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Institutional Development of the United Nations Secretariat

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1 Introduction

Not only the United Nations, but the principal organs will also be celebrating their anniversary in 2020. This article explores how the UN Secretariat was run during the past 75 years. The institutional development of the secretariat of an international organization (IO) depends on the leadership displayed by the executive head and senior staff and on the political settings such as the constitutional leeway, the selection of its main functionaries, the conditions set for activities, and the allocation of resources. The better the secretariat is managed, the stronger the leadership capacity of the organization's executive head will be; however, it may be questioned whether this same expectation regarding effective management can be applied to the UN. A handbook article about the UN Secretariat, written by competent insiders, is quite negative as it describes its existence as a lifelong “battle over its independent nature and an almost constant process of restructuring and reform,” with the reform issue being a recurrent theme in the media.¹

When states create IOs, the negotiation results are carefully recorded in the constitution. However, constitutional sections on the secretariat and staff are relatively short and lack detail, which implies that secretariats need to be elaborated by their staff who are given some room to maneuver to do so (in principal-agent theory referred to as “agency slack” or “slippage”). This is also true of the UN Charter, with only 5 out of 111 Articles discussing the Secretariat and, as shown below, a major administrative role for the first and successive Secretaries-General. IO secretariats are hierarchically organized organs whose leadership sees to the organization's continuity, seeks to devote itself

1 Jonah and Scott Hill 2018, 212.

to its objectives, runs the headquarters and field missions, and represents the organization vis-à-vis other actors. Secretariats encounter limitations, among them political restrictions and insufficient resources. Playing a role of its own in world politics may not be obvious for IOs, given the major powers' inclination to curb that role, but executive heads have several assets available to act independently such as their good offices and the IO's bully pulpit. Entries in *IO BIO*, the *Biographical Dictionary of Secretaries-General of International Organizations*,² show that to be effective, an IO's executive head must combine strong "external leadership" (representing the organization in world politics and find support for its policies and actions) with strong "internal leadership" (directing the bureaucracy and managing staffing, finances, and reform). Leadership matters in the contact with diplomats, the media, nonstate actors, and other IO organs. Relations with staff matter, as the executive head needs their commitment to the organization's efforts; hence, this implies that he or she needs to motivate senior and other staff.

Since most literature on the UN Secretariat focuses on external, or political, leadership, I examine here the internal, or administrative, leadership. When the UN was first established, a choice was made to have one secretariat to serve all principal organs. The Secretary-General is both a political figure, given the opportunity to bring threats to international peace and security to the attention of the Security Council, and the UN's chief administrative officer. The December 1945 *Report of the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations* stipulated that the Secretary-General's choice of higher staff and his leadership largely determine "the character and the efficiency of the Secretariat as a whole," mentioning aspects such as team spirit, moral authority, and Member State confidence. The Secretary-General may assume roles as a mediator and an informal adviser to governments, but also will be called on, when exercising administrative duties, to make decisions "which may justly be called political."³

Given the handbook article's suggestion that implies ineffective management, this article assesses the Secretariat's institutional development, through analysis of the administrative qualities of eight former Secretaries-General, with a focus on how they strengthened the UN Secretariat and how they weakened it.⁴

2 *IO BIO*, edited by Bob Reinalda, Kent Kille, and Jaci Eisenberg, www.ru.nl/fm/iobio.

3 UN 1946, Chapter VIII, Section 2, paras. 15–16.

4 António Guterres has spent too short a time in office but, for an optimistic view, see Ramcharan 2019, 19.

2 Dumbarton Oaks, October 1944

By the end of World War II, the four major Allied powers proposed that a general IO be established. This was not an obvious act, as two of them had undergone unfavorable experiences with the League of Nations—the United States had not become a member, the Soviet Union had been expelled. However, both had their reasons for establishing a new IO. The US government had its own ideas about the malleability of society and international relations, based on the New Deal experience and convictions concerning world leadership. The Soviet Union favored a security organization that would prevent aggression from Germany and other states. Britain stressed its League experience and China sponsored the effort. Given the negatively assessed League's performance, the general IO was to be something "new," disconnected from the League. At Dumbarton Oaks, the Allied powers discussed the possibility of implementing dual leadership for the Secretariat: a president with political responsibility and a Secretary-General for administrative matters. However, they decided that the Secretary-General should combine political and administrative tasks.

