

OVERVIEW AND STRUCTURE

ARCHIVE OVERVIEW

The initial Origins subsection of this archive notes the tremendous amount of international activity of the twentieth century, which has been carefully chronicled in four editions of an excellent book on the topic over the past several decades, with the fourth edition appearing in 2001. It and its predecessors provide a thorough, evolving analysis of the past, present, and future of these organizations and their growth, the influences on their membership, their scope and structures, their administration, and their status as practical necessities to deal with developments and challenges in all areas of human activity.

The book is Robert S. Jordan, with Clive Archer, Gregory P. Granger, and Kerry Ordes, International organizations: A comparative approach to the management of cooperation, fourth ed., Greenwood/Praeger, Westport, CN (USA), 2001.

The fourth edition, published in 2001, argued that a shift from the primacy of the nation state to relations through international organizations is now underway. However, the process is incomplete and the outcome indistinct, because of its halting, largely unplanned and unanticipated manner. The fourth edition emphasized in particular the management of cooperation, in the belief that the incomplete nature of the evolution of international organizations hinges on the presence or absence of cooperation on given issues, and thus requires the management of this cooperation.

Robert S. Jordan, with Clive Archer, Gregory P. Granger, and Kerry Ordes, International organizations: A comparative approach to the management of cooperation, fourth ed., Greenwood/Praeger, Westport, CN (USA), 2001, pp. 1-2 and *passim*.

The fourth edition therefore provides an important general analysis of such international organization topics as management efficiency, leadership effectiveness, organizational structures, institutional governance, policymaking and implementation, and universal international organizations as practical necessities, both at present and on into the future.

IO Watch seeks to expand on this effort, as noted in the preceding Origins subsection, by exploring the critical areas of the rule of law (more properly the lack thereof), management accountability, transparency, and performance (not just talk) in terms of the best-known international organization, the United Nations. Certainly the UN is the one which, for the last sixty years and certainly at present as it comes off an "annus horribilis" in 2004, is the most written about, criticized, and discussed.

IO Watch focuses here on the "United Nations" proper, that is, primarily the Secretariat, the General Assembly, the Security Council, and also, but less specifically, the major semi-autonomous and voluntary-funded programmes, mainly the UNDP (development), UNHCR (refugees), UNICEF (children), and WFP (food aid). The full UN structure is found at www.un.org .

The archive often mentions, but does not focus on, the "United Nations system", which adds the specialized agencies, the largest of which are the FAO (food and agriculture), ILO (labour), UNESCO (education, scientific, and cultural), and WHO (health), plus smaller technical agencies, all to be found at www.unsystem.org .

The focus on the UN proper, within the UN System, is because it is by far the biggest agency, and the General Assembly dominates (or tries to) the many other system governing bodies. It spends some 80% of total system funds. In addition, most of the literature concentrates on the UN, and adding the multiple other agencies would complicate and blur the presentation. However, while the specialized agencies are more focused on their particular areas of expertise and are somewhat less political, many of the issues raised in this archive about the UN culture, rule of law, management accountability, personnel system, and operating problems generally are concerns in the UN system specialized agencies as well.

The United Nations has long been known as a place that "imports a lot of words and exports a lot of documents." This creates a lot of information "noise," but precious little assessment of what all this effort is actually achieving, and how and why it falls short of needs and expectations.

The UN Secretariat has usually been considered a "black

box" by the general public, a quiet and often obscure process that performs neutrally and adequately. But every organization must continuously assess its performance; use its scarce resources wisely; combat fraud, waste, and abuse; and be held publicly accountable.

Recently, the UN has shifted away from its past focus on "talk shop" functions. It has become a massive worldwide conglomerate that spends \$6 to \$10 billion dollars of public monies each year, and employs more than 35,000 to 40,000 people in urgent field programmes spread around the world. It is also involved in almost every global issue (i.e., spreads its capacities and its focus very thinly).

The UN has some very strong and loyal supporters and some angry opponents. But most people still know it only very generally as a sprawling organization, a debating society, and a rather bumbling red-tape bureaucracy that supports many special world conferences and meetings.

