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EMPOWERING THE UNITED NATIONS

Boutros Boutros-Ghali

Historic Opportunities to Strengthen World Body

A NEW CHAPTER in the history of the United Nations has begun. With newfound appeal the world organization is being utilized with greater frequency and growing urgency. The machinery of the United Nations, which had often been rendered inoperative by the dynamics of the Cold War, is suddenly at the center of international efforts to deal with unresolved problems of the past decades as well as an emerging array of present and future issues.

The new era has brought new credibility to the United Nations. Along with it have come rising expectations that the United Nations will take on larger responsibilities and a greater role in overcoming pervasive and interrelated obstacles to peace and development. Together the international community and the U.N. Secretariat need to seize this extraordinary opportunity to expand, adapt and reinvigorate the work of the United Nations so that the lofty goals as originally envisioned by the charter can begin to be realized.

Peacekeeping is a Growth Industry

PEACEKEEPING IS THE most prominent U.N. activity. The “blue helmets” on the front lines of conflict on four continents are a symbol of the United Nations’ commitment to international peace and security. They come from some 65 countries, representing more than 35 percent of the membership.

Peacekeeping is a U.N. invention. It was not specifically defined in the charter but evolved as a noncoercive instrument of conflict control at a time when Cold War constraints prevented the Security Council from taking the more forceful steps permitted by the charter. Thirteen peacekeeping operations were established between 1948 and 1978. Five of them remain in existence, and are between 14 and 44 years old.

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Peacekeeping has sometimes proved easier than the complementary function of peacemaking. This shows that peacekeeping, by itself, cannot provide the permanent solution to a conflict. Only political negotiation can do that.

During the Cold War years the basic principles of peacekeeping were gradually established and gained acceptance: the

“The former Yugoslavia has become the United Nations’ largest peacekeeping commitment ever.”

consent of the parties; troops provided by member states serving under the command of the secretary general; minimum use of force; collective financing. It was also learned, often the hard way, that peacekeeping success requires the cooperation of the parties, a

clear and practicable mandate, the continuing support of the Security Council and adequate financial arrangements.

The end of the Cold War has led to a dramatic expansion in demand for the United Nations’ peacekeeping services. Since 1988 14 new operations have been established, five of which have already completed their mandates and been disbanded. In the first half of 1992 the number of U.N. soldiers and police officers increased fourfold; by the end of the year they will exceed 50,000.

Some of these new operations have been of the traditional, largely military type, deployed to control unresolved conflicts between states. Examples are the military observers who monitored the ceasefire between Iran and Iraq from 1988 to 1991 and those who currently patrol the demilitarized zone between Iraq and Kuwait.

But most of the new operations have been set up to help implement negotiated settlements of long-standing conflicts, as in Namibia, Angola, Cambodia, El Salvador and Mozambique. Namibia was a colonial situation but each of the other four has been an internal conflict, albeit with significant external dimensions, within a sovereign member state of the United Nations.

There is another aspect to the end of the Cold War. The thawing of its frozen political geography has led to the eruption of savage conflicts in, and sometimes between, newly emerging independent states. The former Yugoslavia has become the United Nations’ largest peacekeeping commitment ever. Ethnic conflict across political borders and the brutal

killing of civilians there are reminiscent of the ordeal that U.N. peacekeeping forces faced in the 1960s in the then Congo. U.N. forces again are taking an unacceptable level of casualties. It is difficult to avoid wondering whether the conditions yet exist for successful peacekeeping in what was Yugoslavia.

The 1990s have given peacekeeping another new task: the protection of the delivery of humanitarian supplies to civilians caught up in a continuing conflict. This is currently underway in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Somalia, member states whose institutions have been largely destroyed in a confused and cruel web of civil conflicts. This task tests the established practices of peacekeeping, especially the circumstances in which U.N. soldiers may open fire. Existing rules of engagement allow them to do so if armed persons attempt by force to prevent them from carrying out their orders. This license, used sparingly in the past, may be resorted to more frequently if the United Nations is to assert the Security Council's authority over those who, for personal gain or war objectives, try to rob or destroy humanitarian supplies destined for suffering civilian populations.

Beyond Peacekeeping

ALL THESE NEW modes of peacekeeping have had far-reaching implications for the way in which U.N. operations are organized and conducted.