Despite the desire for a new organization, the League's institutional impact cannot be denied. Parts of the League secretariat still functioned in Geneva and Princeton, supporting the Allied war effort, and former civil servants such as Eric Drummond, the League's first secretary-general, and Egon Ranshofen-Wertheimer shared their secretariat experience. Chapter X of the Dumbarton Oaks proposal on the Secretariat of the new organization did not mention the idea of an "international secretariat," with staff serving the IO independently from their national allegiance. This had embodied the essence of the 1919 League secretariat and several new IOs, set up by the Allied United Nations during 1943–1945, were given such international secretariats. This also applied to the United Nations Organization, which was formed in 1945.

3 San Francisco, April–June 1945

Details that explained more fully the responsibilities of the UN Secretariat were brought in through debates and Charter amendments at the 1945 San Francisco conference. The Secretariat became one of the UN's principal organs (Article 7.1), placing it on a par with the primary political bodies. Article 99 about bringing matters to the attention of the Security Council explicitly recognized the Secretary-General's political prerogatives and distinguished the UN's position from that of the League. Article 100 became the constitutional formulation of Drummond's notion of an "international secretariat," making UN officials

international staff instead of national representatives. International responsibilities in wordings more or less similar to those in Article 100 were brought into the constitutions of most specialized agencies, while older IOs, such as the ones for telecommunication and postal services, had to adapt when they became a UN agency.

The creation of the Economic and Social Council provided an opportunity to continue, and coordinate, the League's successful economic and social activities. The UN sustained many administrative aspects of the League, such as the salary and pension systems, and employed several former officials.

4 The UN Secretariat

The Secretariat assists and facilitates the functioning of the other principal organs and UN conferences, and carries out their decisions. It provides the necessary staff, administers the budget, arranges the agendas, prepares reports to enable discussion on agenda topics, provides expert advice, supervises ongoing operations, and suggests further activities. Apart from the Secretary-General's office, it is organized into offices that reflect the functions and duties of the principal organs (e.g., political affairs, disarmament) and functional departments (e.g., legal services, public information). The composition of offices and departments has changed over time. UN headquarters is in New York City, but the UN took over the League's Palais des Nations in Geneva and opened other UN offices in Vienna and Nairobi, which also serve as the headquarters of several UN bodies and agencies. The principal organs, except for the International Court of Justice, are all based in New York. The full range of specialized agencies, programs, funds, related organizations, and other UN entities is known as the UN system, with the Administrative Committee on Coordination (later renamed) as a means for the Secretary-General to maintain control over the system as it brings together the leaders of all the UN system secretariats. It is not part of the Secretariat, but the Secretary-General chairs it, whereas the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, a standing committee of the General Assembly, allows Member State control over the Secretariat.

The number of Secretariat employees increased tenfold from 300 to roughly 3,000 during 1946 and to 3,900 in 1949, with 44 percent of them being female, all in lower-level positions. The UN had 5,546 staff in 1961: 128 high officers, 1,689 professional staff, 119 on secondment, 3,218 general service, and 353 field service personnel.⁵ The number of employees in the mid-1970s was 12,300 (40 percent

⁵ Bailey 1962, 62.

professional and higher, 60 percent general service) and, in 2007, 36,817: 11,253 at headquarters, 3,858 at other locations, and 19,338 in peacekeeping missions. Female staff in higher positions increased from 901 in 1997 to 1,179 in 2007.⁶

5 Becoming Secretary-General

Article 97 provides that the Security Council is to recommend and the General Assembly to appoint the candidate Secretary-General. There is a 1946 Assembly Resolution 11(I) on the terms of appointment (e.g., two terms, each lasting five years and, in paragraph 4.d, debate on the nomination to be avoided in the Assembly) and there are informal understandings such as no permanent member candidate and rotation between regions. The Council has always recommended only one candidate, followed by an Assembly appointment. No search and nomination procedures or evaluation procedure of the candidates' qualifications exist. Permanent and other Council members hold private negotiations and bargain politically about their candidates. However, in 2016, a more transparent procedure was used in which candidates replied to questions about their objectives during televised debates, and a campaign was launched to appoint a female Secretary-General.