The United Nations does a good job of publicizing its positive activities. Yet its actual operations and effectiveness remain very vague. At least one knowledgeable observer has called it "the least accountable public-based bureaucracy in the world." It is a place of noble words, diplomatic maneuver, pontificating, and posturing. It has no elected representatives, and is in fact quite distant from "the people" (or at least it was until late 2004 and early 2005 when its real roles and performance suddenly came into deepest question.)

The Secretariat and other bodies have many competent and dedicated staff, and some truly outstanding and heroic ones, particularly in its peacekeeping and humanitarian field missions. IO Watch has the good or outstanding work of these many UN staff fully in mind in constructing this archive, and the hope that their commendable efforts will be encouraged and recognized, not wasted.

However, major problems of incompetence, waste, cronyism, mismanagement, and abuse gravely undermine almost all aspects of UN performance. These organizational "diseases" arise, and harm the UN, in eight major ways, which are discussed in detail in the various sections of this archive.

1. Incompetent or self-serving people have consistently been chosen to fill too many UN posts, often at rather high levels. This not only wastes resources, but

blocks creative, highly-motivated, and skilled people from filling those posts.

2. In the UN, the many competent are actually called on to do the incompetents' work for them, which is not only grossly unfair but clearly obstructs and diminishes their own work.

3. Because the incompetent, the ambitious, and their cronies are often placed at higher levels but lack basic managerial skills, they can seriously disrupt UN programme planning, leadership, and implementation.

4. The incompetent also hide behind the competent, wrapping themselves in the UN's noble moral tasks and good work, while obstructing (or negating) accountability mechanisms and oversight which would expose and end their own non-performance.

5. This entire situation is obviously very damaging to organizational morale, resulting in the departure of good staff from the organization, or pressing them submit themselves to the *status quo* (since raising objections only brings retaliation.)

6. As word of poor performance gradually leaks out, however, it also becomes very damaging to the UN's overall reputation.

7. Because UN Member State contributions to the UN budget are obligatory, the UN pays little attention to its fiduciary duty to use global taxpayers' money wisely.

8. Worst of all, poorly-implemented UN programmes may cheat and fail their clients, especially in life-or-death peacekeeping, humanitarian, and human rights missions. To improve its operations in these critical areas, the UN should continually confront itself with the brutal but essential accountability question, "How many lives and how much suffering have our past operational mistakes cost, and how can our more diligent efforts save lives in the future?"

Global society cannot continue to rely on a bumbling Security Council, General Assembly, and Secretariat in the turbulent twenty-first century.

An extensive body of knowledgeable, and surprisingly consistent, analysis of UN operational weaknesses has built up for some sixty years. These insights could do much to remedy the UN's persistent performance shortcomings and their increasingly grave consequences, but they have mostly been lost in the flood of documents about the UN's noble intentions.

There is also a basic lack of real public interest -- some observers feel that the UN is the most "underreported" and "under-analyzed" story in the world, and it seems that general public knowledge about it is "a mile wide and an inch deep".

Every organization in the world must work hard to establish sound management and develop processes of accountability, transparency, performance management, and above all the rule of law. During the 1990s, Member States pressed the UN Secretariat for major management accountability and oversight reforms, without much success. The many current criticisms of UN performance thus repeat those made 30 or even 40 years ago, with little real change. Those who pay for, and rely on, the Organization are the losers.

The UN has always been quite defensive and quick to dismiss its critics. It brushes aside the criticisms, or acknowledges them but makes no real change, and usually labels the critics as:

-- mere "troublemakers" pursuing their own agendas (i.e., *ad hominem* attacks);

-- "uninformed," particularly if they can be faulted for minor errors in describing any of the bewildering technicalities and endless acronyms of UN proceedings; or, worst of all,

-- people who "don't understand the special and unique nature of the UN", the "special" being the intense political maneuvering that underlies almost every UN action, but the "unique" being a continuous appeal for exemption for the many operational shortcomings found in "the world body" because of its high moral calling and noble aims (and evasive Secretariat and often-meddling Member States.)

UN performance failures and stumbles have grown very rapidly in the past decade, especially in peacekeeping and humanitarian programmes and the battle against continuing instances of genocide. The UN critics therefore deserve a much more public and careful hearing.

-- Far from being "troublemakers", they are deeply concerned with built-in UN performance failings and associated incompetence, carelessness, and corruption, and the urgent need to put a stop to it.

