

HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on International Relations

4th Report of Session 2017–19

The United Nations General Assembly 2018

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Select Committee on International Relations

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[Lord Howell of Guildford](#) (Chairman)

[Baroness Coussins](#)

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[Lord Reid of Cardowan](#)

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[Baroness Hilton of Eggardon](#)

[Lord Wood of Anfield](#)

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See Appendix 1.

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Committee staff

The staff who worked on this inquiry were Eva George (Clerk), Joseph Dobbs (Policy Analyst) and Sophie-Jade Taylor (Committee Assistant).

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The United Nations General Assembly 2018

Introduction

1. The 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) will open on 18 September 2018 in New York. The International Relations Committee took evidence ahead of UNGA from Mr Fabrizio Hochschild, Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Co-ordination, United Nations. The Committee has also received relevant evidence in the course of its wider inquiry into UK foreign policy in changed world conditions.¹
2. The transcript of the evidence session, held on 9 May 2018, is on the Committee's website.²
3. This report has been produced to inform the House, and to raise questions for the Government to address in advance of UNGA. It follows up the Committee's report, *The UK and the UN: Priorities for the new Secretary-General*, published on 3 November 2016.³
4. Mr Hochschild noted the "steadfast support" provided by the UK to the UN: "After the US, the UK is the largest financial contributor and, I think, the third largest contributor in terms of our civilian personnel: we have 650 UK nationals working among our 13,000 professional staff."⁴

The global context

5. Mr Hochschild summarised the global context in which the UN is currently operating: "The Secretary-General frequently talks about a shift from what was once a bipolar world order during the Cold War, and then a world that was essentially dominated by one power, to a world order where there are likely to be multiple centres of power." That transition "breeds a great deal of instability as the tectonic plates of power relations shift and new alliances emerge and then are cast aside."⁵
6. He said that "the very problems faced by many countries ... be they migration, the impact of climate change or the growth in terrorism... are not problems that can be solved by unilateral measures by individual countries, even the most powerful of countries." There was a "paradox" that:

"at a time when the problems faced by citizens and individual countries by their very nature require greater commitment and engagement through international bodies, the countries faced with those threats are turning their backs on the international system and asserting sovereignty as the dominant posture."

1 International Relations Committee, 'UK foreign policy in changed world conditions inquiry': <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/international-relations-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/foreign-policy-changing-world/> [accessed 20 June 2018]

2 Oral evidence taken on [9 May 2018](#) (Session 2017–19)

3 International Relations Committee, *The UK and the UN: Priorities for the new Secretary-General* (1st Report, Session 2016–17, HL Paper 60). UN Secretary-General António Guterres took office on 1 January 2017.

4 [Q 1](#)

5 [Q 2](#)

This sort of “hostility” was “really not helpful in terms of coming to grips with the problems that the world faces, including those that the citizens of those countries face.”⁶

Priorities for UNGA

7. Mr Hochschild outlined the key, interrelated issues for the United Nations ahead of UNGA:
 - conflict proliferation and prevention;
 - terrorism;
 - human rights;
 - migration;
 - delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and
 - internal UN reform.

Conflict proliferation and prevention

8. Mr Hochschild said the changing nature of conflicts was a key challenge for the UN ahead of the meeting: “Conflicts have increased over the past 10 years not only in number but in longevity, in regional involvement and in the number of conflict actors.” This had made them “much more difficult to resolve”. The “multiplicity of conflicts and the difficulties that we are having in resolving them” were “a major concern”.⁷ He said that “we do not prioritise”, because “it would be politically impossible for us vis-à-vis member states to say, ‘these are the top 10 conflicts that we are focusing on’”. However, there was “a tendency to focus on those [conflicts] that create the greatest humanitarian suffering.”⁸
9. Conflicts in Yemen and Syria were “perhaps the two conflicts that are creating the largest amount of suffering at the moment”, according to Mr Hochschild. In Yemen, “we have a very gifted UK envoy and Special Representative to the Secretary-General who has some optimism that there may be some possibility for peace with a change of stance in Saudi Arabia.”⁹
10. In Syria, however, Mr Hochschild said it was “more difficult to see how there would be resolution.” The “regionalisation” of the conflict, “with Iran and Israel exchanging fire and with Turkey and various international actors involved”, made it “very difficult to see how a peace process can thrive.”¹⁰
11. Mr Hochschild drew attention to three other areas of particular concern: Israel-Palestine, where the peace process was “suffering a major setback”, and the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi, both of which had “poor signs of early resolutions”.¹¹
12. Mr Hochschild said the Secretary-General focused his efforts on conflict resolution, “where it looks as if an added effort on his part may be conducive