In internal conflicts, or indeed in interstate conflicts where one or other of the governments is not in a position to exercise full authority over territory nominally under its control, not all the parties are governments. As a result the peacekeepers have had to learn how to deal with a multiplicity of "authorities." The leaders of such groups are often inaccessible and their identity even unknown; chains of command are shadowy; armed persons who offend against agreements signed by their supposed leaders are disowned; discipline is nonexistent or brutal. And everywhere there is an evil and uncontrolled proliferation of arms.

Peacekeeping operations still invariably include military personnel. But now the civilian elements often have an even more important role. This is especially true when the task is to help implement comprehensive and complex settlements, as was or is the case in Namibia, El Salvador, Cambodia and Mozambique. Political action is required to resolve disputes

between the parties and persuade them to implement the agreed arrangements. Information programs must explain the United Nations' role and advise the people of the opportunities the settlement gives them. Refugees must be brought home and resettled. Elections must be observed and verified or even, in Cambodia, organized and conducted by the United Nations.

Local police must be monitored to ensure that they carry out their duties in the spirit of the new order and not the old. Respect for human rights must be verified, an especially important task in El Salvador and Cambodia. In the latter country the United Nations also has responsibility for controlling the key parts of the existing administrative structures.

All of these tasks, some of them very intrusive, must be carried out with complete impartiality by civilian peacekeepers. Staff members of the U.N. system, with policy and election observers made available by member states, have risen to these new civilian challenges.

The involvement of such a variety of civilian personnel, alongside their military colleagues, creates a need for tight coordination of all aspects of an operation. As a result it has become normal for the overall direction of a multifaceted peacekeeping operation to be entrusted to a senior civilian official as special representative of the secretary general, to whom the force commander, the police commissioner, the director of elections and other directors report.

Responses Must Be Quick

ONE OF THE LESSONS learned during the recent headlong expansion of U.N. peacekeeping is the need to accelerate the deployment of new operations. Under current procedures three or four months can elapse between the Security Council's authorization of a mission and its becoming operational in the field. Action is required on three fronts: finance, personnel and equipment.

On finance, the member states should provide the secretary general with a working capital fund for the start-up of new operations, so that cash is immediately available. They should also revise existing financial procedures so that the secretary general has authority to spend that cash, within reasonable limits, as soon as the new operation is authorized.

The question of personnel is more complicated. Procedures

for the transfer of U.N. staff to new operations in the field are being simplified for more rapid reaction. But most peacekeeping personnel (troops, police, election observers) are made available by governments. The answer is not to create a U.N. standing force, which would be impractical and inappropriate, but to extend and make more systematic standby arrangements by which governments commit themselves to hold ready, at an agreed period of notice, specially trained units for peacekeeping service.

A handful of governments already do this. A recent invitation to all member states to volunteer information about what personnel and equipment they would in principle be ready to contribute, if asked, produced disappointing results. I have now decided to take the initiative and put specific proposals to governments, in order to identify with reasonable certainty sources of military and police personnel and equipment that governments would undertake to make available at very short notice. These commitments would constitute building blocks that could be used, when the moment came, to construct peacekeeping operations in various sizes and configurations, ranging from a small group of military observers to a full division, as required.

Allied with this effort will be the provision of more extensive guidance to governments on training troops and police who they may contribute to the United Nations for peacekeeping duties.

Equipment can cause even greater bottlenecks than personnel. There are two complementary ways in which this problem can be eased. First, member states should make it possible for the United Nations to establish a reserve stock of basic items (vehicles, radios, generators, prefabricated buildings) that are always required for a new peacekeeping operation. Second, member states could agree to hold ready, at various locations around the world, reserves of such equipment. These would remain their property but could be made immediately available to the United Nations when the need arose.

An even more radical development can now be envisaged. It happens all too often that the parties to a conflict sign a ceasefire agreement but then fail to respect it. In such situations it is felt that the United Nations should "do something." This is a reasonable expectation if the United Nations is to be an effective system of collective security. The purpose of peace enforcement units (perhaps they should be called "ceasefire

enforcement units”) would be to enable the United Nations to deploy troops quickly to enforce a ceasefire by taking coercive action against either party, or both, if they violate it.

This concept retains many of the features of peacekeeping: the operation would be authorized by the Security Council; the

“U.N. troops would be authorized to use force to ensure respect for the ceasefire.”

troops would be provided voluntarily by member states; they would be under the command of the secretary general; and they would be impartial between the two sides, taking action only if one or other of them violated the agreed cease-

fire. But the concept goes beyond peacekeeping to the extent that the operation would be deployed without the express consent of the two parties (though its basis would be a ceasefire agreement previously reached between them). U.N. troops would be authorized to use force to ensure respect for the ceasefire. They would be trained, armed and equipped accordingly; a very rapid response would be essential.

