Kofi Annan's Legacy of UN Reform

Thomas Biersteker
Graduate Institute, Geneva

Abstract: Throughout his ten-year term as United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan pursued reform of the organisation in an effort to strengthen its legitimacy, effectiveness, efficiency, and fairness. This article begins with a definition of UN reform and identifies four different types: Security Council reform, reform of administrative practices, incremental procedural reforms, and creation of new institutions to address contemporary challenges. It next examines Kofi Annan's initiation of reforms over the course of his term in office, from the time of his selection in 1996 to the end of his term in 2006. In addition to his engagement with all four forms, he also pursued improvement of the organisation in each of the three pillars of the UN Charter: security, development, and human rights, arguing that they were fundamentally interrelated. Kofi Annan believed that reform was a process, and he pursued it not only throughout his term in office but also afterwards through his foundation and other activities. His legacy of reform has been continued by his successors in the Office of Secretary-General.

Keywords: Kofi Annan, United Nations, reform, Security Council, administrative practices, procedures

INTRODUCTION

Kofi Annan touched many people throughout the world with his quiet but persistent diplomacy on behalf of humankind. He stands out among former United Nations (UN) Secretaries-General for his vision, humility, and inspiring leadership. Throughout the course of
his tenure as Secretary-General, Kofi Annan played an unusually important role in initiating and facilitating significant UN reform efforts. UN reform is an ongoing, and ultimately, never-ending process, but it is useful to reflect on the distinctive and significant contributions to major UN reform facilitated by Kofi Annan during the ten years in which he served as UN Secretary-General, as they contain insights into the challenges and possibilities of the organisation.

**UN reform**

UN reform is a constant process. The organisation as a whole – as well as its myriad agencies, departments and programs – are constantly undergoing a variety of different types of change and transformation in order to maintain the organisation's relevance, effectiveness, and legitimacy. Mandates change, membership changes (primarily through expansion), and sources of financing change, often with significant consequences for the governance of the organisation. None of the core characteristics identified by scholars of institutional design\(^1\) – membership, scope of issues, degree of centralisation, rules of decision-making, and degree of flexibility – is ever fixed or stable for very long periods of time. Sometimes this change is intentional; that is, it is deliberately designed to improve the performance of the organisation. This is what distinguishes reform from change, although unintended incremental changes can also sometimes trigger performance improvements.

Broadly speaking, there have been four different types of UN reform since the founding of the organisation, and Kofi Annan was instrumentally involved in all four at some point during his term as Secretary-General. The first is Security Council reform. Many equate UN reform with Security Council reform even though changes in the Council’s composition have been rare and the assignment of permanent membership and the veto have remained unchanged since the founding of the organisation. The most significant changes have been the expansion of the number of Council members from 11 to 15 in 1965, and the transfer of the representation of China from the Republic of China (Taiwan) to the People’s Republic of China in 1972.

A second type of UN reform is that of institutional administrative practices within the UN Secretariat and operational agencies, funds, and programs. The introduction of improved
management systems, greater transparency, institutional re-
organisations, and arrangements to increase accountability are
typically associated with efforts to improve the efficiency of the
organisation. Calls for administrative reform tend to come from the
major financial contributors to the organisation, particularly from
the United States, its largest contributor since the founding of the
UN.

A third, and generally less noticed or appreciated form of
reform, is incremental procedural reform sometimes undertaken at
the micro-level. This refers to changes in the working methods of UN
committees, the creation of new oversight mechanisms and
authorities, or the creation of doctrine or strategies for existing
institutional activities. Incremental procedural changes in working
methods can have significant and long-standing consequences since
they establish new precedents and can be used to empower
members of Security Council committees in some instances. The
creation of new oversight mechanisms, doctrines, or authorities
within the Secretariat can also have far reaching implications for the
performance and legitimacy of the organisation.

A fourth and final kind of reform is the creation of new
institutional forms for addressing contemporary challenges. Whenever a new difficulty emerges and existing institutions are
already over-extended or have mandates that are difficult to expand,
new institutional forms can be created to address the emerging
concerns. They may be temporary or term-based arrangements, or
they may become new ways of associating with other actors. The
alternative is to form ad hoc inter-agency groupings of existing
organisations, a common practice in the history of UN reform but a
practice that often becomes bogged down in bureaucratic and inter-
institutional rivalries, where turf protection and established ways of
approaching a topic take precedence over addressing new
challenges.

