The United Nations Year 2007/2008: Focus on Long-term Threats while Dealing with Peacemaking Challenges

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by

Joachim Müller and Karl P. Sauvant[1]

At the beginning of the sixty-second session of the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) on 24 September 2007, the Secretary-General convened a one-day high-level event on climate change: “The Future in Our Hands: Addressing the Leadership Challenge of Climate Change.” The summit drew top officials from more than 150 countries, including 70 Heads of State. Climate change was the “flagship issue” of the sixty-second session.[2] It was also one of the five priorities identified by the General Assembly at the beginning of the session, with the other ones being financing for development, achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), countering terrorism, and reforming the management, effectiveness and coherence of the Organization.[3]

On 11 December 2007, two car bombs exploded in the city of Algiers. One bomb targeted two UN buildings, the other a government building housing the country’s supreme court. The death toll was over 60 (including 17 UN staffers) and injuring 40 more. A subsequent review by UN troubleshooter Lakhdar Brahimi, a former Algerian foreign minister, concluded that UN officials ignored credible threats in the year preceding the attack.[4] This followed the August 2003 suicide bomb attack in Baghdad that killed 22 UN officials. The UN had become the target of al Qaeda and other extremist groups. The reason was that a growing part of the Arab world perceived the policies of the UN as being no longer impartial and neutral, but rather as being too aligned with those of the United States.

Climate change

A major step toward tackling the problem of global warming was the adoption of the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992 and the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. It commits signatories to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and establishes an emissions trading mechanism. The Kyoto Protocol entered into
force in February 2005; it will expire in 2012. By then, a new international framework has to be put in place. Unprecedented interest in climate change was triggered by the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)[5] issued in February 2007. IPCC brought together more than 2,000 scientists. It concluded that the “warming of the climate system is unequivocal,” and that most of the observed increases in temperature are “very likely” due to the rising concentration of greenhouse gases due to human activities, mostly the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation. In October 2007, IPCC and Al Gore, a former Vice President of the United States, were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts regarding manmade climate change.

Negotiations for a post-Kyoto agreement began in early 2007, with the aim of reaching an agreement by 2009 to allow time for ratification prior to 2012. A series of UNFCCC meetings was planned as part of the negotiation process, including a major conference in Bali, Indonesia (3-15 December 2007); the final conference will take place in Copenhagen, Denmark (in 2009). The Bali Conference brought together more than 10,000 participants, including representatives of over 180 countries, observers from intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations and the media. IPCC submitted its Synthesis Report as a major contribution to the discussion. In fact, the Bali Conference was postponed to December to allow the IPCC Synthesis Report to be available for the meeting. The Secretary-General championed the conference, which ended with a historical breakthrough. The participants, including China and the U.S. unexpectedly agreed on the adoption of the Bali Action Plan,[6] which charts the course for a new negotiating process to be concluded by 2009. The issues to be covered include actions for adapting to the negative consequences of climate change, such as droughts and floods; ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; ways to deploy climate-friendly technologies widely, and finance both adaptation and mitigation measures. The conference also agreed that the Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC is the most comprehensive and authoritative assessment of climate change to date.

The General Assembly’s thematic debate on climate change was held on 11-13 February 2008 in New York. The meeting built on the outcome of the Bali Conference and focused on partnership with the private sector and civil society. Attention was also paid to particularly vulnerable States, including small island nations. This was followed by the launch of a new initiative by the Secretary-General in April 2008 at the level of Executive Heads to coordinate a UN system-wide approach to address climate change.[7] Nine focus and crosscutting areas were defined, bringing together UN specialized agencies, programmes, funds and the UN Secretariat.[8] The objective was to show concrete results through this coordination arrangement by the time of the next climate change conference in Poznan, Poland, in December 2008. The work programme covers issues such as reducing emissions
from deforestation, technology transfer, mitigation, adaptation, capacity building, science, early warning, and public awareness.

