

OVERALL UN REFORM ATTEMPTS

Before discussing the ineffective struggles of the 1990s to establish UN management accountability and strengthen UN internal management systems, broader overall UN reform attempts must be briefly noted, because they help to explain why serious UN management reform is so difficult. They also tend to obscure UN management difficulties in the smoke of the grand (but so far, and for almost 60 years, futile) reform and restructuring of the entire Organization.

The general need for reform, the complex architecture, and the varied views which are involved are succinctly summarized by a mid-1990s analysis by James Paul:

"The UN needs reform. ... But people disagree sharply on what kind ... and for what purpose. NGO leaders aim for a more democratic UN ... Technocrats seek more productivity and efficiency ... Delegates favor reforms that conform to national interests ... Idealists offer plans for a greatly expanded body ... conservatives push for a downsized UN ... Agreement is exceedingly hard to come by. ...

The founders of the UN designed it to be highly decentralized, with power shared ...

Even in the core programmes of the UN, there is rarely a clarity of purpose or unity of structure. Decision-making bodies have proliferated along with administrative ones. ...

Approaches to UN reform vary widely. ... [which helps] explain why there are so many different approaches. ...

Most observers recognize that the reform battle is a battle over policy, not simply a management upgrade. ...

Because of these deep policy differences, the reform process has no clear agreed-on goal ... Like all conflict-driven politics, it is a complex process of bargaining, jostling, posturing and outright threats, reconciling very divergent interests, as well as different views of the world and preferences on how global society should be organized."

James Paul, "UN reform: An analysis," UN Reform, Global Policy Forum, www.globalpolicy.org/reform/analysis pp. 1, 2, 4.

A recent and timely overview by Edward Luck of lessons learned in UN reform observed that "by the sheer quantity of deliberations, debates, studies, and resolutions devoted to it, reform has become one of the enduring pastimes and primary products of the UN system." He suggested six factors to explain this apparently irresistible impulse for reforming the United Nations:

"1) Public institutions depend on recurring processes of criticism [and] reassessment ... Reform is a sign of institutional health and dynamism ...

2) Highly complex, decentralized, and multi-faceted institutions, like the UN system, offer more targets for criticism and more opportunities for change ...

3) The diversity of [UN] membership and the ambitious nature of its mandates make it highly likely that some constituencies will be seriously disappointed ... at any point in time. ...

4) As the world changes, so do the politics of the United Nations and the priorities of its Member States. ... proposals for reform usually follow.

5) Critics keep calling for reform, in part, because the United Nations has been so slow in delivering it. ... The concerns about UN management and finance voiced by [the US] Congress in the late 1940s ... were echoed ... in the late 1990s.

6) The universality of the United Nations has fueled a dual pattern ... frequent calls for change by one Member State or group or another, followed by blocking moves by others with divergent interests or perspectives ... [which] differ so markedly as to make consensus on the direction reform should take hard to achieve."

Edward C. Luck, Reforming the United Nations: Lessons from a history in progress, Occasional Papers, 2003 No. 1, Academic Council on the United Nations System, Yale, 2003, pp. 1-2.

Maurice Bertrand has cited important concerns about the difficulties of establishing meaningful decision processes in UN programme planning which extend to general reform activities. He reflected on the work of two UN reform groups in 1986, quoting observations on such deliberations made by de Tocqueville in 1851 on the drafting of the constitution of the Second French Republic:

"Considering the Commission as a whole, it was easy to see that one should not expect it to accomplish anything really remarkable. ... there was no time for lengthy discussions, nor any inclination for them. The immensity and the complicated nature of the subject were daunting and exhausting; most had not even tried to study it or had gleaned only some very vague ideas of it, and those who had formed clearer ideas felt reluctant to express them. ... Furthermore, members feared that endless conflict and violence might result from any attempt to get to the heart of the matter, and they preferred to maintain an appearance of agreement by keeping to superficial subjects. We went on in this way to the end, explicitly adopting grand principles with regard to small details ..."