Each of these four types of reform – Security Council,
administrative, procedural, and institutional form – entails more
than simple change in policies and practices. They can be considered
“reform” if they are deliberately intended to improve the legitimacy
of the organisation (in the case of Security Council reform), the
efficiency of the operational capacity of the organisation (in the case
of administrative reform), the fairness of the organisation (in the
case of some types of procedural reform), and the effectiveness and
relevance of the organisation (in the case of the creation of new
institutional forms). As will be demonstrated, Kofi Annan was
associated with all four types of reform during his term as Secretary-General, to a degree that exceeded that of most of his predecessors and successors.

*Kofi Annan and UN reform*

Kofi Annan was by no means the first UN Secretary-General to embark on United Nations reform efforts. Joachim Müller's *Reforming the United Nations: A Chronology* documents the recurring efforts of his predecessors, from Trygve Lie's foundational innovations with the creation of new entities and subsidiary bodies through to Dag Hammarskjöld’s establishment of peacekeeping, U Thant’s focus on development, Kurt Waldheim’s creation of the UN Environment Program, Javier Pérez de Cuéller’s administrative and financing reforms, and Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s innovative *Agenda for Peace*. Boutros-Ghali, the only Secretary-General to be limited to a single term, does not receive sufficient credit for the many innovative ideas he introduced in the Agenda for Peace, some of which, like peacebuilding, were eventually brought into institutional existence by Kofi Annan. A recurring theme in the history of UN reform efforts is the need to maintain adequate financing for the organisation – not only by satisfying its major donor, but also keeping up with the ever-growing list of demands on its agenda: from development to the environment and changing threats to international peace and security.

Kofi Annan’s association with reform was present even before he was selected UN Secretary-General. In his detailed analysis of the relationship between the office of the Secretary-General and the office of the US President, James Traub argues that one of the reasons the US objected to the second term of Boutros Boutros-Ghali was the firm conviction among senior members of the Clinton administration that reform of the organisation would be impossible under his continued leadership. Quoting a passage from Madeline Albright’s memoir, Traub writes that Boutros-Ghali was considered as “not committed to, or capable of achieving, our urgent reform goals.” Like many reforms, the impetus for purposive change in this instance was partially financial. The Clinton administration was under strong pressure from the US Congress to reduce the size of the US contribution to the United Nations and wanted to ensure that more efficient ways of running the organisation could be found in order to placate domestic critics of the multilateral organisation.
As a result, Kofi Annan’s legacy with UN reform can be traced back to his very first days in office. As the first UN Secretary-General to come up through the ranks of the UN Secretariat, he knew well the strengths, the potential, and the weaknesses of the organisation. He had also experienced some of its most searing failures, including its failure to respond effectively to the genocide in Rwanda under his watch as Under-Secretary-General of the UN’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in 1994. During his first month in office in January 1997, Kofi Annan made some management changes, grouping UN departments, funds and programs under four executive committees, including committees for Peace and Security, Development, Economic and Social Affairs, and Humanitarian Affairs. He also established a Policy Coordination Group in order to create a strengthened, cabinet-style executive management team, and he appointed UN veteran Maurice Strong to the new post of Under-Secretary-General for Reform.

A few months later, in March of 1997, Annan announced the first phase of his reform agenda and issued a report to the General Assembly on Management and Organizational Measures that called for the merger of some existing UN agencies, a goal of reducing administrative costs to 25% of the budget, cutting 1000 regular UN budget posts, developing a code of conduct for Secretariat staff, and strengthening the role of UN Resident Coordinators by making them leaders of UN country teams. The cuts in personnel and reductions in administrative costs were part of the effort to placate UN critics in the US Congress.

