

CHALLENGES FACING THE UN, AND THE UK AT THE UN

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1. [Introduction]

It would be presumptive of me to be prescriptive about the UN after only 8 months in New York. And courageous to say something different from my new Minister, Henry Bellingham, who spoke at a UNA Forum event a month ago. But in the interest of stimulating a debate, I shall try to be both.

2. Earlier this week, Her Majesty The Queen visited the UN. It was her first visit since 1957, when the UN had only 77 members. She was thus able to bring a unique perspective of what the UN has done well, and done less well over the last 53 years. It was also an opportunity for us at the UK Mission in New York to reflect on the UN more broadly.

3. In January, a Times editorial referred to the UN as a “good deal less than the sum of its parts”. The UN certainly has many parts: four HQs, a combined assessed budget of £11 billion per annum, 37 different agencies and funds/programmes operating in 130 countries; 14 peacekeeping missions (with well over 100,000 troops, police and observers) and 27 political missions in the field. It is also busier than ever, with the UN agenda covering every global issue except trade. The Security Council adopted 600 resolutions in its first 40 years, but more than 1200 in the last 20 – a fourfold increase.

Successes and Failures

4. There have been significant successes across the three main pillars of the UN: (peace and security, development and human rights) in the 53 years between the Queen’s two visits:

- the UN has indeed played an important role in saving “succeeding generations from the scourge of war”. World War has been averted and interstate conflicts greatly reduced. There have been peacekeeping successes in the Congo, Cambodia, Angola and Sierra Leone. And lest we forget – this has not come cost free: 218 UN peacekeepers have lost their lives in the last 18 months alone.
- the UN has provided a platform for member states to set impressive targets for reducing global poverty through the Millennium Development Goals and it has established a framework for implementing them. In the last 25 years, 500 million people have been lifted out of poverty; and life expectancy has risen by more than five years;
- the UN has coordinated the international response to innumerable humanitarian disasters, most recently the Asian Tsunami and the Haiti earthquake;
- the UN has provided a platform for leading democracies to maintain a focus on human rights issues, on the back of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

5. But there have been well documented failures too:

- the UN has not prevented, or even reduced, intrastate conflict. UN troops failed to bring peace and stability to Somalia in 1993; they were unable to prevent the Rwandan genocide in 1994. The deployment of UN forces for several decades in eg. DRC, Cyprus and Kashmir has not brought about resolution of those conflicts. In all these cases of course, it is member states – and usually the most powerful – who have prevented the UN from playing a more dynamic role.
- the UN has struggled to tackle new global problems such as climate change, terrorism and the financial crisis – on all of which, the primary response has been shaped elsewhere;
- more fundamentally, it has struggled to foster a genuinely common approach among its disparate 192 members. For its first 45 years, the Cold War prevented an effective international response to many global problems. This has been replaced in the last 20 years by a North/South dynamic, which has inhibited collective action.

6. As a result, the UN is often marked by a gap between activity and effect; and between ambition and reality. In the last 12 months, some have even talked of a crisis of UN identity. The rise of the G20 is seen by many developing countries as a threat, especially after the G20 met in Pittsburgh during UN Ministerial week last year and declared itself “the premier forum for international economic cooperation”. The Copenhagen Summit in December led some in the developed world to doubt the UN’s ability to organise complex global negotiations. Multilateralism has never been under threat, but universalism – the UN’s underlying rationale – has been questioned.

The Need for the UN

7. But in reality, there is no alternative to the UN. It has unique legitimacy and representative authority, which allows it to provide a framework to tackle global problems, such as poverty, conflict, proliferation and climate change. UN peacekeeping operations are helping to stabilise the DRC, Haiti and even Sudan at a fraction of the cost of military intervention; political missions are making a difference in places like Somalia, that individual member states can’t reach. Even pariah states fear the authority of the Security Council, ICC and Human Rights Council. Iran, DPRK, Eritrea may defy the UN, but – as we saw last month on the Iran sanctions resolution – they try hard to avoid its condemnation.

8. From its inception, the UN has promoted democratic ideals and values. This continues today: recent developments such as the ICC, the responsibility to protect, the protection of civilians, especially women and children in conflict, the Human Rights Council are all expressions of this trend.

9. And the UK has a strong and privileged position in the UN system, not only because of our permanent membership of the Security Council, but also because we are a major donor and are seen as a force for good throughout the UN system. DFID is widely admired for its leadership of ideas in the development field. Politically, we should never underestimate the advantages that working in English gives us. Overall, it has been a real

pleasure to hear during my introductory calls in what high regard the professional and well motivated UKMis staff are held across the UN system.

