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The United Nations World Summit – What's at Stake?

Conspicuous foreign policy failures in Rwanda and Sudan, acrimonious disunity over Iraq, and highly publicized internal scandals have made clearer than ever before: the United Nations is in dire need of reform. Yet an ambitious reform agenda to be addressed by world leaders at the UN World Summit on 14-16 September appears in danger of failure. What are the major issues that will be on the negotiating table, and what obstacles are standing in the way of a successful outcome? This report has been produced within the framework of "Europe's Global Responsibility," a project implemented jointly by the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Center for Applied Policy Research.

Visions and Challenges on the Road to UN Reform

On 14-16 September 2005, more than 170 heads of state and government will converge on the United Nations headquarters in New York for a World Summit to celebrate the UN's 60th anniversary and, more importantly, to deliberate on a package of innovations and reforms meant to revitalize the troubled institution. The summit's ambitious agenda covers four main areas: development, peace and security, human rights and the rule of law, and the reform of UN institutions. The meeting holds the potential to launch the most comprehensive overhaul of the UN since its inception in 1945. In recent days, however, disagreements among member states over central reform proposals have come to light, thereby threatening to derail significant breakthroughs in key areas of international governance.

UN's 60th anniversary

Key Innovations and Reforms

The main proposals, innovations, and reforms for each of the four agenda items to be addressed at the World Summit are elaborated in a 39-page "draft outcome document" submitted by the President of the UN General Assembly, Jean Ping of Gabon. This document itself is derived primarily from the recommendations outlined in two of the most important reports to be produced under UN auspices in recent years: the Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, and UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's report, "In Larger Freedom: Towards Security, Development and Human Rights for All." In brief, the draft document's main reforms can be summarized as follows:

Threats, Challenges and Change

Development

Proposals in the area of development focus on debt relief, trade liberalization, and increases in foreign aid on the part of developed nations, as well as improved political and economic governance on the part of developing countries. These steps are meant to promote quicker progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were set forth in the 2000 Millennium Declaration and

include cutting extreme poverty in half and providing universal primary education by the year 2015. In particular:

- Developing countries are urged to take primary responsibility for their own economic and social development, particularly by pursuing sound macroeconomic policies, improving government transparency and accountability, and creating economic environments conducive to investment.
- In turn, wealthy nations are encouraged to provide debt relief, reduce trade barriers, and increase their share of official development assistance (ODA) to 0.7% of gross national income by 2015.
- An additional proposal involves the establishment of an International Finance Facility to front-load ODA commitments, thereby enhancing the availability and predictability of aid flows.

Millennium Development Goals

Peace and Security

The key foreign and security policy reforms to be addressed by the World Summit involve the issues of terrorism, disarmament and non-proliferation, the use of force, and post-conflict reconstruction:

- It is hoped that UN member states will reach agreement on a universal definition of terrorism explicitly declaring that the targeting of civilians and non-combatants is unacceptable under all circumstances.
- In addition, the summit aims to make progress in disarmament and non-proliferation efforts directed toward nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons; small arms and light weapons; and landmines.
- Further, the draft outcome document urges continued dialogue regarding the appropriate use of force and – under strictly defined conditions – opens the door for the possibility of preemptive military action.
- Finally, in what is potentially the most significant innovation in the field of UN security policy, summit participants are expected to approve the establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission. Comprised of representatives from the United Nations, national governments, sub-regional and regional organizations, major financial and troop contributors, and international financial institutions, the Peacebuilding Commission will be responsible for improving the coordination and strategic orientation of international responses to countries recovering from violent conflict. Although the Commission's proposed structure is problematic in several respects – (a) it reports to both the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which could lead to confused mandates and lines of authority; (b) it is described as an advisory body and therefore lacks the decision-making authority that would enhance its influence and credibility; and (c) the role of civil society actors on the Commission remains unclear – it nevertheless has the potential to close a key gap in the international security architecture.

Key policy reforms

Human Rights and the Rule of Law

Three proposed reforms in this policy field deserve particular emphasis.

- First, the largely discredited Human Rights Commission will be replaced by a smaller, elected Human Rights Council whose members are subject to approval of two-thirds of the General Assembly.
- Second, an independent and self-financing Democracy Fund will be created to promote capacity-building in democratic practices and institutions.

