
Interview with Sir Kieran Prendergast, Former UN Under-Secretary- General for Political Affairs

Sir Kieran Prendergast served as Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs for the United Nations from 1997 to 2005. The Department of Political Affairs provides political advice to the secretary-general on issues of peace and security. Prior to this service, he was the British Ambassador to Turkey (1995–1997), High Commissioner to Kenya (1992–1995), High Commissioner to Zimbabwe (1989–1992). He joined the British Foreign Service in 1964. Prendergast was educated in Australia at St. Patrick's College, Strathfield, Sydney, and in England at Salesian College, Chertsey, and St. Edmund Hall, Oxford.

Sir Kieran spoke with The Fletcher Forum's Laura Peterson Nussbaum and Godfrey Waluse on October 4, 2005, in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

FORUM: *I would like to start out with a current event. The EU-Turkey talks have begun and in your position as prior British ambassador to Turkey and with your experience in the United Nations, how do you see events proceeding?*

PRENDERGAST: Well, I'm sure there will be plenty of roadblocks; it is a long road for the negotiations. I saw somebody arguing that the negotiations are going to take 10 to 15 years. But I do not think [the timeframe] matters that much for the Turks. What matters for them is that they know in what direction they are headed—with set criteria that are as specific as possible—rather than be left in a kind of limbo. If you think back over the history of the last 80 plus years, Kemal Ataturk in the 1920s decided that Turkey, the relic of the Ottoman Empire, was going to transform itself into a secular European democracy, and everything that has happened in successive governments since then has been pointed in that direction. It has been a very long, slow transformation. We have set criteria for Turkey in terms of democratic norms and standards of human rights. The Turkish government and

Turkish society have been making a big effort to conform with those norms and standards over the past few years.

The transformation is not yet complete, but you now have discussion of issues that were, even when I first was there [1964-1967], pretty much undiscussable. Things like what happened to the Armenians in the early years of the twentieth century, the question of the position of Kurds within Turkish society, and the use of Kurdish as a language. It was possible to discuss [the Kurdish issues] when I was there 10 years ago, but it was a difficult issue, and there was a lot of resistance—resistance that was sharpened by the existence of a terrorist campaign by the PKK [The Kurdistan Workers Party]. One of the things that I've noticed in my career is that terrorism tends to shift the whole spectrum to the right. It pushes the whole of society to the right and makes it more difficult to discuss neuralgic issues about the shape and the future of society.

It's going to be a long path. Everybody knows that there is going to be popular resistance in Western Europe among the general population to the idea of Turkish membership. This has everything to do with identity. It has not got much to do with anything else because the Turkish economy is in a better state: it is larger, it is more vibrant, it has already made more adjustments to the free market than the economies of several of the former Eastern Europe states that are ahead of Turkey in the queue. If you are a Turk, it must feel very frustrating to find that every time another nation comes into the room, it moves ahead in the queue, while Turkey is permanently at the back of the queue—even though the treaty signed with the European Community back in 1963 envisaged eventual full membership in the Union for Turkey.

When I was ambassador [1995-1997], I once suggested to my EU colleagues that we set some objective requirements for interest and inflation rates, budget deficit, and social development for Turkey. We were worried about turbulence in the economic cycle. Turkey is a big country and has huge developmental differences between provinces in the west that are well above the average and those in the east, especially those which are Kurdish and racked by instability, where there is very little development indeed. The European Union has no great appetite for spending vast amounts of money on social development, so why not set an objective standard requiring that the living and development standards in the least developed provinces must be at a certain level in relation to the average of the whole country. "Oh no," said several of my ambassadorial colleagues, "if we did that there would be a danger that Turkey might meet those standards."

So there is a suspicion in Turkey that the problem is to do with identity. As a previous German chancellor, Helmut Kohl, made pretty clear to the then Turkish ambassador, Turkey simply did not qualify because it is not a Christian country. This might strike you as ironic because what constitutes a Christian country these days? Church attendance has fallen drastically in Europe over the past 30 years, and several of the key member states have large Muslim populations. Nevertheless, I have Turkish friends who believe that Turkey has always been the “other” against which Europeans define themselves. And if Turkey is the other, they say, then it can never qualify as European.

