

## A TRUE GLOBAL STRATEGY

Previous subsections of this concluding section of the IO Watch archive, on Recent Developments, have discussed major problems of the UN's attempt to be "the world organization" and map a future course for the international community:

-- The discussion of An awesome bottleneck surveyed the tremendous roster of world problems clamoring for attention, and the inability of the UN and its Member States, with their very cumbersome decision-making machinery and "business as usual", to make sense of it all as the world spins ever faster and faster;

-- the Lack of a strategy noted that the UN seeks a central role in almost everything, setting grand goals but then struggling to come anywhere near fulfilling them, particularly as new factors and concerns which the UN did not foresee knock the existing agenda off the rails;

-- Resource ambiguities, as the UN focuses intensely on its regular programme budget process, while spending about six times as much on its tremendous range of high-pressure extra budgetary field programmes, with very little control, oversight, and performance reporting; and

-- most of all, a Grand lack of focus, as the UN is not content with all its peacekeeping, humanitarian, negotiations, human rights, development, and other basic priorities and life-and-death challenges. Instead, it dives eagerly into a UN Global Compact with multinational corporations, a grand Millenium Project for development issues and more, a new global Convention Against Corruption. It has also attempted to enter into, and/or direct, quite new fields such as global commerce, an international tax organization, human cloning, control of the Internet, and partnerships with "civil society". Meanwhile, it tries to somehow find some time to deliberate on other "matters", such as biological weapons, terrorism, and genocide.

IO Watch believes that this muddle does damage to the UN and to global governance. The more thinly the UN spreads itself,

the more shallow and confusing its decision-making becomes, and the more it spreads its limited financial and human resources over all the multiple issues outlined above.

In fact, there have been some useful attempts and suggestions to get the UN to better focus its work, concentrate on what it does well, and also participate much more meaningfully in attempting to foresee emerging global issues and priorities.

Almost two decades ago Maurice Bertrand compared two efforts to prepare forward-looking assessments of UN operations. He found that the "Group of 18" deliberations of 1986 largely followed a fairly traditional UN "eminent experts" pattern. A method of work was not clearly defined. The members were experts but in other fields, and they were ambassadors more familiar with politics than with budget and financial problems and UN programmes and machinery. The "around the table" approach led to some 150 "ideas," often contradictory, but nevertheless chosen as the basis for the report. The only area of consensus was criticism of the Secretariat. With better organization of work and more courage, new directions could have been identified, but this was not possible.

In contrast, the work of a Ford Foundation group in 1986-1987 relied on relevant in-depth studies, several lengthy plenary meetings, and the work of sub-panels. It went further in the difficult tasks of reflecting on changes in the international system, without supplying answers, but at least leading to three fundamental conclusions:

" ... first ... the solutions being proposed for [global problems] were inadequate and had not been elaborated by all those concerned ... several matters of an unquestionably global character -- such as ... forecasting of future problems -- were not being dealt with by any world organization.

Second, the work required ... should be done on a permanent basis and [combine]... the research capacities of all the world organizations. In an increasingly fast-changing world the task of [assessing] risks should be the fundamental task of a restructured and better-equipped system of organizations. This led to [the idea of] a reflection and analysis group, consisting of independent and qualified individuals, with an adequate interdisciplinary staff ...

... third ... "weighted voting" was not the right solution ... what was needed was not simply ... a majority capable of taking decisions but ... a representative system of partners interested in discussing matters together in order to arrive at a consensus ... [the report recommended] a Ministerial Board, ... in which the most important states would have one seat each, while others would be grouped, preferably on a regional basis, so as to have collective representation ..."

Maurice Bertrand, The third generation world organization, Martinus Nijhoff, Dordrecht, the Netherlands, 1989, pp. 108-123.

[Note: the two reports referred to are the "Report of the group of high-level intergovernmental experts to review the efficiency of the administrative and

financial functioning of the United Nations", General Assembly, Official Records, forty-first session, Supplement No. 49 (A/41/49), United Nations, New York, 1986, and United Nations Management & Decision-Making Project UNA-USA, A successor vision: The United Nations of tomorrow, United Nations Association of the United States of America, Final Panel Report, New York, September 1987, and related reports.] [emphasis added.]

A second, more recent, observation considered the sudden flood in recent years of senior officials at top levels in the UN (and more recently of special advisers and envoys), a process which continues today:

"The most egregious example of organizational bloat [in the United Nations system] is the one closest to home for Mr. Butros-Ghali: the U.N. Secretariat. .... the top echelon of the Secretariat originally consisted of eight assistant secretaries. Now it has 20 assistant secretaries, a new super-layer of 27 under secretaries and a director-general -- plus 21 more top-level officers who are not on the regular budget, for a total of 69.

Reformers urge clearing out the deadwood and bringing in officials chosen on merit who can provide the Secretary-General with background reports, analyses of complex situations, options for decisions and ideas for future missions."

Bonnie Angelo, "United Nations: Challenges for the new boss," Time, February 3, 1992, pp. 40-41 [41]. [emphasis added.]

