning more and more into a UN-like organization. Consider, for example, the fact that WTO membership rose by more than a third in the period during which the Uruguay Round was negotiated and has risen by more than half between when that process started and now. More importantly, the new members are mostly from the developing countries. They do not have a history of operating by ‘GATT rules’ and are more familiar with UN styles and agendas. Moreover, the agenda of the WTO is becoming more UN-like than GATT-like (in terms of emphasis on development issues). With the addition of China, WTO would become even more UN-like. The tussle between WTO’s lingering ‘GATTness’ and emerging ‘UNness’ was most apparent at the Seattle Ministerial and is again evident in the run-up to Qatar. At some point in the next two decades, it is to be hoped, WTO will begin seeing itself as a ‘Trade and Development’ organization and waste of having a separate WTO, a separate UNCTAD, and a separate International Trade Center (ITC)—all within the UN system—could be averted.
- **International Development.** Convergence and consolidation in the international development assistance regime, while very desirable, seems rather unlikely. Conceptually, there is very little basis for having a World Bank Group separate from UNDP. In a logical world the World Bank would be one part of UNDP. In the political world, however, the golden rule is sacrosanct—‘he who has the gold, makes the rule!’ Unfortunately, politics trumps logic, and gold still trumps politics. While meaningful

consolidation in this area may not be feasible, even with a two-decade time frame, some steps in rationalizing the international development regime might nonetheless be possible. One obvious place to start is to better coordinate the UN's own development efforts. Enhancing the role of the Secretary General in the executive management—including program and budgetary decisions—of the specialized agencies could provide the basis of such change. A key step that could be taken at the World Bank is to move it towards operating like an actual bank—certainly in the sense of ceasing to dictate policy to its borrowers. In other cases, however, the challenges over the next twenty years relate not as much to consolidation as to diversification. For example, the AIDS epidemic provides a new and immediate challenge to WHO. The response should not be to create a new agency or program, but to strengthen WHO to be able to respond to this crisis. Similarly, UNESCO needs to be strengthened to play a more active role as a disseminator of access to information technology as a development tool. In yet other cases, the need may be for better coordination rather than just consolidation or diversification. For example, the issue of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is gaining prominence. It is already being tackled separately by the biodiversity convention and by FAO. There is an obvious need for global scientific standard setting. However, there is no need for a new organization to do so—it can and should be done within the FAO in a coordinated UN-wide effort.

While these examples are necessarily brief and general, the point to be made here is one that reinforces the thrust of this entire essay—our vision for 2020 must be rooted in trying to improve the system as it now exists rather than simply adding new components to it because fixing old ones is too difficult. The crisis faced by most international organizations and by the UN system as a whole is not one of competence or even pertinence, it is a crisis of neglect. It is not simply that the mandates of existing organizations are inappropriate to deal with the challenges of tomorrow, but that the resources and political will invested in these organizations are insufficient to deal even with the problems of today. Absent that fundamental willingness, no amount of organizational tinkering will lead to meaningful global governance.