Vision 2020: Towards Better Global Governance

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There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things.

— Niccolo Machiavelli

This essay sets a rather arrogant goal for itself: To define a vision of what the international organizational architecture should look like in the year 2020; to be innovative, but realistic, in this enterprise; and to push the envelope of the feasible well beyond the merely probable, but not out of reach of the actually possible.

The goal is arrogant not only because it implies that one can actually undertake a task of such intellectual enormity, but even more so because it assumes that whatever attributes we assign to our 'best of all worlds' are likely to be shared by the rest of the world. It is quite evident that, beyond the level of general platitudes, there is no meaningful consensus on what a 'good' world might actually look like; nor are we likely to reach such consensus anytime soon. On the other hand, such a consensus is probably not entirely necessary and arguably not even desirable.

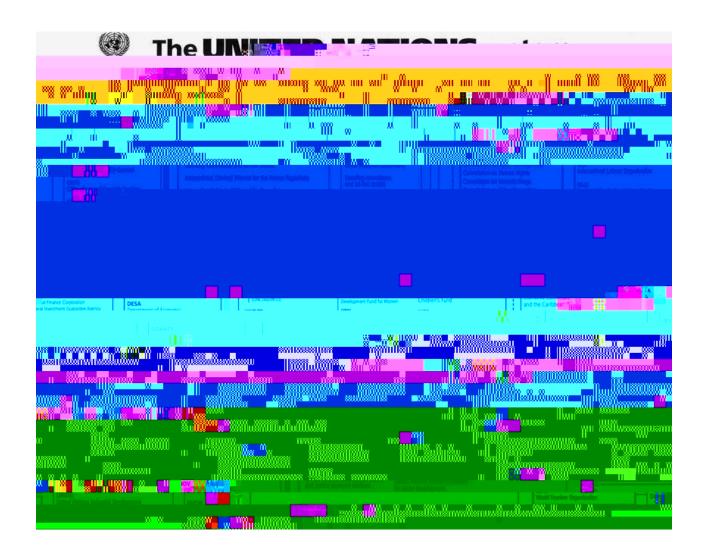
The above notwithstanding, and arrogant as it might be, the challenge that this paper responds to is worthwhile nonetheless. It is worthwhile not because there is any danger of our dream-world coming true; but because in imagining a 'world that could be', we just might stumble upon realities of the 'world that is' which we otherwise refuse to confront. (Besides, playing czar of the international system is bound to be fun!).

We begin, in the next section, by taking a quick snapshot of what the world of 2020 might look like given the trends of the past and indications of the present. This is not an exercise in prediction as much as one of establishing the key assumptions about the future we are designing for. In the following section we set for ourselves a set of key parameters that should guide us both in designing our program for organizational change in the international system, and in evaluating any such proposal. We then outline a vision for what the international system should look like in 2020, both in terms of the broader structural reform that needs to be put into place and some exemplars of the organizations changes this might entail.

Some unflattering confessions about the future

But will they come when you do call for them?"
— William Shakespeare (Henry IV)

Trying to predict, project, propose and sometimes pr



#4. The international system must not be allowed to become any more messy or cluttered than it already is. The international system—particularly the United Nations—has been remarkably good about expanding its mandate to tackle new and emerging challenges. Its failure lies principally in its inability to resolve the existing challenges. While this expansion of effort makes full sense in principle, its practical effect has been to dilute the attention (and proportional resources) invested in the most persistent and chronic challenges faced by global society. Since actually 'reforming' any given element of the international system at any moment in time in immensely more difficult than creating a new organization or program, past reformers have taken the easy route and left us a trail of generally haphazard, often overlapping, sometimes redundant, and nearly always poorly integrated organizations. Whether done with well-meaning intentions or for self-serving reasons, this has contributed to making the international system ever more mushy and ever less coherent. As a result, organizational fiefdoms have proliferated and issue balkanization is rampant. Thirty years ago, Australian diplomat Sir Robert Jackson likened the UN to 'some prehistoric monster incapable of intelligently controlling itself. This is not because it lacks intelligence and capable officials, but because it is so organized that managerial direction is impossible.' The United Nations system is plagued by overlapping and duplicative programs, with various departments and agencies competing for resources or authority. To be at all considered a success, any reform initiative must leave the international system as less messy and

less cluttered than it is today. The organizational effort over the next twenty years should focus on consolidating, streamlining, and strengthening existing international organization. Only under very rare and very special circumstances should we even consider setting up new agencies, organizations or programs; indeed, an explicit goal for 2020 should be to have a much less cluttered organizational chart for the international system than we have today.