Alexis de Tocqueville, as quoted in Maurice Bertrand, The third generation world organization, Martinus Nijhoff, Dordrecht, the Netherlands, 1989, p. 108.

Bertrand found that the "Group of 18" deliberations of 1986 largely followed this 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.]

Despite these very constructive ideas, the traditional "revolving door" of successive, and failed, overall Secretariat reform attempts has continued to spin, as sharply revealed in two articles in a UN journal in early 1992. The first dealt with paeans to UN productivity and reform success at the end of Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuellar's terms (1981-1991), the second with a quite different (but not new) reassessment of urgent needs for change as Secretary-General Butros Butros-Ghali began his term:

"Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar summed up his 10 years ... as 'a most productive decade.' The UN had ... 'moved from the periphery to near the centre of international relations'.

'... a slow but meticulous process of institutional self-analysis, combined with efforts to 'streamline' the Secretariat, had resulted in a rejuvenated UN,' he stated.

Activity, not argument, had thus answered ... questions about the UN that had 'troubled the public through much of its existence' ... he continued. ... 'The effectiveness of the United Nations can no longer be in doubt.'"

"Goodbye to Pérez de Cuéllar: A 'most productive decade at the UN,'" UN Chronicle, **March 1992**, pp. 6-8.

"With a new Secretary-General, reform of the United Nations is in the air at ... [UN] Headquarters.

Since September, intensive discussions have taken place on reforming the work and structure of the world body. Under scrutiny was a plan worked out by 22 industrial and developing countries, including the five permanent Security Council members, intended to strengthen the Secretariat and increase the Secretary-General's authority.

The new plan disapproves of ... the Organization's 'top-heavy' administration, under which 30 to 40 high-ranking officials report directly to the Secretary General. That structure grew over the years in a series of 'ad hoc responses to specific problems.'

The plan speaks of 'a widespread consensus' that the UN must be restructured ..."

"Reform proposals circulate during 46th Assembly: UN faces 'dangerously precarious' financial situation,' UN Chronicle, **March 1992**, pp. 9-10.

As these reform efforts ground slowly along, Childers and Urquhart added to Bertrand's efforts in analyzing (and offered detailed corrective recommendations concerning) the "Purposes and pitfalls in UN reform" in 1994:

"It is seldom possible to use the word 'new' about proposals for reorganization or better coordination in the UN system. They are almost always repetitions from an earlier round. ...

Few UN reforms have been complete enough to work. The negotiation process has often left only slivers of what were originally integrated recommendations.

Negotiated compromise may be the stuff of diplomacy ... But if compromises on structure turn out to be unwise or unworkable, correcting them may be extremely difficult and may take years. ...

Equally disastrous are the temptations of mechanistic change, [carelessly] moving boxes on an organizational diagram ... Reorganization proposals need a comprehensive scrutiny in the same way that a heart specialist must look at the entire blood-circulation system. ...

If governments make indifferent choices of executive heads, no amount of reform will compensate for the lack of leadership. ...

Good organizational decisions can be, and have been, wrecked by overlooking the staff requirements to make them effective ... [this has] invariably been neglected by governments and most executive heads in UN system reforms, with the result that five years later delegates usually wonder why the reforms are not producing significant improvement."

Childers, Erskine, with Urquhart, Brian, "Renewing the United Nations System", Development Dialogue, 1994:1, Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, Uppsala, Sweden, **1994**, pp. 34-37.

[Note: the related recommendations are found on pages 37-38 and 188.]