Trygve Lie, the first Secretary-General, was a compromise candidate between the two major powers and felt catapulted into the position. Dag Hammarskjöld, unaware of his candidacy, was informed about his selection by telegram. Kurt Waldheim, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and Ban Ki-moon wanted the position and campaigned to secure it. U Thant and Javier Pérez de Cuéllar (also a compromise candidate) both knew the institution because they had previously served as ambassadors to the UN, the latter also as under-secretary-general, and Kofi Annan spent most of his career working for the UN.

6 Elaborating the Secretariat's Political Role

The first executive heads of an IO can be seen as "frontierspersons" who actually build up the secretariat and set the first institutional processes into motion. Gladwyn Jebb, executive secretary of the Preparatory Commission, was acting UN Secretary-General in January 1946, but Lie elaborated the Secretariat's political and administrative roles as the first Secretary-General (since February).

⁶ UN 2007, 10–11, 41.

He carved out a space for an active and expansionist Secretary-General, establishing a number of precedents for his successors to build on.⁷ He expanded the political powers of the office by delivering legal memorandums to argue why the Secretary-General should be able to act in a certain manner. In this way, he managed to change Security Council rules of procedures during the 1946 Iranian crisis, giving the Secretary-General the right to address the Council with oral or written statements on each agenda item. Lie took advantage of several crises to expand the powers of the office and to gain recognition of the Secretary-General's political role, including the right to establish investigating committees and gather intelligence on disputes of UN concern, draft Security Council resolutions, appoint special representatives, and delegate his authority to them, propose solutions to problems, coordinate the responses of the UN organs and Member States to crisis situations, and take initiatives to implement UN decisions. His involvement in the 1947 Palestine issue opened the door for UN Secretaries-General to become active in the peaceful settlement of disputes. Lie also used the office as a bully pulpit to voice his own political views and push for action and change by launching his program to win peace through the UN. He went on a tour of major world capitals to discuss his ideas directly with the heads of government and foreign ministers, rather than merely relaying his information through their UN delegations. To enlist their support, he also visited UN agencies in Europe.

Lie's role in expanding the political powers of the office cannot be ignored. Successive Secretaries-General have, more and less successfully, added to the Secretariat's political role, making the best out of "the most impossible job on this earth."⁸ What can be said about Lie and his successors' administrative roles?⁹

7 Administrative Leadership: Lie (1946–1953) and Hammarskjöld (1953–1961)

According to a 1946 agreement, Lie had eight assistant secretaries-general (five of them nominated by the Security Council's permanent members) who headed eight departments and met with him on a weekly basis. Lie used the Soviet assistant as a go-between with the Soviet government, and he also built

⁷ Muldoon and Ravndal 2017.

⁸ Trygve Lie, quoted in Chesterman 2007, 1.

⁹ The limited space here does not allow for many references. I mention comparative works such as Kille 2006, Myint-U and Scott 2007, and Mouat 2014.