A few months later, in July of 1997, Annan unveiled his new reform package, Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform (A/51/950) which called for additional managerial reforms, including the creation of a Deputy Secretary-General position, strengthening of the UN’s peacekeeping rapid response capability, consolidating UN funds deployment under the resident coordinators at the country level, and reaching out to civil society and business actors. He also raised the idea of introducing results-based management into UN operations. Other important administrative re-organisations were proposed involving human rights, disarmament, emergency relief, drug control, and crime prevention. The General Assembly approved most of these reform proposals, but deferred action on results-based management and other controversial reform proposals, to later in the year.

However, Kofi Annan’s contributions to UN reform went far beyond the mundane, even if important, administrative and
management reforms with which he began his term in office. He used the occasion of the coming Millennium in 2000 to support the idea of convening a Millennium Summit and articulating a set of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000. This was a novel institutional form, taking advantage of a one-time event – the advent of a new millennium – to energise and mobilise the UN to address one of the three pillars of its institutional mandate: the promotion of international development. As articulated in the publication issued under his name by the UN's Department of Public Information in 2000, *We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century*, the eight goals were intended to "put people at the centre of everything we do." The goals focused on tangible, material improvements in living standards with special emphasis on hunger and extreme poverty, education, gender equality, health (with three interrelated goals), environmental sustainability, and development partnerships. The process by which the MDGs were selected was relatively top-down, and sceptics raised questions about the challenge of achieving them without identifiable criteria and the absence of new resource allocations to facilitate them by the target date established for their fulfilment in 2015. The process initiated under the leadership of Kofi Annan has continued and has been extended in the form of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by the UN by 2030.

Recognising that the "goals of the United Nations and those of business can, indeed, be mutually supportive," Kofi Annan proposed the creation of another new institutional form at a World Economic Forum meeting in 1999. He suggested that business leaders from the private sector and the United Nations initiate "a global compact of shared values and principles, which will give a human face to the global market." The sometimes controversial set of partnerships with major business enterprises worldwide – controversial from the standpoint of some advocacy NGOs who expressed concerns that the interests of large corporations would crowd out the voices of civil society – was motivated by political-economic realism and guided by a set of principles developed with the assistance of international affairs scholar and then Assistant Secretary-General John Ruggie. The UN was facing growing demands but a continuing decline in Member State financial contributions in real terms; new institutional arrangements – partnerships of various forms – were a potential way to overcome the growing gap in resources. The Global Compact was significantly involved in supporting the achievement of the MDGs, and more recently, since
2015, the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Public-private partnerships have taken off exponentially since the early 2000s and today provide the UN with sources of finance, information, technological access, and mechanisms of dissemination of ideas and services.¹²

The operationalisation of the Global Compact provides a good illustration of the potential of productive and constructive alliances between the UN and the scholars from the academy. John Ruggie eventually developed a set of principles, the so-called “Ruggie principles” that were adopted by the Human Rights Council in 2008, to guide the role of business in the support of human rights. The principles articulated the role of states to protect against human rights abuses by business, for corporations to respect human rights principles, and for both judicial and non-judicial remedies for the victims of human rights abuses. They have become a basis for new forms of global institutional governance in a variety of different issue domains, significantly in the development of the global code of conduct for the activities of private military and security companies. The International Code of Conduct is governed by a multi-stakeholder initiative composed of representatives of signatory companies, member states, and civil society. It establishes “principles regarding the conduct of Member Company personnel based on international human rights and humanitarian law standards including rules on the use of force, sexual violence, human trafficking and child labour,” and it also establishes principles “regarding the management and governance of Member Companies including the selection, vetting and proper training of personnel.”¹³

There was an extraordinary growth in the number of peacekeeping operations during the 1990s, and the number of peacekeepers had increased to over 45,000 by the middle of 2000. Yet, as James Traub observes:

> DPKO barely had the resources to manage its burgeoning portfolio, much less to codify a set of principles and procedures. Missions were cobbled together on the fly and thrust into utterly unfamiliar and often terrifying settings.¹⁴

Based on his previous experience as Under-Secretary-General of the DPKO and his deep knowledge of some of its severe failings in the past, Kofi Annan was acutely aware of the need to develop a doctrine for peace operations and asked Lakhdar Brahimi, a distinguished Algerian diplomat and his special envoy to
Afghanistan, to chair a group and produce a report to guide future missions and manage both demands and expectations. The Brahimi Report made a strong case for taking a systematic approach to peace operations and the need for clear, credible and achievable mandates. According to Traub, the report “had a profound impact on the culture of peacekeeping” because it “gave Secretariat officials the courage and the cover to offer blunt assessments to the Security Council.”\textsuperscript{15} Despite this, some of the innovative institutional recommendations included in the Brahimi report – such as the establishment of an intelligence-gathering unit or the creation of a standby force – never materialised, failing as UN reform ideas often do when confronted by the opposition of UN member states.

