DOCUMENTI
IAI

EFFECTIVENESS AND INEFFECTIVENESS OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL IN THE LAST TWENTY YEARS: A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

by David Hannay

EFFECTIVENESS AND INEFFECTIVENESS OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL
IN THE LAST TWENTY YEARS: A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE[1]

by David Hannay[2]

1. The end of the Cold War and its impact on the UN

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War struck the UN, as it struck the governments of its member states, like a bolt from the blue. It had not been predicted, nor anticipated; and no thought had been given to its possible consequences for the UN, which had been, since its establishment forty-five years before, a victim of the frozen certainties of bi-polar international diplomacy. There had been no consideration of what the post-Cold War world would look like and of what role the UN might be expected to play in it. It truly was a watershed moment, and therefore a sensible one to take as the start of any analysis of the Security Council in the twenty year period that has since followed.

In truth everything did change at the UN and no-one discovered that more rapidly than President Saddam Hussein of Iraq when he invaded Kuwait in August 1990 and found himself confronted by a Security Council whose five Permanent Members were united in their determination to reverse his act of aggression, if necessary by the use of force. But that willingness to stand up to what had, after all, been one of the hallmarks of the twentieth century, inter-state acts of agression, was by no means the only change to take place. Many of the old Cold War taboos disappeared almost overnight; no-go areas, as for so long had been the case in Cambodia, became the forum for substantial UN peacekeeping activity; proxy wars, in which the allies or clients of the two super-powers had been engaged with no risk at all of effective UN action being taken – as had been the case in El Salvador, in Angola and in Mozambique – were wound down under the UN's aegis. This transformation at the UN was greatly encouraged and accelerated by two concurrent developments over which the UN Security Council had little influence – the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa and the Oslo agreements between the Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organisation – but from which it benefited massively. No single, simple metric conveys better the contrast between the Cold War and the post-Cold War Security Council than the fact that, during the first forty-five years of its existence the Security Council adopted 660 resolutions, while, by the end of the next twenty years, its score was rapidly approaching the 2000 mark.

---

[1] Much of the material in this paper is drawn from the author's book "*New World Disorder: the UN after the Cold War*": I B Tauris: June 2008

[2] Former British Ambassador to the UN and EU Chair, UNA-UK Board of Directors, London.

2. The first decade (1989-1999)

The early years of that first post-Cold War decade were ones of remarkable achievement for the Security Council. Not only was Iraq's act of aggression against Kuwait rapidly and, by twentieth century measurements, relatively cheaply in terms of loss of life and material damage, reversed, but the whole post-war settlement – the demarcation of the Iraq-Kuwait border which had been the original casus belli, the assessment of and compensation for the material damage caused by Iraq, the eradication of Iraq's massive programme to produce the full range of Weapons of Mass Destruction (nuclear, chemical and biological) – was handed over to the UN, acting under the authority and supervision of the Security Council. As we now know, that task, despite Saddam Hussein's cat-and-mouse tactics with the weapons inspectors, was successfully, although painfully slowly, accomplished.

At the same time a massive expansion of the UN's peacekeeping activities was under way, as was a shift away from the earlier "classical" peacekeeping operations involving monitoring of a ceasefire line following the cessation of hostilities between two state parties in dispute, to much more complex, multi-faceted operations with many of the activities which have since come to be known as peace-building. This shift, which began with Namibia and which was followed by the successful operations in Cambodia, El Salvador and Mozambique and by failure in Angola, involved the UN in elaborate state-building activities, arranging and monitoring democratic elections, where none had ever taken place before, establishing police forces and the rule of law, protecting human rights.[3] In parallel the Security Council took a number of steps towards what would later be called the Responsibility to Protect, when the international community moved in, if necessary without the consent of the host country, to remedy a situation where the government was either unable or unwilling to protect its own citizens. Examples of this were action in post-war Iraq to protect the Kurds (successfully) and the Shi'a (unsuccessfully) against the wrath of Saddam Hussein, the first (highly successful) phase of the operation in Somalia to alleviate famine conditions exacerbated by local warlords and the absence of any functioning government at all, and the attempt to reverse the overthrow by military force of the elected President of Haiti.[4]

The apogee of this first post-Cold War period was reached with the holding of an unprecedented Security Council Summit in January 1992, just one month after the installation of a new, more assertive UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali. The Summit agreed a statement which it is hard to fault conceptually even with the benefit of hindsight. It made the critical link between security issues and wider, hitherto mainly economic, concerns for world poverty, disease and environmental degradation; it identified clearly two looming threats to international peace and security in the form of terrorism and the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction; and it invited the Secretary-General to bring forward his ideas for handling these threats, which he duly

---

[3] A 2005 Rand Corporation Study compared eight UN and US nation-building operations. It found that the UN operations were more successful, more cost-effective and achieved greater international legitimacy.