An article by Iqbal Quadir in 2002 helps question and challenge the idea of the UN taking the UN leadership role for the world in the 21st century. He focused on the way in which modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) are generating profound changes in advanced countries, and can facilitate them in poor countries as well. He felt that the real bottleneck blocking processes -- such as ICTs -- that may transform societies in developing countries is the quality of general governance. He observed that:

"Despite an increase in professional institutions and multilateral organizations promoting international norms of behavior ... Transparency International ... [cites] 'a worldwide crisis involving pervasive misuse of power by public officials.' ...

... top-down state-led efforts have, by and large, failed ... [because they] all involved strengthening the state, centralizing it, and making it immune to pressures from citizens ...

... recognition of governance problems [by the World Bank and the UN] may do little good ... [without] genuine dispersion of power. ...

Most interestingly, governments may ... [have to accept] ideas and concepts that ... compete with the concept of territory on which they place their strongest claims. ...

ICT's empower from below while devolving power from above, resulting in a two-pronged attack on abuse of state power that has left so much of the world's population languishing in poverty.

What can be done to sustain this trend? ... Promote tailwinds to these technologically driven ... processes that are empowering citizens ... Empower commercial and social entrepreneurs ... ICT's can help people [to help others] directly, without the need to have state-to-state intermediaries. ... ICTs can be the means to

freedom and development by blindsiding the obstacles to both."

Iqbal Z. Quadir, "The bottleneck is at the top of the bottle", Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, vol. 26:2, **Summer/Fall 2002**, pp. 69-89 [73, 75, 77,83, 87-88.  
[emphasis added.]

[Note: Mr. Quadir is the founder of GrameenPhone in Bangladesh.]

But just as there are many new crises, so too are there new ways to foresee and deal with them more strategically. An excellent 2003 article states that:

"All companies ... are vulnerable to predictable surprises. ... we have found that organizations' inability to prepare for them can be traced to three kinds of barriers: Lapses in recognition occur when leaders remain oblivious to an emerging threat or problem ...

Failures of prioritization arise when potential threats are recognized by leaders but not deemed sufficiently serious to warrant immediate attention. ...

... failures of mobilization occur when leaders recognize and give adequate priority ... but fail to respond effectively. ...

we found that ... [some] causes are psychological -- cognitive defects that leave individuals blind to approaching threats. Others are organizational -- barriers within companies that impede communication and accountability. Still others are political -- flaws in decision making that result from granting too much influence from special interests. Alone or in combination, these three kinds of vulnerabilities can sabotage any company at any time. ...

'Prediction is very difficult', physicist Niels Bohr once said, 'especially about the future.' Difficult, yes. Impossible, no. Even though many organizations are caught unprepared for disasters they should have seen coming, many have successfully recognized approaching crisis and taken evasive action.

There are practical steps that managers can take. ..."

Michael D. Watkins and Max H. Bazerman, "Predictable surprises: The disasters you should have seen coming", Harvard Business Review, **March 2003**, pp. 72-80 [ 74-76, 79.] [emphasis added.]

Another excellent analysis highlights the hidden but emerging issues that the global community must assess and deal urgently with in addition to all the others.

"The illegal trade in drugs, arms, intellectual property, people, and money is booming. Like the war on terrorism, the fight to control these illicit markets pits governments against agile, stateless, and resourceful networks empowered by globalization. Governments will continue to lose these wars until they adopt new strategies to deal with a larger, unprecedented struggle that now shapes the world as much as confrontations with nation-states once did.

Why governments can't win [these wars]

They are not bound by geography

They defy traditional notions of sovereignty

They pit governments against market forces

They pit bureaucracies against networks

Rethinking the problem

Develop more flexible notions of sovereignty

Strengthen existing multilateral institutions [particularly INTERPOL]

Devise new mechanisms and strategies

Move from repression to regulation."

Moisés Naím, "The five wars of globalization," Foreign Policy, **January/February 2003**, pp. 29-37.

[Note: the article identifies other areas traded illegally for huge profits, including human organs, endangered species, stolen art, and toxic waste. As with most other *Foreign Policy* articles, it also contains an excellent guide for further reading on these topics.]

Most intriguing of all, however, is a new process which emerged in 2004, and is located outside the UN. The "Copenhagen Consensus" is an ambitious project to set priorities among ideas for improving the lives of people in developing countries. It was developed by the Environmental Assessment Institute of Denmark in conjunction with *The Economist* magazine.

The Consensus process used a panel of challenge-papers and an expert group to assess top-priority projects globally, recognizing that resources are scarce and difficult choices have to be made, and relying in particular on cost-benefit analysis to find the most worthwhile projects, if about \$50 billion would be available to spend. The group had narrowed a much larger list of development challenges down to just ten. In alphabetical order, they now are:

- Climate change
- Communicable diseases
- Conflicts
- Education
- Financial Instability
- Governance and Corruption
- Malnutrition and Hunger
- Population: Migration
- Sanitation and Water
- Subsidies and Trade Barriers.

