

Summary Observations

Today, as throughout the UN's history, there is no shortage of proposals for the "reform" of the Secretariat. For this reason and because this book is intended only as an introductory survey, we have not included any prescriptions for a way ahead. Instead, we provide below some concluding observations, highlighting recurring pathologies, ambiguities, and trade-offs in the hope of encouraging more historically informed discussions in the future.

The Secretariat and the Secretary-Generalship (An Ambiguous Mandate Evolving over Time)

The Preparatory Commission in London recognized that the very success of the organization would depend on there being a capable Secretariat, one that was not simply a conference organizer and implementer of mandates (as was the Secretariat of the League of Nations), but a Principal Organ which would help steer the new United Nations. However, this vision has not always been in the interests of some member state governments and each Secretary-General, in his own way and in his own political context, has had to push back repeated attempts to roll back Secretariat independence and agency.

The relationship between the Secretariat and other principal organs has changed greatly over time. On the one hand, the Security Council has a special influence over the Secretariat, through its role in the appointment of the Secretary-General and as a result, the disproportionate hold of the Permanent Five over key Secretariat appointments. On the other hand, the P5 have generally been among those least keen on a Secretary-General willing or able to act independently, except in cases where his actions have meshed with their own interests. The authority of the Secretary-General has shifted over time depending on his relationship to the P5 governments.

Since the General Assembly pays the UN's expenses, it has Charter authority over the budget. For a short time, US dominance over the General Assembly (until about 1960) meant that the US and its allies provided the bulk of the Secretariat's funds and controlled its budgeting process. But for the past forty or so years, a "G-77" or "Third World" majority has exercised considerable control over the Secretariat budget through its majority in the Assembly. Much of the life of the Secretariat and the Secretary-General involves juggling the (often competing) demands and priorities of the Security Council and the (G-77 dominated) General Assembly. Meanwhile, through the 5th committee, the broad governance role of the Assembly has crept into the day-to-day management of the Secretariat, greatly restricting the Secretary-General's flexibility in his role as CAO. Many reform initiatives have been attempts to readjust the balance between governance and management.

The Work of the Secretariat (Multiple Functions and Personalities)

The work of the Secretariat has always been divided into distinct parts. The vast majority of its staff have always been primarily involved in providing basic conference services and supporting the intergovernmental organs; informing the general public about the UN and its work; providing technical assistance to developing countries; collecting information and undertaking a variety of studies on economic and social issues at the request of the membership. For more than forty years, only a tiny number of staff were ever engaged in the actual political work of the Secretary-General, supporting his good offices and assisting his mediation function. This changed dramatically in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the rising number and complexity of peacekeeping operations and the need for more peacekeeping-related staff at headquarters. But even by 2006, political and peacekeeping-related staff comprised under 8 percent of the Secretariat's staff at headquarters. Meanwhile, apart from Hammarskjöld, no Secretary-General has had particular expertise in economic and social affairs, which has perhaps contributed to the lack of leadership in those areas.

The Organization of the Secretariat (Different Models for Different Political Contexts)

The Secretariat has had three basic organigrams since 1946. The first, from 1946 to 1954, was a simple organigram of eight departments, each headed by an ASG, with an Executive Office of the Secretary-General. The second, established by Hammarskjöld, created a much bigger Secretary-General's office (later called the "Offices of the Secretary-General"), which included the Personnel and Budget offices, as well as the Legal Office and the Office of Special Political Affairs. By the late 1980s, the Offices of the Secretary-General included a plethora of ad hoc offices (such as those dealing with Namibia and Cambodia). Hammarskjöld's original idea of the Secretary-General personally supervising personnel and budgetary policy was by then long gone. Many other new offices and departments (outside the "Offices of the Secretary-General") had mushroomed, especially in the 1970s and early 1980s.