[4] Some key UN Security Council Resolutions setting out these major shifts in policy were: Iraq (Security Council Resolutions 678, 687 and 688), Somalia (Security Council Resolution 794), Haiti (Security Council Resolutions 841, 862 and 867).

did in a perhaps over-ambitious but nevertheless perceptive document entitled "An Agenda for Peace". But, when this document arrived, there was simply no effective follow-up to it. The member states were too busy handing themselves peace dividends from the winding down of the Cold War and too pre-occupied with fire-fighting the many mini-crises which had been dropped into the lap of the UN to give any thought or resources to a systematic overhaul of the UN's machinery for handling threats to peace and security which had been designed for operations in much less demanding circumstances.

Nemesis was not long in coming. Between 1992 and 1995 three major disasters struck UN peacekeeping operations and severely undermined the authority and credibility of the Security Council. The first of these occurred in Somalia where local insurgents inflicted heavy casualties on the peacekeeping forces, leading to the withdrawal of the large US contingent and eventually to the collapse of the whole operation. The second case was in the former Yugoslavia, where, despite very large UN deployments and some tactical successes (the first ever preventive deployment of UN peacekeepers – to Macedonia, the delivery of humanitarian aid to all parts of Bosnia, and the brokering of a ceasefire between the Muslim and Croat warring parties in Bosnia) the UN proved unable to check Serb and above all Bosnian Serb acts of aggression, and serious tensions arose over the coordination of UN troops on the ground and NATO air support, culminating in the massacre of thousands of civilian refugees by the Bosnian Serbs at Srebrenica, right under the noses of a battalion of UN peacekeepers. And then thirdly, and perhaps most shamefully of all, the small, under-resourced UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda became a helpless spectator to acts of genocide of massive proportions, the force itself disintegrating, as two out of the three main troop contributors withdrew, and no member state volunteered to replace them.

So the first post-Cold War decade at the UN drew to a close in much less favourable circumstances than it had opened. Heady talk of a new world order, with the UN Security Council at its head, had given way to concerns about new world disorder with the UN once again being marginalised as it had been during the Cold War period (the UN's humiliation in Bosnia where it had been forced to hand over the whole operation to NATO had been particularly painful). This atmosphere of failure was compounded when, in 1997, a major attempt to bring to a decisive conclusion three years of stultifying negotiations over the enlargement of the Security Council to make it more representative and thus more legitimate, reached deadlock. The proximate cause was disagreement among the non-aligned countries on how they should be represented in a new, enlarged Council. But underlying that were fundamental disagreements over the whole concept of enlargement (US, China and Russia) and over the possible emergence of new permanent members in the form of Japan, Germany, Brazil and India. And the veto by the US at the end of 1996 of a second term as Secretary-General for Boutros-Ghali did nothing to improve the atmosphere.

What conclusions should be drawn from that roller-coaster of a decade? Firstly a major opportunity was missed to strengthen the world's primary multilateral institution at a moment when the auguries were as auspicious as they had ever been. In reality political willingness to mandate the UN to do a whole range of things it had never even contemplated doing in the past far outran its capacity to undertake these new tasks and the provision by the member states of resources and of political will when the going got

rough. Second, the need for a systematic review of the challenges facing the international community in the new, post-Cold War era and of what was needed if the UN was to be asked to fulfil a larger role was continually ducked and obfuscated. Thirdly, the vagaries of US policy towards the UN in a decade when it genuinely was the only super-power left standing, were extremely debilitating and confusing. The zigzags of US policy from the solid and effective support of George Bush senior's administration through the erratic performance which undermined the rhetorical support of the first Clinton administration to the outright hostility of many in Congress and the administration after the failures in Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda (even when they bore considerable responsibility for those fiascos themselves) were a recipe for divided counsels and inadequate performance. And fourthly it was very clear that the UN was not capable of undertaking full-scale military enforcement operations of the sort which had been required to eject Saddam Hussein from Kuwait or to subdue the Bosnian Serbs.

