

Joachim Müller (ed.), *Reforming the United Nations: A Chronology*. Leiden: Brill, 2016. Pp. 440. €159. ISBN 978-90-04-24221-0

Joachim Müller, the editor of the book reviewed, can be regarded as a real United Nations (UN) insider. He joined the UN Secretariat as a junior officer in New York in 1984, was posted at all four UN headquarters, worked in two specialized agencies and retired at the end of 2017 as director of management and finance of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in Vienna. During his career, he specialized in the areas of budget and administration and, thus, gained a particular insight into the internal life of the UN. Among UN staff, one can perceive a certain degree of regret that such careers have become rare. Staff members in leading functions now often join the secretariats of international organizations from outside at a senior level. Müller's main focus is the one of a chronicler and commentator. He is also, *inter alia*, co-editor, together with Karl Sauvant, of the *Annual Review of UN Affairs*, which is issued by Oxford University Press. The publication provides commentaries by UN experts and documentation according to the main organs of the UN (six volumes annually).

The new publication is part of a mini-series entitled *Reforming the United Nations* and subtitled *A Chronology*. The other volumes are *New Initiatives and Past Efforts* (1997); *The Quiet Revolution* (2001); *The Struggle for Legitimacy and Effectiveness* (2006) and *The Challenge of Working Together* (2010). The current fifth volume can be regarded as the culmination of the series. The introductory chapter gives some basic information about the UN: the principal organs and their most important subsidiary bodies, the structure of the UN Secretariat, the major duty stations, the financial structure of the UN, peacekeeping missions and the composition of the UN system. The information contained in the introduction facilitates an understanding of the subsequent chapters, particularly for those readers whose cognizance of the UN system is less detailed and specific.

The second chapter presents over 72 pages on the major reform efforts and achievements during the 70-year UN history. This is done in a subchapter for each term of the Secretary-Generals: Trygve Lie (Norway, 1946–1953); Dag Hammarskjöld (Sweden, 1953–1961); U Thant (Burma, now Myanmar, 1961–1971); Kurt Waldheim (Austria, 1972–1981); Javier Pérez de Cuéllar (Peru, 1982–1991); Boutros Boutros-Ghali (Egypt, 1992–1996); Kofi Annan (Ghana, 1997–2006) and Ban Ki-moon (South Korea, 2007–2015). The year 2016, the end of Ki-moon's second term, could not be covered due to the editorial cut-off date of 31 December 2015. The subchapters begin with a summary of each Secretary-General's main achievements – a useful method to attract the interest of those readers who are satisfied to just learn a few basic facts. The summaries are followed by a more detailed appraisal of the major reform efforts and achievements, also making reference to the previous publications of the series. The more the book approaches the present, the more Müller goes into detail. Annan and Ki-moon are given a lot more space than Lie and Hammarskjöld. Accordingly, Müller meets the expectations of the reader whose main interest likely relates to the efforts at reforming the UN since the end of the Cold War.

The third chapter represents the nucleus of the book: a chronology of UN relevant events. The publication goes deep into the UN's history from 1941 when US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill issued the so-called 'Atlantic Charter', which contained the principles to govern the establishment of a worldwide security system. Following the creation of the UN in 1945, the book guides the reader through seven decades of UN history. A reader will learn details of the early days of the UN that even UN connoisseurs may not remember anymore. For example, many people remember San Francisco as the place of signature of the UN Charter at the end of June 1945. But it is less known nowadays that the first meeting of the UN General Assembly took place in London at Westminster Central Hall, which was also

where the first meetings of the UN Security Council and of the UN Economic and Social Council took place in January and February 1946.

Müller reminds us, *inter alia*, of the architectural plans of the central building of the UN headquarters in New York, located on the East River at First Avenue between 42nd and 48th street, which were delivered by two famous architects, Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer. As is the case for the elaboration of major reform efforts and achievements covered in the second chapter, Müller goes into fuller detail the more the reader approaches the present. The chronology contains a comprehensive description of all of those efforts, including those initiated by Secretary-Generals, by member states or group of states, by former UN senior officials (for example, Brian Urquhart and Erskine Childers) or by experts from academia. At the end of each calendar year, the status of the UN membership is noted and, from time to time, also the increase of the regular budget and headcount. In general, the editor exercises self-restraint with regard to evaluations and, in essence, concentrates on factual reporting with a few elements of evaluating remarks, which are drafted in carefully chosen language. Whereas the early editions of the series were by and large purely factual, you can observe that Müller's most recent book has become increasingly conceptual and analytical.