Similar good advice was offered by yet another long-time and astute observer in a 1996 report on reforming "the UN tangle." Leon Gordenker stated that "the organizational translations of the tasks assigned to the UN had "resulted in a web of structures whose formlessness even the sloppiest spider would reject." A wide stream of complaints and reports, many of them indisputable, had been recently been presented about the UN, and "all of them have in one way or another aimed at simplifying, rationalizing, and economizing." He found that the organization as a whole was defensible and worth preserving, but

he took a primarily critical approach as a means of making a reconnaissance of organizational difficulties and problems. He stated that:

"Posing the question of what parts of the UN system -- some lurking in obscurity - - may be scrapped, promptly leads to other, indeed more profound, queries. An initial question as to common elements leads to sorting organizational types ... [to grasp] the main strands in the sticky web. It precedes an explanation of how old organizational construction burdens the present ... [and provides] some examples of what could be done in reorganizing, eliminating, or adapting some of the web. ...

The causes of the organizational tangle, in any case, are to be found in the diplomacy of creating organizations, assigning them tasks, and supervising their work. Some of the decisional organs ... suffer from the same organizational cumbersomeness as their products. If the representatives of member governments ... continue to approach organizational issues ... with their customary selfish logic, wholesale change is unlikely, however desirable it may be. ..."

Leon Gordenker, The UN tangle: policy formation, reform, and reorganization, WPF Reports number 12, The World Peace Foundation, Cambridge, Mass., 1996, pp. 1-3.

Gordenker also presented and discussed a complex but very useful typology to help comprehend the extraordinary UN organizational types (rather than merely presenting a phone-book type listing of all of them), and to allow further analysis and judgments about specific organizations as representatives of these types. A brief listing gives the flavor:

"Intergovernmental treaty organizations (referred to as convention-organizations or COs) created by treaties ...;
Organizations based on specific decisions of COs (referred to as decision-based agencies, or DBAs) ...;
Interorganizational entities (... IEs, created by COs or DBAs);
Intergovernmental deliberative bodies (...IDBs] ... created in the constitutional documents of COs or DBAs ... [as their main organs];
Process-assisting bodies (... PABs) created by COs or DBAs ... [to prepare or assist with] the taking of decisions in IDBs;
Interbureaucratic entities (... IBEs) formed by agreement among two or more COs or DBAs);
Other ..."

Leon Gordenker, The UN tangle: policy formation, reform, and reorganization, WPF Reports number 12, The World Peace Foundation, Cambridge, Mass., 1996, pp. 4-8.

All this wise advice did not deter the UN from forging ahead with still more grand attempts at reform during the mid- and late 1990s. As Luck summarized it:

"... during the last broad-based reform drive, from 1995 to 1997, the General Assembly was consumed with no less than five working groups on different aspects of reform, its President was engrossed in developing his own reform package, [ECOSOC] adopted new procedures for relating to [NGOs], and the new Secretary-General [Kofi Annan] offered a comprehensive ... plan ... Before the dust had settled from these battles, the

US-led drive to have Member State assessment scales revised took center stage at the Assembly from 1998-2000, and ... in mid-2002 the Deputy Secretary-General is heading yet another drive for internal reform. "

Edward C. Luck, Reforming the United Nations: Lessons from a history in progress, Occasional Papers, 2003 No. 1, Academic Council on the United Nations System, Yale, **2003**, p. 2.

[Note: the major reports were "Report of the Open-Ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System," General Assembly, UN document A/50/24, **1996**, and

"Renewing the United Nations: A programme for reform: Report of the Secretary-General," UN document A/51/950 of **14 July 1997**.

Nor were these attempts, and particularly those of the Secretary-General, free from the battles of the past:

"Secretary-General Kofi Annan's plans to make major changes in the way the United Nations works have run into serious trouble in General Assembly committees, where they are being buried in a blizzard of questions and objections.

... the measures -- totaling more than 70 large and small ones ... are being dissected by national delegations.

The fate of Mr. Annan's plans, which critics in Congress have dismissed as not bold enough, will reflect on [his] reputation as an insider who knows how to get things done. ...

... what is happening now in the General Assembly shows the near-impossibility of quick action from the 185-member body, where every proposal is scrutinized for any number of reasons by one or more national delegations or groups of countries. ...

