



VIVISECTION: REFORMING THE U.N.

Newton Bowles
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Here I am again. I wonder how much longer you can put up with me. At least you have had a good lunch, you eat before I talk, a good arrangement. Now it's my turn. I may have to eat my words.

You who have spent any time south of the border will share my relief at being up here again. We have moved the furniture around a bit in Bytown but we still live in the same house. We have no glorious myth about how we began; we just talked our way into it. Even our national hockey myth has found us on thin ice. We may not know who we are, but we know who we are not. In the big world, clustered around the U.N., who are we?

The search for identity is not unique to Canada . It is deeply, passionately and tragically inherent in the very existence of the United Nations. The name itself exists as hope. We are living in the kindergarten of world civilization. Against the backdrop of bloody human history, it is something of a miracle that the U.N. exists at all. The League of Nations lasted only 20 years; the U.N. has made it to sixty. With 191 member states and 160 nationals in the Secretariat, the U.N. could be the young mother of a new identity, a citizen of the world.

Let us remember that, in joining the U.N., states commit themselves to work together, to avoid war, to promote the good life for all. Joining the U.N. is a formal commitment under international law. It is an easy commitment since there is no built-in penalty for breaking the law. At the international bar, we have just the beginnings of criminal justice through the ad hoc war crimes tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda , mimicked by joint U.N. and national tribunals in Sierra Leone and Cambodia ; and now at last, the permanent International Criminal Court. Along with universal jurisdiction stemming from the Geneva war protocols, there is now a way to catch some of the worst monsters. It is beginning to happen.

On the world's maternity ward, the birthing of the U.N. was something new. Would this baby survive? Could it be born again? My reverend father kept telling his flock that they had to be born not once, but again and again. So it seems with the U.N. Is it vivisection or resurrection?

With 24-hour TV and airlines criss-crossing the globe, we can't help noticing that the world is a pretty messy place. The whole mess lands on the doorstep of the United Nations. That's the place to fix it, isn't it? So the tinkering goes on. Over the years, I have seen them come and go, the international midwives playing with the machinery which they themselves set up. Fix the world, fix the United Nations.

There is a big problem for these super midwives, and that is: How will you know it is fixed? If you are fixing a car, you know it is fixed when it runs. That is what it is supposed to do. What about the U.N.? What do we, this dysfunctional world family, want the U.N. to do? The Charter sets the goal and the rules. Do we really mean it?

The latest go at it was the summit of world leaders, coming to New York to celebrate the U.N.'s sixtieth anniversary last September, 2005. This was not just one more summit. The very existence of the U.N. seemed challenged as our neighbor, the super power, defied the Security Council, invaded Iraq, and said it could attack perceived enemies anywhere, anytime. Going it alone in this brash way had been triggered by 9/11, the terrorists strikes on New York's Trade Towers, and on the Pentagon. Terrorism is nothing new, but the penetration of the American fortress, while a disaster for its victims, for the terrorists was a spectacular P.R. success. The summit gathering in New York was a critical event. There were knives at the U.N. throat. Could terrorism kill the U.N.?

Let me first say something about terrorism itself, and then go on to the Summit. There are already 12 international treaties on specific aspects of terrorism. These treaties were created through the U.N. But there is a big political problem. The problem is this: What is terrorism? In 1937, a comprehensive treaty on terrorism was presented to the League of Nations, but it got nowhere because there was no consensus on what we mean by terrorism. We are still there today. There is no overall treaty on terrorism because members of the U.N. can't agree on what it is. Is it state terrorism or only what guerrillas--not governments--are doing?

On this issue, where is Washington? Having turned its back on the U.N. shortly after 9/11, the U.S.A., the Pentagon, is now saying that it needs international help. This is a major concern of the Security Council which is actively engaged in coordinating worldwide action to catch and paralyze terrorists. This is not a military problem, it is much more psychological and political.

So now to the 60th birthday Summit. You don't bring world leaders to the U.N. for a round of cocktail parties. They are there for only three days. Everything depends on what has gone before, on thinking through this U.N. crisis, on what has to be done to maintain and strengthen the U.N.--Vivisection or renaissance?