-- They are not "uninformed." Most of them in fact have extensive experience inside the UN or working alongside it,

or have followed its activities for extended periods.

-- They do indeed "understand" the UN culture all too well. In particular, they protest performance failings which occur because the UN continues to engage in moral posturing, self-indulgence, and cronyism among its senior ruling class.

IO Watch believes that such critiques, if finally and seriously recognized and addressed, could do much to revive a faltering UN. This IO Watch archive is thus a first-ever systematic attempt to "bear witness," to finally present at least some of the rich lode of assessments made by participants and observers of UN performance and accountability problems. Their voices provide cogent analyses and evaluations, excellent insights, some wonderful writing, and valuable proposals for change.

These analysts focus not on the perpetual but elusive "what could be," but "what is," warts and all, and then urge actions to improve it.

IO Watch believes that if the UN can finally establish and apply the rule of law and management accountability, and open up its operations to public scrutiny, it could become far more effective and disciplined in helping to solve pressing global problems. If not, the Member States who pay its bills and rely on its services, and "We the peoples of the United Nations ..." cited in the first words of the UN Charter, should urgently seek alternative processes to enhance (rather than impede) collaborative global governance efforts.

After a brief illustrative sampling of the quotations which are at the center of this archive, a very concise summary of the archive's structure and content concludes this subsection.

A SAMPLING

Lest a skeptical potential user still suspect that the above overview leads to the usual musty, dusty archive, or even "much ado about nothing", IO Watch offers below nine

representative quotations which illustrate the main issues discussed throughout this website, and underscore the need for urgent and decisive change.

" any respect for the institution of management within the UN has largely disappeared. [Unavoidable staff cynicism] thankfully does not affect their belief in the value of what the organization does, [but] centers on the perception that there is little or no relationship between the value of the work one performs and the rewards, psychic or tangible, likely to be received

Cynicism is a corrosive quality. it ultimately becomes very difficult indeed to maintain an increasingly abstract pride in an Organization's ideals and purposes when you despise many of its nominal leaders, and most of its standards for selecting those leaders.

As was the case ... 40 years ago the U.N. has no 'unifying directive on the functions of management. All it would take is the implementation of a meritocratic standard for advancement at all levels of staff employment. Do this and virtually all other problems would fade away Make quality leadership and good management qualities the hallmarks for praise and promotion, and at the very least we will have, finally, a mature United Nations with a proud, strong, unified staff to do the work."

Stephen Baldwin, "Good management in the United Nations", Secretariat News (New York), **January 31, 1986**, pp. 11-12.

"Accountability, that source of institutional health, had been excluded from United Nations experience; and, along with it, indivisibly, the stimulus of direct public engagement and response. 'It is not a United Nations Organization', Aleksander Solzhenitsyn was to say, in his Nobel address of 1970, 'but a United Governments Organization.' In offering itself as the mere creature of its member governments, the United Nations system entered a state of arrested moral development, marked by the habitual emblems of immaturity: demands for approval, and incapacity for individual or collective self-questioning."

Shirley Hazzard, "Breaking Faith: I", The New Yorker, **September 25, 1989**, pp. 63-99, [76].

[Note: Ms. Hazzard worked at the UN for ten years, resigning in 1962 to become a very successful full-time writer.]

"Current problems in what you [Secretary-General Butros Butros-Ghali] have correctly identified as 'the present outmoded system of personnel management' constitute a major stumbling block to true reform within the Organization.

Defects exist in nearly every aspect of present personnel practice. Recruitment has been undertaken on a more or less haphazard basis and consumes an inordinate amount of time. Training programmes are insufficient. Promotion exercises have become inordinately complicated to the point of being nearly unworkable ... Discipline and dismissal procedures are encumbered by seemingly interminable appeals processes.

The result is too much 'deadwood' doing too little work and too few good staff members doing too much, over-extending themselves sometimes to the point where they have become counter-productive."

Dick Thornburgh, Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management, "Report to the Secretary-General of the United Nations" ["The Thornburgh report"], **1 March 1993**, pp. 8-9.