UN response to emergencies: Cyclone Nargis and the global food crisis

On 2 and 3 May 2008, Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar with winds up to 200 kph, sweeping through the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) delta region and the country's main city and former capital, Yangon (Rangoon). The storm claimed over 130,000 lives and left more than 2 million people in need of humanitarian aid, contaminating water sources and obliterating schools. A UN flash appeal was launched on 9 May. Relief efforts were already underway at the time of the launch of the appeal, but they were hampered by access difficulties. Myanmar’s regime complicated recovery efforts by delaying the entry of UN planes delivering medicine, food and other supplies. A natural disaster was turning into a humanitarian catastrophe. Similarly, the Myanmar junta continued to reject offers by the United States to provide assistance. The Secretary-General visited Myanmar by the end of May to persuade the military rulers to open the borders for relief workers and facilitate the clearance of relief supplies in every way possible. This was partly successful and opened the way for much needed relief and relief operations, which got off the ground in early June.

The years 2007 and 2008 saw dramatic rises in world food prices, creating a global crisis and causing discontent and hardship in both developed and developing countries and political and economical instability and social unrest in the latter. Initial causes of the price spikes included unseasonable droughts in grain-producing nations and rising oil prices. Oil prices further increased the costs of fertilizers, food transport, and industrial agriculture. Other causes were the rising use of biofuels in developed countries and growing demand for a more varied diet, especially meat, across the expanding middle-class populations of Asia. These factors, coupled with falling world food stockpiles contributed to the dramatic worldwide rise in food prices. By mid 2008, the average world price during the past two years for rice had risen by over 200 percent; for wheat, maize and soybeans, the increase had been over 100 percent.[9]

In April 2008, the Chief Executive Board (CEB)[10] of the UN system established a High-Level Task Force (HLTF)[11] on the Global Food Security Crisis under the leadership of the Secretary-General. The HLTF created the Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA)[12] which covers activities in three areas: emergency needs; building up the agricultural sector and food production; and loosening counter-productive trade restrictions. The Secretary-General appointed UN Under-Secretary-General John Holmes as Task Force Coordinator.
As part of ECOSOC’s efforts to respond to emergencies, the Council held a Special Meeting on the global food crisis (20-22 May) to consider the threat posed by the global food crisis and its impact on food security for the poor and the most vulnerable. The FAO held a High-Level Conference on World Food Security: Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy in June 2008 that called for increased food production, fewer trade restrictions, and more agricultural research. Even though the Summit was not a pledging conference, US$18 billion was mobilized for food security and agriculture. At July’s G8 Hokkaido Tokyo Summit, the G8 leaders recognized the UN’s coordinating role and recorded their support for the High-Level Task Force and the Comprehensive Framework for Action.

Development

The operational arm for development includes such UN 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), and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).[13] Coordination of activities between the UN system organizations, including the specialized agencies, is done in the UN System Chief Executive Board (CEB).[14]

In April 2008 and in response to a new mandate, the General Assembly held the Annual Ministerial Review of progress on the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. The Assembly also assessed progress as regards system-wide coherence already achieved at the country level. The year 2007 presented the midpoint for achieving the MDGs, which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS to providing universal primary education by the target date of 2015. The ministerial-level thematic debate considered where priority action could be taken to accelerate progress, especially since it was clear that some countries would fall short, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. The event also reviewed the anti-poverty promises pledged in the Monterrey Consensus[15] (a development financing partnership struck in 2002 in Monterrey, Mexico) and laid the groundwork for the Review Conference on Financing for Development to be held in December 2008 in Doha, Qatar.

The 2006 report of the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence had put forward a number of proposals to restructure the UN development work in order to eliminate program overlap between UN agencies and offices in each country. System-wide coherence included “Delivering as One,” also called “One UN,” at the country and regional levels, the harmonization of business practices, funding, governance and gender equality and the empowerment of women. To test the
restructuring, eight countries (Albania, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uruguay, Viet Nam) have been operating as pilot countries since January 2007. The pilot programs have begun implementing UN development work by consolidating the operations at the country level, with one leader, programme, budget, and office. The stocktaking exercise by UN country teams, national governments and UN agencies in June 2008 provided a preliminary analysis. The pilot countries’ experience was considered positive and brought significant changes in traditional methods of work. Increased government leadership and ownership was seen to have led to a greater alignment between UN and government development-related priorities. Moreover, the UN agencies had demonstrated increased participation and joint programming. A formal evaluation will be conducted in 2009.