... Pakistan's representative ... said ... that there 'wide divergences' among countries on the dozens of measures they are considering."

"UN leader's grand plans for reform hit obstacles," International Herald Tribune, **November 3, 1997**.

In addition, in 1997 a massive compendium of key UN reform proposals over the years was published in a three-volume set which amounts to some 3,400 pages. It covered 50 such proposals, originating inside and outside the United Nations, plus 67 resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly, Security Council, and ECOSOC on the approval and monitoring of UN reform efforts. Although the period covered reached back to the 1960s, the vast majority of the proposals were from the 1990s. At a price of \$US 536 or £337, it is not easily obtainable, but it does show the overwhelming amount of groups and proposals constantly competing with ideas for overall UN reform.

Joachim Mueller, ed., Reforming the United Nations: New initiatives and past efforts, 3 vols., United Nations and Kluwer Law International, The Hague, Boston, 1997.

Luck observed that all this institutional change at the UN is subtle, complex, and uneven. The reform and adaptation phenomena are still not widely studied or well understood. But he found some lessons to be learned:

"1) Reform does not come easily to the UN system. The Secretary-General has little leverage, the system is diffuse, and the Member States are rarely united ...

2) On the other hand, the process of reform is a constant ... At times, process seems more important than results, while at other times process is the desired result.

3) Those unaware of the history of reform may indeed be condemned to repeat it

...

4) The key to UN reform, in that sense, may lie less in trying to be innovative than in understanding why past initiatives have failed and how the strategies and tactics for achieving them could be improved. ...

5) More study is needed of how independent scholars and commissions have helped to shape the UN reform process. ...

6) When it comes to moving an agenda for reform in the United Nations, it is not always clear where power dwells ...

7) Change happens even if reform doesn't. ... Sometimes formal reform follows (it never leads.)

8) The course of reform tends to be decidedly unpredictable. ...

9) ... the temptation to mistake modest and short-term adjustments for epochal change has proven irresistible ..."

Edward C. Luck, Reforming the United Nations: Lessons from a history in progress, Occasional Papers, 2003 No. 1, Academic Council on the United Nations System, Yale, **2003**, pp. 47-49.

Luck concluded that the pace of UN reform has become markedly skewed:

"There have been repeated incremental refinements to the United Nations' response to the question, 'Who implements?' ... Likewise, the struggle over 'Who pays?' never ends. ... There has been no answer, however, to the core question of 'Who decides?' for the past three decades. The ongoing debate about Security Council reform, in particular, revolves around complaints about the inequity of the current system. ...

The question of 'Who decides?' raises a related dilemma. Should the goal of UN reform be to make its decision-making processes more reflective of the membership as a whole or more in line with the prevailing balance of power and capacity outside its halls?"

Edward C. Luck, Reforming the United Nations: Lessons from a history in progress, Occasional Papers, 2003 No. 1, Academic Council on the United Nations System, Yale, **2003**, pp. 47-49.

The flurry of new reform efforts from 1995-2000, however, has already been buried by demands for far more fundamental change. In September 2003, Secretary-General Annan delivered a drastic call for even more urgent UN reforms:

"In unusually strong language that reflected strains over the crisis in Baghdad, Annan suggested that the credibility of the Security Council, the General Assembly, and other UN bodies was at stake.

'If they are to regain their authority, they may need radical reform,' Annan said ...

'We can no longer take it for granted that our multilateral institutions are strong enough to cope with all these challenges,' Annan added, saying UN members should ask themselves whether the existing structure is 'adequate for the task we have before us.' ...

He also criticized the 191-member General Assembly for lacking priorities, the Security Council for being undemocratic, the UN trusteeship Council for failing to perform, and financial institutions for not adequately involving the developing nations that the measures are meant to serve."

"UN needs big changes, Annan says," International Herald Tribune, **September 9, 2003**.