6 Q 2

7 Q 1

8 Q 3

9 Q 1

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

to bringing about a solution or preventing a deterioration.” He gave the example of Cyprus: while the conflict was “essentially frozen”, and “one could not argue [that it] creates great humanitarian suffering,” it was “long overdue for resolution.” The Secretary-General had “spent a great deal of time on it, sadly without success, but I think we came close”.¹²

13. Mr Hochschild said that inability to resolve major conflicts was “damaging to the image of the UN.” He said that “The fallout in terms of reputation is not on the members of the Security Council who have those differences; the fallout in terms of reputation and thus in terms of authority, credibility and effectiveness is on the institution of the UN.” This was “a major problem”.¹³
14. The UN was also concerned by what he described as “the rearmament of the world.” He said “for the first time in a number of decades, defence spending has actually increased in many of the member states.” Mr Hochschild was concerned about “the threat of the use of nuclear weapons” and nuclear controls procedures, including in the light of the US “stepping down” from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.¹⁴

Terrorism

15. Mr Hochschild said that “the plethora of conflicts” also “create a conducive atmosphere for the thriving of terrorist groups.” The Secretary-General had “made counterterrorism one of his main priorities” and there were “many efforts going on to try to increase co-operation on counterterrorism”. Before UNGA “there will be the first ever high-level meeting of member states on counterterrorism measures.”¹⁵

Human rights

16. Mr Hochschild drew a link between terrorism and human rights: a recent joint UN-World Bank study had showed that “what often motivated [the joining of terrorist groups] was that sense of exclusion, the tipping point for joining a violent group was usually some sort of violation of law, or a sense of violation of law, committed against either themselves or one of their relatives.”¹⁶
17. Mr Hochschild said the UN was concerned by “the step back that the world has made in many ways in the protection and promotion of human rights ... We live in a time when sovereignty and counterterrorism measures are often invoked to clamp down on civil society and to restrict the freedom of the press and the right to free assembly.”¹⁷
18. There was now a more coherent UN approach on human rights issues. He thought the UN’s ‘Human Rights Up Front’ initiative¹⁸ “has been a success” in the areas of “prevention [and] coherence”. It had sought to embed human

12 [Q 3](#)

13 [Q 6](#)

14 [Q 1](#). The JCPOA is the 2015 agreement between Iran, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, Germany and the European Union on Iran’s nuclear programme.

15 [Q 1](#)

16 [Q 2](#); United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (2018): <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337> [accessed 20 June 2018]

17 [Q 1](#)

18 The Human Rights Up Front Initiative “seeks to bring the UN System together in a way that is mutually supportive, helps prevention, and prioritises human rights”. United Nations, ‘Human Rights Up Front Initiative’: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/ban-ki-moon/human-rights-front-initiative> [accessed 20 June 2018]

rights “within the culture of the whole UN system, not just of the human rights officers”. This was “an ongoing task”, and had not been helped by what Mr Hochschild called “the global pushback against human rights.”¹⁹

Migration

19. Mr Hochschild said there would be “a debate on the proposed global compact on migration” at UNGA.²⁰ The existing approach of dealing with migration challenges at a bilateral or regional level, and outside of the UN system, was now “inadequate” due to the “proportions and trends” of the challenge.²¹ The final global compact would probably be “fairly loosely worded” and “voluntary... [with] no status in international law.” He said this would still represent a “step forward”, by recognising that “this is a problem that cannot be handled only bilaterally or among regional groups but needs international co-operation.”²²
20. There were two motivations behind the proposed compact. First, the Secretary-General hoped to tackle the “stigmatisation of migration”, and develop a recognition that migration is “a very old phenomenon” and “a source of growth, increasing diversity and renewal”. Second, the Secretary-General hoped to “get a commitment to the better protection of irregular migrants, even if ... the UN upholds the clear distinction between refugees, those who are compelled to flee for fear of persecution, and those who are motivated to move on economic grounds.” He noted however that “the Mediterranean does not distinguish in taking lives”.²³
21. Mr Hochschild said “the hope is that we can also convince states to open more channels for regular migration as a means of diminishing the pressure from irregular migration and of better tackling the trafficking phenomenon.” He noted that while “one or two countries” had already withdrawn from discussions, including the United States, “positions not far from those of the US” would nonetheless be likely to be reflected in the global compact.²⁴