In a third organigram, devised by Boutros-Ghali in 1992, the notion of an "Offices of the Secretary-General" distinct from the rest of the Secretariat was abolished and replaced with a more streamlined system. All departments were now under USGs reporting to the Secretary-General. Under Annan, the structure was made more complex with the establishment of a Deputy Secretary-Generalship as well as Executive Committees and "focal points" meant to increase coordination between the various Secretariat departments, specialized agencies, funds, and programs.

Reflecting the demands on the Secretary-General's attention, the apparatus immediately surrounding him has also become more complex, containing more speech writers, a "strategic planning unit" and a "director of communications." The question of how the Secretary-General delegates authority for the wide-range of tasks required of him is one that the various incumbents have responded to differently. In contrast to the early Secretaries-General, Annan in particular has been forced to delegate, for example through the DSG and empowerment of the *Chef de Cabinet* position.

The Organization of the Secretariat in the Field of Peace and Security (Different Models for Different Secretaries-General)

Secretaries-General from Hammarskjöld through Pérez de Cuéllar depended on their Office of Special Political Affairs for all of their important and sensitive political work, including preventive diplomacy and mediation, and peacekeeping. This was a deliberately small and top-heavy office with one or more USGs and even as late as the mid-1980s only fifteen other, mainly senior, staff. In the late 1980s, the Offices of the Secretary-General also included offices set up to support specific peacekeeping operations or good offices efforts.

There was always a much larger Department of Political and Security Council Affairs. But because this department was headed by a Soviet appointee (with an American heading its main “General Political Division”), it was never given important tasks. Some related functions – like “Disarmament Affairs” and “Outer Space Affairs” – were at times merged into DPSCA. Other independent offices were also created, such as the short-lived Office for Research and the Collection of Information and the Office for Special Political Questions.

In 1992, Boutros-Ghali sought to rationalize the situation by merging all existing department and offices into two peace and security departments: (1) From the Office of Special Political Affairs and all the ad hoc offices dealing with specific peacekeeping missions, he created the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. An administrative and logistical component was also merged into this new department. (2) The formerly Soviet-led Department of Political and Security Council Affairs was merged with half a dozen or so other offices (such as the Centre for Apartheid and the Office of Special Political Questions) to create the Department of Political Affairs. But the division of labor between the two new entities was never made clear and “political affairs,” previously a function clearly in the domain of the Secretary-General’s own office, now occupied an ambiguous relation to the rest of the Secretariat.

Especially in Annan’s second term, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General again played an increasing role in political

affairs, with the appointment of “Special Advisors” and a Director for Political Affairs, Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Affairs.

The Independence of Staff (an Old Problem)

The Charter and the Preparatory Commission envisaged a Secretariat of career international civil servants independent of all national governments. This was a model opposed by the Soviet Union and its allies during the Cold War. From the start, the appointment of Soviet officials to high positions undermined the initial vision, both through the appointments themselves and through the precedent it set for other (primarily P5) countries also insisting on specific posts. While lobbying for more nationals in the Secretariat was common from the 1950s, by the 1970s specific jobs in the top echelon were being coveted by one or more of the big powers. In the 1990s it became accepted, for example, that a US nominee would be the USG for Management, a UK nominee would head the Department of Political Affairs, and a French nominee the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. In the past, only the Soviet Union had enjoyed this sort of apparent claim to office.

At lower levels, pressure by member states on the Secretary-General to accept this or that national candidate has been endemic for some time. Many bureaucracies have a mix of political appointments and careerists, but in the Secretariat this is not rationalized in any way (for example by ensuring that a senior political appointment is routinely assisted by a deputy of long experience in the organization).

The Vexed Question of Ensuring Geographic Distribution (Never Adequately Addressed and in Need of a Strategy)

It was clear from the start that ensuring the staff was both top-quality and representative of the entire membership would be difficult (but not impossible). Early on, a big challenge was ensuring enough staff from the Latin American countries (then a plurality in the General Assembly) because of the difficulty of finding candidates with suitable qualifications who were also fluent

in English and wished to move to New York or other UN locations. Later, with an expanding Asian and African membership, the problem was compounded by the need for many of these newly decolonized countries to retain for themselves their most educated young professionals.