- Third, the draft outcome document adopts the “responsibility to protect” principle, which asserts that states have the responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. When states are unable or unwilling to do so, this responsibility must be borne by the international community, which must then decide on the appropriate instruments to safeguard the affected population. Such instruments may include preventive diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, and in extreme cases armed intervention.

Responsibility to protect

Reform of UN Institutions

These reforms focus on improving the internal functioning of the UN and include, most crucially, proposals to (a) reform the Security Council to make it more representative of the current constellation of states, (b) revitalize the moribund ECO-SOC, (c) streamline the structure and operations of the General Assembly, (d) reform the Secretariat’s staff and structure on the basis of a comprehensive budgetary and human resources review and (e) establish independent oversight of UN spending.

Internal reforms

The Rocky Road to Reform

Apart from the highly contentious issue of Security Council reform (see below), there appeared to be strong international support for the draft outcome document’s proposals in the run-up to the World Summit. However, recent events have exposed significant differences among key actors that could severely limit the ultimate outcome of summit deliberations. The most dramatic of these events was the submission by John Bolton, the new U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, of up to 750 substantive and editorial changes to the draft outcome document.

In the proposed changes, which became public only in late August, the United States seeks to remove nearly all references to the Millennium Development Goals, preferring instead to emphasize the so-called “Monterrey Consensus,” which underscores the need for developing countries to take more responsibility for their own economic growth by fighting corruption and improving the overall climate for investment and commercial activity. The U.S. also deletes numerical targets such as the goal of wealthy countries to spend 0.7% of GDP on development assistance. Furthermore, the U.S. wants to weaken the section on the “responsibility to protect” by asserting that the world bears a “moral responsibility” to act against massive crimes against humanity while preferring to avoid any legal responsibility to do so.

The position of the US

Other changes proposed by the Bush administration include the following:

- the removal of provisions referring to the International Criminal Court, the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change, and the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, all of which have been rejected by the U.S.;
- the deletion of a statement that the use of force should be a “last resort” when responding to security threats;
- the repeated deletion of the word “disarmament” in the section on nuclear weapons, in accordance with the U.S. government’s emphasis on nuclear non-proliferation rather than disarmament.

Perhaps most alarming of all, U.S. officials have stated that they would be perfectly satisfied if the draft outcome document were scrapped in favor of a 2-3 page statement of general intentions.

While the sheer volume and perceived last-minute nature of the changes submitted by the U.S. government have been sharply criticized in the international media (see, for example, Julian Borger, "Road Map for US Relations with Rest of World," *The Guardian*, 27 August 2005), the United States is certainly not the only member state with reservations regarding the summit proposals. For example, numerous non-aligned and developing countries are skeptical of the "responsibility to protect" clause, since they fear it could be misused by large powers as an excuse to intervene in weaker states. A number of Islamic countries are concerned that the proposed definition of terrorism could restrict the right of countries to resist foreign occupation. And developing countries worry that internal management and procedural reforms could cost them both political influence and jobs.

Reservations regarding the summit proposals

The European Union as well as most Latin American and African countries support the summit document largely as it stands. Dirk Jan van den Berg, Dutch ambassador to the UN, has stated that approximately 125 nations support the proposals. Nevertheless, a sense of crisis now grips UN officials as they engage in intense negotiations in preparation for the summit. Jean Ping has assembled a core group of representatives from approximately 30 nations to hammer out final compromises, and a new draft outcome document is expected within the coming days.

Security Council Expansion

At least one thing is certain for the World Summit: no final decision will be made regarding Security Council expansion during the meeting. UN officials had hoped consensus could be reached on this issue prior to the summit, but intractable disagreements among various camps of member states have caused any ultimate decision to be postponed until at least the end of 2005.

At present, three proposals for Security Council expansion have been submitted:

- The "G4": put forward with an intensive diplomatic onslaught by Germany, Japan, India and Brazil, this proposal seeks to add six permanent seats (for themselves and two African countries, all without veto power) and four non-permanent seats to the Security Council.
- African Union: submitted by the 53-member African Union, this proposal is very similar to the G4 plan, adding 11 seats (6 permanent, 5 non-permanent) to the Security Council while upholding veto powers for new permanent members.
- "Uniting for Consensus": promoted by a loose grouping of countries including Italy (opposed to a permanent seat for Germany), Pakistan (opposed to a permanent seat for India), South Korea (opposed to a permanent seat for Japan), Colombia and Argentina (opposed to a permanent seat for Brazil), this proposal seeks ten new non-permanent seats that are eligible for reelection.