#5. Reform must be designed and evaluated for its system-wide impacts. Unfortunately, the sum of a number of 'good' organizations need not necessarily amount to a 'good' organizational system. On the other hand, it is unlikely to have a 'good' system that is composed of component

attempts have turned		

A very first recommendation, therefore, would be to convene a world conference on reforming the international system with active participation from civil society and a stated upfront commitment for reform from the world powers. Given the momentum of prevailing

However, conferences alone are not enough to turn around unwieldy organizational systems. To be meaningful and sustainable, reform must take place both at the level of the system and of its component organizations. The following subsections will sketch out some key elements of our vision in both domains.

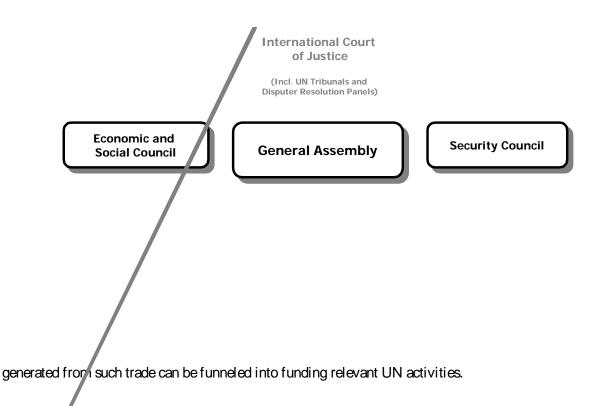
Structural Reform: The Big Picture

System-wide reform, although more difficult, is a prerequisite for the success of reform in specific organizations. Nearly all that has to be said for structural reform in the international system, and particularly the UN system, has already been said. However, little has actually been done. This is partly because of the already mentioned lack of political will on the part of the UN's custodians (key membof political will on.8l10.98 0 0 10.98 212.38n 0 10.98 900 59T47 .0 6Tm(bof p.0003 T

General directly into the hands of the General Assembly through an open and transparent process and without the possibility of veto intervention from the P5 would be the obvious step to take, it may not be feasible to do so at this point. However, what is certainly feasible and certainly desirable is to amend the tenure of the Secretary General so that it is limited to a single, longer (possibly of seven years), term in office. This would be a first step towards providing the Secretary General with greater independence by ridding him of the necessity to appease the permanent members who can veto his reappointment.

Term limit ch

UN dues—are likely to put up a fight to such proposals. They will do so not because it threatens their sovereignty in any real way, but because it takes away the extraordinary level of influence they now have over the world agenda by virtue of controlling the UN purse strings. The political problem of getting their support is non-trivial. However, one could begin by taking small steps. For example, if global emission trading to curb climate change is to become a reality it should be housed in the UN system (and certainly not the World Bank) and at least some of the revenue



envisaged that this would spur, or lead to, some consolidation within the UN organizational architecture. For example, it makes full sense for the United Nations University to consolidate with the various UN Research and Training Institutes (INSTRAW, UNITAR, UNIDIR, UNICRI, and UNRISD). Right now, each is so small and under-funded that none makes a significant contribution. Pooled together, they would at least have enough resources to make a meaningful contribution in some areas. Similarly, there is an obvious case to be made for merging the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), with the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

The Economic and Social Council will also revert to the role originally envisaged for it. Right now it has become the most hodge-podge organ with an unwieldy membership and an unmanageable mandate. By placing the executive ownership of all specialized agencies directly under the General Assembly one hopes to free up the time and resources of the ECOSOC to play a more meaningful role as the equivalent of the Security Council in the realm of Economic and Social issues. Its task would not be to manage the 'line agencies' of the UN but to advance the goals laid out in the Charter and respond to new and emerging issues. As such, it would have executive ownership of all UN Commissions and Conferences. The commissions had been originally envisaged as the 'cutting edge' of the UN system; they have since been reduced to mere talk-shops. UN conferences have already taken on a new salience as the place where civil society meets (and pushed upon) intergovernmental organizations. executive owner of UN Commissions as well as UN Conferences, ECOSOC can serve as the bridge between civil and intergovernmental societies. The proposal here is to revert them to their original intent, this will hopefully be assisted by the fact that the ECOSOC could now focus exclusively on them. Once again, the hope is that by 2020 the Commissions would have been consolidated into a smaller number of more active and more influential commissions that do actually symbolize the 'cutting edge' of the international agenda.

The Security Council will essentially remain as is. It will be remain responsible for peacekeeping missions and related activities but the responsibility for special international criminal tribunals (even those established by the Security Council) will move to the International Court of Justice, where they logically belong.

By 2020 the Secretary General should be operating as the chief executive of the entire UN system; and all agencies, commissions, etc. will report to the General Assembly, Security Council and ECOSOC via the Secretary General. A key task of the Secretary

By 2020, the International Court of Justice should be revitalized and become the central pillar of global governance that it was originally supposed to be. Of all the organs of the UN system, the fate that has befallen the International Court of Justice is probably the saddest. Born amidst much hope and optimism, it has been relegated to a near non-entity. National governments have used spurious arguments about sovereignty to usurp from it even that authority which they themselw5m(h)Tj10.98 0 0 10.98 1919 International court of Justice is probably the saddest.