In November Mr. Annan announced a new 16-member group for a far-reaching review of the role of the United Nations:

"... [Mr. Annan said that] 'The aim of the high-level panel is to recommend clear and practical measures for ensuring effective collective action.' ...

... the team ... numbers a host of former politicians ...

Gareth Evans, the Australian panelist, former foreign minister, and head of the International Crisis Group, said 'None of us have any illusions about the degree of difficulty involved in saying anything that will be both compelling and achievable.'

Mr. Evans said the panel faced three main challenges: to address the international order's rules, institutions, and strategies; to examine the rules governing the use of force such as preemptive actions, and to look at regional organizations such as Nato."

Mark Turner, "Annan sets up review of UN's global role," FT.com, **November 4, 2003**.

In December 2004 (amid calls from US Congressional investigators for Mr. Annan to resign because of the steadily mounting flood of serious allegations and revelations about the UN-administered oil-for-food programme in Iraq), he released the report of his high-level panel.

A more secure world: Our shared responsibility: Report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Changes, United Nations, **2004**.

The full report is available at www.un.org/secureworld/

Reactions to the panel's report -- in declining order of enthusiasm and expectations -- can be offered from Mr. Annan himself, from a panel member, and from an observer of UN reform attempts in general.

"... A year ago I appointed a panel of 16 people from [many regions and differing fields of expertise] ... to assess the threats facing humanity today and to recommend how we need to change, in both policies and institutions, in order to meet those threats. ... [The report's] 101 recommendations are the most comprehensive and coherent set of proposals for forging a common response to common threats that I have seen. ...

... If governments follow [the panel's] lead -- as I hope they will -- it will be much easier for the UN to develop a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, and for me to take the lead in promoting it, as the report asks me to do.

The report also contains a welter of practical proposals to prevent a cascade of nuclear proliferation, to improve bio-security and to make the UN itself more effective, notably in prevention and peace-building. ...

The report tells us how to do it ... It puts the ball firmly in the court of the world's political leaders. It is for them to negotiate the details, but I strongly urge them to act on the main thrusts of the recommendations."

Kofi Annan, "A way forward on global security", International Herald Tribune, **December 3, 2004**.

"The report of the United Nations secretary-general's High Level Panel ... is perhaps the most comprehensive and ambitious review undertaken since the organization was set up. ...

The onus is now on the UN's 191 member states to use the report to build the new consensus ... and take effective collective action ... Otherwise, [the report] will, like so many reports before it, just gather dust on the shelves of the UN's library, a reminder of the gap between aspirations and performance that has dogged the organization throughout its history.

The panel identifies a dauntingly broad range of threats ...

The panel has also called for a comprehensive strategy ...

The threads will need to be drawn together by the heads of state and government when they meet in New York next September. But that meeting will not succeed if the building blocks for a new consensus are not in place by then.

Only if tough decisions are taken in the coming months will the maxim 'the UN is indispensable' become a reality, rather than an empty slogan, finally providing the organization with the capacity for effective and equitable action that it has lacked."

David Hannay, "Global threats require a global response", The Financial Times (UK), **December 2, 2004**.

[Note: Mr. Hannay was a member of Mr. Annan's panel and former British ambassador to the European Union and the UN.]

"Until it cleans up its act, the U.N. can never be as influential as its boosters would like. ...

Last week came the umpteenth report on reform, this one from the [High Level Panel] ... Its criticisms are as scathing as anything written by the (US) Heritage Foundation. The report noted that the General Assembly 'often fails to focus effectively on the most compelling issues of the day', that the Commission on Human Rights (which includes among its members gross human-rights violators) suffers from a 'legitimacy deficit', that the Security Council has responded with 'glacial speed' to 'massive human rights violations in Darfur' and elsewhere, and that the U.N. Secretariat is filled with bureaucrats who have 'little or no expertise for tackling many of the new or emerging threats' that confront the world.'

All true, but note that these problems have persisted despite all the past reform efforts. ...