"At a UN conference in Geneva on October 12, 1992, Sahnoun was direct. 'A whole year slipped by whilst the UN and the international community, save for the International Red Cross and a few nongovernmental humanitarian organizations, watched Somalia descend into this hell. The damage will not be repaired.' During this period '300,000 Somalis, mostly children, have succumbed, some of them in agony' he said."

Mohammed Sahnoun, as quoted in Ray Bonner, "Why we went: How the United Nations turned its back on Somalia and subverted the best chance for peace", Mother Jones, (USA), **March-April 1993**, pp. 54-60.

[Note: Secretary-General Butros Butros-Ghali summarily fired Mr. Sahnoun, his Special Envoy to Somalia, for making these and other comments. Mr. Sahnoun made these warnings "to save lives ... and avert future tragedies." Since 1992, in Rwanda, Bosnia, the Congo, and elsewhere, millions more lives have been lost during tardy and inept UN peacekeeping missions. See a much fuller quote on Sahnoun's efforts in the Humanitarian subsection under UN Performance Problems in this archive.]

"In considering [a major UN staff-management dispute] ... a critical question has been avoided: what is the rationale for increasing the vulnerability of staff to unfair and/or arbitrary judgements by administrators ? The pat answer to that -- it will allow "managers to manage" -- is unconvincing because the most serious problem affecting the efficiency and effectiveness of the UN Secretariat has been bad management. ...

The Secretariat reforms proposed by the Secretary-General would ... remove a range of checks and balances built into the international civil service for the very obvious reason that in a multicultural, multinational context, justice must not only be done but be seen to be done.

The United Nations will clearly [face] ... wrenching changes in the period ahead, and it would be both unfair and counterproductive to do away now with the only means staff have to hold managers accountable."

"Staff-management spat with possible serious impact reflects a joyless 50th anniversary," International Documents Review, **16 October 1995**, p. 2. [emphasis added]

"For years Western governments have complained about the lack of accountability prevailing in UN organizations, but in practice they have tolerated a degree of opacity that would be considered totally unacceptable for any civil service in a democracy. The Geneva Group's 'zero-growth' policy has been the nearest they have come to sanctions, [but it] ... has had only limited success in compelling secretariats to cooperate in discussing management practices and opening the books. Inadequate internal auditing and slipshod evaluation procedures have not only shielded inefficiency, waste, maladministration, and downright fraud; they have deprived the UN's member states of the information they need to identify the organizations' weaknesses -- and strengths. ...

... [No] amount of exhortation -- as the years have proved -- can compensate for the lack of routine inspection under established rules of 'open government.' Evaluation would require ... built-in procedures requiring the UN bureaucracies to respond to criticisms. So ingrained is the collusion between the permanent representatives to these organizations and the secretariats that a majority for such an initiative among the UN membership would be difficult though not impossible to muster. But many UN staff

members would welcome more rigorous scrutiny ...”

Rosemary Righter, Utopia lost: The United Nations and world order, Twentieth Century Fund, New York, **1995**, pp. 280-281.

"I hope to provide an 'inside story' which will allow the public to peer behind the facade... This is sorely needed because the UN's culture of 'self-justification' and 'self-exoneration' has disseminated so much propaganda about 'the accomplishments' of the system and how 'doomed' the world would be without it, that it has become extremely difficult for many people to see the organizations for what they are. This can only be done by dispelling a number of myths ...

Taxpayers and governments should no longer be duped into financing these institutions in their present form. They should only pay if these organizations become streamlined, efficient institutions, devoted to serving the international community; not corrupt, inefficient, disreputable bodies staffed mostly by deadwood incompetents living in grand style.

There are in fact a number of U.N. employees who, in one whole year, do not write one sentence for the Organization or spend one single hour working for it in any way, yet receive unbelievable salaries at the end of each month. Such a situation does not exist anywhere else in the world, not even in the bureaucracies of the least developed countries."

Houshang Ameri, Fraud, waste and abuse: Aspects of U.N. management and personnel policies, University Press of America, Lanham, MD (USA), **June 2003**, pp. viii-ix.

"... after all these years, the United Nations is still struggling to adjust its human resources policies and practices to the reality that surrounds it. ...

In [a highly competitive international] environment, the UN will have to reform its reforms, or go down reforming.