This is not the place to undertake a detailed analysis of the type of particular changes that particular organizations might need to undertake. However, we present here some examples of the types of changes that might need to be taken over the next twenty years if this vision is to be realized. It should be noted that the program of reform would have to be strategically paced. It is suggested that all the changes suggested here are, in fact, feasible but none is easy; it would not be possible to bring about these changes in one broad stroke but it is also not impossible to bring them about in a period of twenty years.

International Environmental Governance. The proliferation of global environmental treaties has not only led to significant negotiation fatigue, but also to a dispersed set of organizations dealing with environmental issues. Some have called for creating a new environmental supra-organization. However, the more obvious answer is to strengthen UNEP and enable it to perform the coordination task that is already in its mandate rather than just to add to the organizational clutter. Contrary to popular misinformation, UNEP has been one of the most impressive UN organizations in terms of its actual achievements and has already been entrusted by Agenda 21 (at the Rio Earth Summit) with the task of consolidating disparate treaty secretariats, etc. While placing the Global Environmental Facility in the World Bank rather than at UNEP was a major mistake, it is a mistake that can be rectified. One would envision that by 2020, UNEP would have become what it was originally mandated to be—a global environmental coordinator and the 'environmental conscience of the world.' In this process, treaty proliferation could be tackled through clustering of treaty regimes and negotiation fatigue could be addressed by consolidating various treaty secretariats at one central location—preferably Nairobi—and by moving towards a more streamlined negotiation cal endar.

International Trade Governance. The fact that UNCTAD and WTO are both simultaneously part of the UN family can be explained by the tortured political histories of both these organizations. It is, nonetheless, a painful—and wasteful—coexistence. The good news, however, is that consolidation seems on the card as WTO, which was born out of the very non-UN-like GATT, is turning more and more into a UN-like organization. Consider, for example, the fact that WTO membership rose by more than a third in the period during which the Uruguay Round was negotiated and has risen by more than half between when that process started and now. More importantly, the new members are mostly from the developing countries. They do not have a history of operating by 'GATT rules' and are more familiar with UN styles and agendas. Moreover, the agenda of the WTO is becoming more UN-like than GATT-like (in terms of emphasis on development issues). With the addition of China, WTO would become even more UN-like. The tussle between WTO's lingering 'GATTness' and emerging 'UNness' was most apparent at the Seattle Ministerial and is again evident in the run-up to Qatar. At some point in the next two decades, it is to be hoped, WTO will begin seeing itself as a 'Trade and Development' organization and waste of having a separate WTO, a separate UNCTAD, and a separate International Trade Center (ITC)—all within the UN system—could be averted.

International Development. Convergence and consolidation in the international development assistance regime, while very desirable, seems rather unlikely. Conceptually, there is very little basis for having a World Bank Group separate from UNDP. In a logical world the World Bank would be one part of UNDP. In the political world, however, the golden rule is sacrosanct—'he who has the gold, makes the rule!' Unfortunately, politics trumps logic, and gold still trumps politics. While meaningful

consolidation in this area may not be feasible, even with a two-decade time frame, some steps in rationalizing the international development regime might nonetheless be possible. One obvious place to start is to better coordinate the UN's own development efforts. Enhancing the role of the Secretary General in the executive managementincluding program and budgetary decisions—of the specialized agencies could provide the basis of such change. A key step that could be taken at the World Bank is to move it towards operating like an actual bank—certainly in the sense of ceasing to dictate policy to its borrowers. In other cases, however, the challenges over the next twenty years relate not as much to consolidation as to diversification. For example, the AIDS epidemic provides a new and immediate challenge to WHO. The response should not be to create a new agency or program, but to strengthen WHO to be able to respond to this crisis. Similarly, UNESCO needs to be strengthened to play a more active role as a disseminator of access to information technology as a development tool. In yet other cases, the need may be for better coordination rather than just consolidation or diversification. For example, the issue of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is gaining prominence. It is already being tackled separately by the biodiversity convention and by FAO. There is an obvious need for global scientific standard setting. However, there is no need for a new organization to do so—it can and should be done within the FAO in a coordinated UN-wide effort.

While these examples are necessarily brief and general, the point to be made here is one that reinforces the thrust of this entire essay—our vision for 2020 must be rooted in trying to improve the system as it now exists rather than simply adding new components to it because fixing old ones is too difficult. The crisis faced by most international organizations and by the UN system as a whole is not one of competence or even pertinence, it is a crisis of neglect. It is not simply that the mandates of existing organizations are inappropriate to deal with the challenges of tomorrow, but that the resources and political will invested in these organizations are insufficient to deal even with the problems of today. Absent that fundamental willingness, no amount of organizational tinkering will lead to meaningful global governance.