This is a novel idea that involves some obvious difficulties. But it should be carefully considered by the international community as the next step in the development of the United Nations’ capability to take effective action on the ground to maintain international peace and security.

Unpaid Bills

THERE HAVE BEEN prolonged delays by member states in meeting their financial obligations regarding peacekeeping operations. For instance, four months into one of the largest and most complex U.N. operations ever, only nine member states had fully paid their obligations to the U.N. Transitional Authority in Cambodia. Delays in payment add to the fragility of an already delicate mission by hampering the United Nations’ capacity to deploy and causing delays in the schedule. These in turn threaten the agreed timetable and jeopardize the entire peace process. At a time when the United Nations is being asked to do more than ever, it is being shortchanged by the member states who have breached their

legal obligations and deprived the United Nations of necessary resources.¹

These difficulties occur against a background of dramatically increasing costs for establishing and maintaining peacekeeping operations. During the first half of 1992 there was a fourfold increase in peacekeeping costs—from some \$700 million to about \$2.8 billion. Expenses are likely to rise even higher with new and expanded operations that could be launched in the coming months. Meanwhile the continued failure of most member states to meet their financial commitments to peacekeeping operations and to the United

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Nations in general is a most serious problem. The continued viability of these missions, as well as the credibility of the United Nations itself, is threatened.

Mounting Development Needs

POLITICAL STABILITY is not an end in itself; it is a condition of durable economic and social development and the fulfillment of the human potential. At the same time inseparable links between peace and development need to be acknowledged and understood. The world has seen the deterioration of economic and social conditions give rise to political strife and military conflict. The activities of the United Nations for peace and security should not be carried out at the expense of its responsibilities for development. It is essential that peace and development be pursued in an integrated, mutually supporting way.

One can point to a number of situations where the United Nations has kept the peace, or at least prevented conflicts from escalating, but the balance sheet on the development side is less than encouraging. A billion people live on less than one dollar a day; children in many parts of the world are dying

¹*Editor's Note:* The five member states with the largest arrears, in both regular budget and peacekeeping assessments as of October 1992, are the United States, Russia, South Africa, Japan and Ukraine.

unnecessarily of diseases that could easily be cured; women are striving to be both breadwinners and homemakers in situations of intolerable strain; and there are too few jobs. The crisis is deeper than merely another manifestation of the familiar disparity between the developed nations of the North and the developing South.

No such clear-cut pattern offers itself to our eyes today. East European countries and the former Soviet Union are struggling in their transition toward democracy and market-based economies. Even the nations of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development are not immune to economic and social ills. Poverty, unemployment, inequity and growing insecurity exist in virtually every part of the globe. Even rich nations are tempted to turn inward to attend to their own agendas. But today there is no longer any such thing as "someone else's problem"; the globalization of economies and communications deepens our interdependence.

The responsibilities of the United Nations in the field of social and economic development are central to the purposes and principles of the charter: first, because the maintenance of international peace and security is inextricably entwined with economic and social progress and stability; and second, because the promotion of social and economic progress is a specific task given to the United Nations by the charter.

Development policy was significantly shaped by the Cold War and the process of decolonization. When the charter was being framed at San Francisco in 1945, and when most of our current world economic institutions were being created, most of today's states were either colonies, semi-colonies or parts of extensive empires. The notion of "development" was unformed; the concept of the "Third World" had not emerged. The idea that the United Nations should be concerned with economic and social issues sprang from what has been called "welfare internationalism," which evolved in wartime planning for the peace and was a formative influence on the Bretton Woods institutions dating from that period.

As demands for independence gathered momentum in African and Asian lands, programs of assistance and economic cooperation were initiated by former colonial powers. These were joined by assistance programs established by states with no recent colonial past, such as the Nordic countries. Meanwhile the World Bank was becoming the lead institution in the

channeling of multilateral development finance to developing countries.

Provision of development assistance to newly independent nations became part of the foreign policies of the industrialized countries, intricately bound up with the global contest for power and influence. The United States, through its Agency for International Development, became a major provider of development finance and technical assistance in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The Soviet Union was deeply involved with a relatively small number of states considered potentially significant in its ideological sphere, and provided substantial technical support for them. In both cases development assistance was often interwoven with military aid.

