

A Critical Review: The New Agenda for Peace

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by

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I would like to start with three observations:

First, the United Nations is losing market share. If one could quantify global governance, I believe the UN's share has been declining. Financially, it is stable to declining in most budgets. For example, resources for UN Peacekeeping have declined or flatlined since 2015, and are now, in real terms about 30% less than eight years ago. In terms of membership, there are now 20 countries lined up to become members of the BRICS, and the G-20 continues to have growth in the breadth of its substantive agenda and in terms of heads of state interest, as we now see in the G-20 Summit to take place in three weeks.

Second, The P-5 wants competent but not dynamic Top UN leadership. Some years ago, Sir Brian Urquhart, the acknowledged historian of the UN, and I counted up 13 who were the truly dynamic change-making UN leaders—people who launched serious and fundamental initiatives and sometimes changed history. Naturally, Dag Hammarskjold was first on his list. Everybody agrees on Hammarskjold, but no great power wants another one. On my list, by the way, was Mrs. Ogata, who I so admired for quietly getting significant things done in the UN's Chief Executive Board meetings I attended. The potentially dynamic leader to watch now is Ajay Banga at the World Bank.

Third observation. The constraints on the Secretary-General are considerable. I remember a former secretary general launching some peacekeeping reforms and then being dressed down by the then president of the UN General Assembly for announcing changes without first getting his O.K., which, in this case, the UNGA President refused. Secretary-General Guterres has done the best he can in creating his new agenda. He has checked with all the relevant powers in and outside the UN, and what he has proposed, I'm sure, is less than he wanted, but it reflects all he can get.

I believe these points influence what we have in the New Agenda. In fact, it is bold because it took courage for the Secretary-General to acknowledge that the UN's peacekeeping work is failing. And it took courage to say the real action on peace is outside of the UN. To me, these are note-worthy points, and they create opportunities.

First, the key point that the SG very correctly observes is that the focus on peace must be on national capacities and institutions at the national level. The SG's description of this architecture is limited, so it is up to the rest of us to fill in the blanks by noting that a vibrant national peace architecture should include dedicated governmental functions, academic training, forecasting, building up of civil society, security

sector reform most often, and influencing the culture through campaigns and through curricula reforms that can keep the old militaristic histories but add to that the victories of peaceful settlements.

Unfortunately, there appears to have been no possibility for the Secretary-General to propose a solution to national peace architectures commensurate with the scale of need. He says let us add financing national architectures and infrastructures to the UN Peacebuilding Fund's mandates along with a new mandate to address climate and peace challenges: two big additions with zero new resources. As you know, the Fund is flatlined at about \$170 million yearly, a paltry amount for any of its mandates.

My colleagues and I at Plan for Peace have been working on an adequate funding mechanism to address peace architectures, institutions, and operations challenges. We are testing the concept of creating a new multilateral fund like GAVI and the Global Fund to fight three diseases. This would be an International Peacebuilding Fund, neutrally located (perhaps jointly in Geneva and Singapore) and staffed with experts demonstrating real social entrepreneurship skills. My paper goes into more detail about this proposed fund.

The bottom line is that the Secretary-General knows he should design an elephant, but his authority limits his design to that of a mouse. Dynamic leaders would not let this situation be the final word. They might organize international expertise to create new funding mechanisms; they might use their convening power to engage sources of global wealth to support new ways to fund peace; and they would not treat this as just one of a few hundred priorities but as a key part of their legacy.

The second courageous acknowledgment of the Secretary-General is getting a good deal of attention. His focus is on the deficits of UN peacekeeping in Africa. He proposes that African regional and sub-regional strengths be utilized to take up peacekeeping, with regular UN financial support. One must agree with Mr. Guterres that something serious must be done. And there are a few options. The old colonial powers want out. The new colonial power, Russia, may actually be less involved now that the Wagner Group is beginning to dissolve. But from my perhaps incorrect perspective, after ten years as senior advisor to the UN Economic Commission for Africa, turning to the African Union is not a panacea. Its record is not excellent, and it needs strengthening on the peace side of peacekeeping. ECOWAS is in better shape. Off-loading peacekeeping will have some applicability in Africa but none in the other regions where the regional organizations are not well organized to manage peace. Even in Europe, this is true, as there is no reliable European peacekeeping operation to assume duty in, for example, Cyprus, where \$57 million a year is spent on UN peacekeepers whose force has been on duty for an astonishing 59 years without a political solution. And that is so superior to Myanmar and other places where the Responsibility to Protect is not being instituted in any way.

What could a dynamic UN Secretary General do in these cases? Perhaps nothing. But also perhaps using his good offices to encourage countries to actually build up regional organizations acting as a friend and champion for the growth of regional and perhaps sub-regional political organizations. Making peer learning available from UN experts to regional functions, and so forth. This will be a long process, but it could be a vital step to foster a multi-polar world of regional political power as opposed to merely yielding to the biggest national powers in regions. I believe Asia has one of the greatest needs for this aggregation of effective power vested in well-balanced regional organizations.

So, my bottom line:

The UN is weak but vital. It can't be substituted by groups like the G-20 and BRICS with no professional depth. The Secretary-General has proposed a number of doable, incremental improvements. My paper lists these and adds some more doable ideas. Among the most important ideas is to upgrade and streamline the UN's Peacebuilding Commission into an empowered Council.

I feel particularly strongly that the UN needs to start getting approval and implementing the doable ideas. Each such improvement will add to the credibility of this weakened institution. I would never start the improvements with the hardest and least likely tasks, which, to my mind, is changing the composition of the Security Council. Let that come fourth or fifth in line. But the key point is to start the reforms. The results will be incremental. They need to be followed and publicized so that the UN is again seen as a place where humanity finds solutions and effectiveness. The SG must find the courage to end useless programs and concentrate on the key issues; none is more key than peace.

Thank you.