The United Nations Year 2008/2009: The Challenge of Global Crises

Karl P. Sauvant
The United Nations Year 2008/2009: The Challenge of Global Crises

by

Joachim Müller and Karl P. Sauvant[1]

The 63rd session of the United Nations took place during 2008/2009 in the shadow of global crises.[2] The Organization responded by developing contributions to possible solutions and by adjusting its own set-up to cope better with the new challenges. On both accounts, the Organization was not fully successful. The global financial crisis and recession dominated the work of the General Assembly in the context of the traditional North-South divide.[3] Closely linked were the continuing food crisis and the lack of progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The United Nations was marginalized in facilitating a solution of such conflicts as the aftermath of the Russia-Georgia war in South Ossetia in August 2008 and the 22-day Gaza clashes in early 2009, and it could do little to ease the build-up of tensions relating to Iran and North Korea. The United Nations presence continued in Sudan, Congo, Haiti, Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, just to mention some of the key conflict areas. Humanitarian crises of displaced people in Sri Lanka and Pakistan were addressed, sometimes insufficiently and with delay due to security and access problems. Moreover, the likelihood of reaching a treaty on climate change in Copenhagen in December 2009 rapidly deteriorated. Finally, terrorism continued to spread to new regions with the attack in Mumbai, India, in November 2008.

Conferences, high-level meetings and resolutions

Approving joint action and fostering global norms through conferences and meetings, in particular the session of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), are key functions of the United Nations.[4] The first major event during the 2008/2009 United Nations year was the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, held in Doha from 29 November to 2 December 2008. (The 2002 Monterrey Consensus had brought together developed and developing countries on a joint
approach towards globalization and development principles; it also brought together the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions on these subjects.) Representatives of 160 countries attended the conference, including nearly 40 heads of state or government. Originally, it was designed to be a review of progress on the 2002 Monterrey Consensus, in terms of aid, trade, debt, private investment flows, mobilizing domestic financial resources, and systemic issues. However, in light of the financial crisis and looming recession, the need for emergency rescue methods came into view and eventually dominated the discussions. In the end, the Doha Declaration reaffirmed the 2002 Monterrey Consensus on aid and debt relief and stressed that the commitments for an increase in official development assistance should be maintained despite the global financial crisis. The conference also emphasized the need for developing countries to participate in the discussions of the crisis and called for the holding of a United Nations summit on world financial structures.

The General Assembly endorsed the Doha Declaration[5] and subsequently decided to hold a United Nations Conference at the Highest Level on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and Its Impact on Development in New York from 24 to 26 June 2009.[6] The President of the General Assembly subsequently established a Commission of Experts on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System, chaired by Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz, who, in turn, submitted a score of preliminary recommendations to the Conference. The United States was critical, arguing that the United Nations had neither the mandate nor the expertise to provide direction for meaningful dialogue on the international financial architecture, and that this was to be done at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The criticism was echoed by a number of other developed countries that had sent rather low-level representatives to the Conference. The Conference agreed on an Outcome Document, subsequently adopted by the General Assembly,[7] which called for additional resources for social protection, food security and human development, and follow-through on commitments for increased development assistance. The document also called for further progress on developing country representation and international oversight in the IMF and World Bank. In particular, it recommended enhanced IMF surveillance of major financial centers, international capital flows and financial markets, and an improved early warning system against impending crises. The Assembly also established an Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group to follow up on the issues contained in the Outcome Document of the Conference and to report to the forthcoming Assembly session 2009/2010.[8]

The impact of the global crisis on development was also at the centre of other United Nations events. The High-level Meeting on Africa’s
Development Needs held in New York on 22 September 2008 reaffirmed member states’ commitment to address Africa’s special needs. No new pledges were made, but the focus was on reinvigorating existing commitments made in the context of the 2000 Millennium Development Goals; the 2002 Monterrey Consensus on development financing; the 2002 Johannesburg Declaration on sustainable development; and the 2005 Gleneagles (G8) commitments (which were to double aid to Africa within a given timeframe). Concern was expressed that the global food crisis and climate change would impact Africa’s ability to eradicate poverty. Emphasis was given to strengthening a non-discriminatory trading system and, on climate change, to address both adaptation and mitigation to ensure low-carbon-intensive economic development.