The Sustainable Development Goals

22. Mr Hochschild said “the reporting done by individual countries” was “the basis of measuring progress” against the SDGs. “Across the world, UN country teams are working with varying degrees of success with the member states concerned to set up structures within their planning offices, or sometimes the Prime Minister’s or President’s office, to measure progress on the implementation of the SDGs.”²⁵
23. He said that “coherence in the UN system” was “the major aim of the development system reform.” While he “will not say that we are breaking down the walls between different agencies” he said “certainly we are making progress on having a single UN culture in the system.” The UN had “replaced a multiplicity of bodies” and “reduced the number of senior-level

19 [Q 12](#)

20 [Q 1](#). The global compact “will be the first, intergovernmentally negotiated agreement, prepared under the auspices of the United Nations, to cover all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner.”. United Nations, ‘Refugees and Migrants: Compact for migration’ (2018): <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/migration-compact> [accessed 20 June 2018]

21 [Q 4](#)

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*

25 [Q 11](#)

co-ordination mechanisms and senior-level meetings and replaced them with others that are more effective”. Importantly, it was “now the Secretary-General, as opposed to the head of one of the agencies, who chairs the UN Development Group, the assembly of UN entities in the development field. That brings added authority to the co-ordination effort.”²⁶

24. On climate change, Mr Hochschild said there was “a sense that on the current trajectory we will fall short of the goals.” He said that “the hope is that the US withdrawal will increase the commitment of the member states that remain engaged.”²⁷
25. Mr Hochschild said “the financing of the SDGs is an issue that we constantly grapple with”; “a lot of effort is made ... trying to get member states to live up to their commitments.” The UN was “very grateful” that the UK was “one of the five countries” that met its commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on development.²⁸ The Secretary-General was trying to increase the involvement of the private sector, “which we want to mobilise to play a greater role in the implementation of the SDGs”, and “better use some of the new technological developments” to “accelerate the implementation of the SDGs and to reduce the cost of that implementation”.²⁹

UN peacekeeping

26. In our report, *The UK and the UN: Priorities for the new Secretary-General*, on UN peacekeeping we recommended increasing investment in conflict prevention, a more rigorous appointment process for senior management, an increased role for the Secretary-General, and more effective tackling of sexual abuse and exploitation by UN peacekeepers.³⁰
27. Mr Hochschild said that “part of the reform efforts that are going on in the peace and security field are aimed precisely at liberating more resources.” The Secretary-General had “called for more resources, specifically for the Peacebuilding Fund.”³¹
28. On personnel appointments, Mr Hochschild said there had been “an important professionalisation of our approach to towards the selection of mission leadership”.³²
29. There had been progress in the organisation’s approach to tackling sexual abuse by UN peacekeepers. Mr Hochschild said the Secretary-General had “created a new position of a victims advocate within the organisation, which will be replicated in each mission where this is an issue.” The UN had also “strengthened our own internal investigation capacity”. The idea of putting UN peacekeepers under a form of international jurisdiction would be an issue for decision by member states rather than the Secretary-General.³³

26 *Ibid.*

27 [Q 14](#)

28 [Q 13](#). As measured by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development only the UK, Denmark, Norway, Luxembourg and Sweden spend 0.7% of GNI or more on Official Development Assistance.

29 [Q 13](#)

30 International Relations Committee, *The UK and the UN: Priorities for the new Secretary-General* (1st Report, Session 2016–17, HL Paper 60)

31 [Q 9](#)