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Just as the Cold War distorted the vision of collective security set forth in the U.N. Charter, it also impaired cooperation for development. Bilateral foreign aid programs were often an instrument of the Cold War, and remain deeply affected by considerations of political power and national policy. Multilateral development programs, even when managed well and with admirable ethical purpose, derived from ideas and ideologies that proved inadequate at best and in some cases ruinous.

At this time of change in world affairs, when restructuring the institutions of international relations is high on the agenda, there are increasing demands for action in the field of economic and social development. The call for a new unity and clarity of purpose from the United Nations in the field of development—which is now commonly understood to include social and economic development and environmental protection as well—has come from developing and developed countries alike.

Traditionally U.N. social development activities have concentrated on the most vulnerable groups of populations. Increasingly in developing countries efforts at modernization tug at institutions that hold the social fabric together. Declining social cohesion, in turn, can undermine economic prog-

ress. The organization is beginning to take a closer look at specific phenomena affecting social cohesion and to view the social and economic dimensions of development in a more integrated way. Issues of demography and cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic diversity are so closely related today to prospects for political stability and economic advancement that the involvement of the United Nations in issues of social development is acquiring a qualitatively different nature.

If the process of decolonization is over and the Cold War has ended, and now that there is no "struggle" or bipolar competition to dramatize and distract development efforts, how can the United Nations seek consensus on the need for a fairer, more just, world and focus on the long-standing needs of the poor?

Today a consensus is emerging around a fundamental perception that the unfettered talents of individual human beings are the greatest resource a society can bring to bear on the task of national development. But the troubled state of the global economy indicates that we are still far from achieving universal economic prosperity, social justice and environmental balance. Cooperation for development will require the greatest intellectual effort in the period ahead because, as understood and applied until now, it has not resolved the urgent problem of the development of the planet. The need is comprehensive. Issues once approached separately, or sequentially, now may be seen as essentially indivisible.

Changed View of Sovereignty

THE TRANSITION FROM one international era to another is symbolized today, as it has been at earlier turning points in the history of the United Nations, by a new group of member states taking their seats in the General Assembly. (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, San Marino, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan all joined in 1992.) Their entrance reaffirms the concept of the state as the basic entity of international relations and the means by which peoples find a unity and a voice in the world community.

While respect for the fundamental sovereignty and integrity of the state remains central, it is undeniable that the centuries-old doctrine of absolute and exclusive sovereignty no longer

stands, and was in fact never so absolute as it was conceived to be in theory. A major intellectual requirement of our time is to rethink the question of sovereignty—not to weaken its essence, which is crucial to international security and cooperation, but to recognize that it may take more than one form and perform more than one function. This perception could help solve problems both within and among states. And underlying the rights of the individual and the rights of peoples is a dimension of universal sovereignty that resides in all humanity and provides all peoples with legitimate involvement in issues affecting the world as a whole. It is a sense that increasingly finds expression in the gradual expansion of international law.

Related to this is the widening recognition that states and their governments cannot face or solve today's problems alone. International cooperation is unavoidable and indispensable. The quality, extent and timeliness of such cooperation will make the difference between advancement or frustration and despair. In this setting the significance of the United Nations should be evident and accepted. Nothing can match the United Nations' global network of information-gathering and constructive activity, which reaches from modern world centers of power down to the villages and families where people carry out the irreducible responsibilities of their lives.

At the other end of the scale only the United Nations can convene global-scale meetings of ministers and heads of states or governments to examine complex issues and propose integrated approaches. Such gatherings can have enormous implications for the world's good. At the Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, for example, states obligated themselves to take global consequences into consideration in their domestic decisions. This is a fundamental philosophic undertaking by the world's nations, adding one more pillar to the gradually growing array of internationally accepted principles of national conduct.

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Reforming the U.N.

RENEWING THE PROMISE of an effective and cooperative United Nations means, in the first instance, reform of the organization and the broader system of specialized agencies from within. There is much that can be done now, but it must be understood that this will be an evolutionary process. The world is still in some ways in its "Middle Ages" when it comes to international organizations and cooperation. Centuries were required before the struggle among monarchical and baronial forces was transformed into states capable of carrying out responsibilities in the fields of security, economy and justice. There is no doubt that the institutions of the U.N. system must travel such a path if chaos is to be avoided.

Given firm leadership and a common resolve by member states I am confident that major achievements can be made by the end of this century.