The Millennium Development Goals High-level Event was held in New York on 25 September 2008. Although new pledges were made (supporting a range of goals including malaria prevention, food security, and national health plans), it was acknowledged that more was needed in order to reach the 2015 target for reducing extreme poverty. The Assembly approved a 2010 high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly to review the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.[9]

Finally, the High-level Meeting on the Midterm Review of the 2003 Almaty Programme of Action was held in New York in October 2008 to discuss specific measures to facilitate the development and cooperation of landlocked and transit countries. The General Assembly called for investment from donors, international financial institutions, and development assistance agencies and for accelerating the accession of those countries to the World Trade Organization.[10]

Not surprisingly, the global financial and economic crisis was at the centre of consideration by ECOSOC.[11] During its spring session in April 2009, ECOSOC carried out an informal dialogue with the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on the impact of the global crisis on development, including issues related to the international financial and monetary architecture and global governance structures. The 2009 Annual Ministerial Review, held during the high-level segment of the ECOSOC session in July 2009, assessed the implementation of the United Nations Development Agenda and explored challenges to achieving the international goals in the area of global public health. The Council also considered the outcome of the Doha conference on financing for development. The new biennial Development Cooperation Forum, first held in 2008, was not convened in 2009.
On climate change, the negotiations for a post-Kyoto agreement continued during the United Nations year 2008/2009. They started in early 2007 and followed the process outlined in the Bali Action Plan approved in December 2007. Agreement was to be reached by December 2009 in Copenhagen, Denmark, to allow time for ratification prior to 2012. As part of the process, a United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Climate Change Conference was held in Poznan, Poland, in December 2008. Commitments were expressed to move into full negotiating mode in 2009, and some progress was achieved in the area of adaptation, finance, technology, reduction of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and disaster management. A first draft of a concrete negotiating text was available at the UNFCCC Climate Talks in Bonn in June of 2009. The text provided the basis to intensify negotiations on emission reduction commitments of industrialized countries, emissions trading, and the project-based mechanisms. This was followed by the Climate Change Talks in Bangkok in September/October 2009 and in Barcelona in November 2009. There was an increased momentum at a high political level for a strong result. However, it became apparent that negotiations would not succeed in arriving at a treaty text that could be signed in Copenhagen.

The Durban Review Conference took place in April 2009 in Geneva, Switzerland. It evaluated progress towards the goals set by the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa, in 2001. The Conference reinvigorated its commitment to the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. The United States and others had stayed away based on the retention of language in the outcome document considered defamatory of religion and anti-Semitic. Prior to the Geneva review conference, the related General Assembly resolution received 13 opposing votes, with 35 abstentions and 109 in favor.[12] There was also an incident at the conference, with the Secretary-General deploring “the use of this platform by the Iranian President to accuse, divide and even incite.”[13]

By the end of 2008, the General Assembly celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Delegates adopted a declaration recognizing the progressive nature of human rights and endorsed a new Optional Protocol to the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that established an individual complaints mechanism to address violations of those rights.[14]

In July 2009, the Assembly considered proposals by the Secretary-General to operationalize the concept of “Responsibility to Protect” from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity when
a state is failing to do so. This commitment was possibly the most important outcome of the 2005 World Summit, although mainly symbolic. The Secretary-General proposed the possible appointment of fact-finding missions to investigate alleged violations, notice to leaders on whether states fail to meet obligations, and targeted diplomatic sanctions, including sanctions regarding travel, financial transfers, luxury goods, and arms. In addition, proposals were made in favor of the development of principles that should guide the application of coercive force and in favor of the development of a UN rapid-response military capacity to deal with atrocity crimes. A number of member states expressed concern that the proposed mechanism could devolve into interference in the affairs of sovereign and politically independent states and in the use of force. Although no agreement was reached, the Assembly decided to continue the consideration of this item during the 64th session of the General Assembly.[15]

In total, the General Assembly approved 311 resolutions during the 63rd session.[16] Of those, 63 received opposing votes, including 12 resolutions with a negative vote only by the United States. Of the 12 resolutions, 9 dealt with security, disarmament, arms trade, and outer space issues[17] and the remaining 3 with economic issues, rights of children, and rights to food.[18]