All of the *reformistas*' efforts founder on the rocks of apathy and inertia. The reality is that most of the U.N.'s 191 member states ... [and] its 49,000 employees, ... usually have other priorities. ..."

Max Boot, "Why U.N. stays mired in its defects: Start with too-friendly media, apathy and members' entrenched interests", Los Angeles Times, **December 9, 2004**.

In March 2005, Mr. Annan weighed in with his own sweeping proposals for reforms of all aspects of UN operations, including major structural changes, presented as a "grand bargain" for the world, and containing much emphasis on enhanced accountability and improved management within the UN Secretariat. The initial response, however, was mixed, with indications of many difficulties to be overcome, and also a strong feeling of *déjà vu*.

" ... Today, I shall be presenting my report "In larger freedom" to the United Nations General Assembly ...

I wanted to remind the governments of the world who put me in my job and to whom I am accountable that they are in the UN to represent not themselves but their peoples, who expect them to work for the aims set out in the organisation's charter. ...

The UN is a forum where sovereign states can work out common strategies for tackling global problems, and an instrument for putting those strategies into effect. But it can be a much more effective instrument if its governing body, the General Assembly, is better organized and give clearer directives to us in the secretariat, with the flexibility to carry them out, and holds us clearly accountable for how we do it.

I shall today propose decisions in all these areas, and challenge world leaders to respond with action at the UN summit in September. ... if world leaders rise to their responsibilities, the rebirth and renewal of the UN will be just beginning -- and with it, renewed hope for a freer, fairer, and safer world."

Kofi Annan, "An aspiration to a larger freedom", Financial Times (UK), **March 21, 2005**.

"Secretary general Kofi Annan of the United Nations proposed sweeping reforms Sunday, recommending the expansion of the Security Council ..., the restructuring of the discredited Human Rights Commission ..., and the adoption of a definition of terror ...

Annan will make the recommendations in a speech Monday to the General Assembly aimed at restoring confidence in the UN that has seriously lapsed because of bitter divisions over the war in Iraq, charges of mismanagement and corruption in the oil for food program and revelations of sexual misconduct by blue-helmeted peacekeepers.

His proposals, drawn from the conclusions of a high-level panel ... in November, will be the subject of a special General Assembly gathering in September that hopes to reinvigorate the United Nations at a time when its worth and relevance are being so widely questioned. ...

The speech on Monday ... will also be seen as a bid by Annan to shore up his stewardship of the institution in his last two years in office. While he has maintained much of his once-vaunted reputation abroad, he has come under pointed criticism in Washington where some members of Congress have called on him to resign ..."

Warren Hoge, "UN chief seeks huge reforms of world body", International Herald Tribune, **March 21, 2005**.

"C. The Secretariat

184. A capable and effective Secretariat is indispensable to the work of the United Nations. ... In 1997 I launched a package of structural reforms ... and followed up with a further set of managerial and technical improvements in 2002 ...

185. ... But these reforms do not go far enough. If the United Nations is to be truly effective the Secretariat will have to be completely transformed.

186. ... The Secretary-General and his or her managers must be given the discretion, the means, the authority and the expert assistance that they need to manage [the] organization ... Similarly, Member States must have the oversight tools they need to hold the Secretary-General truly accountable for his/her strategy and leadership.

190. ... I therefore request the General Assembly to provide me with the authority and resources to pursue a one-time staff buyout so as to refresh and realign the staff to meet current needs.

191. ... I ask Member States to work with me to undertake a comprehensive review of the budget and human resources rules under which we operate.

192. Thirdly, we must continue to improve the transparency and accountability of

the Secretariat. ..."

"In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all"
Report of the Secretary-General", UN document A/59/2005 of **21 March 2005**.

"Kofi Annan, United Nations secretary general, yesterday proposed the most wide-reaching reforms ever in the UN's 60-year history, but warned they would work only if countries accepted his ideas as a comprehensive package. ...