Intractable disagreements

While the G4 proposal has gained the most traction, none of the submitted proposals enjoys enough support to succeed on its own. The G4 countries and the African Union missed a crucial opportunity to join forces in support of a compromise proposal when the AU decided, at a summit meeting in early August, to

maintain its insistence that new permanent members receive veto rights. As a result, the international community is currently in disarray with regard to the future structure of the Security Council. Current permanent members Russia, France, and the United Kingdom have signaled their support for the G4 plan, but the U.S. and China recently joined forces in opposition to it. Moreover, U.S. government officials have stated that they want to see clear progress on other aspects of UN reform before taking up the issue of Security Council expansion.

Meanwhile, Germany's prospects for a permanent Security Council membership are looking bleak. U.S. support for Germany's effort is essential, but this support has not been forthcoming. Not only has the Bush administration refused to support Germany's bid, but U.S. experts of all political stripes have expressed pointed skepticism toward the need for a permanent German seat (see, for example, Philip H. Gordon, "Scenarios for Reforming the United Nations," *Le Monde*, 9 August 2005; John van Oudenaren, "The German Seat on the UN Security Council: A Tough Call"; "Reforming the U.N.," *Washington Post*, 30 June 2005). The highly influential conservative Heritage Foundation has even gone so far as to urge the Bush administration to oppose any expansion of the Security Council whatsoever. Any resolution to expand the Security Council must be approved by each of the current permanent members as well as two-thirds of the General Assembly (128 states). Given the internecine rivalries among member states, the number of contending proposals, and the potential veto of certain current permanent members, it is questionable at this point whether the Security Council will be expanded at all.

Germany's prospects

Towards Effective Multilateralism or Institutional Obsolescence?

The UN World Summit and the ongoing process of UN reform will shed light on a number of key questions affecting interstate relations. Some of the critical issues to watch include:

The direction of U.S. foreign policy. As the world's sole remaining superpower and the leading financial contributor to the UN, the United States will have a pivotal influence on the UN reform process. The behavior of U.S. officials at the World Summit will therefore send a strong signal as to whether the Bush administration's recent international "charm offensive" indicates a substantive change in U.S. foreign policy towards a greater willingness to compromise and build effective alliances, or whether the U.S. government remains committed to pursuing a largely unilateral foreign policy that threatens to maneuver the U.S. further toward the margins of international public opinion.

Transatlantic relations. Given the European Union's support for the draft outcome document and the EU's overall commitment to strengthening the UN's effectiveness in the field of foreign and security policy, failure at the World Summit - particularly if it is perceived as a consequence of American intransigence - could exacerbate ongoing tensions in transatlantic relations.

Key questions affecting interstate relations

National interests vs. multilateral cooperation. As divisive national interests come increasingly to the fore in the run-up to the summit, those states and groups of states that favor strong institutions and multilateral solutions to foreign policy challenges must find common ground in order to achieve their objectives. For example, the G4 and the African Union will not be able to accomplish their goals

regarding Security Council expansion – in the face of U.S. and Chinese opposition – unless they compromise and join forces.

International conflict management strategies. Concrete proposals contained in the draft outcome document represent important innovations and advances in the field of conflict management. These include the establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission, the assertion of the "responsibility to protect" principle, the creation of a Democracy Fund, improvements in development policy, and a forceful emphasis on the interdependence between development, human rights, governance, and security. These steps aim to enhance the international community's capacity for action and coordination, so that international security policy debacles such as those in Rwanda, Iraq, Sudan, etc., might be avoided in the future. The outcome of the World Summit therefore has crucial implications for the future of international policies of conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction.

The United Nations has always been an unwieldy institution, and the implementation of all the proposals contained in the draft outcome document will not significantly alter this fact. Nevertheless, the reforms and innovations to be addressed by the World Summit represent an important step forward in strengthening multilateral cooperation to confront the intertwined challenges of development, governance, and security that have become increasingly global in scope. Furthermore, the UN needs the positive institutional momentum that a successful summit would provide, particularly in light of the past decade's foreign policy failures and internal scandals. Allowing national interests to gain the upper hand, or replacing a substantive final agreement with a watered down 2-3 page statement of general purpose, could weaken the UN's credibility and legitimacy and further marginalize the institution on the international stage.

Strengthening multilateral
cooperation

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