**UN Secretariat and UN reform**

The report of the Secretary-General details the work of the secretariat during the United Nations year 2008/2009.[19] The secretariat is a complex organization that services meetings, prepares negotiations, provides studies, and implements decisions. The Headquarters is located in New York with main offices in Geneva, Vienna, and Nairobi. The operational arm for development includes such United Nations funds and programs as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and the World Food Programme (WFP).[20] Although under the authority of the General Assembly, those entities have their own governing bodies, budgets, and secretariat. In 2009, the United Nations budget amounts to approximately USD20 billion with a staff of 70,000.[21] Of the total budget, approximately half is funded from assessed contribution, which is determined based on the capacity of a member state to pay. Coordination of activities between the United Nations system organizations, including the specialized agencies, is done in the United Nations System Chief Executive Board (CEB).[22]
The major United Nations reform initiative during the 2008/2009 United Nations year focused on increasing system-wide coherence.[23] This included “Delivering as One” to achieve coherence for operational activities at the country level, involving not only the United Nations funds and programs, but also the United Nations specialized agencies. As part of a coherence reform package, other initiatives were pursued in the area of international environmental governance; the harmonization of business practices, funding, governance, and gender equality and the empowerment of women. In September 2009, the General Assembly expressed broad support in September 2009 for the consolidation of four small organizational entities in the area of gender equality and empowerment of women, led by an Under-Secretary-General who would report directly to the Secretary-General.[24] Little else was achieved. The consolidation of organizations in the environmental area was put on hold and the harmonization of business practices did not advance. On funding and governance, the initial proposals had been watered down so much as to be meaningless. As for the “Delivering as One,” the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to urgently undertake an independent evaluation of the ongoing pilot project at its upcoming session. With regard to management reform, the Assembly approved a harmonization of staff contracts and conditions of service,[25] and a reform of the administration of justice at the United Nations, by adopting the statutes of the newly constituted United Nations Dispute and Appeals Tribunals.[26]

**Peace-building and peacekeeping**

The expansion of peacekeeping operations continued in 2008/2009. Following a dramatic rise in recent years, the number of peacekeepers increased to over 115,000 (see box on the following page). By September 2009, the UN had been involved in 19 peace operations directed by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and 10 political and peace-building missions directed by the Department of Political Affairs (DPA).[27] In the following text, a number of the main peacekeeping operations and peace-building missions are outlined.