*The Economist* reported that after analysis and discussion of the papers, the panel agreed on four "very good" proposals: with estimated social benefits exceeding costs by a factor of ten or more. *The Economist* concluded:

"That proposals this good should fail to be adopted for lack of finance is a scandal, especially when you reflect on some of the projects that governments are currently financing.

[The four very good projects were]:

- |                        |                           |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Diseases            | Control of HIV/AIDS       |
| 2. Malnutrition        | Providing micro nutrients |
| 3. Subsidies and trade | Trade liberalisation      |
| 4. Diseases            | Control of malaria"       |

"Putting the world to rights", The Economist, **June 5th, 2004**, pp. 59-61.

The project is obviously complex and full of pitfalls, but the effort to attempt to carefully determine where scarce aid resources and efforts could best be used is a very important contrast to the usual global policy of "throwing money at problems" without much sense of whether it will make a real difference or not. The process will be an ongoing one, to be followed up on in several years, and it has generated much more positive than cynical comment.

See [www.copenhagenconsensus.com](http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com) ,  
[www.economist.com/](http://www.economist.com/) "Copenhagen consensus", with the set of articles that The Economist published in 2004 on the topic,  
and a book, Bjørn Lomborg, ed., Global crises, global solutions, Cambridge University, (UK), 2004.  
And such articles as  
Bjorn Lomborg, "Prioritizing the world's to-do list", Fortune Europe, May 17, 2004, pp. 38-39, and  
"World Affairs: The biggest impact," Newsweek Europe, June 7/June 14, 2004, p. 4.

*The Economist* subsequently expressed some very pertinent further reservations about the Millennium Development Goals effort.

"This week the United Nations published its annual assessment of progress toward its Millennium Development Goals -- targets established in 2000 for advancing welfare in the developing countries. The record, as you might expect, is mixed. ... It remains questionable, in fact, whether the MDG exercise, with its unimpeachably good intentions and its proliferating bureaucratic overhead, has done any good at all on balance. ...

... The weakness of the whole MDG concept is that it wills the ends without willing the means – something which the UN, perforce, has come to specialize in. A plan to spend a specific allocation of aid on specific interventions ... could be judged for cost-effectiveness and ranked alongside alternative ways of expending resources ... A statement of good intentions is unfortunately just that.

The UN seems especially proud of the progress [toward the goal] ... in which it has a vested interest ... greater global co-operation on development. ... Conferences, working groups, declarations, strategies, and programmes ... swearing allegiance to the MDG idea, are multiplying fantastically. In this sense, at least, the concept is a runaway success. However, what this is actually doing for the putative poor country beneficiaries is harder to say."

"Ends without means: The United Nations has set benchmarks for progress in poor countries. Are these any use?", The Economist, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2004, p. 78. [emphasis added]

The point to be made is that all the quotes above suggest that the UN is not working to facilitate effective and flexible global strategy priorities with its business-as-usual efforts to do a lot of everything, with grand goals and requests for lots of money, but a cumbersome and disorderly process once it comes to implementation.

IO Watch believes that the UN could do much better by starting from the opportunities identified by Bertrand two decades ago, undertaking its own serious, reasoned, and transparent analysis of interrelated global problems, deriving suggested best priorities therefrom and determining carefully how inevitably scarce resources could be most effectively applied. After such a publicized and reflective process, it could at least offer up to its rather tempestuous and bickering Member States (and others) a coherent, regularly updated, and pragmatic agenda.

Above all, the UN should seek finally to focus and organize its own efforts clearly on those areas where its programmes can do the most good, instead as attempting to be "the world body" doing a little bit of everything, with everybody, everywhere.

Meanwhile, it seems that Mr. Annan's latest "eminent group" of 2003 has at least a few bold ideas, although they may never come to fruition, or at best only in a few years:

When Kofi Annan ... set up a 'high-level panel of eminent personalities' ... to assess the UN's role in dealing with new global threats, many yawned. Surely such a bunch of worthies -- most of them retired -- would simply produce yet another platitudinous report. 'Relics trying to reform a relic,' said one UN ambassador. Yet the group has [already] come up with some surprising ... ideas ...

[In addition to an expanded 24-member Security Council] ...

... the panel has divided ... [its] work into six 'baskets': classic inter-state conflict; internal violence, including genocide; social and economic threats, such as poverty and disease; weapons of mass destruction; terrorism; and organized crime and corruption. The panel decided early [not to distinguish] between 'hard' threats, which worry the rich world most, and 'soft' threats, of greater concern to the rest of humanity. Both, it agreed, were inextricably linked. ...

... The panel is to [report to] Mr. Annan by December 1st. He will ... [add to and] present it ... in September next year to the General Assembly, where it will need a two-thirds vote to pass."

"The United Nations: A winning recipe for reform? After Iraq, some ideas for rescuing the UN," The Economist, **July 24th, 2004**.

[See further quotes on this group's report, and subsequent developments, in the archive subsection on Overall UN Reform Attempts .]