Another innovation in institutional form initiated under Kofi Annan’s leadership at the UN was his proposal for the creation of a Global AIDS and Health Fund, the Global Fund, toward the end of his first term as Secretary-General in April of 2001. Focused initially on the destructive consequences of epidemics such as HIV/AIDS, the Global Fund today is a partnership – an extension of the Global Compact idea into the realm of global health – focused on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. The Fund has mobilised significant funding from private philanthropic foundations like the Gates Foundation. A genuine multi-stakeholder initiative, today it engages governments, civil society, the private sector, and people affected by the diseases, raising and investing nearly US $4 billion a year to support programs run by local experts in countries and communities most in need. The Global Fund was formally established in 2002.

In that same year, Kofi Annan commissioned the Millennium Project, an independent advisory body headed by Columbia University economist Jeffrey Sachs, to develop a concrete action plan for the world to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Indicative of Annan’s approach to mobilising civil society actors to support UN reforms, the Millennium Project created ten thematic task forces comprising more than 250 development experts from around the world to conduct research on how best to achieve the MDGs. The task forces engaged representatives from the academic community, civil society organisations, and UN agencies with practical experience and technical expertise on the different goals.

Perhaps the most far-reaching set of reforms was to come a year later with the commissioning of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change in 2003 and their subsequent production of a report for UN General Assembly consideration that
Kofi Annan’s Legacy of UN Reform

was published in 2004, titled *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*. The panel of eminent persons drawn from around the world focused on developing a vision for the UN for the 21st century. Their report spanned the range of major issues, from the development of criteria for international intervention to the creation of an architecture for UN peacebuilding, reform of the Human Rights Commission, and even the need for major reform of the peak institution of the UN, the Security Council. They did more than just repeat the case for the need for its reform, but they articulated concrete ideas about different models of reform of its membership.

One of the principal motivations for the initiative was the crisis of legitimacy and relevance created by the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Unable to obtain a veto-proof majority of votes on the UN Security Council, the US bypassed the institution and created a so-called "coalition of the willing" to overthrow the government of Saddam Hussein. As a result, the intervention was multilateral, but not legalised or legitimised by the UN, creating questions about the continued relevance of the organisation in the provision of international peace and security. As David Hannay writes, the paralysis on the UN Security Council and “the way the UN was brushed aside by the US-led coalition, all inflicted great damage.”

Following the death of the UN’s Head of Mission to Iraq, Sergio de Mello, and many of his colleagues in a terrorist attack on their headquarters in Baghdad in August of 2003, Annan decided to tackle the situation of the organisation head-on in his annual address to the UN General Assembly in September of 2003. He argued that “we have come to a fork in the road. This may be a moment no less decisive than 1945 itself, when the United Nations was founded.” He went on to suggest:

Now we must decide whether it is possible to continue on the basis agreed then, or whether radical changes are needed. And we must not shy away from questions about the adequacy, and effectiveness, of the rules and instruments at our disposal. Among those instruments, none is more important than the Security Council itself.

Annan argued that the time was ripe for a hard look at fundamental policy issues, for an examination of the structural changes that may be needed in order to strengthen them, and accordingly that:
For my part, I intend to establish a High-Level Panel of eminent personalities, to which I will assign four tasks: First, to examine the current challenges to peace and security; Second, to consider the contribution which collective action can make in addressing these challenges; Third, to review the functioning of the major organs of the United Nations and the relationship between them; and Fourth, to recommend ways of strengthening the United Nations, through reform of its institutions and processes.\(^{19}\)

The panel was assigned with the task of focusing primarily on threats to peace and security, but it was also given a mandate to examine other global challenges, particularly in so far as these may influence or connect with threats to peace and security. In the end, however, Annan argued that “institutional reforms alone will not suffice. Even the most perfect instrument will fail, unless people put it to good use.”\(^{20}\)

