

GLOBAL INSTITUTIONS



# The UN Secretary-General and Secretariat

Second edition

Leon Gordenker



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First edition published 2005

Second edition published 2010

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada

by Routledge

270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2005, 2010 Leon Gordenker

Typeset in Times New Roman by

Taylor & Francis Books

Printed and bound in Great Britain by

TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Gordenker, Leon, 1923–

The UN Secretary-General and Secretariat / Leon Gordenker.—2nd ed.  
p. cm

1. United Nations. Secretariat. 2. United Nations. Secretary-General.

I. Title

JZ5008.G67 2010

352.11'3—dc22

2009032723

ISBN 978-0-415-77840-4 (hbk)

ISBN 978-0-415-77841-1 (pbk)

ISBN 978-0-203-85748-9 (ebk)

# The UN Secretary-General and Secretariat

The new edition of this accessible introduction to the important role of the United Nations Secretary-General continues to offer a keen insight into the United Nations—the Secretariat and its head, the Secretary-General, summing up the history, structure, strengths and weaknesses, and continuing operations of an ever-present global institution.

Behind the public face of the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, and his predecessors, an active corps of officials and advisers face ceaseless pressures and challenges. This clear and concise introduction examines both the solid and substantive work of the UN's permanent staff and the role of the Secretary-General in policy development.

The second edition has been thoroughly revised and updated to reflect:

- the retirement of Kofi Annan and the appointment of Ban Ki-moon as the new UN Secretary-General;
- the withdrawal of John Bolton as permanent representative of the United States and the consequent softening of his government's approach to the UN;
- developments in the global economy and international security dilemmas;
- the change of administration in the United States.

Written by a recognized authority on the subject, this book continues to be the ideal interpretative introduction for students of the UN, international organizations, and global governance.

**Leon Gordenker** is Emeritus Professor of Politics at Princeton University, USA and Senior Visiting Research Professor at the Roosevelt Study Center, Middelburg, the Netherlands. He is a long-time observer of international organization and has written extensively on the United Nations and organized transnational relationships.

# **Routledge Global Institutions**

Edited by Thomas G. Weiss

*The CUNY Graduate Center, New York, USA*

and Rorden Wilkinson

*University of Manchester, UK*

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The “Global Institutions Series” is designed to provide readers with comprehensive, accessible, and informative guides to the history, structure, and activities of key international organizations as well as books that deal with topics of key importance in contemporary global governance. Every volume stands on its own as a thorough and insightful treatment of a particular topic, but the series as a whole contributes to a coherent and complementary portrait of the phenomenon of global institutions at the dawn of the millennium.

Books are written by recognized experts, conform to a similar structure, and cover a range of themes and debates common to the series. These areas of shared concern include the general purpose and rationale for organizations, developments over time, membership, structure, decision-making procedures, and key functions. Moreover, current debates are placed in historical perspective alongside informed analysis and critique. Each book also contains an annotated bibliography and guide to electronic information as well as any annexes appropriate to the subject matter at hand.

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## Foreword to the second edition

First published in 2005, Leon Gordenker's volume was among the first in what was then a new, and continues to be a, dynamic series on "global institutions," which now includes, only four years later, more than 40 published titles and another 30 commissioned. This is the second of our titles to go into a second edition. With the 2006 election of Ban Ki-moon as the eighth person to occupy what the first, Trygve Lie, called "the most impossible job in the world,"<sup>1</sup> we thought that it was essential to offer readers an updated guide to the history, structure, and concrete activities of the UN Secretary-General and Secretariat. The second edition even more than the first provides readers with definitive guides to one of the most visible, yet underappreciated, aspects of what many of us know as "global governance."

Remarkable as it may seem, there exist relatively few books that offer in-depth treatments of prominent global bodies, processes and associated issues, much less an entire series of concise and complementary volumes. Those that do exist are either out of date, inaccessible to the non-specialist reader, or seek to develop a specialized understanding of particular aspects of an institution or process rather than offer an overall account of its functioning. Similarly, existing books have often been written in highly technical language or have been crafted "in-house" and are notoriously self-serving and narrow.