3. The Second Decade (1999-2009)

The second post-Cold War decade at the UN took place in an international climate much less propitious to concerted and effective action than the first. The two term presidency of George W. Bush put a heavy emphasis on unilateral action and was largely contemptuous of the UN; and, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, US policy was tilted disproportionately towards dealing with one particular threat to international peace and security almost to the exclusion of all others. At the same time the steady rise of China, gradually emerging from being just a regional power to becoming a global one, and the re-assertiveness of Russian foreign policy under Vladimir Putin, however tinged with post-imperial nostalgia, meant that the solidarity, or at least the acquiescence, of the five Permanent Members of the Security Council (P5) could no longer simply be taken for granted. The collapse of the Oslo peace accords and the increase in tension in the Middle East, breaking out in South Lebanon in 2006 and in Gaza in 2009 into actual hostilities, which the US did little to mitigate, contributed to a deterioration of the general climate at the UN. Towards the end of the decade a global financial and then economic crisis threatened to draw the attention of the main players away from the security agenda and to reduce the resources without the availability of which the security climate in the broadest sense was likely to deteriorate further.

The breakdown in the solidarity of the P5 was most obviously striking in the contexts of the hostilities in Kosovo in 1999 and in Iraq in 2003. On both occasions military operations were launched without the explicit authorisation of the Security Council. The case of Kosovo was much less damaging, given Russia's substantial isolation in refusing to allow the Security Council to act to enforce its own resolutions when the Serbs consistently flouted them. But over Iraq, following an ill-considered (by all sides) series of public confrontations at Foreign Minister level in the Security Council, and given the disastrous sequence of events which followed the military operations, the damage was much more far-reaching. More insidious was the gradual re-emergence of what could be called a P5 penumbra under which a whole range of sensitive issues were kept away from the Security Council or its activities were rendered nugatory. Least

surprising were issues directly affecting one of the Permanent Members themselves; so, when fighting broke out between Russia and Georgia in 2008, there was no question of any effective action being taken in the Security Council and the small UN peacekeeping operation in Abkhazia subsequently fell victim to collateral damage. Similarly the idea of any UN activity over Tibet was ruled out. But the penumbra spread out more widely than that. The US held off allowing any UN pressure for cease-fires in South Lebanon and Gaza even when Israeli attacks were clearly disproportionate. And Russia and China prevented any action in the causes of Burma, Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka; and dragged their feet over Darfur. It would be wrong to suggest that these trends marked a full scale reversion to Cold War practices at the UN but the warning signals were there and should not be ignored.

The divisions over the handling of the North Korean and Iranian nuclear programmes were less marked but they too contributed to the failure so far by the Security Council to take effective action to reverse two extremely damaging threatened break-outs from one of the key elements of international peace and security, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) regime. From the outset, in 1993, when it first became clear that North Korea was misusing its NPT membership as a cover for a military programme, this case proved difficult to deal with, given the erratic nature of the regime, the vulnerability of South Korea to attack from the North and the vagaries of US policy, swinging between conciliation and denunciation. Iran too proved hard to manage, with many similar drawbacks, including in this case a refusal by the US to talk directly to the regime. Gradually, but painfully, it proved possible to construct viable frameworks for negotiations with both countries, the six-nation group (China, Russia, North Korea, South Korea, Japan and the US) in the case of North Korea and the 3 (France, Germany, UK) + 3 (US, Russia, China) group in the case of Iran; the US agreed to talk directly to both countries; and the Security Council imposed a series economic of sanctions when faced with defiance. The denouement of these two crucial cases lies outside the period covered by this paper, but probably not far outside it. Either of two possibilities, an outbreak of hostilities precipitated by Israel or the US (or both of them), or a definitively successful break-out from the NPT regime by either North Korea or Iran would represent an extremely damaging setback for the Security Council.