It is interesting to note that although Kofi Annan mentioned the word “reform” in his General Assembly address on several occasions, and although the High-Level Panel ultimately came up with the most far reaching and significant set of major reform proposals during his tenure, his carefully crafted terms of reference for the panel made no mention of the term “UN reform.” According to panel member David Hannay,

Annan made it clear to us when he saw us in New York on 5 December 2003 at the start of our work that this omission had been deliberate. He felt that the mantra of UN reform had become over-used and discredited, associated with institutional tinkering which failed to get to grips with the underlying issues of policy and substance.\(^{21}\)

The initial focus of the High-Level Review panel was on the substance of contemporary threats and challenges facing the world, not institutional tinkering. The panel deliberately chose a broad agenda for considering potential security threats and challenges, driven by a particular concern with the problems associated with dysfunctional or failing states. They were also attuned to heightened degrees of global interdependence and tried to stress interlinkages, rather than replicate the North/South divide that accompanied so many other questions within the organisation. They considered
weapons of mass destruction (and the variety of different ways in which they were governed), global terrorism, the application of sanctions, and the criteria for the use of force, and drew on the work of the Canadian-sponsored International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) to endorse the idea that sovereign states not only had rights associated with their sovereignty, but they also had responsibilities to their populations. At one level, this was not such a novel idea, since both Bodin and Montesquieu had made references to the responsibilities of sovereigns to their subjects in their early writings on the concept of sovereignty. Yet the practices associated with many recently independent states emerging from decolonisation processes tended to reflect the assertions of rights, rather than responsibilities to their populations. The prevalence of post-Cold War conflicts driven by the mobilisation of ethnic identification highlighted further the need for more attention to the responsibilities of ruling elites, rather than their assertions of rights. Given its subsequent unanimous adoption by the UN General Assembly in its World Summit Outcome document in 2005, the High-Level Review’s endorsement of the idea of the responsibility to protect (R2P) was probably the most significant ideational contribution of its report.

Despite its initial focus on substantive issues, the High-Level Review did not stay entirely away from proposals for institutional changes. According to the account provided by David Hannay, it also called upon the UN General Assembly to engage civil society actors more systematically; it proposed the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission, recommended reforms of the Human Rights Commission, commented on Secretariat reform, and proposed some Charter reforms (particularly with regard to references to the defeated Axis powers from World War II, the Trusteeship Council, and the Military Staff Committee). It also identified principles for Security Council reform: including more representation for major contributors (financial, military, and diplomatic), increased representation from the developing world, and more democratic accountability, but not in ways that might impair the functioning of the organisation. The panel came up with two formulations for UN Security Council reform, both of which entailed expanding the size of the body to 24 members. One formula recommended adding six new permanent seats, but without giving them a veto; the other envisaged adding new members, but extending their terms, rather than creating new permanent members. In the words of panel member David Hannay, "It was the
single most comprehensive reform package put forward in the nearly 60 years since the UN was established."^24

Many of the ideas contained in the High-Level panel’s recommendations were drawn from other initiatives. As already mentioned, the idea of R2P came from the International Commission on State Sovereignty, some of whose members, like Gareth Evans, also served on the High-Level panel. Ideas about Security Council reform could be traced back to initiatives in the General Assembly dating from the late 1990s, and ideas about the need for longer term, strategic peacebuilding can be traced back to Boutros-Ghali’s Agenda for Peace, a forward-looking document produced in 1992 following the end of the Cold War. Nonetheless, these ideas were updated to current needs and concerns, and they provided a basis for a spirited debate about the way forward for the organisation.