The editor does not yield to the temptation to enumerate each and every event in the history of the UN. Publishing such an *oeuvre* would mean a never-ending story. One could question why a few events that many would have regarded as relevant are not mentioned. For example, the reader does not find a reference to UN General Assembly Resolution 14(I)A on Budgetary and Financial Arrangements, which established the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), a subsidiary body of the General Assembly.¹ The ACABQ subsequently gained a very influential role in assisting the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly to make decisions, particularly in view of the fact that the Fifth Committee works in general on the basis of consensus rather than voting. Another more recent event that is not mentioned is the acceptance of the World Tourism Organization in 2003 as a specialized agency and a fully-fledged member of the UN system in accordance with Articles 57 and 63 of the UN Charter.

The integration of other specialized agencies that took place prior to this episode, however, are recorded. Some other events are only mentioned in broad terms. For example, the first blue helmets in UN history were stationed in Egypt in 1956 as a result of the Suez crisis, in concurrence with the Egyptian government. This act could neither be qualified as a case of application of Chapter VI of the UN Charter (the Security Council offers mediation) nor of Chapter VII (authorization to apply enforcement measures). It stood in legal terms, one could say, in between both chapters, which was an important act of legal precedence for future UN practices in peacekeeping. This action was initiated by Secretary-General Hammarskjöld in cooperation with Canadian Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. However, it should be left to the discretion of an editor to determine what is worth highlighting and what can be left out.

Appendix I contains the full text of UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1 on Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; 'The Future of United Nations Peace Operations: Implementation of the Recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO)'; the Report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture: Challenge of Sustaining Peace and the Five-Year Action Agenda.²

¹ GA Res. 14(I)A, 13 February 1946.

² GA Res. 70/1, 25 September 2015; UN Secretary-General, The Future of United Nations Peace Operations: Implementation of the Recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO), UN Doc. A/70/357, 2 September 2015; Report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture: Challenge of Sustaining Peace, UN Doc. A/69/968, 30 June 2015; Secretary-General, Five-Year Action Agenda, 25 January 2012, available at www.un.org/sg/priorities.

Appendix II contains, in addition to the UN Charter, useful information of a general nature about the UN, such as a compilation of all peacekeeping operations since 1948.

In conclusion, the book outlines that reform initiatives have changed the organization over time. Compared to the initial years, the UN has expanded in size, become more complex and gained a larger mandate. The editor seeks to provide conceptual insight. UN reform is seen as a political process guided essentially by the member states of the organization with numerous interests considered, rejected and adjusted. This process moves cautiously, aiming to reach consensus. The price to pay, however, is often adjustment to the lowest common denominator.

The editor aims to understand the dynamics of the reform process by addressing a number of important questions: what prompted the reform initiatives; what were the interests and constraints; what change was achieved? Some limited conclusions have been highlighted. Müller argues that the most powerful incentive for reform is a catalytic shift in the political environment in which the UN operates, such as the end of the Cold War or the emergence of new issues such as climate change and global terrorism. Historically, the USA as the dominant military and industrial power has been the main stakeholder in UN reform with particular interest in matters of security, human rights and UN internal administration and management. Developing countries are more concerned with economic issues and development assistance. European countries often take the role of a mediator between conflicting reform interests. As for constraints, national sovereignty is a key issue in nearly all of the major UN reform initiatives. How does the reform initiative affect sharing in the governance and control of the UN? Smaller and medium-sized industrial countries appear more ready to accept restrictions in order to strengthen international cooperation. Finally, civil society can be a partner in reform initiatives. Its interest is to gain a voice in decision making.

Even when approved, reform initiatives face the barrier of implementation. Among other things, this is seen as a consequence of the fragmentation of the UN into a multitude of semi-independent funds and programmes. In particular, the heads of funds, programmes and specialized agencies tend to resist proposals carrying the risk to limit their autonomy. Müller also comments on aspects that have proven to be reform resistant. This is particularly true of governance, which is frozen in time as far as the Security Council is concerned. It also applies to some aspects of administration and management, as Müller argues, still being rooted in the arrangement developed for the League of Nations.

Rather than prescribing what should be done, Müller conceptualizes and analyses the dynamics of the UN reform process. Such insight is necessary to understand, develop and implement reform initiatives, which is currently a high priority for Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Müller's book can be regarded as a golden source of information for academic studies in the areas of modern history, political science and international law. It also offers journalists the opportunity to dig thoroughly into any subject of UN-related political interest. May intensive use be made of it and may it have a follow-up in the future.

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