The **United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)**[28] was established in March 2002.[29] Its original mandate was to support the 2001 Bonn Agreement signed by Afghan political groups opposing the Taliban and ratified by the Security Council.[30] The Security Council[31] created a stabilization force, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), with about 100,000 troops in Afghanistan provided mainly from North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries, with United States troops making up about half of its force. As of August 2003, NATO assumed political command and coordination of the ISAF. Initially, the Taliban was removed from power; since 2006, however,
Afghanistan has seen threats to its stability from mounting Taliban-led insurgent activity, record-high levels of illegal drug production and a fragile government with limited control outside Kabul. UNAMA provides support to the political process,[32] by such means as information campaigns, voter registration, and election monitoring. Support is also provided for the implementation of the Afghanistan Compact, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, and the National Drugs Control Strategy. UNAMA coordinate all UN-led humanitarian relief, recovery, reconstruction, and development activities in Afghanistan. The Mission has over 1,500 staff; around 80 percent of staff consists of Afghan nationals. Hamid Karzai was elected as President in 2004 and won re-election in 2009. There had been claims of widespread fraud and reports of low voter turnout and violent disruption by Taliban militants. UNAMA and the United Nations as an entity have become targets in Afghanistan. In October 2009, a suicide bombing followed by militants’ storming of a UNAMA guesthouse in Kabul killed nine people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Africa</th>
<th>Peacekeepers[33]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MINURCAT (Central African Republic and Chad)</td>
<td>3,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINURSO (Western Sahara)</td>
<td>514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONUC (Congo)</td>
<td>22,798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNAMID (Sudan/Darfur)</td>
<td>22,431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNMIL (Liberia)</td>
<td>13,192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNMIS (Sudan/South)</td>
<td>13,183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNOCI (Côte d’Ivoire)</td>
<td>9,509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINUSTAH (Haiti)</td>
<td>11,041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNMIT (East Timor)</td>
<td>3,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNMOGIP (India and Pakistan)</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFICYP (Cyprus)</td>
<td>1,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNMIK (Kosovo)</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDOF (Golan Heights)</td>
<td>1,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIFIL (Lebanon)</td>
<td>13,209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNTSO (Middle East)</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>115,470</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) was established by the Security Council in November 2000 to help implement a ceasefire and bring about an agreed process for a political settlement.[34] MONUC is the largest peacekeeping force deployed by the United Nations, with an annual budget of USD1.2 billion and 22,798 peacekeepers by mid-2009 (as compared to 22,026 in mid-2008).[35] The Second Congo War, also known as Africa’s World War, was the largest war in modern African history. It directly involved eight African nations, as well as about 25 armed groups, and resulted in the killing of over five million people, mostly from disease and starvation, the deadliest conflict since World War II. The war started in August 1998 and officially ended in July 2003 when the Transitional Government took power, though hostilities continue. In November 2006, Joseph Kabila was elected president. MONUC forces had been charged with keeping the election peaceful and orderly, and they began patrolling areas of eastern Congo after clashes broke out in August following the chaotic collection of elections results. Whereas the poll had the general approval of international monitors, forces loyal to the opposition leader Jean-Pierre Bemba clashed with government troops in Kinshasa in March 2007. Fighting continued during 2007, with forces of renegade General Laurent Nkunda in North Kivu province on the border to Rwanda and Uganda. With the signing of a peace pact between the government and the rebel militia in January 2008, it was hoped that the conflict in the east would end. Heavy clashes erupted again in October 2008, causing deaths, rapes, lootings, forced recruitment, and further displacements of civilian populations. Illegal mining operations were providing funding for the rebel groups, with diamonds, gold, copper, and cassiterite being extracted in thousands of open mines in the contested eastern Kivu region. United Nations peacekeepers engaged the rebels in an attempt to support Congolese troops. Thousands of people, including Congolese troops and the United Nations Uruguayan battalion, fled, as clashes in eastern Congo intensified. In November 2008, the Security Council approved a reinforcement of 3,000 more peacekeepers. In January 2009, Congo and Rwanda launched joint military operations against forces led by Laurent Nkunda, who was displaced and arrested in Rwanda. In May 2009, President Kabila offered an amnesty to armed groups as part of a deal meant to end fighting in the east. After the end of the joint Congo-Rwanda campaign in the east, the Hutu militia re-emerged in April 2009, prompting thousands to flee. Criticized by humanitarian organizations, MONUC has provided support for an army offensive against Hutu militias from neighboring Rwanda. This has included the provision of military firepower, transport, rations, and fuel for government troops as these have sought to disarm the militias.
The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) has been in Haiti since 2004 in support of the Transitional Government, to support security and provide protection during the electoral period and to assist the restoration and maintenance of the rule of law, public safety, and public order in Haiti.\[36\] MINUSTAH is the only significant military mission of the United Nations dispatched to a country facing an internal conflict without a peace agreement between the parties. MINUSTAH consisted of 11,041 peacekeepers in mid-2009, as compared to 10,837 in mid-2008.\[37\]\[35\] The mission’s military component is led by the Brazilian army. The Mission continues to struggle for control over armed gangs. By end-2006, the United Nations announced that it would take a tougher stance against gang members. In early February 2007, 700 United Nations troops flooded Cité Soleil, resulting in a major gun battle. President René Préval has expressed ambivalent feelings about the United Nations security presence. In July 2007, the MINUSTAH mission chief warned of a sharp increase in lynchings and other mob attacks. In April of 2008, Haiti faced a severe food crisis as well as governmental destabilization due to Parliament’s failure to ratify the President’s choice of a prime minister. There were severe riots, and the United Nations force fired rubber bullets in Port-au-Prince, to calm the riots. The head of MINUSTAH has called for a new government to be chosen as soon as possible. Meanwhile, the United Nations is providing emergency food. A number of incidents have led to widespread criticism of the United Nations mission and appeals for its departure.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) focuses on political facilitation and humanitarian assistance. Specifically, the Mission was tasked with promoting national reconciliation, reducing sectarian tension, strengthening national unity, assisting in the holding of elections, supporting the drafting of the Iraqi constitution, and promoting the protection of human rights. One of its tasks is to implement the International Compact with Iraq. UNAMI was set up by the Security Council in August 2003, following the invasion of Iraq by coalition forces led by the United States. The mandate of UNAMI was updated in June 2004\[38\] with the establishment of the Iraqi Interim Government. By mid-2008, there were approximately 300 United Nations international staff and 400 national staff serving in Iraq, Kuwait and Jordan.\[39\] The first head of the UNAMI operation, Sérgio Vieira de Mello, was killed in the Canal Hotel bombing on 19 August 2003. The security operation in Iraq included 130,000 coalition forces, over 600,000 Iraqi security forces, and 160,000 contractors. Violence against coalition forces and among various sectarian groups soon led to the Iraqi insurgency, strife between many Sunni and Shia Iraqi groups and al-Qaeda operations in Iraq. Coalition dead amounted to 4,700, 4,400 of them United States personnel. Throughout 2008, the security situation improved. This began with a March operation in Basra, which led
to fighting in Shia areas throughout the country, especially in the Sadr City district of Baghdad. In May 2008, the Iraqi army, backed by Coalition support, launched an offensive in Mosul, the last major Iraqi stronghold of al-Qaeda. Member nations of the Coalition withdrew their forces as Iraqi forces began to take responsibility for security. In late 2008, the United States and Iraqi governments approved a Status of Forces Agreement effective through the end of 2011. In January 2009, the United States handed control of the Green Zone and Saddam Hussein’s presidential palace to the Iraqi government in a ceremony described by the country’s prime minister as a restoration of Iraq’s sovereignty. In late February 2009, United States President Barack Obama announced a new 18-month withdrawal timetable for combat forces, with approximately 50,000 troops remaining in the country to advise and train Iraqi security forces and provide intelligence and surveillance. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has supported the accelerated pullout of United States forces. On 9 April 2009, tens of thousands of Iraqis marked the sixth anniversary of Baghdad’s fall and demanded the immediate departure of Coalition forces. On 30 April 2009, the United Kingdom formally ended combat operations. The withdrawal of United States forces began at the end of June 2009.