Mr. Annan's officials say the package basically proposes a bargain whereby rich countries help the poor to develop by promoting the Millennium Development Goals, while poor countries help alleviate rich countries' security concerns. In both cases, Mr. Annan says, action must be underpinned by respect for human rights.

But almost every proposal faces opposition from some quarter, whether Arab concern at Mr. Annan's stance on terrorism, US objections to the International Criminal Court or Chinese reluctance to allow the Security Council to intervene in countries such as Sudan, which is accused of genocide."

Mark Turner and Bertrand Benoit, "Annan warns over UN reform package",
Financial Times (UK), **March 22, 2005**.

"To hear Kofi Annan, the reforms he recommended this week are some sort of make-or-break last chance to repair the United Nations. On this, however, the UN's secretary-general is surely wrong. Of two near-certainties about the future of the organization, one is that it will continue to exist, not least because most big powers, including habitual critics such as the United States, will continue at times to find it useful ... The other certainty is that no reforms, however well-intentioned will turn the UN into the perfect instrument millions of people seem to want -- one capable, that is, of ordering international relations so that all states obey the same rules, and especially rules that govern the use of force.

These ideas ... do not -- indeed cannot -- solve the underlying problem. ... the absence of [political] will, not some legal quibble ...

None of this means that Mr. Annan's ideas ought to be rejected, or that the UN is not worth improving. ... [For instance,] it would be wonderful if Mr. Annan's proposal to buy out some of the UN's existing staff ended up producing a secretariat that was selected on merit rather than nationality."

"Kofi Annan's reform plan: Some good ideas, but no revolution in the running of the world", The Economist, **March 26th, 2005**.

[Note: IO Watch believes this succinct summation has much extra weight, because no media source has followed the UN so closely over the past few decades as has *The Economist*.]

"A grass roots Chinese campaign to keep Japan out of the United Nations Security Council has gathered about 22 million signatures [in China], increasing the chances that China would block Japan's bid to join the group, organizers and analysts said Thursday. ...

As one of the five existing permanent members, China has the power to veto the proposal. Beijing has not said how it planned to vote.

Relations between the two countries have deteriorated sharply in recent weeks, strained by competition for energy resources [and other issues] ...

[Kofi Annan has] appeared to signal that Japan and Germany would be prime candidates for a revised Security Council when he discussed plans to remake the governing structure last week.

The council should 'increase the involvement in decision-making of those who contribute most to the United Nations financially, militarily and diplomatically' ... he told reporters.

Japan and Germany are by far the largest contributors that do not have permanent council seats. Japan has said it will cut its contributions if it did not get a seat.

North and South Korea, which were colonized by Japan, have already said that they oppose Japan's bid."

Joseph Kahn, "China tries to block Japan at UN: Beijing's effort to bar Security Council seat set up confrontation", International Herald Tribune, **April 1, 2005**.

[Note: This is just the first of many serious disagreements between countries, and between and within regional groupings, that quickly emerged over seats in an expanded UN security council.]

The discussions of this latest grand set of UN reforms, in a long list of such reforms, will undoubtedly go on over the summer of 2005, and at the General Assembly in September. Particularly since UN reform now seems to have elements of a debate over, and fight for, the UN's very relevance and importance as a central element in global governance, it will probably continue for months and years beyond.

IO Watch concludes that the barriers to effective reform raised by the UN's consensual, bumbling, and politically-charged processes are very strong and persistent. And Secretary-General Annan does not make it easier by now launching his third major management reform programme, without having successfully implemented the two preceding ones, as discussed throughout this section on Management Accountability Struggles . Will there be a real breakthrough in 2005, or just more "blue smoke and mirrors" leading to further disappointment about UN inability to better assist in meeting urgent global challenges?

IO Watch will continue to track the overall UN reform developments. Meanwhile, please see also the archive subsection on The UN and Global Governance under Recent Developments .