10. The United Kingdom therefore has a strong interest in making the UN as effective as possible, fit to meet the challenges of the 21st century. It is one of the reasons why the new government attaches great importance to strengthening and reforming the UN's performance across all three pillars.

11. Today, I want to talk mainly about peace and security, but first a few comments on development and human rights.

Development

12. The MDG Summit in September will be one of the biggest set pieces of the year. Over 130 heads of state/government are expected to attend. It marks a final sprint to the line before the 2015 deadline set for achieving the MDGs. The Secretary-General has taken a lead, including by establishing a high level advocacy group (including Bob Geldof) to generate political momentum in the run up to the Summit. The UK will be pressing for agreement among world leaders to a framework for action for the next five years. This is particularly important at a time when budgets are under pressure from the financial crisis. The UK is a powerful role model here, as the government has reaffirmed its commitment to spending 0.7% of GNP on overseas development by 2013 – and to legislating to that effect.

13. At the same time, we are working to ensure effective value for money from the UN's development system. The government has a responsibility to British taxpayers to show that their generosity is properly targeted. Andrew Mitchell has set up a Multilateral Aid Review and told Agency heads in New York last week that he would be closely evaluating aid effectiveness. We are also championing the Delivery as One agenda, which is aimed at bringing together the different agencies working on a developing country into a single strategic delivery. Last month's conference in Hanoi of those countries who piloted Delivering as One shows that this is a win win reform – benefitting both donors and recipient countries.

14. I am delighted that – after nearly 4 years of negotiation – we are in the end game of System Wide Coherence. In particular, last week we secured agreement on the establishment of a new Gender Entity for women (UN women) which will bring focus and coherence to the disparate work done on women's development and empowerment across the UN system.

Human Rights

[15. We know that conflict has a devastating and disproportionate effect on women and girls - the impact is all the more debilitating because it most affects the very people we rely on to rebuild a society and deliver lasting peace and long term stability. We have seen how women can be a powerful force in resolving conflict in, say, Liberia; yet they are regrettably often the target of some of the most terrible abuses during a conflict.

16. Last year in the Security Council we agreed two Resolutions to address the continued threat from sexual violence in conflict, and to ensure that women's participation, including

in peace processes, can achieve the status it deserves. We have made some progress towards delivering a lasting effect on the ground in the DRC. But this is one of those issues where rhetorical promise comes easy, and action can be far more difficult.

17. This September marks the 10th anniversary of Resolution 1325 - often called a landmark, because it recognised for the first time that rape and sexual violence against women was so destabilising that it could represent a threat to international peace and security (the magic words for Security Council attention). Assistant Secretary-General Bob Orr recently said - and I think it's worth repeating here - that promoting the role of women in stabilisation and peace isn't a political imperative, it is an operational necessity.]

18. The Human Rights Council is the foremost HR organ of the UN. But it is still in its early childhood, if not its infancy. In some ways it has exceeded expectations: the Universal Periodic Review is the first truly universal human rights peer review system and the Council has on occasion issued important resolutions, for example on Burma and Sudan. But it has been unable to respond appropriately to some of the most serious recent human rights crises. Sri Lanka last year was a case in point. As an HRC Member since its creation, we have a responsibility to try and address some of its shortcomings. We want the Reviews in Geneva and New York to improve the Council's ability to carry out its mandate. This will be our guiding principle as the process kicks off later this year and we will work hard to find support among the HRC and wider UN membership for adjustments that strengthen Council performance.

Peace and Security

19. The nature of UN peacekeeping is changing, because the nature of conflict is changing. The Eritrea/Ethiopia peacekeeping mission could prove to have been the last of the traditional "interposition force" between two warring armies. Conflict is now intrastate, rather than interstate. This has a number of consequences:

- we are probably at the high water mark of total peacekeeping numbers. Rather than the current 100,000 I would expect in five years time for there to be around 60,000-70,000 peacekeeping troops;
- the type of troops required is changing. There is less need of infantry battalions; and more need for specialist units (eg engineering companies), enablers (eg helicopters and strategic airlift) and police (Haiti is a good example where the military are doing a job more suited to police);
- there is also a greater need for specialist civilian advisers, including Justice and the Rule of Law experts. This creates new challenges for member states' contributions. Whereas the bulk of UN infantry battalions comes from developing countries, many of the specialist cadres will need to come, in the first instance at least, from the developed world. As you know, the UK has established a cadre of deployable civilian expertise for just such eventualities;
- the focus has expanded from simple security to protection of civilians (now central to most peacekeeping operations), security sector reform, peacebuilding and capacity building. This is at the heart of what UN peacekeeping operations will do in the future;