The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was entrusted with sweeping powers to govern Kosovo. Following the end of the conflict in 1999, the Security Council placed Kosovo under a transitional United Nations administration, pending a determination of its future status.[40] NATO had a separate mandate to provide for a safe and secure environment. In May 2001, UNMIK promulgated the Constitutional Framework, which established Kosovo’s Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG). Since 2001, UNMIK has been gradually transferring increased governing competencies to the PISG. Kosovo also established a municipal government and an internationally supervised Kosovo Police Service. In November 2001, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) supervised the first elections for the Kosovo Assembly. In February 2006, United Nations-backed talks began to determine the final status of Kosovo, led by United Nations Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari (who had received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2008). Kosovo’s Albanians, the great majority of the province’s population, preferred independence; the minority of Kosovo’s Serbs was diametrically opposed to it. After many weeks of discussions at the United Nations, the United States, the United Kingdom and other European members of the Security Council formally discarded Ahtisaari’s proposal on 20 July 2007, having failed to secure Russia’s backing. Nevertheless, the Assembly of Kosovo went ahead and approved a declaration of independence on 17 February 2008. As of April 2008, most member countries of the European Union, NATO, and the OECD had recognized Kosovo as independent, despite protests by Russia and others in the United Nations. All of Kosovo’s immediate neighboring
states, except Serbia, have recognized the declaration of independence. However, the Security Council, which would decide on a possible United Nations membership of Kosovo, remained divided. Of the five members with veto power, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France recognized the declaration of independence, China expressed concern, and Russia considered it illegal. In October 2008, the United Nations agreed to ask the International Court of Justice for a non-binding advisory opinion on the legality of Kosovo’s declaration of Independence from Serbia, by a vote of 77 in favor, 6 opposed, and 73 abstentions. The United Nations had initially planned to close UNMIK and hand over authority after Kosovo’s constitution was approved. With the opposition of Russia to Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence, however, the United Nations decided to reconfigure the mission for a temporary period. While UNMIK still exists, it does so in a minor role with drastically reduced staff, and it transferred power to the Kosovo authorities and the newly created European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) in December 2008. UNMIK consisted of 360 peacekeepers in mid-2009, a major decrease as compared to 4,604 in mid-2008. EULEX assists and supports the Kosovo authorities in the rule of law area, specifically in the police, judiciary, and customs areas. UNMIK retains control over police in Serb-inhabited areas and sets up local and district courts serving minority Serbs. The move was in response to opposition to the EULEX presence in North Kosovo and other Serb-dominated areas. In July 2009, the World Bank and the IMF granted membership to Kosovo.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has been deployed in the Middle East since 1978, initially to observe the withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon. The mandate of UNIFIL was subsequently adjusted a number of times in accordance with the changing situation. In July 2006, war broke out between Israel and the paramilitary forces of Hezbollah, mainly located in southern Lebanon. A United Nations cease-fire resolution ended the 34-day war on 14 August 2006. In response, the Security Council approved one of the largest peacekeeping missions in the history of the United Nations by expanding the existing UNIFIL operation. The mission consisted of 13,209 peacekeepers by mid-2009, as compared to 13,289 in mid-2008 (and 2,395 in mid-2006). Along with the United Nations troops, an equal number of Lebanese army troops were deployed in the south, in the area that borders Israel. In addition, the rules of engagement changed by allowing UNIFIL troops to use force not only in cases of self-defense, but also in order to protect civilians and United Nations personnel and facilities. The main task of UNIFIL is to ensure that southern Lebanon may not be used as a base for attacks on Israel. Specifically, the Security Council mandated the cessation of hostilities, the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, the disarmament of Hezbollah, the full control of Lebanon by the Lebanese
government, and the removal of Hezbollah south of the Litani River and its replacement by UNIFIL. A UNIFIL Maritime Task Force (MTF) was established in October 2006 to assist the Lebanese Naval Force in preventing arms proliferation to Hezbollah. The force was led by the German Navy until February 2008, when control was passed on to EUROMARFOR, a force made up of ships from Germany, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and France. In July 2008, Hezbollah transferred the coffins of two captured Israeli soldiers in exchange for one incarcerated Palestine Liberation Front militant, four Hezbollah militants captured by Israel during the war, and about 200 other Lebanese and Palestinian militants held by Israel. As of December 2006, Israel had withdrawn from Lebanon and hostilities had ceased. The disarmament of Hezbollah, however, has not been carried out.