The objective reasons for having Turkey in [the European Union] are very considerable. A Greek scholar at a recent seminar said that Turkey’s vigorous young society is the dose of Viagra that Western Europe needs with its aging population and declining demographics. Europe is going to have to be increasingly an immigrant society if jobs are to be filled. I would argue that there are also very strong geostrategic reasons why Turkey should be encouraged to move towards the European Union. First of all, wouldn’t it be better to have Turkey permanently anchored in the European Union in a western secular orientation rather than left to float aimlessly, possibly heading off in the direction of Iran or Saudi Arabia? Is this something the European Union really wants on its doorstep? Second, the acceptance of a secular, multi-party Muslim democracy in Europe would set a very good example to others and would also give the lie to those who say that there is a clash of civilizations and that Europe is fundamentally hostile to Islam.

Turkey’s vigorous young society is the dose of Viagra that Western Europe needs with its aging population and declining demographics.

FORUM: *As under-secretary-general of political affairs, you dealt with quite a number of conflicts around the world from Burma to Western Sahara to Cambodia, Guatemala, Haiti, and others. Given that background, what are the high and the low points of your career in the UN?*

PRENDERGAST: Let me start by saying that I think it was a more interesting and exciting and responsible job than any I ever held as a British diplomat. And I held some reasonably responsible and fascinating jobs. It was also a more stressful job because you were dealing very much with the lives of people. As a young delegate, I was a member of the British mission to the UN from 1979 to 1982. One frequently dealt with resolutions on important

issues like the Middle East. But it was more, if you like, a diplomatic exercise: do we negotiate on this resolution—or is it a case of worst is best? Do we veto? Do we abstain? Do we vote in favor?

But when you are in the Secretariat, you have a very strong feeling that it is for real. If you make a mess of an important issue, you are going to cost people their lives. And I don't mean just the lives of our own staff or even mainly the lives of our own staff. You actually have the fate of human beings in your hands, even a contribution to the future direction of a country, for good or for ill. Now that is terribly serious responsibility.

[The work] was extraordinarily varied, and one felt a bit like a fireman. You look to find out where is the biggest fire, and you spend most of your time fighting it. The first couple of years, I spend most of my time on the Democratic Republic of Congo. It started off with that extraordinary march across the Congo by the elder Kabila and his forces with the very considerable assistance of the Rwandese forces.

[When working for the UN,] you actually have the fate of human beings in your hands, even a contribution to the future direction of a country, for good or for ill.

The regime of Mobutu collapsed like a husk, like a tree that doesn't have any center, like a baobab tree—it just collapsed. Whoever thought that [Kabila's forces] would reach Kisangani so quickly and easily and whoever thought that they could then race across the country to Kinshasa?

A key highlight in my tenure—one from which I get great satisfaction—is the fact that the East Timorese were able

to exercise their right of self-determination. I think this is one of those issues that is very clear-cut in terms of the decisive role played by the UN. Very often it is difficult to demonstrate conclusively that the UN made a big difference. But we did a lot to keep the hope of self-determination alive in East Timor during decades when nothing seemed to be happening.

When the secretary-general took office in the beginning of 1997, he looked at various long-standing stalemates in the area of peace-making and decided on three or four where it was worthwhile making a new push, and one of those was East Timor. So we encouraged and facilitated the initiation of dialogue between the Portuguese, who were the colonial power, and the Indonesians, who were administering East Timor. When an opening came—when Suharto fell—we pushed through that opening, negotiating

for an outcome that would actually be feasible and that maintained the principle of self-determination, but one that would also be acceptable to the Indonesians. But the new Indonesian president [Baharuddin Jusuf Habibie] acted in a way that was completely unexpected because he stated that either the East Timorese stayed with the Indonesians permanently or they left permanently and became independent. A session of the Grand Indonesian Parliament was happening in autumn 1999, so we knew that this window would close probably sometime in September or October. We had about three months to organize a referendum, which was called a Popular Consultation, but that's what it was in reality—a referendum.

Very often it is difficult to demonstrate conclusively that the UN played a big difference.

In extremely difficult circumstances, we had to field several hundred youngsters as UN volunteers and organize a referendum in a country that had very little infrastructure. When things started to go wrong—or in the beforehand when we were worried that things were going to go wrong—we made arrangements with a little core group of countries for there to be an over-the-horizon military presence that would come to rescue the situation, if necessary. When the violence started, in an extraordinary piece of diplomacy, the secretary-general persuaded the president of Indonesia that if his forces could not bring things back under control, then he must allow a force authorized by the Security Council to come in to do it. I am proud that in East Timor a tiny window of opportunity opened, and we were able to get through that window. If we hadn't, the window would certainly have closed, and East Timor would still be a zone of conflict and disagreement.