Some of you may have read my newsletter of last November in which I told the story of this Summit. I will recap that story now and bring it up to date.

There are two narratives, two stories. The first and far the more important is about governance, the General Assembly and Security Council, their mandates and the way

they behave. The other story is about the hired help, the Secretary General and his staff, at the beck and call of the governments and their fickle funding.

In popular reporting, these two distinct stories often are mixed up. For those who wish to undermine the U.N.--the vocal rabble to our south--this is a convenient confusion. The Secretary General, who in reality has little authority, is attacked for the stumblings of governments. "S.G." means Scape Goat, says Kofi Annan. Decapitating the Secretary General won't improve government behavior.

Reform was the buzz word for the Summit , a word that implies going back to some idyllic time, whereas in fact the U.N. must move forward. But then, in political life, since when was anyone troubled by semantics or etymology. So reform it is, reformation.

Preparation for September went back a year or more. Crisis provoked two major and complementary studies. Best brains were brought in to think about the two main dimensions of the U.N.: Security (or threats) and Development (meaning human development, a better life for all). These two dimensions, converging and meshing, are what the U.N. is all about.

Terrorists and Iraq --the U.S.-led invasion--put fire to the feet of the eminent students of threats to security. They took a wide-lens look, focusing on human security--not just state security--and on how to make societies more stable and secure: What must be done to prevent war and terrorism, to control arms (especially nukes), to protect the people from mass violence, to realize human rights, to update the Security Council. This was a serious probing of life and death issues.

The study of development had a made-to-order platform, the U.N. Millennium Development Goals, adopted in 2000. Just to remind, the goals were to show U.N. action (i.e., action by the N , the Nations) within a time frame, by the year 2015. The core goal, enabling all else, was halving extreme poverty (one billion people living under \$1 a day). There followed: Universal primary education (especially for girls); gender-equality in all education: Two-thirds reduction in under-five toddler deaths; three-quarters reduction in the ratio of maternal deaths; turning back major diseases (HIV, malaria, TB); and doubling access to safe water and sanitation. Broader goals had to do with a comprehensive strategy for promoting development and protecting the environment.

The report on development is more prospective than retrospective. The approach is advocacy, as its title shows: Investing in Development - A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals. For developing countries, our poor cousins, what they must do (strategies) is spelled out. For richer nations, a phased increase in grant aid has to happen, rising from around 0.25 percent of GNP, up to 0.44 percent in 2006, and up to the U.N. norm of 0.7 percent of GNP by 2015. The report is careful to indicate what development countries themselves must invest. External aid isn't everything, but it is absolutely essential. The report estimates that, from the present annual level of around \$60 billion, external grant aid should reach \$73 billion by 2006, and \$135 billion by

2015. This is a long and detailed study, directed at fundamental strengthening of the development system, involving all players, national and international.

And so, ahead of the 60th anniversary Summit, two important "panels," top experts, came up with complementary advice on what to do. Security and development come together. Desperate poverty, the black hole separating rich and poor, is itself a time bomb. Human development is our only security. No development, no peace.

These were threads that Kofi Annan wove into his proposals for the September Summit. That was just one year ago. Backed up as it was by the two big studies, the agenda for September had been in the works for well over six months. This made it possible, through many months of hard work, for the U.N. drones to reach consensus ahead of the Summit.

Or so it seemed. Just days, hours, before the Summit was set to begin, a notorious new U.S. Ambassador arrived demanding many changes to this hard-won consensus. Nevertheless, struggling all through the night, the drones were able to salvage, to produce a somewhat weakened agenda for heads of state. So that is, blow by blow, chapter one of the Summit story.

Chapter two is the birthday party where national leaders signed on to action, to reform. The party was a bit subdued, but 147 heads of state were there, once again, saying how much they love the U.N. I hardly need to remind you that love takes many forms. What this love spawned was not bad, in fact a lot better than might have been expected. What reforms came out?