The **United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS)**[44] is a political mission with approximately 60 staff members. Given the poor security situation inside Somalia, UNPOS has been working from Nairobi, Kenya. Originally established in April 1995, its current mandate[45] is to advance the cause of peace and reconciliation through contacts with Somali leaders and civic organizations and to facilitate coordination of international support to these efforts. In addition, UNPOS supports the re-establishment, training, and retention of inclusive Somali security forces. The Somali civil war began in 1991 and, by 2004, the main parties to the conflict were the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and the mostly secular warlords of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), backed by the United States. With instability and civil war came the threat of piracy to international shipping off the Somali coasts. In 2006, the ICU rapidly consolidated power in Mogadishu and caused the intervention of Ethiopia in support of the TFG. The ICU obtained the support of Eritrea and foreign mujahedeen. The ICU was defeated by the TFG in the battles of 2006. The Ethiopian troops in Somalia were replaced by the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) in early 2007, a peacekeeping mission operated by the African Union with the approval of the United Nations. AMISOM is mandated to support transitional governmental structures, implement a national security plan, train the Somali security forces, and assist in creating a secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian aid. AMISOM’s strength is about 5,000 troops from Uganda and Burundi. Fighting continued after the arrival of the AMISOM troops, with the TFG facing the Islamist rebel force Al-Shabaab, an extremist ICU splinter group designated by the United States Department of State as a terrorist organization. By the end of 2008, Somali pirates began hijacking ships well outside the Gulf of Aden. NATO sent seven frigates off the coast of Somali to join anti-piracy operations, and the Security Council authorized states and regional organizations to enter Somalia’s territorial waters to combat piracy.[46] Clashes have been reported also between pirates and Islamist
fighters opposed to the TFG. In the second half of 2009, the TFG lost substantial control of the state to rebel forces. Somalia’s government declared a state of emergency in June 2009, requesting immediate international support, and the military intervention of neighboring East African states. In July 2009 Al-Shabaab issued a statement banning UNPOS and other United Nations organizations from operating in Somalia, citing them as enemies of Islam and Muslims. In September 2009, United States special forces killed a top al-Qaeda militant associated with Al-Shabaab, which subsequently killed 17 AMISOM peacekeepers in a car bomb attack.