Normative issues

Conferences and meetings to foster global norms remain one of the key functions of the UN.[16] This includes efforts to draft a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT), on the agenda of the General Assembly since 1996. The CCIT is meant to serve as a binding and enforceable instrument of international criminal law. Member States struggled with questions on the scope of, and exception to, the definition of terrorism. Among the most problematic issues are whether the definition should include state-sponsored acts and/or military activities, and how to handle acts within an armed struggle against foreign occupation, aggression or colonialism (which some consider as exercising the right of self-determination).

In September 2006, the Assembly succeeded in approving the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy. The Strategy aims to dissuade, deny, and defeat terrorism while maintaining a defense of human rights. Although not the hoped-for CCIT, agreement on this Strategy was expected to provide momentum for agreement on the Convention. A new attempt by the Assembly to reach agreement on the CCIT failed, however, in March 2008, with the problem of definition still unresolved. Nevertheless, the Assembly held a review of the Global Counter Terrorism Strategy in September 2008, to monitor its implementation.[17]

The Assembly also convened interactive thematic debates on human security and human trafficking. This included the June 2008 comprehensive review of the progress achieved in realizing the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.[18] It also adopted the UN Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN Staff and Related Personnel.[19] Another session highlight was the convening of the Assembly’s first ever dialogue to promote interreligious and intercultural understanding and cooperation for peace. The Assembly also convened a three-day conference to review progress toward “A World
Fit for Children”; the Plan of Action to improve the lives of young people had been approved by Governments in the Assembly in 2002.

Rafiq Hariri: Special Tribunal for Lebanon

Rafiq Hariri, the Prime Minister of Lebanon from 1992 to 1998 and again from 2000 to October 2004, had been assassinated on 14 February 2005 when explosives were detonated in the Lebanese capital, Beirut. Hariri, a self-made billionaire and business tycoon, dominated the country’s post-war political and business life and was widely credited with reconstructing Beirut after the 15-year civil war. Hariri’s killing led to political changes in Lebanon, including the Cedar Revolution and the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. Following Hariri’s death, there were several other bombings and assassinations against anti-Syrian figures. These included Samir Kassir, George Hawi, Gebran Tueni, Pierre Amine Gemayel, and Walid Eido. Assassination attempts were made on Elias Murr, May Cidiac and Smir Shehade; the last of them was investigating Hariri’s death.

At the request of the Government of Lebanon, the Security Council set up the International Independent Investigation Commission (IIIC) in April 2005. In October of that year, the Commission submitted its initial findings to the Security Council, implicating Syrian and Lebanese officials, with special focus on Syria’s military intelligence chief, Assef Shawkat, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s brother-in-law. In November 2007, the Secretary-General appointed Daniel Dellemare of Canada to be the Commissioner of the IIIC to succeed Serge Brammertz of Belgium. In March 2008, a report of the IIIC to the Security Council stated that evidence had shown that a criminal network had been responsible for the massive car bombing that killed Hariri and 22 others in Beirut in February 2005. The same network was seen to be linked to some of the other cases of assassination that fall within the mandate of the Commission.[20]

The Statute of the Special Tribunal entered into force in June 2007; the Tribunal is hosted by The Netherlands. The Special Tribunal is a “hybrid” international court. It will not, however, apply international criminal law but rather Lebanese law. The chambers are composed of both Lebanese and international judges, with the latter having the majority. It is estimated that the Tribunal will cost $120 million over three years. In March 2008, the Secretary-General appointed Robin Vincent of the United Kingdom, a veteran of numerous international court proceedings, as Registrar of the Tribunal. The appointment reflects the steady progress in establishing this institution. The court is expected to open in 2009. This is the first time that an international court will try individuals for a terrorist crime committed against a specific person.
Peace building and peacekeeping

The expansion of peacekeeping operations continued in 2007/2008. Following a dramatic rise in recent years, the number of peacekeepers had risen to over 80,000 by mid-2006. By mid-2007, this figure had grown further to over 100,000 peacekeepers, and by mid-2008 to nearly 108,000 (see box on the following page). By September 2007, the UN was involved in 11 political and peace-building missions.[21]