relations with the ambassadors to the UN. His closest team of advisers focused on legal matters, military affairs, and public information. Lie made his law staff write opinions on key issues and held weekly press conferences. Personnel selection was not his strength. A large share of the original staff was British and American; however, many governments that were asked for help in screening potential applicants refused to lend such assistance. Lie, willing to consult with member governments but also avoiding national pressures, left most of the recruitment and the running of the Secretariat to the assistant secretary-general for administration and an executive assistant. He, however, saw to the UN settling its headquarters in New York City by acquiring a site, arranging plans with the city, and assembling a team of architects. Lie was not particularly popular with his staff, as many did not believe that he defended their employment rights sufficiently. In March 1947, he faced a mass employee protest over salaries and working conditions. Lie could be emotional. Patience and self-control were not his strengths, and both his staff and diplomats met with occasional outbursts of anger. Due to his support for the US-led UN intervention in Korea (1950), the Soviet Union opposed Lie being reelected for a second term. When the United States insisted it would veto anyone but Lie, and the General Assembly extended his original term, the Soviet Union boycotted his office, which made him politically powerless. Furthermore, Lie betrayed the Secretariat's independent character (Article 100) by allowing the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to screen US staff under McCarthyism, based on a 1948 confidential agreement. This resulted in more severe tensions with his staff and his resignation.

Lie's successor, Hammarskjöld, not only was an activist Secretary-General but also a competent administrator. He immediately began to revive the morale of the Secretariat, saw every office, and came up with a complete reorganization plan. He brought the top legal, financial, and personnel officials under the direct supervision of his own office and created two under-secretary-general positions, one from the United States (Ralph Bunche) and one from the Soviet Union. Hammarskjöld wanted a more efficient Secretariat, and followed a conservative budget policy by first cutting the budget and staff (through attrition) and then forcing the Secretariat to absorb new tasks without increasing its size. To put forward his case for reorganization, he regularly appeared in front of the Administrative and Budget Committee. He rewrote staff rules to reflect the principle of an independent civil service with uniform standards for recruitment. He ordered the FBI agents off the UN premises and won a UN judicial process rendering justice to some of the victims accompanied by a financial compensation (not appreciated by US politicians), but he did not reintegrate them into the UN services. He also managed to increase his power over staffing

matters by insisting on having exclusive responsibility for appointments to the Secretariat (eventually this was also accepted by the Soviet Union). Hammarskjöld kept his staff working long hours, did not delegate much work to others, and surrounded himself at the upper echelon with a core group of collaborators who tried to keep up with him. The reorganization reflected his need for control, particularly because he used the Secretariat as a tool of influence in politics. He “employed the range of administrative activities not as an end unto themselves, but to bolster his chances of being an influential Secretary-General.”¹⁰ In 1958, the Administrative and Budget Committee believed that he had consolidated too much administrative power in his office.¹¹ To ensure that documents bore his stamp and policy approach, Hammarskjöld personally drafted most of his reports and speeches. To make Security Council resolutions practical, he persuaded the Council on several occasions to write specific instructions for him to follow exactly as he wanted them to be read. Hammarskjöld used the introduction of his annual report to the General Assembly to present his thoughts about UN priorities and action. He had frequent contact with Member States through the permanent missions that, by then, had been established at UN headquarters, with ambassadors and ministers moving in and out of his office.

8 Administrative Leadership: Thant (1961–1971) and Waldheim (1972–1981)

Thant, also an activist Secretary-General, was committed to creating a strong political role for the office. He met regularly with eight senior officials, including Bunche, and drafted his own speeches and reports, but delegated most of the work of his office to others. He rarely traveled, avoided most UN social functions, had little understanding of UN finances, and could not find a solution to the growing problem of financing UN security and (increasing) economic operations, with France and the Soviet Union refusing to pay their share of the Congo peacekeeping budget. He had “no appetite for administration” and marked the beginning of “the Secretariat’s flabbiness and decay by the end of the twentieth century.”¹² Thant was criticized for not making the Secretariat more representative, given the many new members from the South, and for disregarding the Secretariat’s relatively low salaries and limited career prospects.