To initiate reform from within I launched, soon after taking office a year ago, a process of restructuring the U.N. Secretariat. My first short-term aim was to eliminate duplication, redundancy and excessive layering of offices and duties at headquarters. This process has brought some results and must continue toward a coherent institutional strategy.

The Administrative Committee on Coordination is the highest body bringing together the executive heads of all the specialized agencies and organizations of the U.N. system. This committee must act more definitively to guide and harness the work of the various organizations of the system.

Similarly, the Economic and Social Council, despite its preeminence in the charter, has proved too weak to provide coherence and form to the work of the specialized agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions, the regional economic commissions and the array of U.N. programs. Duplication is widespread; coordination is often nominal; bureaucratic battles aimed at monopolizing a particular subject are rife, and organizational objectives are sometimes in conflict.

The proliferation of institutions that characterize U.N. work in the economic, social and environment fields has been another product of previous decades. Member states often pressed for measures on a piecemeal basis. Bureaucracies were sometimes set up as substitutes for problem-solving and served, in some cases, to camouflage problems rather than expose them to serious attention.

I have recommended the introduction of a flexible high-level intersessional mechanism to enable the council to respond in a continuous and timely way to new developments in the economic and social sphere. It should possess an early-warning function encompassing threats to security and well-being: from energy crisis to the burden of debt, from the risk of famine to the spread of disease. As the Security Council can envision new possibilities in the cause of peace, so the Economic and Social Council's role can be significantly strengthened. At this time when old conceptions of development are fading and new departures are required, each element of the U.N. system will need to reexamine and justify anew its mission and the human and financial resources it employs.

The Interaction of Peoples

NEW POSSIBILITIES exist for shared, delegated and interactive contributions to the world organization from the burgeoning number of regional associations and agencies and the huge network of nongovernmental organizations that in the past largely operated from North America and Europe but increasingly are a feature in countries all over the world. More than a thousand NGOs are active in the United Nations, working through and with people everywhere.

There is an even deeper level to this trend: relationships among nations are increasingly shaped by continuous interaction among entire bodies politic and economic. Such activity almost resembles a force of nature, and indeed may be just that. Political borders and geographic boundaries pose slight barriers to this process. Governments increas-

“Governments increasingly prove ineffective in their efforts to control, guide or even keep track of these flows of ideas, influences and transactions.”

ingly prove ineffective in efforts to guide or even keep track of these flows of ideas, influences and transactions. The challenge for the foreseeable future will be to make sense of these evolving relationships between and among peoples.

As one area for such efforts, I have put forward the concept of “post-conflict peace-building.” In the aftermath of warfare, concrete cooperative projects that link two or more countries

and peoples in a mutually beneficial undertaking can not only contribute to economic and social development but also enhance the confidence that is so essential to peace. Freer travel, cultural exchanges, youth projects and changes in educational practices all could serve to forestall a reemergence of cultural and national tensions that could spark renewed hostilities. Post-conflict peace-building will be needed not only in cases of international conflict, but also for the increasing number of intrastate, internal conflicts arising today.

Changing U.N. Culture

THE SPIRIT OF the U.N. Charter was kept alive for decades under very difficult circumstances. Hope has been crucial; achievement is now required. Beyond declarations, beyond position-taking, the time is here to look at ideas as plans for action. Beyond restructuring, the culture of the United Nations must undergo a transformation.

The bipolar contest relegated the United Nations to a status far removed from its original design. A propensity to rhetoric, to protocol and a delight in maneuvering for marginal advantage or national prestige came to characterize many delegations' activities. Committees and commissions have been assigned important duties only to find governments participating through assignment of lower level officials, unauthorized to engage seriously. Time is too precious and the tasks too urgent today to permit these indulgences.

In the Cold War era a fundamental split was taken for granted on virtually every issue. We have been relieved of that burden. But we cannot expect to be free of controversy, dispute or debate. The problems before us are complex and the solutions not at all obvious. If we work seriously on them, we must expect serious differences of opinion. Rather than be deterred by this we should be grateful and eager to engage in the intellectual struggle that is needed. Sharp differences are inevitable, but consensus is possible. I am committed to a broad dialogue between the member states and the secretary general. Preserving the world authority of the United Nations requires the fullest consultation, participation and engagement of all states, large and small. This in turn requires the empowerment of people in civil society and a hearing for their voices at all levels of international society and institutions.