I also think [the UN] had the prime responsibility for creating the Quartet on the Middle East. The Middle East peace process has pretty well been an American monopoly. But it was clear during the time of the then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and the beginnings of the so-called Jerusalem *Intifada* that the Americans couldn't stabilize the situation by themselves. The secretary-general prompted the holding of the Sharm al-Sheikh Summit in October 2000 and from that came the Quartet. The Quartet is a very good instrument for managing the diplomacy of the Middle East because it has a very well-balanced composition: the United States as the sole remaining super power; the UN, which gives this funny concept of legitimacy that matters hugely to a lot of the Third World and

particularly the Arabs; the European Union, which is on the doorstep of the Middle East and which I think will make a lot of reconstruction funds available if there is ever a comprehensive settlement; and the Russians, who are reassuring to both sides because they traditionally supported the Arabs but there are more than a million Israelis of former Russian citizenship. So that was a big achievement.

I think the UN has moved forward the thematic debate on peace-building and on conflict prevention. We stood up for multilateralism in a way that

[The UN] stood up for multilateralism in a way that was constructive and brave at a time of unilateral hubris.

was constructive and brave at a time of unilateral hubris. I think the low point and a high point were Iraq. It was a low point because we lost more than 20 killed in the terrorist bombing on August 19, 2003. Of course, that is quite a small number in terms of the total number of casualties in Iraq, but for us it was a terrible shock because it was the end, if you

like, of our age of innocence. We had thought that everybody understood that we were in Iraq to help: therefore, although we risked being in the wrong place at the wrong time and being caught in the crossfire, we were not a deliberate target. But then we found that we were being deliberately targeted.

It was a bitter blow for me also because my own special assistant was killed. Rick Hooper was a brave and active person and a particularly good Arabist. He had gone to Iraq to allow somebody else to take some leave and was caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. The second attack forced us to withdraw. I've always believed that the UN should accept a degree of risk when it has an indispensable role to play, as in Afghanistan, for example. But I spent months resisting pressure for the secretary-general to appoint a replacement to Sergio Vieira de Mello, who was the UN secretary-general's special representative for Iraq, because I could not get the coalition to tell us what was the substance of the vital role that they said they wanted us to play. We were not asked for advice on anything, we were not asked to play a role in anything. We were just there for decoration. When the coalition began to realize that they had a problem, including with the future exit strategy, and they began to realize that the UN was needed, for example to help organize elections, I encouraged a carefully calibrated, limited, well-secured return by the UN to Iraq.

But Iraq was also the UN's high point because we stood against the

tide. When many people were unwilling to say no, we made clear before the war that, first of all, we were concerned about the damage to the international system of collective security and the rule of international law. We were concerned that this [action] was not a contribution to the war on terrorism but a distraction, and it would indeed stimulate rather than suppress terrorism. We were very worried about the ideology-driven predictions that this was going to spread freedom and the coalition [was] going to be greeted as liberators.

I come from a military family, and my own experience is that it is always much better in such cases to plan on worst case rather than on best case assumptions. It is also very difficult to change societies. One of the lessons of my career is that you can change systems much more easily than you can change mindsets. Iraq is a society that is coming out of more than 30 years of very brutal dictatorship. The mindset that is inculcated then takes years, if not decades, to change. Also, I happen to agree with U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld that there are things we know we don't know and there are things we don't know we don't know. Military campaigns never go according to the book. There are always going to be surprises—usually they are unpleasant surprises. I don't think there was any real preparation for the problems of “catastrophic success.” What's happening now in Iraq is that the mainstream, nationalist insurgency, largely composed of former security forces, is fighting by asymmetric methods the war that they did not fight in 2003. Very serious mistakes were made before, during, and after the war. We in the Secretariat pointed out quite a number of these mistakes, but I think this was resented.

There has been a constant temptation to sacrifice legitimacy for the sake of short-term expediency. But legitimacy is a concept that matters in the Middle East.

Even when the coalition subsequently came to the same conclusions as us, it was usually too late. Doing the right thing on day 10 may help stabilize the situation. But doing the same thing on day 40 or day 100 may be much too late because the wave has passed. I think there has been a consistent failure to get ahead of the curve and a constant temptation to sacrifice legitimacy for the sake of short-term expediency. But you have to remember that legitimacy is a concept that matters in the Middle East.