10 Kille 2006, 85.

11 Myint-U and Scott 2007, 33.

12 Brian Urquhart, quoted in Chesterman 2007, 25.

Under Thant, the expanding UN Secretariat began to be portrayed negatively. Following a 1967 review, Thant proposed a reduction in, and reallocation of, top positions, but his efforts were feeble as he had no desire to deal with administrative matters directly. By the end of his term, many delegates agreed that the Secretariat needed a shake-up.¹³

However, Waldheim's bureaucratic leadership was also poor. Waldheim was a "limited and cautious, but reasonably efficient, civil servant that the permanent members of the Security Council probably preferred."¹⁴ He saw administration as a burden in addition to the actual diplomatic work, and tended to use the process of hiring staff as a way of earning support from governments.¹⁵ In response to the UN's urgent financial problems, he froze recruitment, cut the number of staffs severely, and reduced the number of meetings, conferences, and documents. His reduction of top positions and his disregard for the lower ranks resulted in lower staff quality and demoralization. He had an authoritarian and arrogant attitude toward employees. Although he was able to delegate, he was also noted for his meticulous attention to detail. He remained inactive when inflation lowered the value of staff salaries and some governments awarded bonuses to their nationals. Having little interest in, and understanding of, UN finances, he called for greater budgetary constraints but he did not work to guide budgetary priorities and address structural problems (including Southern underrepresentation), whereas expenses mounted as the General Assembly regularly accepted higher budgets. Waldheim's increase of staff to meet Member State demands for their nationals resulted in overstaffing at a time when cuts were necessary. Support for creating attractive UN salaries began to fade, and no further reform initiatives were made.

9 Administrative Leadership: Pérez de Cuéllar (1982–1991) and Boutros-Ghali (1992–1996)

Pérez de Cuéllar, a "meticulous diplomat, who was in control of everything done in his name,"¹⁶ had limited administrative experience. He worked with a small senior team and his way of delegation created a distance to the entire staff. He did not control the ongoing skirmishes about salary levels and the need to retain qualified employees by higher salaries. Willing to restore staff morale

13 Myint-U and Scott 2007, 55.

14 Brian Urquhart, quoted in Chesterman 2007, 26.

15 Mouat 2014, 135–136.

16 Myint-U and Scott 2007, 79.

by tackling bureaucratic issues, such as national patronage and red tape, he was annoyed by government pressures on Secretariat appointments and felt his administrative powers being steadily eroded.¹⁷ He soon encountered growing hostility from the Ronald Reagan administration, which viewed the Secretariat in terms of mismanagement, waste, and anti-Americanism, followed by a reduction of dues by 20 percent in 1985 (the Kassebaum-Solomon Amendment). The US focus on excessive staff costs (pay levels, pension schemes) was shared by Japan, the European Economic Community, and communist states, and also was expressed in two UN Joint Inspection Unit reports (1984, 1985), the latter also critical of staff representation bodies. With some twenty-five members withholding part of their assessments and the General Assembly approving new expenditures, the UN was on the brink of bankruptcy. In 1986, the Assembly established a "Group of 18" experts, which produced substantial recommendations for administrative and financial reform. These resulted in streamlining the Secretariat in the political domain (which actually helped Pérez de Cuéllar to enhance his control over UN diplomacy),¹⁸ but the lack of money to improve staff quality and the decision to cut back through attrition, instead of reassessment, caused many competent staff to leave. Pérez de Cuéllar did considerably reduce staff numbers, but he failed to implement appropriate reform and, contrary to the Charter, he allowed the US General Accounting Office to review UN auditing. He also failed to refute the United States' political appreciation of the organization, and he was in fact saved by the Soviet Union's 1988 decision to use the UN for withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan. Repayment of Soviet arrears forced the United States to do the same.

Boutros-Ghali was an intellectual leader, who expanded the role of the Secretary-General as an international player, but he was a poor administrator who witnessed how the General Assembly defeated several of his reform proposals. Based on an existing twenty-two Member States plan, he immediately started promising Secretariat decentralization and reduction of senior staff, also introducing one-year contracts. However, he followed the plan only partially, ignoring the advice of having a General Assembly resolution to support his reform, met with angry ambassadors, and began to reserve positions for certain states (mainly from the North). He successfully asked the US president to name an under-secretary-general for management, but burdened his relations with the United States by refusing to accept a proposed agency head and