The advent of electronic media has undoubtedly helped research and teaching by making data and primary documents of international organizations more widely available, but it has also complicated matters. The growing reliance on the Internet and other electronic methods of finding information about key international organizations and processes has served, ironically, to limit the educational and analytical materials to which most readers have ready access—namely, books. Public relations documents, raw data, and loosely refereed web sites do not make for intelligent analysis. Official publications compete with a

vast amount of electronically available information, much of which is suspect because of its ideological or self-promoting slant. Paradoxically, a growing range of purportedly independent web sites offering analyses of the activities of particular organizations has emerged, but one inadvertent consequence has been to frustrate access to basic, authoritative, readable, critical, and well-researched texts. The market for such has actually been reduced by the ready availability of varying-quality electronic materials.

For those of us who teach, research, and practice in the area, such limited access to information has been particularly frustrating. We were delighted when Routledge saw the value of a series that bucks this trend and provides key reference points to the most significant global institutions and issues. They are betting that serious students and professionals will want serious analyses. We have assembled a first-rate line-up of authors to address that market. Our intention, then, is to provide one-stop shopping for all readers—students (both undergraduate and postgraduate), negotiators, diplomats, practitioners from nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations, and interested parties alike—seeking information about the most prominent institutional aspects of global governance.

### **The UN Secretary-General and Secretariat**

Developments in the international milieu since 2005, when the first edition of this book was published, have led to many changes in the world organization as well as its top official and its staff. The retirement of the telegenic and charismatic Kofi Annan and the appointment of a far less visible Ban Ki-moon have affected the entire organization. Parallel to these changes, the end of the George W. Bush presidency and the departure of the conservative firebrand John Bolton as permanent representative of the United States, and the consequent softening of the American image in the world, were complemented with the arrival of Susan Rice as the US permanent representative to the United Nations in the far more multilaterally inclined administration of Barack Obama. Beyond that, the Security Council created a series of new tasks in the security realm. Moreover, since the publication of the first edition, an interesting set of new books has appeared which furnish more insights into the subject and a number of new books about the UN system in the Routledge Global Institutions Series, not available earlier, are also available to readers.

The editors hope that they will remain as productive as Leon Gordenker, professor emeritus at Princeton University, who in the midst of his ninth decade was keen to undertake the task of updating his earlier

efforts to help make sense of the globe's top international civil servant and the people who work for him. We could not have found a commentator with more experience or wisdom. Having begun work for the world organization as a journalist in the mid-1940s and covering the Korean conflict before doing his Ph.D. at Columbia, one of his first and most widely cited books was on the Secretary-General.<sup>2</sup> And much of his distinguished career as a teacher and researcher has focused on the behavior and misbehavior of international secretariats.

Lee Gordenker's concise and elegant volume permits readers to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the international civil service and the leadership at the United Nations. Frustrations and exasperation, yes, but also the eight occupants and their senior and junior staffs have made a difference to the rhetoric and reality of multilateral cooperation.

During the Second World War, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace sponsored a series of conferences to learn the lessons from what many believed was the "great experiment" of the League of Nations, namely creating a core of independent officials to attack international problems.<sup>3</sup> This legacy was carried over to the UN, and Charter Article 101(3) called for the "paramount consideration in the employment of staff" to be "securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity" while paying regard "to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible." This book portrays the pluses and minuses of the heart and soul of the "second United Nations"—not the arena where states make decisions, but the international civil service. Our hope is that Lee Gordenker's analysis reaches a broad audience with its many useful descriptions, lists of resources, and numerous concrete examples that illustrate how people matter.

As always, we welcome comments and suggestions from readers.