FORUM: *The UN 2005 World Summit was held this September. What is your assessment of the Summit, having been an outsider at that time?*

PRENDERGAST: I think the summit was about what one would expect in the circumstances. It was better than feared because at one point, up until about 24 hours before the summit, it looked as if there wouldn't be a final document at all. But it was less than had been hoped for because the secretary-general set out an ambitious agenda in his report, *In Larger Freedom*. Although it was a rather unmanageable agenda and many of the issues aroused very strong disagreement among the member states, I think it mattered more to set out and frame the big questions than to expect consensus on them.

With my peace and security background, the issues I was most interested in were those to do with the nexus involving the use of force. There, I still think there may be eventually be achievable a grand bargain whereby the global superpower (which, we must remember, may not be the United States in 40 or 50 years), or anybody else who wants to use force because they feel threatened by a situation, would go to the Security Council and seek prior authority [to use force]. The other side of the bargain is that the Security Council would have to be ready to authorize more intrusive action than it has in the past and at an earlier stage in a crisis. I think it would be a great pity if the council just sat and waited for a situation to reach a sufficient point of gravity that the superpower, or the Russians, the Indians, or the Chinese for that matter, felt they had to come and ask for authority to address the situation. It would be an encouragement to the council to take conflict prevention more seriously and more broadly. But I got the impression that, on the one hand, in Washington this was seen as an attempt by the Lilliputians to tie down Gulliver, and they don't want to be tied down by Lilliputians. And on the other, the idea of the Security Council being ready to act in a more intrusive way at an earlier stage in conflicts is regarded as rather threatening by a number of countries. This may not be a bad thing, actually—there are plenty of bad boys in the world. Use of force issues by themselves, by the way, would have been enough to tie down the summit. But I think that's alright as long as the issues are flagged, and some thought is given to a mechanism that would pursue the search for a consensus.

Then there was the issue of Security Council enlargement. I was worried from the beginning that this would dominate the summit and the preparation for the summit. And I think that this proved to be the case. I didn't think that there would ever be an outcome that would satisfy the four

aspirant Permanent Members, the Gang of Four as they were called, because for each aspirant, there were several states who felt equally strongly that they didn't want an enlargement of Permanent Members of the Security Council—at least as long it was some other country and not them. So in Europe, the Italians led the charge and mobilized a quite a strong coffee club group against enlargement. In addition, America's fairly conspicuous distancing itself from Germany did not help the German bid. In Latin America, the Mexicans and the Argentineans didn't argue against Brazil; they just argued against the whole idea of new permanent members. And with India's bid, Pakistan was on grounds of strong principle opposed to enlargement or to hurrying it. It was pretty deadly for the prospects of the aspirants when the Chinese entered the fray and made clear that enlargement should not be hurried and should be done on the basis of consensus, considering that consensus has been elusive in discussions on Security Council enlargement for at least ten years. Interestingly, this campaign [to slow down enlargement] started, whether or not it was encouraged by the Chinese government, over the Japanese refusal to apologize for their behavior before and during the second world war. So all of this was a side show that distracted attention from serious preparation for the summit.

So the summit was a kind of game of chicken between the radicals on both sides in which neither side was very worried about a head-on crash.

Those of us on the peace and security side of the UN were worried that if the report of the High Level Panel and the secretary-general's report were put before the General Assembly at the summit, then they would inevitably bog down because that's the dynamic of the General Assembly. We argued that there should be a vigorous attempt to keep these issues out of the normal processes of the ambassadors and instead engage directly with governments at the highest level, with heads of governments, the prime ministers, presidents, and foreign ministers. But this didn't happen until too late in the day and the process became a General Assembly negotiation, pretty well guaranteeing there would not be a dramatically positive outcome. I think also that nobody among the member states attached enough importance to the outcome to be afraid of a train wreck. So the summit was a kind of game of chicken between the radicals on both sides in which neither side was very worried about a head-on crash.