Following the peacekeeping debacles of the mid-1990's there was quite a sharp decline in demands for UN peacekeepers. But that trend did not continue; and in the second post-Cold War decade it was reversed, so that, towards the end of the period the numbers authorised for deployment by the Security Council were well over 100,000 and the number of operations being handled by the Secretariat under the supervision of the Security Council was again in the high 'teens. Most of those new operations were in Africa and, with the sole exception of the mission deployed along the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea following the ending of the hostilities between those two countries, they were all of the multi-faceted, intra-state variety designed to remedy the consequences of failed or failing states. There were some notable successes, in Liberia (although only after the failure of earlier West African operations (ECOWAS), in Sierra Leone (although only as a result of a unilateral British military operation to stabilise a UN peacekeeping mission close to collapse), in Burundi (where the UN worked closely with an African Union (AU) operation) and in the Southern Sudan. In Haiti the lesson of earlier failures, which followed the premature withdrawal of UN missions, seemed to

have been learned, and a much larger and longer-sustained mission was undertaken with more ambitious state-building targets. But in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and in Darfur, the two largest missions in Africa, the UN struggled to keep its head above water, in the latter case due largely to the obstinacy and lack of cooperation of the Sudanese government and the unwillingness of the Security Council to take a tough line with them.

During this period there was also a clear trend towards hybrid missions in which the UN worked alongside another organisation, either because the latter was more politically acceptable to the host country or because the task was beyond the capacity of the UN. Thus, in Kosovo, the UN worked alongside NATO and the EU; in Chad the EU was deployed to help stabilise the situation in neighbouring Darfur; in Darfur itself and in Burundi the AU was in the lead; and in the DRC an EU intervention helped at a critical stage. These hybrid missions presented the UN with plenty of unprecedented challenges, not all of which were met as rapidly and as smoothly as might have been desirable. But the overall picture of UN peacekeeping during this decade, despite some failures, and some major blots as a result of human rights abuses by peacekeepers, was one of considerable achievement under great stress.

The second decade was noteworthy too for major reform efforts being made to remedy the UN's, and above all its Security Council's, main weaknesses. The first of such reform effort, the Brahimi report of 2000, was directed at peacekeeping. Many of its recommendations were implemented and did a good deal to strengthen that over-worked part of the organisation. But the more ambitious proposals such as the encouragement to the Secretary-General simply to refuse to take on operations which he believed were beyond the capacity of the organisation remained merely pious aspirations. In the last resort the UN belongs to its stakeholders, the member states, not to its Secretariat. A far more ambitious, system-wide reform effort, which led into a three year campaign (2003-6) to bring about changes, was set in hand in September 2003 when Kofi Annan, in the aftermath of the bitter quarrels and tensions over the invasion of Iraq, declared that the organisation was "at a fork in the road" and set up a High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change to make recommendations for reforms right across the board. The High Level Panel was composed of sixteen members (of whom the present author was one), drawn from the four corners of the earth. It was striking and quite surprising, that its report, which was submitted to the Secretary-General in November 2004, was adopted by consensus. Throughout the period of the Panel's work Annan urged its members to be ambitious in their proposals. In only one instance, the enlargement of the Security Council did he intervene and ask for two alternative schemes, not a single one, to be put forward. The report's one hundred and one proposals which he subsequently endorsed and reinforced by his own document "In Larger Freedom", was the single most wide-ranging and most far-reaching effort at reforming the UN since its establishment in 1945.

Among the most prominent of the proposals put forward were:

i) Two alternative schemes for Security Council enlargement to 24, the first for the addition of new permanent members to the Council (but without a veto), the second for

the creation of a new category of members elected for longer than the current two year terms and with scope for renewal;

ii)   The establishment by the Security Council of guidelines for future authorisation of the use of force drawn from classical "just war" theory adapted to modern conditions;

iii)   The creation of a new norm of international practice under which, if a government was unable or unwilling to fulfil its primary duty towards its citizens of protecting them from gross breaches of international humanitarian law, that "responsibility to protect" would be transferred to the international community as a whole, acting through the Security Council;

iv)   The promulgation by the Secretary-General of a counter-terrorism strategy which would balance the need for tough and effective action against terrorism with the protection of individual human rights, and a legal definition of terrorism to underpin the existing body of international law on the subject;

v)   The establishment of a new Peace-building Commission designed to provide sustained support for countries emerging from a situation of state failure;

vi)   A ten year programme to strengthen African peacekeeping capacities and a willingness to finance out of UN assessed contributions regional peacekeeping operations, undertaken with the support of the UN Security Council;

vii)   The replacement of the discredited Human Rights Commission by a new Council for Human Rights reporting directly to the General Assembly;

viii)   A wide range of measures to strengthen international action against the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), including the provision of internationally guaranteed supplies of enriched uranium and reprocessing services, thus obviating the need for the construction of new uranium enrichment facilities;

ix)   A substantial increase in the resources allocated to achieving the UN's Millennium Development Goals; a timetable for countries to achieve the UN target of 0.7% of GNI devoted to development aid; and an expansion of the G8 to include the largest developing countries;

x)   Aboliton of the UN Trusteeship Council and of the Military Staff Committee.