On governance, for the members of the U.N. club, there were a number of structural innovations, but little noticed was the formal adoption of a radical new principle, a radical advance into domestic violence, that is, the presumed immunity of sovereign states. This principle makes each state, each government, responsible to protect its citizens from gross violations of their rights, from such crimes as genocide. The responsibility to protect makes the U.N. the guardian of people's rights everywhere. Wherever terrible things are being done, mass violations of human rights, the U.N. has the legal and moral authority to intervene. Canada can take credit for the formulation of this principle and for its formal adoption by the U.N. Cynics will say this is only empty words, but it opens up a whole new strategy for the promotion of human rights.

Even giant U.S.A. must have noticed that human rights are highly political. Genuine democracy is the only sure foundation for human rights. The old Human Rights Commission had been strangled by a clique of rights violators. In its place the Summit created a Human Rights Council whose members should in fact be rights advocates. The Council is to examine the performance of all states, not only notoriously repressive states; and it will have more time to do its work, meeting not just once but at least three times a year. The basic idea for the Council, which came from Kofi Annan, was endorsed at the September Summit, but it had to be firmed up and formally established by the General Assembly. This happened only in March of this year. The U.S.A. voted against, on the

grounds that the Council might still be infiltrated by saboteurs. Rights advocates think the Council will be much better than the old Commission.

Canada has squirmed a bit as our treatment of first nations has been criticized, but we can feel good about the performance of our Louise Arbour as Human Rights Commissioner. The General Assembly voted to double the meager budget for her establishment.

The U.N. role as peace keeper, advanced by our Lester Pearson, has evolved into peace making and nation building. There are now 18 U.N. peace operations with 85,000 civilian and military personnel. New peace operations are under civilian direction to help countries recover from violent conflict. A new Peace Building Commission will back up these peace operations.

Now what about development and poverty? All this Summit could do was to endorse what the big study said, that grant aid must be doubled. It has been evident all along that, for development, the role of the U.N. is mainly diagnostic and prescriptive, to show what is wrong and what must be done to make things better. But the U.N. is important for humanitarian aid in emergencies, now feeding 100 million people. The demand for emergency aid doubled last year. New this year is the creation of a contingency fund of \$500 million for quick U.N. aid in sudden catastrophes.

Two big failures of this Summit are symptomatic of the hobbling of the U.N. One chronic failure was the block against updating the Security Council, to make it more representative of our times, more responsive to the whole membership of the U.N. The other tragic failure was silence on nuclear weapons, the threat that still hangs precariously over all humanity. Nukes are our worst terror, they must be abolished.

Now a word about management, the Secretary General and the Secretariat. What came out of this Summit with considerable fanfare was pretty much an acceleration of what Kofi Annan has been trying to do, to improve management, to open up performance, to free the Secretary General from political micro-management. Creating a more flexible secretariat and separating internal management from diplomacy are all to the good. But the General Assembly with all its foibles is right in insisting on the international status of the Secretariat.

And so ends my story about this Summit and reform. Where are we today and where are we going? What can we expect of heads of state? Lord Acton said it in 1887: Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Darfur is our test case. Too little and too late. Must it be too late? It is good that the African Union, for the first time, has put troops into humanitarian action. It is bad that the rest of us have dumped our responsibility on this fledgling African force. This is the face of corruption.

Yet the U.N. is still standing, shining a light on our apathy, our savagery, our moral corruption. And showing us nevertheless what good we are willing and able to do.

This has been a traumatic year for all who have invested life and hope in the U.N. Yet the U.N. has more than survived. The Summit did not advance on all fronts, but look at what it did: Peace Building , Human Rights Council, Responsibility to Protect. All new. Omissions, failures, these are our next agenda.

The international family is in its infancy. How can we break through the pervasive cynicism and apathy of our times? In Iraq , we see the latest demonstration of the limits of military power. It is not sentimental to speak of "soft power." In our minds and hearts, we have an inexhaustible currency.

Let me share with you something written by a Palestinian pastor coming out of the depths of despair. This is what he wrote:

"Suffering people desperately need to transform their feelings of being overwhelmed by the extent of the suffering into an ability to take control of the suffering by developing a vision of the future ... Rightly understood, hope is nothing less than gaining control over one's own destiny" (Mitri Raheb: Bethlehem Besieged, p. 153).

Hope and compassion will always be our weapons of mass construction . Invest in hope. The future is inevitable after it happens.