Thomas G. Weiss, The CUNY Graduate Center, New York, USA  
Rorden Wilkinson, University of Manchester, UK  
December 2009

# Preface

This book uses some of the work and experience of countless journalists, scholars, civil servants and politicians who have sought to understand the development of international organization since World War I. It is a formidable body of writing that covers a novel and growingly complex civic experience related to bringing some useful logic to the relations among all governments on earth. With gratitude, I refer in the text to this writing.

As my contact with the United Nations began in 1945, my interpretations of what the office of Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Secretariat represent are colored by early and later occasional participation and by long observation. That has helped turn this book, whether for good or ill, rather more toward the form of an essay than the systematic academic scholarship represented by much work cited below. I hope that it will help increase understanding of and curiosity about how an international secretariat functions and why its activities have their particular flavor.

In the course of thinking and writing this work, I have had the benefit of conversations—not structured interviews—with old colleagues and active and recent members of the Secretariat of low and high rank. If they recognize their contributions here, I hasten to assure them that misinterpretations, as others here, are mine. I undertook not to quote or refer specifically to these conversations in order to collect untrammelled opinions and facts and to subject my tentative conclusions to expert scrutiny.

Helpful comment also came from academic colleagues. I am grateful for criticisms of early drafts offered by Peter Baehr, Jacques Fomerand, Dennis Dijkzeul, and the editors of this series, especially Tom Weiss. Their encouragement helped me both with content and with the excruciating process of compressing a vast amount of information and theorizing into a short account. The Center of International Studies, now

succeeded by the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies, and the Department of Politics at Princeton University also offered assistance.

I offer special acknowledgment for helping maintain my morale, a necessary support for a veteran supposedly in retirement, to my daughter, Emilie Gordenker, and to my friend, Sophia Smitskamp.

L.G.

Princeton, N.J., February 2005

## **Preface to the second edition**

In 2007, after the first edition of this book had appeared, the eighth Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, former foreign minister of the Republic of Korea, occupied the office on the 38th floor of the UN Headquarters in New York. As his predecessors did, he has conformed in his own fashion to an active agenda. It responds to almost every international crisis down the scale of complexity to routine housekeeping functions. His is an office that serves an organization that constantly develops new forms and practices. Neither the swiftly changing international environment nor the adaptation of the United Nations as a functioning organization could have been predicted in the founding year of 1945. Therefore, it is no surprise that during the last three years, manifold changes in the UN system and in the office of its premier executive could be observed.

Furthermore, the intensely active eight years of Kofi Annan's tenure and its imminent end stimulated a shower of new writing. Some of this came from academic sources, some from participants in senior offices in the Secretariat, some from journalists with privileged vantage points. This writing provides a mine of new ore for revising the first edition of a book that ended before the appointment of Mr Ban.

Apart from the internal functions of the Secretary-General, a new president leads the United States, which of all the UN members has had the strongest voice, if not always with acclaimed results, in the organization. The eight years of the administration of George W. Bush, its leadership in military action in Afghanistan and especially Iraq, its skepticism about multilateral international commitments and the reflections of its domestic political controversies greatly affected the fortune of the Annan tenure at the United Nations. A new president clearly promised to bring a different tone to its participation in the organization that his country had so enthusiastically sponsored. How that promise is applied also necessarily requires new contents for this book.



For this edition, I have supplemented some of the conversations with insiders in the UN Secretariat and enthusiastically relied on academic insights not earlier available. As before, I have had generous support from the Department of Politics at Princeton University. In mid-2009, the Roosevelt Study Center at Middelburg, Netherlands, appointed me Senior Visiting Research Professor and offered me use of its facilities. To these institutions and their personnel, I am grateful, as well as to Professor Peter R. Baehr whose comments and continuing friendship provided encouragement. So, too, have my daughter, Emilie, and my friend, Sophia Smitskamp, encouraged this work. The responsibility for gaffes and ignorance are mine alone.

L.G.  
Grijpskerke, Netherlands  
December 2009