Despite this expansion, the UN appears to be increasingly relegated to a supporting role in many of the world’s diplomatic conflicts. When violence erupted in Kenya after a disputed presidential vote, the African Union recruited Kofi Annan to help restore calm. Similarly, South Africa effectively blocked an initiative to grant the UN a more central role in mediating an end to an election crisis in Zimbabwe. The efforts of the UN to stem bloodshed in Sudan’s Darfur region have experienced major difficulties. Russia rebuffed the UN’s offer to provide diplomatic help in stemming further violence in a conflict between Georgian and Russian troops over the separatist province of South Ossetia. The Secretary-General had clashed before with Russia over Kosovo’s independence drive. Moreover, the Secretary-General had been careful when pressing Myanmar to democratize the country and to secure the release of political prisoners, including Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. He decided in December 2007 not to travel to the country and meet with military rulers, fearing it might end in failure.[22] The low-profile diplomatic style of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon contrasts with the activism of his predecessor, Kofi Annan, who sought to expand the authority of his office. In the following, a number of the main peacekeeping operations and peace-building missions are reviewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peacekeeping operations as of 31 June 2008</th>
<th>Peacekeeper*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Africa</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MINURCAT (Central African Republic and Chad)</td>
<td>451</td>
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<tr>
<td>MINUSORE (Western Sahara)</td>
<td>491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MONUC (Congo)</td>
<td>22,026</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNAMID (Darfur)</td>
<td>11,125</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNMEE (Ethiopia and Eritrea)</td>
<td>728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNMIL (Liberia)</td>
<td>14,568</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNMIS (Sudan)</td>
<td>13,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNOCI (Cote d’Ivoire)</td>
<td>10,458</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Americas</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mission Name</td>
<td>Troops</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>MTNUSTAH (Haiti)</td>
<td>10,837</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>UNMIT (East Timor)</td>
<td>2,827</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNMOGIP (India and Pakistan)</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNF1CYP (Cyprus)</td>
<td>1,072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNMIK (Kosovo)</td>
<td>4,604</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNOMIG (Georgia)</td>
<td>414</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDOF (Golan Heights)</td>
<td>1,188</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIFIL (Lebanon)</td>
<td>13,289</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNTSO (Middle East)</td>
<td>394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>107,990</td>
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</tbody>
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*Including troops, military observers, police, international civilians, local civilians and UN volunteers.

The United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) was established by the Security Council in November 1999 to help implement a ceasefire and bring about an agreed process for a political settlement. MONUC is the largest peacekeeping force deployed by the UN, with 22,026 peacekeepers by mid-2008 (as compared to 21,898 in mid-2007).[23] The Second Congo War, also known as Africa’s World War, began in August 1998 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly called Zaire), and officially ended in July 2003 when the Transitional Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo took power (though hostilities continue to this day). The largest war in modern African history, it directly involved eight African nations, as well as about 25 armed groups. In October 2006, Joseph Kabila was elected president. Despite an overall increase in the level of stability, over one million people remained internally displaced in the east of the country. By 2008, 5.4 million people had been killed in the war and its aftermath, mostly from disease and starvation, making the Second Congo War the deadliest conflict worldwide since World War II. Millions more were displaced from their homes or sought asylum in neighboring countries.

The United Nations Stabilization Mission (MINUSTAH) has been in Haiti since 2004 in support of the Transitional Government, to support a secure and stable environment within which the county’s constitutional and political process can take place. MINUSTAH consisted of 10,837 peacekeepers in mid-2008, as compared to 10,389 in mid-2007. The Mission continues to struggle for control over armed gangs.
By end-2006, the UN announced that it would take a tougher stance against gang members. In early February 2007, 700 UN troops flooded Cite Soleil, resulting in a major gun battle. Survivors frequently blame UN peacekeepers for the deaths of relatives. 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 UN force fired rubber bullets in Port-au-Prince to calm the riot. The head of MINUSTAH has called for a new government to be chosen as soon as possible. Meanwhile, the UN is providing emergency food.

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. Initially set up by the Security Council in August 2003, the mandate of UNAMI was updated in June 2004 with the establishment of the Iraqi Interim Government. By mid-2008, there were approximately 300 UN international staff and 400 national staff serving in Iraq, Kuwait and Jordan. The mandate of UNAMI operates through a Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Iraq. The first such representative was Sergio Vieira de Mello who was killed in the Canal Hotel bombing on 19 August 2003. The most recent Special Representative is Staffan de Mistura.