The process of negotiating this substantial reform package was an agonisingly long and reductive one, complicated as it was in its last stages by the arrival in New York of a new US Ambassador, John Bolton, whose agenda certainly did not include making the UN stronger and more effective. The after-shocks from the Iraq war were still making themselves felt. And the oil-for-food scandal which reflected discredit on both the Secretary-General (who was responsible for administering the programme) and the Security Council (which was meant to provide the oversight of it) hung like a dark cloud over the whole proceedings. The outcome, reached at the UN Summit meeting in September 2004, despite the stalwart support for the reforms of the EU, deserved two

cheers at best. There was agreement on setting up a Peace-building Commission and to establish a Human Rights Council in place of the Human Rights Commission; perhaps more surprisingly, there was agreement on the Responsibility to Protect; and substantial new resources were pledged for the Millennium Development Goals. But the good news ended there. Enlargement of the Security Council ran aground yet again on the conflicting views of those who sincerely wanted to become permanent members and those who did not want those particular countries to do so, on the reluctance of some Permanent Members to embrace a substantial enlargement at all, and on the unreadiness of the African countries to decide which of their number might become Permanent Members. Nothing could be agreed on guidelines for the Security Council authorising the use of force nor on the definition of terrorism. The whole WMD agenda was ditched, following the fiasco of the May 2005 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Review Conference which failed even to adopt its own agenda. Even those points that were agreed have proved rather disappointingly difficult to operate in their early years of application, with the Peace-building Commission only working in a few, small countries, and with the Human Rights Council and the Responsibility to Protect generating more controversy than effective action. On the positive side it can be said that a number of the reform package recommendations – for example enlargement of the G8 to a G20 (now achieved), some of the WMD proposals, the second formula for Security Council enlargement, assessed contribution financing for regional peacekeeping operations (endorsed again recently by the Prodi report) – have since shown some signs of gravitating towards the category of ideas whose time is coming.

Looking back at that second post-Cold War decade of Security Council activity many of the lessons to be learned are the same ones as have been identified for the first decade. In particular enabling the Security Council to act to prevent states failing in the first place, and to deal effectively with the consequences when they do fail, remains a largely unanswered challenge but also one replete with dangerous cross-linkages to other problems such as terrorism, WMD proliferation, human rights abuses and extreme poverty. The warning signals of the fraying of P5 cooperation are there for all to see; if they are not heeded, and if the compromises needed to achieve a minimum of P5 solidarity cannot be struck, then the chances of the Security Council becoming more effective are slight indeed. As a new effort now gets under way in the General Assembly to negotiate Security Council enlargement it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the only viable short term basis for agreement lies in the second of the High Level Panel's recommendations, for the creation of a new category of longer mandated and renewable elected members. It is also important that all concerned reflect on the fact that yet another failed attempt to harpoon this Great White Whale of international diplomacy will only undermine the effectiveness and legitimacy of the institution to whose strengthening all are, in principle, committed. On the issue of reform more widely, it was, I believe, justified to make a major effort at system-wide reform in the aftermath of the Iraq war. But such efforts cannot be repeated at short intervals without creating reform fatigue and the risk of diminishing returns. So the future is likely to lie with sectoral reforms brought forward when a particular aspect of the UN's activities offers a reasonable prospect for achieving a broad consensus.

4. The Role of the EU: from irrelevance to centre stage [5]

When I moved from Brussels to New York in September 1990, at the very beginning of the period we are looking at, the EU and the UN might have been situated on different planets for all they knew about each others' workings. Such cooperation as there was, was suffused with mutual misunderstanding and suspicion. Admittedly it had, over the years, been possible to achieve an increasing degree of EU common voting in the General Assembly. But the Security Council remained strictly off-limits for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, its gates jealously guarded by the Cerberus of the EU's two Permanent Members of the P5, France and the UK. Much of this was due to a combination of Cold War paralysis at the UN and to the pre-occupation of the EU with its own internal development and enlargement. It did not long survive the demise of those two factors.