In his subsequent commentary on the document published in 2005, In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All, Kofi Annan drew on Franklin Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms speech – particularly freedom from want and freedom from fear, but adding freedom to live with dignity – to articulate the need for major reform of the UN system. He stated:

I have named the present report ‘In larger freedom’ to stress the enduring relevance of the Charter of the United Nations and to emphasize that its purposes must be advanced in the lives of individual men and women. The notion of larger freedom also encapsulates the idea that development, security and human rights go hand in hand.^25

He rearticulated the Millennium Development Goals in the section devoted to freedom from want and assessed progress on their achievement between 2000 and 2005, drawing on the research work of the Millennium Project and its 2005 report, Investing in Development. While he endorsed most of the recommendations of the High-Level Review, he also made several changes to their recommendations. In response to opposition from the developing world, he dropped the reference to conflict prevention in the mandate for the Peacebuilding Commission, but he pushed for more radical reform of the Human Rights Commission, recommending that it be replaced by a Human Rights Council with universal membership.

This extensive process of reform – from the commissioning of the High-Level Review panel to the Secretary-General’s
Kofi Annan’s Legacy of UN Reform

One of the most significant reforms during Kofi Annan’s tenure was the reform of the Security Council, which was blocked by the permanent five members of the body as well as regional powers who feared a loss of influence if the rival states gained too much political influence. The General Assembly meeting in September 2005 brought together the largest assemblage of heads of state in the history of the organisation, and following skilful negotiation, the body unanimously adopted the World Summit Outcome document translating many of the reform proposals into new institutional arrangements. Traub quotes the head of the High-Level Review panel’s research staff, Stephen Stedman, one of the architects of the text, as saying, “These are the most far-reaching reforms in sixty years,” though, Stedman added, “God knows there’s not much competition...”

While the High-Level Review, In Larger Freedom, and the World Summit Outcome document might appear to have been the pinnacle or culmination of Kofi Annan’s reform initiatives as Secretary-General, he continued to support important reform efforts until the end of his term in 2006, some of which came to fruition years after he left office. In the wake of growing legal challenges in European courts to the implementation of UN targeted sanctions on individuals (because of the absence of minimum due process standards which violated the European Convention on Human Rights), Annan asked the head of his Office of Legal Affairs (OLA), Nicholas Michel, to convene a meeting of scholars of international law and international relations along with senior members of the UN Secretariat to explore ideas about how to address the matter. Even though he was not an advocate for the use of sanctions, particularly in the wake of the comprehensive sanctions applied against Iraq in the 1990s, Annan recognised the implications for the legitimacy of the instrument that was now targeting individuals, not entire states. It was a good example of Annan’s support for incremental procedural reform to develop innovative ways to restore and maintain the legitimacy of the increasingly used instrument for the maintenance of international peace and security. While the effort did not lead to any immediate institutional reforms, it was an important part of the process that led ultimately to the creation of the Office of the Ombudsperson in 2009.

At the beginning of his final year in office, Kofi Annan delivered an address to the United Nations Association of the UK in
which he outlined a vision for a comprehensive and significant reform of the UN Secretariat. Before the conclusion of his term at the end of the year, Annan called for an overhaul of the Secretariat's field operations in an effort that ultimately came to be known as “delivering as one.” This idea was the outgrowth of an initiative he had begun as part of an effort to implement the decisions contained in the World Summit Outcome document. He appointed another High-Level Panel, this time on UN system-wide coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance, and the environment. The panel finalised its report in November 2006, and one of the key recommendations of the Panel was that the UN system should “Deliver as One” at country level, with one leader, one program, one budget and, where appropriate, one office. This was an illustration of managerial reform, and brought him back to where he began his reform efforts in 1997. It was part of an effort to give the UN “a more effective, efficient, coherent, coordinated and better performing country presence with a strengthened role of the senior resident official and a common management, programming and monitoring framework.”

"Knowledge is power. Information is liberating"

Throughout his career, and particularly during his time as UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan provided strong support to engaging with the global scholarly community to support the goals of the United Nations. Many of the reform efforts described above involved partnerships with the academic community – from John Ruggie’s articulation of principles for global corporations participating in the Global Compact to the roles of Stephen Stedman and Jeffrey Sachs in the high-level reviews undertaken toward the end of Annan’s tenure. The idea of appointing leading scholars to positions of authority and influence within the UN began with the appointment of John Ruggie, and was followed by appointments of Michael Doyle, Edward Luck, Stephen Stedman, Jeffrey Sachs, and Jennifer Welsh to Assistant Secretary-General positions, among other types of engagement with scholars, a practice that continues to this day. Kofi Annan also provided support for academic research institutions. One example was his recording of a special video for screening at the dedication of a new building at Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University, partly for its long history of research on humanitarian intervention, conducted by Thomas Weiss. His support for the initiatives of higher education and the ways in which
academic scholarship could support the goals of the UN continued into his retirement. I was deeply honoured that Kofi Annan agreed to offer an endorsement on the back cover of my 2016 book on UN targeted sanctions, even though it was a subject about which he had serious reservations and limited enthusiasm. He wrote:

*I have long believed that sanctions are a blunt instrument of international security policy. This timely book provides a comprehensive review of UN sanctions and raises important questions about their effectiveness. I hope that policy makers will review the valuable lessons of experience put forward in this book when they consider any future sanctions regimes.*

His extensive and long-lasting engagement with the global scholarly community is testimony of his enduring commitment to creating partnerships to pursue his conviction that “*knowledge is power*” and “*i*nformation is liberating”

**Conclusion**

Over the course of his ten-year term as UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan consistently pursued a variety of different types of reform of the organisation. He initiated a deliberate and purposeful set of proposals for improvement of the organisation as it faced some existential legitimacy challenges. The US-launched Iraq war in 2003 prompted the most substantial set of reform initiatives, but from the very start of his term, Kofi Annan patiently pressed the UN to improve its internal governance. The quality of global governance can be evaluated by a number of normative criteria – effectiveness, fairness, efficiency, and legitimacy – and each of these goals was pursued at some point during his tenure in office.

As shown in the following table, Kofi Annan pursued each of the four types of reform identified at the outset of this article while he served as UN Secretary-General. He began with the reform of administrative practices, introducing ideas for new management and organisational measures and his *Renewing the UN* proposals in his first months in office in 1997. Throughout the course of his ten years in office, he consistently created new institutional forms or ways of conducting business within the organisation. The MDGs, the Global Compact, the Brahimi Report, the Global Fund, and the Millennium Project were initiated and developed between 1999 and
2002. When he faced what he thought was the most significant challenge to the legitimacy of the organisation in 2003, Kofi Annan appointed a panel of eminent persons to constitute the *High-Level Review of Threats, Challenges and Change*. The panel’s report in 2004 and Annan’s response in *In Larger Freedom* in 2005 contained sweeping proposals for Security Council reform and came the closest to reform of the body since the expansion of the Council in the 1960s. While the summit of world leaders that unanimously adopted the World Summit Outcome document in September 2005 did not endorse the recommendations for Security Council reform, it did create new institutions (the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council), and it pushed the UN into new ideational territory with the endorsement of the idea of responsibility to protect. When he perceived another legitimacy challenge to the UN in 2005, he supported incremental procedural reform to address the growing number of legal challenges to the implementation of UN targeted sanctions on individuals. He did so by engaging members of the global scholarly community, another example of the development and use of new institutional forms, something he did throughout his entire term in office. It is an example of a practice introduced by Annan that both of his successors have continued to this day. He concluded his tenure in office in 2006 with a return to a focus on reform of administrative and managerial practices with which he began in 1997. The idea of “delivering as one” continues to this day. Among the most significant reforms undertaken by Antonio Guterres to date is his restructuring of who takes the lead in country resident coordinators. He has replaced reliance on the UN Development Program with a specially designated lead, but his reforms are built around the core idea of delivering as one that was first introduced by Kofi Annan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Reform</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reform of administrative practices</td>
<td>Management &amp; Organizational Measures, 1997 Renewing the UN, 1997 Delivering as One, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental, procedural reform</td>
<td>Brahimi Report, 2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kofi Annan was also committed to reform of each of the core three pillars of the UN Charter: security, development, and human rights. Within the domain of peace and security, Annan proposed reforms of the Security Council, the creation of new security institutions (the Peacebuilding Commission), and the introduction of new norms with his endorsement of the idea of “responsibility to protect.” In the realm of international development, he pioneered the introduction of development goals with the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 and their interim review in 2005 and the idea of “delivering as one” at the very end of his term in office. In the domain of human rights, he went beyond the recommendations of his High-Level Review panel to recommend the creation of the Human Rights Council. He also facilitated the adoption of the Ruggie principles and supported a process of reform that ultimately ended with the creation of the Office of the Ombudsperson. It is significant to note the longevity of many of his reform ideas. Not only do many continue to this day, but some of his reform initiatives led to the creation of new institutions (like the Office of the Ombudsperson) after he departed from office. The Millennium Development goals were succeeded by the Sustainable Development Goals when the MDGs came to a conclusion in 2015. The engagement of scholars as consultants, special assistants, or Assistant Secretaries General continues to this day. And as described above, the “delivering as one” principle has been internalised in the organisation with the recent (2018) reforms of the current Secretary-General.