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 UN administration, pending a determination of its future status. NATO has 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 has 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. UNMIK consisted of 4,604 peacekeepers in mid-2008, as compared to 4,770 in mid-2007. In February 2006, UN-backed talks began to determine the final status of Kosovo, led by UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari (who 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 UN, 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. The Assembly of Kosovo approved a declaration of independence on 17 February 2008.
Over the following days, several governments (of the United States, Turkey, Albania, Austria, Germany, Italy, France, the United Kingdom, and others) announced their recognition of the new state, despite protests by Russia and others in the UN.

The **UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)** and the **United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)** are two missions that have been deployed in the Middle East for a considerable number of years. In July 2006, war broke out between Israel and the paramilitary forces of Hezbollah, mainly located in southern Lebanon. A UN 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 UN that included and expanded and enhanced UNIFIL.[27] The mission was strengthened from 2,395 peace keepers in mid-2006 to 13,289 in mid-2008.[28] Along with the UN troops, an equal number of Lebanese army troops were deployed in the south in the area that borders Israel. The main task of UNIFIL is to ensure that southern Lebanon could 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 with their replacement by UNIFIL. As of December 2006, hostilities had largely ceased, Israel had withdrawn from Lebanon and UNIFIL forces were in place. The disarmament of Hezbollah, however, has not been carried out so far. 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.

The **United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS)** was established to support the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Sudan/National Congress Party in Northern Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) in southern Sudan. By mid-2007, UNMIS in southern Sudan consisted of 13,400 peacekeepers, a small decrease compared to 13,755 in mid-2007. For the Darfur region, the Sudanese government and the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) signed the Darfur Peace Agreement, which sought to end the three-year 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. The agreement, however, was not signed by all of the rebel groups. 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 UN peacekeepers in Darfur. With fighting continuing, the Security Council approved in July 2007[29] the **United Nations African Mission in Darfur (UNAMID)**, an AU/UN hybrid peacekeeping operation. Its core mandate is the protection of 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 UN 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 UN peacekeeping mission in history and cost more than $2 billion a year. On 31 December 2007, African Union troops in Darfur exchanged green berets for blue ones to signal the formal creation of UNAMID. However, deployment had to be delayed. Lack of key equipment and the anticipated support by the Government of Sudan was not forthcoming. Instead, Darfur experienced an escalation of violence. UNAMID consisted only of 11,125 peacekeepers in mid-2008.[30] The United Kingdom and France suggested sanctions against the Sudanese government for the continuing violence in Darfur. Meanwhile the International Criminal Court’s chief prosecutor requested an arrest warrant for the Sudanese leader, President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity. This seriously restricts the ability of the Secretary-General to engage in direct talks with Sudan’s leader. The nearly five-year conflict has killed over 200,000 people and uprooted 2.5 million from their homes. The Secretary-General said that no political issue has taken more of his time in 2007 than Darfur.

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)[31], established in September 2003, supports Liberia through a process of peace negotiations between Liberia’s factions, presidential elections and continuous unrest. 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-2008, the mission included 14,568 peacekeepers, a decrease compared to 16,995 in mid-2007.[32] Liberia had experienced civil war since the early 1990s; 200,000 people were killed and millions others displaced into refugee camps in neighboring countries. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has 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, to result in a reduction to 9,750 peacekeepers by the end of 2010. At the request of the government, former president Charles Taylor was extradited by Nigeria to the UN war crime tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands. He is the first head of state in Africa to stand trial for war crimes.

The United Nations Operation in Cote d’Ivoire (UNOCI)[33] was established to observe and monitor the implementation of the ceasefire agreement of May 2003 to end the civil war in that country. Since then, the country has been divided between the government controlled south and the rebel-held north, the Forces Nouvelles. The Ouagadougou Political Agreement, a peace deal between the government of President Laurent Gbagbo and the rebels, was signed in March 2007. Subsequently, Guillaume Soro, leader of the Forces Nouvelles, became Prime
Minister. The agreement calls for the creation of a new transitional government, the organization of free and fair presidential elections, 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. By mid-2008, the mission included 10,458 peacekeepers, a small increase as compared to 10,379 in mid-2007.[34]