In many ways it was remarkable there was any outcome at all. But I don't think one should exaggerate the results. The devil is always in the details. We didn't get anything on terrorism out of the summit. They condemned terrorism, but my goodness, that's like saying motherhood is a good thing. It's when you get into questions of planned motherhood or reproductive rights that you have problems, so saying that you're against terrorism means nothing. The failure to deal with proliferation issues was the single most shocking aspect of the summit—there wasn't a word on proliferation in the document. The High Level Panel came up with a really important proposal of a five-year moratorium on the nuclear fuel cycle. In other words,

The UN summit condemned terrorism, but my goodness, that's like saying motherhood is a good thing. Saying that you're against terrorism means nothing.

non-nuclear weapon states would agree to suspend use of the nuclear fuel cycle for five years. In return, the nuclear weapon states would give a guarantee that enriched uranium for civil use would be made available through the IAEA. This proposal offers a possible way of getting out of the difficulties over Iran—the Iranians are looking for a face-saving exit. But the proposal has attracted no attention at all. I do believe that the lack of real interest by the nuclear weapon states in

the disarmament side of the nonproliferation approach strengthened the hand of the spoilers. But for whatever reason, after the failure of the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, it's very worrying because if you get another breach in the NPT, it may cause a much wider breach. I myself believe the most serious issue with Iran is that if Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons, it would be very hard to stop several other states in the region from pressing ahead with nuclear weapons, and then you have had a very substantial breach. How could you stop further breaches?

FORUM: *The summit endorsed the concept of "the responsibility to protect." Who will ultimately enforce this? Is the UN therefore advocating for its own standing army?*

PRENDERGAST: The UN is not going to advocate a standing army because no one's going to be willing to pay for it. But I had this issue in mind when I said before that the devil's in the details. We'll have to see how much members really meant it—whether they'll abandon their fundamental positions. In

1999, the secretary-general made his single most significant speech, which was on the right of humanitarian intervention. The nonaligned hate that concept, and nonaligned foreign ministers and the G-77 at the summit level rejected the existence of any concept of a right of humanitarian intervention within a few months. You don't have to be a genius to work out that the responsibility to protect is just turning the [humanitarian intervention] coin over, but it doesn't actually change the coin. The coin is still there. So I think there are going to be a lot of problems in [enforcing a responsibility to protect] because I don't believe a great majority of member states have changed their position at all on noninterference in internal affairs and the nonexistence of a right to humanitarian intervention. But I would very much like to be wrong.

FORUM: *Why was it necessary to propose the creation of a Human Rights Council instead of reorganizing the Human Rights Commission?*

PRENDERGAST: Well, the problem is that the Human Rights Commission has lost all credibility, and, therefore, there was a desire to do something eye-catching. And reforming a vehicle that's broken down isn't as eye-catching as abolishing it and replacing it with a new

vehicle with new criteria. Again, jolly good luck, and I hope it will emerge because the area of human rights is extremely important. I think the change is buttressing a shift in international law away from the idea of noninterference in internal affairs and towards an acceptance that what goes on inside a country isn't purely the business of the government concerned. Actually, this change is based on the way in which the reading of international law and the UN Charter can

You don't have to be a genius to work out that the responsibility to protect is just turning the [humanitarian intervention] coin over, but it doesn't actually change the coin.

change over time. Article 2(7) of the Charter says that there's no right to deal with matters that are essentially within the jurisdiction of member states. I don't know whether whoever wrote that article was lucky or a genius, but the word "essentially" is important because what is "essentially" within the domestic jurisdiction of member states can evolve over time and be subject to different interpretations. We now accept that what we do on the environment isn't essentially our own business and nothing to do with anyone else. In Germany, acid rain carried by the winds eastward devastates the

Black Forest. So they wouldn't accept that the pumping out of materials that go into acid rain by power stations further to the west is nobody's business but those of the country concerned. Or take international terrorism, international crime, drugs, or currency movements. And so with human rights and democracy, the world can make a judgment that that which is essentially within the jurisdiction of member states can change over time. The first big breach in the wall of noninterference came with the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe 30 years ago. Among its components was a human rights basket that set various standards and allowed member states to hold one another to those standards.

I would like to see a Human Rights Council and I think that there's a handsome majority in favor of it among the UN membership. But there are very complicated considerations when it comes to forcing a vote on things. Member states that may favor a human rights council might say to themselves, "But ah, if there are important states who are opposed to the council, and I go against them and insist on a vote, then they may use that issue against me later." It's not at all straightforward, and I would expect a lot of problems in implementing the declaration in that respect.