The handling of the Bosnia crisis and of subsequent Balkan operations, in all of which the EU was deeply involved, necessarily brought the two organisations together into a much closer working relationship. And, although the experience of those Balkan complexities was a pretty painful one for both of them, it brought out more clearly than in the past that the EU and the UN shared many common objectives and approaches to the solution of international problems, that in fact they were natural allies, not, as some had earlier thought, rivals. This feeling of shared objectives was strengthened, as the two decades passed, as a result of the ever larger proportion of resources for UN programmes and operations which were provided by the EU and its member states (between 40% and 50% in many cases), by their reliability as a funding instrument and by the key contribution they were making to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. When, at the end of 2003, the EU adopted its first ever European Security Strategy (ESS), and when, at the end of 2008 it reviewed that strategy, one of its three key pillars was stated to be "effective multilateralism" and that naturally implied a strengthened and more effective UN system. Throughout the reform campaign between 2003 and 2006 the EU and its member states became the UN Secretary-General's strongest supporters in pushing for an ambitious programme of change. Indeed without them nothing at all would have been achieved.

But the EU's move closer to the centre of the stage at the UN was not without its complications and setbacks. For one thing the EU role remained in many ways more virtual than apparent, particularly as its larger member states continued to jostle for influence at the Security Council's top table. Moreover, as the EU's influence at the UN grew, so too did the negative effort on its position whenever the member states failed to agree on a common approach to a major issue of policy. That was most prominently the case during the disagreement over the Iraq war in 2003 and subsequently. But it also surfaced damagingly over the conflicting attitudes taken by the member states to Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008. And it was most insidiously manifest in the intensive rivalry between its members whenever enlargement of the Security Council came up for discussion or negotiation, with Germany (with British and French support) pushing aggressively for its own recognition as a Permanent

---

[5] A fuller treatment of this subject can be found in the author's contribution to UNA – Spain's Conference in Barcelona on 15 April 2009, the text of which is on UNA-UK's website.

Member of the Security Council and Italy (with support from some other EU member states and from many outside the EU such as Canada, Pakistan, Indonesia, Argentina and Mexico) which moved heaven and earth to ensure that enlargement did not result in the creation of new Permanent Members. This dispute over Security Council enlargement remains to this day the pebble in the shoe of the EU's aspirations at the UN. Whether it can be removed by common support for an enlargement involving at this stage only the creation of a new category of longer-term, renewable Security Council members remains to be seen.

5. The Way Ahead

As this analysis has sought to demonstrate, a great opportunity was missed immediately after the end of the Cold War to shape a reformed UN capable of facing up to and to handling effectively the challenges of the new era. A new world order was never, in reality, on offer. But something a good deal better than the UN oscillating between indispensability and ineffectiveness with which we have had to work in these two decades could have been achieved. The question now is whether the ground then lost can be regained? It is tempting to be cautiously optimistic. The election of a new US President, far more deeply committed to working with both allies and adversaries to achieve negotiated solutions, and President Obama's first steps, on the Arab-Israel question, towards Iran, and on nuclear disarmament, provide some of the necessary if not yet sufficient material to turn optimism into reality. Moreover a UN more diverse in its nature, with power and influence gradually shifting towards the larger developing countries (not, pace those who misunderstand the concept, a multi-polar UN which would imply the outmoded and discredited balance of power concepts of the nineteenth century), could over time be more propitious to the emergence of global solutions to the global problems which confront the international community than one dominated by a single super-power. That uni-polar moment has in any case passed. In the immediate future one could without too much speculation, identify the following policy areas, and functions, on some, if not all, of which decisive progress will be needed if that second opportunity is to be seized.

-     If the Security Council is to become more effective on a day to day basis, then there has to be serious cooperation and an ability and a willingness to reach compromises amongst its five Permanent Members. Without that the Security Council can easily slip back into the diplomatic jousting of Cold War days. Of course reaching compromises is time consuming and involves accepting outcomes which can seem less than ideal; but it brings with it an increase in legitimacy and effectiveness which is well worth paying a price for. After the ructions over Iraq the P5 do seem to be attempting a continuing dialogue on the burning questions of the day but far more systematic effort will be needed. The key relationship within the P5 is likely to be that between the US and China. Russia in its new post-Yeltsin assertiveness is more a spoiler than a policy-maker and, with its demographic and economic problems, is likely to remain so; but its capacity to spoil depends crucially on the Chinese position. If China can be persuaded to move further towards a foreign policy designed to find concerted solutions to problems in partnership with the US and the EU members of the P5, then that capacity will be reduced;