17 Mouat 2014, 196.

18 Myint-U and Scott 2007, 80.

(effectively) asking for a female candidate. Establishing the Office of Internal Oversight Services did improve supervision, but the ongoing financial crisis, with \$1 billion in unpaid assessments, and the high costs of the UN's growing operational role were still unresolved. A report, drawn up by two central bankers, included recommendations, but the General Assembly and Boutros-Ghali did not act, which in turn annoyed US politicians. While staff numbers increased considerably (including special representatives and numerous employees in peace missions), the budget was drastically reduced. New trends to solve this contradiction consisted of an increasing reliance on voluntary contributions to activities and "extra-budgetary" staff. Furthermore, a divide developed between the staff at headquarters and those in missions in the field, with the latter having different experiences and attitudes. Boutros-Ghali's relationship with staff deteriorated further, with the unions going on strike and complaints about his secretive management style. Collaborators regarded him as demanding, with too much attention to detail and vagueness about what he expected from them, and unwilling to delegate tasks. His original decentralization and reduction of senior officials actually had a reverse effect because, eventually, more of them reported directly to him. He certainly did not deliver the expected managerial and financial reforms the United States had hoped for by holding back its membership dues to the UN.

10 Administrative Leadership: Annan (1997–2006) and Ban (2007–2016)

Annan, the first UN staff member to become Secretary-General, installed a new team and announced an organizational reform in phases, with changes that he initiated himself and those that required General Assembly approval. He grouped the many UN agencies, funds, and programs under four sections with coordinating executive committees, established a senior management group and a deputy secretary-general (first held by Louise Fréchette), integrated twelve Secretariat entities into five, and strengthened the independent auditing department. He cut costs by eliminating jobs and red tape, proposed a revolving credit fund, and managed to stabilize the budget. The Assembly approved most of the changes, but did not create the proposed fund. The Administrative and Budget Committee remained critical of aspects. The United States responded positively by beginning a partial repayment of its back dues, but it also reduced its share of the regular and peacekeeping budgets. Annan's management style was inclusive. He delegated substantive issues, held weekly "cabinet" sessions with a wide representation from within the UN system, asked

for opinions, and announced clear decisions. In 1999, Annan published two self-critical reports about massacres, one about Srebrenica (requested by the General Assembly) and another about Rwanda (that he himself had requested). The latter was also critical of the United States, but Annan's admittance of collective and personal responsibility made the difference. A general response to peacekeeping problems was found in the 2000 report drafted by Lakhdar Brahimi. Even if the Assembly did not approve Brahimi's recommendations, it did help to clarify specific weaknesses and potential solutions. Annan had to deal with the UN becoming a target in Iraq in 2003. Eventually, he gave in to the staff committee's request to withdraw all personnel, whereas he first argued that the UN should not be deterred from its work. When the UN (including his son) was accused of corruption in the Oil-for-Food Programme in Iraq, Annan directed Paul Volcker and Richard Goldstone to investigate the scandal. They found no evidence of misbehavior by Annan, but noted that the UN did not control what went on between the Iraqi government and the oil companies. Annan proposed a bold reshaping of the UN in his 2005 report *In Larger Freedom*¹⁹ and sought the support of the 2005 summit of world leaders, but the outcome was limited (although two new institutions were set up and the Responsibility to Protect doctrine was accepted). All reforms that the Assembly passed were weaker than those that had originally been proposed. Kent Kille emphasizes Annan's strategic understanding of how to best run the Secretariat because Annan had an agenda in mind with his guidance of reports and the budget, awareness of political pressures, and control of the gradual give-and-take process within the organization.²⁰

Ban, a quiet and skillful diplomat, was not a gifted manager. He asked his top staff to name some issues on which his office should focus, but it took them years to craft a global strategy. During his first month in office, Ban proposed two major restructurings (splitting the peacekeeping department and combining the disarmament and political affairs departments), but he met with resistance from the General Assembly and had to give in. Eventually, he concluded that proposing reforms required holding consultations beforehand.²¹ Although his first appointments gave the impression that he would not change the top level dramatically, he surrounded himself with a small group, consisting mainly of South Koreans, which raised allegations of favoritism and blocked access to him. Ban underscored their quality, expressed a negative perception of the Secretariat (too many turf battles; weak in transparency, quality, and ethics), and