As mentioned above, not all of Kofi Annan’s reform efforts were successful. Some of the most innovative ideas of the Brahimi report were ignored, UN Security Council reform failed, and internal
managerial reforms often faced stiff resistance from within the organisation. Indeed, his proposals for increased budgetary discretion were rejected by the General Assembly in 2006, and the UN Staff Union expressed a vote of “no confidence” in the Secretary-General over his proposal to turn over some jobs to the private sector. There were other failings of the UN during Annan’s tenure – such as its failure to accept responsibility for sexual exploitation by UN peacekeepers, its limited progress in achieving gender parity, and questions about Kofi Annan’s personal integrity that were raised during the investigation of the Oil for Food program. In addition, some of the institutional reforms that came out of the High-Level Review and subsequent World Summit such as the Peacebuilding architecture and Human Rights Council have begun to reveal their limitations and, in the case of the Human Rights Council, return to the old ways.

Despite these limitations, there was a remarkable amount of innovative reform initiated during Kofi Annan’s tenure as UN Secretary-General. Some of this can be attributed to his quiet, soft-spoken, and diplomatic manner. He sometimes used this to advantage, as he did by lowering expectations of him by the Clinton Administration at the time of his initial appointment. He also devoted considerable time and attention to managing the UN’s relationship with its major donor, the United States. His ability to navigate the corridors of US power and engage its Congressional delegations was central to his success. The depth of his internal knowledge of the UN system, being the only Secretary-General to date to come up from within the ranks of the organisation, also contributed to his ability to initiate reforms (but could also lead to his occasional hesitance to take on the institutional culture of the organisation). He was also innovative with his engagements of civil society actors outside of the UN system by forming alliances with scholars and partnerships with the private sector to mobilise resources necessary for the operations of the UN. He also displayed a unique ability to tap into talent, from scholars like John Ruggie and Jeffrey Sachs, to diplomats like Lakhdar Brahimi and the members of the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change.

According to Alan Doss, the President of the Kofi Annan Foundation, when Kofi Annan spoke about reform, he emphasised that “reform is a process, not an outcome.” Throughout his entire ten-year term in office, Kofi Annan initiated, facilitated, and supported the processes of reform in a concerted effort to improve the performance of the United Nations. It was a pursuit that he
continued through his foundation and his many other contributions to the international community for the remainder of his life.

NOTES


2. Changes in the working methods of subsidiary bodies like Security Council sanctions committees can level the playing field for the elected members of the Security Council by replacing indefinite holds on decisions with term limitations.


11. Annan, Address of the Secretary-General, 31 January, 1999, para. 4.


18. Annan, Secretary-General’s Address, 23 September, 2003, paras. 33 - 35.

19. Annan, Secretary-General’s Address, 23 September, 2003, paras. 47 - 51.

20. Annan, Secretary-General’s Address, 23 September, 2003, para. 55.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR  
Thomas Biersteker is Gasteyger Professor of International Security and Director for Policy Research at the Graduate Institute, Geneva. He previously directed the Graduate Institute’s Programme for the Study of International Governance (recently renamed The Global Governance Centre), the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University and has also taught at Yale University and the University of Southern California. He is the author/editor of ten books. His current research focuses on targeted sanctions, transnational policy networks in global security governance, and the dialectics of world orders. He was the principal developer of SanctionsApp, a tool for mobile devices created in 2013 to increase access to information about targeted sanctions at the UN. He received his PhD and MS from MIT and his BA from the University of Chicago. Email: thomas.biersteker@graduateinstitute.ch