- there is a higher premium on rapid deployability and rapid drawdown. Traditionally the UN has taken a lot of time to build up its forces (eg in Sudan) and many months to withdraw. Susana Malcorra (DFS) has put forward a “global field support strategy” aimed at addressing these weaknesses;

- there will be an increasing emphasis on working with, and through, regional organisations. Neither the AU/UN hybrid model in Sudan, nor the purely AU model in Somalia has worked perfectly, but the trend is - rightly in my view - in that direction.

20. Much of this is new, and will take time to evolve. But the direction of travel is clear, as Brahimi recognised back in 2000. The UK and France have been helping to build on his recommendations.

21. There are other challenges too. I will mention two of them today:

(a) host country consent. We have seen already this year two cases - Chad and DRC- in which heads of government asked UN peacekeepers to leave. The Secretariat, together with the Security Council, is considering ways to ensure that there is a better – and perhaps more binding – agreement between the UN and the host country at the start of a peacekeeping mandate, which will prevent precipitate expulsion – which in most cases would be disastrous for the civilian population – and is also very wasteful in financial terms;

(b) understanding the links between peacekeeping and peacebuilding. The UK believes that conflict prevention, peace enforcement, peacekeeping, peacebuilding are all part of a single whole. The Security Council should consider them all. Peacekeeping mandates should not be agreed without careful thought being given to the exit strategy through peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Most importantly, we should do more conflict prevention in the first place, to avoid the need for peacekeeping missions. This is something that the UK is pioneering in the Security Council. Last month we held a series of events looking strategically at how the Security Council should tackle Sudan, in particular in the run-up to the January 2011 referendum in southern Sudan.

[22. Non proliferation and Disarmament is the other key pillar of peace and security. The past 12 months have seen a reinvigorated period of activity at the UN, in part thanks to the priority given to the issues by the Obama administration. Last September saw the first Security Council meeting chaired by a US President adopting the Security Council's most forward resolution on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation ever. In May, for the first time in 10 years, the NPT Review Conference ended in agreement. Next week, the first round of negotiations on establishing an Arms Trade Treaty to regulate the supply of conventional arms will get underway, and we hope that these negotiations will result in a new international treaty by 2012. The Convention on Cluster Munitions will enter into force on 1 August 2010, six months after it was ratified by the requisite 30 states.]

Conclusion

23. That is a huge agenda and the challenges facing the UN will continue to mount. This week the Security Council is deciding on a response to the sinking of a South Korean warship. Next week the Secretary-General's Climate Finance Panel (of which Chris Huhne and Lord Stern are members) meets to look at ways of mobilising public and

private finance for the mitigation and adaptation actions required to meet our agreed climate goals. The UN remains the default organisation to tackle global issues across the three pillars (peace and security, human rights and development). Strengthened and expanded regional organisations may gradually take up some of the slack (I've referred to the African Union on Peacekeeping in Africa). But I do not see that diminishing the UN's central role.

24. That is why we put such an emphasis on reform. Not just Security Council reform – though that is important. As William Hague said in his first major foreign policy speech last week, geopolitically the world is changing and it is right that Security Council membership should reflect that change. But it would be wrong to focus all our efforts in that area. There are other less, glamorous, reform issues which can make a huge difference: in personnel and budgeting for instance; in System Wide Coherence and General Assembly procedures. I have been struck by the massive difference that can be made by choosing the right candidate as the Force Commander of a peacekeeping operation; or as a Special Representative in a troubled region.

25. In my first few months, I have sensed a willingness among a significant number of member states, but also in the senior reaches of the UN secretariat, to make progress in these areas too. That is another reason for me to look to the future with optimism.

Notes:

Sir Mark has been in his post at the UN in New York since November 2009, representing the UK on the Security Council and in the General Assembly. Previously he spent two years as Director General for Political Affairs at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. From 2003 – 2006 he served as British High Commissioner to Pakistan. Other international postings included two years as Deputy Head of Mission in Pretoria and three years as First Secretary in Paris. Other roles at the FCO in London included three years as Africa Director, two years as Head of the European Union Department and two years as Private Secretary to Lynda Chalker MP (then FCO Minister of State).