UN reform

Management and governance reform remained on the agenda of the Assembly. In April 2008, it held a thematic debate on management reform, focusing on three specific topics: improving budget analysis, modernizing human resources practices and mandate review. Little, however, was achieved. Member states expressed concern about the piecemeal approach of the budgetary process, but supported the modernization of human resource management[35] and encouraged further efforts to achieve a better gender balance and equitable geographical representation. A new internal system of justice is expected to become operational in 2009.[36] Procurement has been strengthened through the appointment of a lead agency and the introduction of an independent bid protest system.[37] The approval of the Capital Master Plan allowed for the beginning of the renovation of the headquarters building. After reorganizing the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Secretary-General was pressing ahead with the reform and expansion of the political affairs activities. Such activities come under a new entity that follows through on policy implementation and deals with issues like election monitoring and judicial reforms.

The review of the Organization’s 9,000 mandates had been one of the most contentious parts of the 2005 World Summit reform package. Through 2006, the General Assembly’s informal consultations on this subject were marked by intense divisions over the scope and purpose of the exercise. The United States strongly supported the review and, by implication, the potential elimination of obsolete and redundant mandates, resulting in fearful reactions from states with vested interests. In addition, it was noted that the resource implications of mandates were not transparent and fully traceable, limiting therefore the value of the review. Given the obstacles identified, the Assembly decided to discontinue the mandate review process.[38]

Consultations on Security Council reform have been ongoing for the past 15 years, but without coming closer to an agreement. Expansion 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. In March 2008, a
group of member states (including Germany, along with Cyprus, Malaysia, Netherlands, Romania, and the United Kingdom) submitted a new reform proposal which had emerged from meetings in the General Assembly in November and December 2007. Rather than presenting a specific reform option, the proposal laid out a framework for negotiations, including the size of an expanded Council, the term length for the new seats and how many years the Council would follow an intermediate formula before conducting a review. Half of the proposal was devoted to changes in the Council's working methods.

The hope in producing such a proposal was to move from informal consultations in the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) to intergovernmental negotiations in the plenary of the General Assembly. By doing so, the reform question would move from a consensus-based forum into a forum that allows for majority decisions. However, the membership disagreed with this approach. In an atmosphere of confusion and disarray, the Assembly agreed by consensus during the final hours of the sixty-second session to move to intergovernmental negotiations no later than 28 February 2009. As a basis for negotiations, the decision set out various positions and proposals, including as regards categories of membership, the question of the veto, regional representation, size of an enlarged Council, working methods of the Security Council, and the relationship between the Council and the General Assembly. The outcome was called historic and a “breakthrough” by delegations and UN officials. The United Kingdom said that the decision represented a move from a discussion of procedure to a discussion of substance. The President described it as a “very dramatic final stage of the 62nd session.”[39]

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The UN seems to be less in the headlines. There is a risk that the UN is being marginalized by other power centers as the guarantor and arbiter of peace and security. Partly, this is the result of a change in geopolitics and gridlock in the Security Council. Russia and China have become increasingly assertive as reflected, for example, in the blocked proposals of western states to intervene in internal conflicts ranging from Georgia to Myanmar to Zimbabwe. On the other hand, new visions and spectacular proposals no longer overshadow painstaking daily work to bring about incremental improvements in the human endeavor. Moreover, the UN has been successful in raising awareness about such long-term threats as climate change and the global food crisis and in helping to secure commitments to fight poverty. This mixed picture may well endure as long as the Security Council lacks legitimacy and effectiveness -- or it may be the inevitable result of a world in which individual nation-states pursue their own (often different) interests.
[1] The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the institutions with which the authors are affiliated. The authors wish to thank Hannelore Hoppe and Timothy Wall for helpful comments.


[4] The Secretary-General established an Independent Panel on Accountability in June 2008 to gather and review documentation relating to the attack, identify the officials and offices concerned with the security of the UN operations in Algiers, establish findings and make recommendations. The panel submitted its report to the Secretary-General in September 2008.


[8] Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA); the World Bank, World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).


[11] HLTF participation has included: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); International Monetary Fund


[22] At the same time, he entrusted those tasks to his Senior Representative Mr. Gambari.