FORUM: *While the intervention in Iraq may have marked a low point in U.S.-UN relations, last year's High Level Panel Report on Threats, Challenges, and Change seemed to point towards a rapprochement based on greater UN engagement in areas of U.S. security concern like terrorism and chemical and biological weapons. The Summit Declaration takes these forward but continues to condemn the use of preventive force. Is it possible for the UN and the United States to get back in step and what would that look like from your point of view? And if not, what are the implications?*

PRENDERGAST: I believe there is a big dynamic among the membership to try and keep the United States within the system and that gives rise to a certain flexibility in accommodating U.S. concerns. The image I've used before when these things get very difficult may be that the choice is between the plague and the cholera. Neither is desirable, but better the cholera than the plague. So you've seen many instances when the United States really wanted to do something and exercised its persuasive powers, the membership was willing to go a long way to compromise—even sometimes against its better judgment. That is what was so extraordinary about Iraq. I thought myself until pretty late in the day that if the United States exercised full diplomacy and a bit of patience, that they would have got the necessary votes in the Security Council for a resolution to authorize the use of force against Iraq on

grounds on noncompliance with previous resolutions concerning the disarmament of Iraq.

My sense also is that there is a grudging acceptance by the membership of U.S. leadership. They know that without the United States the UN is a vehicle without an engine. On the other hand, I think there's some growing understanding in the U.S. administration that an engine without a vehicle isn't much use either. It has limits. And you can't construct a vehicle entirely on the basis of *ad hoc* alliances—borrowing a wheel here, a wheel there. People may want their wheel back at an inconvenient moment. But I think that the membership wants leadership to be exercised in a persuasive way rather than coercively. They want some indication that the United States is willing to abide by the same rules it expects everyone else to abide by.

I don't think we should take the current mood in Congress too tragically. We should think of it a bit like undulating fever. The temperature is going to go up, the temperature is going to go down. Congress is going to withhold money, then Congress will suddenly discover that there's some issue on which the assistance of the UN is badly needed, and the Congress will turn round on a sixpence as they did after September 11. So this is a relationship in which each side needs the other. I think that's been the case for a long time, and it will continue to be the case. For example, I think that the UN is absolutely essential to the United States in terms of an exit strategy in Iraq and also in Afghanistan. If the UN is not the exit strategy, what is? So we'll live together. There will be ups and there will be downs. But certainly the atmosphere is much better than it was six months ago, a year ago, or two years ago. And that can only be a good thing for both sides.

FORUM: *Tying together the U.S. relations and UN reform, do individual state legislatures have a responsibility to qualify their state's support of the UN on efficiency and reform, as Congressman Henry Hyde's UN Reform Act tries? Or does the UN take U.S. domestic politics with a grain of salt?*

PRENDERGAST: Well, I would say that when I first came to the UN, the United States had a Democrat administration. Just about the only issue on

You can't construct a vehicle entirely on the basis of ad hoc alliances—borrowing a wheel here, a wheel there. People may want their wheel back at an inconvenient moment.

which the British government was happy to disagree very sharply and publicly with the United States was the question of U.S. dues, which were in arrears. This is because there is an obligation under international law to pay your assessed contributions. It's not *à la carte* or a matter of choice; it's a matter of international law. So that reduces sympathy even from the closest allies. Of course, if this were a disease that spread, the UN would become unviable because you can be sure that each of the 191 member states has got something or other that they would like to object to or withhold over. I think the other thing to remember is that our legislature is the member states. You can't add another legislature. It's absolutely up to each member state to decide how it functions and how it regulates relations between the executive and their own legislature. But they have an obligation to deliver in terms of contributions. The member states, because they are the UN legislature, have lots and lots of opportunity to play a really important role in relation to reform. For example, they can withhold money in the budget because they control the budget right down to the post of every last junior secretary. My view, and the view of the secretary-general, is that the UN is extraordinarily micro-managed by the membership. We would much rather see the system move to something analogous to many member states, where you let managers manage, judge them by results; if the results aren't any good, sack them.

FORUM: *The next secretary-general—Asia says it is their time, Eastern Europe wants its turn. And then there's Bill Clinton. Your comments?*

PRENDERGAST: I'd be a bit surprised if it were President Clinton because there's never been a secretary-general from one of the permanent five countries. I'm more worried actually about the possibility of having a very bland secretary-general because to be appointed he or she will have to avoid an effective veto by all five permanent members. If the member states could produce some good candidates, I think that would be more decisive than geographical distribution. But if the Chinese have been correctly quoted as saying that the new secretary-general has to be Asian, then I believe it will have to be an Asian because I don't think the Chinese would hesitate to veto repeatedly. However, we're at the very early stages of the skirmishing, and I haven't seen a long list or even a short list of credible candidates from anywhere. But we will need some real choice, and I hope that we get a good secretary-general who's going to be able to meet the challenges because they seem to increase year after year. ■