Several dilemmas that have crippled the UN for generations, however, remain unresolved, and this organizational pathology stands in the way of the UN's efforts to remain meaningful. When it comes to managing human resources, the following are [some of] the obstacles that the UN must overcome:

- Its addiction to the trappings of a careers-for-life staffing model, with its emphasis on seniority ...
- Its fear of offending Member States that exert political pressure -- by not insisting on merit in staffing, even at the highest levels;
- Its reliance on patronage as a survival strategy, especially where outputs are nebulous; ...
- the persistent gap between its perennial promises to improve human resources management and its capacity to deliver; and
- Its obsession with cosmetic reforms, hiding the root causes of dysfunctionality.

For most pathologies, there is a cure. For the UN, faith healing will not suffice."

Dirk Salomons, "Good intentions to naught: The pathology of human resources management at the United Nations," in Dennis Dijkzeul, and Yves Beigbeder, eds., Rethinking international organizations: Pathology and promise, Berghahn, New York and Oxford, **2003**, pp. 111-139 [136-137].

"The [United Nations is] suffering from two self-inflicted wounds ,, a kickback scandal of multi-billion dollar proportions swirling around the UN-run oil-for-food program

[in Iraq]. The other is ... that oversights in UN security management may have worsened the toll in last August's terrorist bombing of the Baghdad headquarters.

Urgent steps, including high-level demotions and dismissals, are already underway to address the security failures. Ferreting out the murky details of the financial scandal, and meting out appropriate punishments, is no less urgent.

... UN officials clearly failed to supervise effectively the roughly \$10 billion a year in transactions and may have been involved in illicit deals. ...

Now there is finally some political will to investigate, and details of the corruption are emerging ... The investigators must put aside diplomatic niceties and concentrate on cleansing the UN's reputation."

"Clean up the UN," International Herald Tribune, April 8, 2004.

ARCHIVE STRUCTURE

The **FIRST** major section of this archive, on UN Performance Problems, provides hundreds (eventually expected to be well over a thousand) quotes analyzing more than half a century of UN performance shortcomings. The section begins with a six-decade overview of UN operational problems, and then provides a set of UN performance assessments over the years.

Sixteen subsections then review performance problems in specific areas: above all personnel, but also structure and operations, leadership, management systems, and past management reform efforts. The next three sections explore the functioning of the Security Council, General Assembly, and other conference and negotiation issues, followed by sections on the problems in the very demanding (and struggling) field operations for peacekeeping, humanitarian, and nation-building efforts. Assessments of development assistance work, efforts for human rights and women, and interactions with NGOs and civil society follow. The section ends with some anecdotes and observations on UN "goings-on", and references for those who want to study the UN's versions of things.

The **SECOND** major archive section, UN Management Accountability Struggles, begins with material on corruption as a pervasive operational hazard in all organizations, and the accountability and transparency processes which seek to prevent it, both generally and in the UN.

A summary of overall UN reform efforts over the years shows how difficult this process is. Among them, an excellent 1993

General Assembly initiative to establish firm management accountability in the Secretariat has largely failed, although dramatic performance problems since 2003 may constitute a "tipping point" at which real UN reform (or collapse?) finally becomes unavoidable, as discussed in this archive's pivotal subsections on management accountability reform under The UN old boys' Last Hurrah? .

In addition, the UN's attempts to reform its various management systems have continued to be patchy. In contrast, successful Secretariat initiatives to "free the managers" have brought troubling problems by liberating both good and bad UN managers, establishing amateur internal investigations by managers of staff, making whistle-blowers disappear, and, not surprisingly, creating a strong new need for staff to defend themselves.

The **THIRD** major archive section, Where is the Rule of Law?, examines **the pressing core question: How can it be that the UN is still unable, despite decades of "reform" efforts, to cope with its legal, management accountability, transparency, and corruption problems?**

The answer is that the UN operates with diplomatic immunity, and is above (or at least outside) the law of nations. The Secretariat was scarred by an ugly staff "loyalty" scandal in the early 1950s, which subsequently led all Member States to seek staff posts in a highly-politicized process, and made subsequent Secretariat operations cautious and fearful of transparency and accountability.

In addition, the Secretariat leadership became and remains very autocratic, and immunity has gradually turned into management impunity. Staff rights have been tightly controlled, a homemade "internal justice" system has performed poorly for decades, and some ugly "behind the scenes" disciplinary activities have continued on and on.