The United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) was established in March 2005 to support the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Government of Sudan in northern Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) in southern Sudan.[47] In addition, UNMIS’s tasks also include functions relating to humanitarian assistance and the protection and promotion of human rights. Under the CPA, it was envisaged that as a stable Sudan would conduct a peaceful referendum in six-and-a-half years in southern Sudan to determine either Sudanese unity or a peaceful secession. UNMIS consisted of 13,183 peacekeepers in mid-2009, as compared to 13,400 in mid-2008. Not all belligerent groups have been party to the peace negotiations, and not all will automatically feel bound by the CPA. For the Darfur region, the Sudanese government and the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) signed the Darfur Peace Agreement, which sought to end the three-years long conflict. The agreement specified the disarmament of the Janjaweed and the disbandment of the rebel forces, and aimed at establishing a temporal government in which the rebels could take part. As in the case of southern Sudan, not all rebel groups signed the agreement. The 7,000-strong African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) was established to supervise the Darfur Peace Agreement. Sudan had long resisted the entry of United Nations peacekeepers in Darfur. With fighting continuing, the Security Council approved the United Nations African Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) in July 2007,[48] an African Union/United Nations hybrid peacekeeping operation. Its core mandate is protecting civilians, as well as contributing to security for humanitarian assistance, monitoring and verifying the implementation of agreements, and assisting an inclusive political process. This is one of the largest and most complex field operations the United Nations has ever undertaken. UNAMID incorporates AMIS and is expected to have some 26,000 peacekeepers at full deployment, including almost 20,000 troops, more than 6,000 police, and a significant civilian component. At full strength, UNAMID will become the largest United Nations peacekeeping mission in history and cost more than USD2 billion a year. However, the planned deployment had to be delayed. A lack of key equipment and the anticipated support by the Government of
Sudan was not forthcoming. Instead, Darfur experienced an escalation of violence. In March 2007, the United Nations mission accused Sudan’s government of orchestrating and taking part in gross violations in Darfur and called for urgent international action to protect civilians. The United Kingdom and France suggested sanctions against the Sudanese government for the continuing violence in Darfur. In July 2008, the chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Court (ICC) filed charges of war crimes against Sudan’s President Omar al-Bashir and issued an arrest warrant in March 2009. This was the first time a sitting head of state had been charged by the ICC. President Al-Bashir rejected the charges, and Sudan rejected the ICC’s jurisdiction. The Arab League announced its solidarity with the President, and the African Union condemned the arrest warrant. Some believe that the arrest warrant would hinder the efforts to establish peace in Darfur. It restricted the ability of the Secretary-General to engage in direct talks with Sudan’s leader. Al-Bashir had announced in November 2008 a ceasefire in Darfur, but the region’s two main rebel groups proclaimed their intention to fight on until the government agreed to share power and wealth in the region. In July 2009, outbursts of fighting and periodic harassment of UNAMID by pro-Government factions continued. Nevertheless, the Security Council welcomed the improvement in the Government of Sudan’s cooperation with UNAMID and called for further compliance with the Status of Forces Agreement, particularly in providing visas for UNAMID personnel and clearances for flights and equipment. The deployment of UNAMID had improved considerably during the United Nations year 2008/2009, with 22,431 peacekeepers in place by mid-2009, a major increase as compared to 11,125 in mid-2008. It is estimated that the conflict has killed over 200,000 people and uprooted 2.5 million from their homes.