- Peacekeeping will remain the bread and butter of Security Council business for as far ahead as the eye can see. So it does need to be done better, and the Security Council does need to be wary of overstretch and of embracing exaggerated aspirations without providing the means of achieving them. Giving the UN a rapid response capability (not the same thing at all as a standing force), which would enable it to respond quickly to a new mandate or to a sudden crisis in an existing one should be a high priority. The EU battle group system provides one means of plugging that gap, but it has to be admitted that the EU has not yet shown much enthusiasm for serving in that role; in any case a rapid response capability cannot and should not be exclusively European – the major troop contributors of the Indian sub-continent should be asked to consider this too. It is also of the greatest urgency to find a better way of avoiding and responding to human rights abuses by peacekeepers. These risk bringing the whole system into disrepute. The nettle of jurisdiction must be grasped, since countries where peacekeepers are serving are unlikely to provide a satisfactory venue for prosecuting such offences and nor, it is now all too lamentably clear, do the countries of the troop contributors themselves. If an international tribunal for trying a range of crimes (the International Criminal Court) can be established, why can there not too be an international tribunal for hearing cases against peacekeepers?

- The new norm of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) needs to be rescued from the disputes about its scope and methodology in which it currently languishes and which have resulted in it being unusable even when most needed, as for example in Darfur. The recent report submitted by the Secretary-General and Professor Ed Luck provides an opportunity to break out of the erroneous view that R2P is simply a device for justifying military intervention. The aim should be to operationalise R2P in a way which would enable the whole toolbox at the UN's disposal – diplomatic, mediatory and economic – to be brought to bear in a preventive manner with respect to states risking sliding towards failure before any question of military intervention is even considered;

- The role of regional and sub-regional organisations in the field of international peace and security needs to be given more attention and UN support than it has hitherto received. The major successes of European regional organisations – not just the EU, but the Council of Europe and the OSCE as well – and also the activities in recent years of the African Union and of the Organisation of American States have demonstrated the potential such organisations have to work together with the UN towards shared objectives. It is no coincidence that some of the most unstable regions of the world – N. E. Asia, South Asia, the countries around Afghanistan, the Gulf – are ones where no effective regional or sub-regional organisations exist. It should surely be one objective of any action to achieve stability in these regions that effective regional security arrangements should be established. And it is surely also high time to give effect to the recommendation of the High Level Panel and of the more recent Prodi report that when a regional organisation undertakes a peacekeeping task for the UN, then it should be financed by UN assessed contributions;

- No policy area is more crucial to future Security Council effectiveness than nuclear disarmament and the prevention of nuclear proliferation. The problems in this sector

reach far beyond those posed by North Korea and Iran, although the outcome of those two cases will have a major effect on the wider picture and vice-versa. The programme sketched out in President Obama's Prague speech – significant new US-Russian arms control agreements, wider measures to reduce the assets of all nuclear weapons states, a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty, the coming into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, measures to guarantee internationally the supply of enrichment and reprocessing services so that the expansion of civil nuclear energy as part of the climate change campaign does not create new proliferation risks – leading towards a world free of nuclear weapons, sets out a formidably challenging agenda. Its recent endorsement in a unanimous resolution of the Security Council is an important and welcome step. Hopefully the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, and perhaps further action by the Security Council on negative security assurances of the sort taken at the time of the successful 1995 review conference, will mark an important further stage along that road;

- It is gradually becoming better understood that the environmental challenges associated with climate change contain important threats to international peace and security. So the outcome of this December's Copenhagen Summit will be highly relevant to the Security Council's future agenda. Ironically, the more successful Copenhagen and the implementation of any package of measures agreed there is, the less likely the direct involvement of the Security Council, and the converse is also true;

- No future agenda for the UN can simply avoid the question of Security Council enlargement. But it is important to remember that each failed attempt to achieve enlargement damages this institution. So considerable care is needed. It is not easy to see agreement being reached any time soon on an enlargement that would create new permanent members. So a better approach might be, as a first step, to agree on the creation of a new category of longer-term, renewable members;

Altogether this makes up a formidable agenda and one which the EU and its member states need to play a role in shaping, if their interests are not to go by default. To do so effectively will require a greater sense of strategy and a greater degree of tactical flexibility than the EU has so far managed to demonstrate. It will require less time to be spent on internal EU deliberations and more on listening to and influencing those non-European states and groups of states who will inevitably play a larger role at the UN than they have done in the past. Lisbon Treaty or no Lisbon Treaty this is the challenge the EU faces at the UN in the period ahead.