19 UN 2005.

20 Kille 2006, 183.

21 Mouat 2014, 381.

advocated that job requirements be reformed, making him unpopular among his staff. He proposed some slight reforms with regard to staffing and improving the coherence of the UN system, but with mixed outcomes. Ban, however, appointed relatively many women to higher positions, and he guided the renovation of the UN headquarters buildings (with relocation as a source of many complaints).

11 Conclusion: Administrative Leadership of the UN Secretariat

No fewer than six out of eight former UN Secretaries-General showed poor administrative leadership of the Secretariat, particularly regarding issues that require specific competences such as staffing, finances, and team coherence. Lie carved out the Secretary-General's administrative role, but he weakened it by his troubled staff relations and his betrayal of the Secretariat's independent character. The sequence of four weak administrators (Thant, Waldheim, Pérez de Cuéllar, and Boutros-Ghali) during a period of thirty-five years (1961–1996) considerably and continuously enfeebled the Secretariat's institutional development, which can be attributed to their apparent lack of administrative skills and their understanding of UN finances. Ban's administrative record was also weak. Only two Secretaries-General had obvious administrative leadership qualities and succeeded in strengthening the Secretariat: Hammarskjöld, because he enjoyed administration, and Annan, who profited from knowing the organization from within. Unlike the others, both also mastered intraorganizational relations, particularly with the General Assembly and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. These relations are crucial, given the Assembly's inclination to control the Secretariat and to approve new expenditures resulting from what happens in the world, particularly when reform efforts are being made with austerity.

This poor administrative leadership outcome fits some general patterns observed in the literature regarding IO administration. Trust, confidence, expertise, knowledge, information, and persuasion are crucial skills to the constructive workings of secretariats.²² But IOs have a relatively poor personnel management record, according to Michael Davies: "There is an overall lack of transparency, processes are not always respected, accountability is poor and democratic dialogue between staff and management is sometimes conspicu-

²² Xu and Weller 2018, 139.

ous by its absence.”²³ The UN Secretariat’s problems have been compounded by “a management, which could not master its complexity and size.” Davies mentions factors such as failing to stimulate the inertia of its large bureaucracy, a lack of accountability at the top, a general review of issues being followed by a lowest common denominator approach, reluctance to take steps toward modernization, a poor record in damage control, and a lack of recognition for its administrative achievements. “If every action is subsumed to political decisions then it is almost unnecessary to discuss the issues in the first place and it certainly provides management with a perfect reason not to produce results.”²⁴ John Mathiason observes that secretariat management regarding dismissals, appointments, and shifting resources is constrained by the necessity to convince member states to endorse proposals and to motivate staff to implement requests, with a general consensus serving as the main means of decision-making. He mentions leadership challenges such as overseeing the complex machinery and bringing the staff along on the basis of their belief in the correctness of the executive head’s ideas and their connection with the organization’s purpose. The fact that most staff are already in place implies that many have their own political constituencies. He also stresses that executive heads need to delegate to pivotal tenured career staff or senior officers serving as a cabinet, yet they should remain vigilant about many of the details.²⁵

Notwithstanding the states’ potential interest in having weak executive heads, the selection process of the UN Secretary-General should from an institutional perspective value not only issues such as gender, but also administrative qualities regarding staffing, finances, and team coherence to break away from the continual process of reform. To end the UN’s poor administrative record, particularly in a world with multilateralism under serious pressure, there should be a greater control of internal developments (Secretariat- and UN system-wide). Then, the UN leadership will have a greater chance to effectively use, as Kille puts it,²⁶ the UN Secretariat as a tool of influence in world politics.

23 Davies 2002, 160.

24 Davies 2002, 197.

25 Mathiason 2007, 82–85.

26 Kille 2006, 85.

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