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was established in August 2003 to monitor a ceasefire agreement and elections in Liberia following the resignation of President Charles Taylor. The mission helped to set up a transitional government and assisted in the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and national security reform, including national police training and the formation of a new, restructured military. By mid-2009, the mission included 13,192 peacekeepers, a decrease compared to 14,568 in mid-2008. Liberia had experienced civil war since the early 1990s; 200,000 people were killed and millions others displaced into refugee camps in neighboring countries. With the deployment of the UNMIL mission, the security situation improved, and the new President, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, made great strides in consolidating peace and promoting economic recovery in the country. As a result, the Security Council approved measures to draw down UNMIL. At the request of the government, former president Charles Taylor was extradited to the United Nations war crime tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands. The trial had
been moved from Sierra Leone’s capital Freetown out of fear that it could foment instability in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Charles Taylor is the first head of state in Africa to stand trial for war crimes. He faces charges over his role in the brutal civil war in neighboring Sierra Leone, where he is accused of backing rebels responsible for widespread atrocities. The specific charges related to terrorizing the civilian population, murder, sexual violence, physical violence such as cutting off limbs, using child soldiers, and enslavement.

The United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI)[53] was established to observe and monitor the implementation of the ceasefire agreement of May 2003 to end the civil war. Although most of the fighting ended by late 2004, the country remained divided between the government-controlled south and the rebel-held north, the Forces Nouvelles. The presidential election was expected to be held in October 2005, but was then postponed first to October 2006 and then to October 2007. In March 2007, President Laurent Gbagbo and the rebels agreed on a peace deal that called for the creation of a new transitional government, the organization of free and fair presidential elections by early 2008, the merging of the Forces Nouvelles and the national defense and security forces, the dismantling of the militias and disarming of ex-combatants, and the replacement of the “zone of confidence” separating north and south with a green line to be monitored by UNOCI. Subsequently, Guillaume Soro, leader of the Forces Nouvelles, became Prime Minister. In May 2008, the Forces Nouvelles began disarming, and by May 2009 started the process of handing over the northern part of the country to state control. President Gbagbo and Prime Minister Soro agreed to postpone presidential elections yet again to the end of 2009. UNOCI is requested to support the organization of free and fair elections. By mid-2009, the mission included 9,509 peacekeepers, a decrease as compared to 10,458 in mid-2008.[54]

*****

The United Nations struggled to address the global crises of the years 2008/2009 in the financial, economic, security, environmental, and humanitarian areas. Moreover, reform efforts to adapt the Organization have not met initial expectations. This also applies to Security Council reform, an ongoing effort for the past 15 years. The expansion of the number of permanent seats and veto privileges were the most controversial issues. Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan, in particular, had high expectations as regards an improvement of their status. The Assembly had agreed during the final hours of the previous session, the 62nd, to move from informal consultations in the Open-Ended Working Group to informal intergovernmental negotiations in the plenary of the General Assembly. By doing so, it moved the reform question from a consensus-based forum into
a forum that allows for majority decisions. Although the change was seen to facilitate reaching an agreement, such an agreement was not forthcoming during the 63rd session of the General Assembly, and hopes for future negotiations are slim. Rather than not living up to expectations, the United Nations year 2008/2009 may indicate the limits of the Organization to deal with the new global crises. If so, this would call for a fundamental assessment of how the Organization can develop its comparative advantage. It is the only “Group of 192” (all United Nations member states), as described by Miguel d’Escoto-Brockmann, President of the 63rd session of the General Assembly. Clearly, as demonstrated in the working of the United Nations, this is a challenge for decision-making, but universality is certainly also a unique strength in a globalized world.

[1] The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the institutions with which the authors are affiliated. Helpful comments by Hannelore Hoppe, Timothy Wall, and Nikolai Zaitsev are gratefully acknowledged.


[21] Of the USD10.0 billion assessed contribution, USD2.0 billion is provided for the UN secretariat and USD8.0 billion for peacekeeping operations. Of the USD10 billion voluntary contributions, the major share is related to semi-independent programs and funds such as UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNFPA and UNRWA. Of the 70,000 UN staff, 20,000 are with the UN secretariat, 20,000 at peacekeeping operations (in addition to approximately 100,000 military personnel provided by governments to UN peacekeeping missions) and 30,000 at semi-independent programs and funds.


[33] Including troops, military observers, police, international civilians, local civilians, and UN volunteers.