More recently, major internal justice flaws have been exacerbated by new policies and issues of conduct and misconduct, abuse, fraud, "freeing" UN managers to manage, harassment, accountability, investigations, and whistleblower issues. This has led to a muddled staff code of conduct, an even more outdated internal justice system, very serious legal loopholes, and, *inter alia*, grave human rights issues of refugee protection in UN humanitarian and peacekeeping programmes in the field.

The UN has meanwhile become increasingly involved in advising Member States on improving legal and judicial processes, while not reforming its own practices. But new investigations processes are indeed finally sending at least some UN staff to national courts, as the cloak of UN impunity begins to lift.

There is some further hope in new General Assembly concerns with internal justice defects. Reasonable reform opportunities are available to properly revise the UN staff code of conduct, commission an expert external review of the UN's administration of justice system, provide independent internal judicial oversight, and establish an independent human rights ombudsman to monitor the UN's own overall human rights performance in its worldwide operations.

The **FOURTH** major section, Inadequate UN Oversight, discusses the troubling deficiencies of UN personnel management (the Office of Human Resources Management, OHRM), particularly in its assigned role of interpreting and enforcing the UN rules and regulations and the full implementation of General Assembly human resources mandates. The new Secretariat internal oversight body since 1994 (the OIOS) could be a powerful actor, but its diplomat/leaders have chosen to emphasize close cooperation with managers rather than essential investigations functions, to the serious detriment of UN corruption-fighting.

The main external oversight body for the UN and the UN system (the Joint Inspection Unit, JIU) is a very small and outdated group of diplomats who issue a few unimpressive reports each year. And the 190-some Member States in the General's Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary), and its "expert" advisory committees are not capable of effective management oversight either. Only the UN Board of Auditors brings professional skills and discipline to oversight work, but it is underutilized.

Multinational corporations and other international organizations themselves have some severe accountability, governance, and corruption-fighting problems. They do not do much better than the UN, but at least they have made (or been forced to make) some serious reforms (particularly corporations which are subject to the rule of law as the UN and its sister organizations certainly are not).

The **FIFTH** and final major archive section, Recent Developments, begins with the topic of global governance and how the UN fits in among emerging worldwide networks, power sources, and issues -- definitely not at the pinnacle as it would like to be. The archive also examines the emerging interest in a new international "right to know" to obtain much greater transparency, accountability, and comparative assessment of governments' and organizations' (including international ones) performance worldwide. IO Watch then examines the UN's awkward exercise of its "moral authority" -- which is fine in general, but not when directed only to others but not to itself.

The next three subsections of the archive are all very much "to be continued." The first explores nine aspects of the UN's awkward status as an unaccountable organization in the 21st century. The second cites a dozen major problem areas which the UN must confront -- and resolve -- if it is to maintain or regain its credibility.

The third and final wrap-up subsection offers eight "answers" as starting points for real UN reform (to accompany the three already proposed under the rule-of-law section) to end the UN's rule-of-law and management accountability deficits. They are: a serious UN fraud prevention programme; external expert reviews of defective UN oversight and of personnel decision-making; a true global strategy -- instead of doing a little bit of everything unsatisfactorily; establishment of a General Assembly audit subcommittee and two new annual Secretariat reports, on UN results obtained and on the use of human and financial resources; and a serious strengthening of UN monitoring and oversight processes by major donor countries.

All of these suggestions have been applied elsewhere, or proposed before, but they are still quite feasible, modest, and reasonable steps. They would go a long way toward creating a law-abiding and much more transparent, accountable, and credible UN, instead of defending the old entrenched management culture of impunity of the past six decades.

In the final two subsections, IO Watch offers an informal selection of the most relevant sources it has found related to UN management accountability. They begin with an overall "Top 50" list of material from all sources, followed by separate lists of what IO Watch considers to be the 50 most useful books, reports, articles, and assessments of UN field operations. A similar subsection provides information on more than two dozen sources and websites that IO Watch has found informative and helpful. IO

Watch will update all these lists as new material comes to light.

The full detailed structure of the archive and these five major sections just described can be found on the [Archive Site Map](#) .