What was also clear from the start was that the best solution to this problem was to identify and actively recruit good people from around the world and offer them the necessary language and other training they might need. In other words, the Secretariat needed to be proactive and help create the labor pool it needed. This was never done.

The Quality of Staff and the Secretariat as a Career (the Most Basic and Urgent Reform)

The quality of Secretariat staff was always viewed as mixed. In the earliest days this was because of the rush to recruit. But later fairly basic questions emerged: How does the Secretariat dovetail the need for often very specialized technical or professional skills and training with the idea of a career civil service? What happens to a staff member who has been recruited based upon a particular set of skills (such as cartography or an expertise in the Middle East) after a few years? Are staff members generalists or experts?

In the UN's early years, it was at least possible to recruit (temporarily or for life) a top diplomat or development expert from a national government or university. But given that the UN has become increasingly complex, with its own internal fields of expertise (for example running a peacekeeping operation), how is it possible to recruit new people with sufficient a priori knowledge of the organization? Could a training program be created that would be mandatory, viewed seriously, and actually serve to screen bad candidates?

Moreover, as the Secretariat routinely accepts political appointments at (especially) a senior level, how can career bottlenecks be avoided? At present, the Secretariat has relatively few junior staff and many middle to upper-middle level (P4-D1) staff with few prospects for further upward mobility and after many years in the organization and specialized UN skills, few prospects

for employment outside. Can an “up or out” system create a senior or executive service where management competency would be required? What is the right way to manage political appointees and career civil servants? What is the right way to manage technical experts (who might for example join the organization only for a short period) and those who could later assume more general and managerial functions?

These are questions which have never been answered. Yet, they are integral to an organization for which salaries and personnel costs account for approximately 75 percent of regular budget expenditure.

Financial Crisis and the Reformist Impulse (a Recurring Challenge)

There have been numerous attempts, big and small, public and low-profile, to reform the Secretariat since its inception. Hammarskjöld acted aggressively at a time when the Secretariat was in deep crisis. He had his own strong vision of an international civil service and also enjoyed the backing of the US, which then effectively controlled the General Assembly and thus the UN’s budget. Later Secretaries-General all attempted to improve the Secretariat but with only moderate success. While many reform processes began with a desire to improve the Secretariat’s management of human resources, these same processes often ended with more superficial changes to the Secretariat’s organigram.

An important part of the Secretariat’s history is the element of its recurrent financial crises – in the 1960s and 1970s the result of Soviet unwillingness to pay its peacekeeping dues, and in the 1980s and 1990s the result of American attempts to force budgetary and other reforms. These crises have repeatedly guided the reformist impulse towards cut-backs rather than more thought-through and long-lasting reforms.

Transitions as Windows of Opportunity

The transition from one Secretary-General to another has traditionally been an opportunity for administrative reform and

reorganization. However, each transition has presented its own challenges and risks and each Secretary-General has differed in his handling of the process. Whereas Thant initially kept many of Hammarskjöld's senior staff (largely because he was first only an Acting Secretary-General), Waldheim oversaw a fairly thorough transformation of the top echelon from the very start. Pérez de Cuéllar also made many changes in personnel at the outset as did Annan. Boutros-Ghali's start, occurring at the end of the Cold War, was perhaps the most sudden and revolutionary from a structural perspective. He did away with key posts, abolished whole offices and departments, created new ones and appointed a new senior team all within the first weeks of taking office. However, only Hammarskjöld systematically and personally supervised a change to management practices and policies as well as the structure of the Secretariat and the composition of the senior echelon. He did this only after nine months of careful and focused study, leading to major changes in human resources management and in his own relationship with the General Assembly. Hammarskjöld benefited from a sympathetic context but also came to the Secretary-Generalship with a clear interpretation of Chapter XV of the Charter and a vision of "the international civil servant."