32 *Ibid.*

33 *Ibid.*

UN reform

30. Mr Hochschild said that reform was “a key issue”, and the Secretary-General was “pursuing it vigorously on multiple fronts.” Increased transparency in senior appointments, including of the Secretary-General, was a key goal. Mr Hochschild said that “a record number of senior appointments have been advertised at the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant-Secretary-General levels”.³⁴
31. Increased gender balance at senior levels in the UN has been achieved. Mr Hochschild said “through [the Secretary-General’s] own appointments of the most senior staff, for the first time ever among the so-called senior management group—the 50 most senior people in the organisation, including heads of agencies, funds and programmes, heads of departments and the Secretariat” more than 50% of positions are now held by women.³⁵
32. Reflecting on the recommendations on the management of the UN of our 2016 report, *The UK and the UN: Priorities for the new Secretary-General*,³⁶ Mr Hochschild said “some of the specific recommendations that you made have been heard and integrated.” We recommended that the Secretary-General should be allowed more autonomy, including budget management, and that he should pursue institutional reforms to overcome fragmentation and build more coherence between the UN’s various departments and offices.³⁷ Mr Hochschild said increasing the Secretary-General’s budgetary powers was something the secretariat was “still pursuing”. There was “less enthusiasm among the membership for that sort of flexibility, but that discussion has yet to come to a conclusion.”³⁸
33. The General Assembly has approved a switch to an annual budget cycle, which, according to Mr Hochschild, means that the UN is “better aligned with what most member states have.”³⁹
34. There was “a great deal going on” in the area of management reform, particularly “delegating greater authority to our line managers in the field”. Mr Hochschild said the organisation was “rationalising and getting rid of duplication in our headquarters structures, and ... reviewing and simplifying our rules and procedures.”⁴⁰
35. Mr Hochschild’s position of Assistant-Secretary-General for Strategic Co-ordination was itself a new role to “adopt a more strategic approach”, in addition to “responding to the crisis of the moment”. Mr Hochschild said the UN had “the equivalent of weekly Cabinet meetings ... The Secretary-General meets on a weekly basis with his senior advisers ... to take a much more strategic look at the world and at the peace, security, development and human rights challenges and to take a longer view.”⁴¹

34 [Q 8](#)

35 *Ibid.*

36 International Relations Committee, *The UK and the UN: Priorities for the new Secretary-General* (1st Report, Session 2016–17, HL Paper 60)

37 *Ibid.*

38 [Q 8](#)

39 *Ibid.*

40 [Q 6](#)

41 [Q 3](#)

Conclusions

The international context and multilateralism

36. **The rules-based international order is facing greater stresses and threats than at any time since the end of the Cold War. In this context, the UN is under considerable strain: the mismatch between the current operation and structure of the UN system—a structure inherited from a previous and very different era—and the issues it faces is becoming increasingly evident. It must address more effectively current global challenges such as terrorism, migration and cyber governance.**
37. **The 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly represents an opportunity for the UK to continue to champion multilateralism. The Government should use it to work with its international partners to strengthen the UN and make it more focussed in dealing with contemporary global issues.**
38. **As one of the UN's principal funders the UK can and should be at the forefront of efforts to make the UN more effective in dealing with international challenges.**
39. **Member states must provide adequate resources if the UN is to meet the huge demands being placed on it. We call on the Government to use its position to encourage other member states to increase their funding, and support an ambitious role for the UN in facing global challenges.**

Conflict resolution

40. **In a time when conflicts are numerous, protracted, and complex, the role of the UN in conflict resolution and settlement is ever more essential. The UN needs additional resources to support this work. The UK should make specific commitments in this field at the time of the UN General Assembly and should publicise them.**
41. **We support the ongoing role of the UN as a peacemaker, seeking to negotiate a resolution to the conflicts in Syria—through the Geneva Process—and Yemen. The UK should use its position on the Security Council to support these efforts.**
42. **Tensions between the member states of the UN, particularly the permanent five members of the Security Council, undermine efforts to resolve conflicts and damage the reputation of the UN. We urge the Government to use the influence afforded by its permanent membership of the Security Council to discourage the use of vetoes, especially in cases of extreme humanitarian concern.**

Weapons of Mass Destruction

43. **We share the Government's ongoing support for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran's nuclear programme, and regret the US decision to withdraw. We welcome the Government's efforts to uphold the international regimes against the proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction; this leadership role will be particularly important in the run-up to the Nuclear Non-**

Proliferation Review Conference in 2020. We support the efforts being made to strengthen the effectiveness of the Organisation for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons.

Counter-terrorism

44. **We welcome the Secretary-General's initiative to strengthen the activities of the UN as a forum to co-ordinate efforts to tackle international terrorism.**

The Sustainable Development Goals

45. **We draw attention to the link between the delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and efforts to tackle violent extremism. The Government must work to persuade its international partners to meet their commitments to the SDGs and ensure their timely delivery. In that respect we applaud the Government's continued commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI on development aid, and welcome enhanced scrutiny to ensure there is no waste.**
46. **We welcome recent reforms to the UN development system to reduce duplication and enhance co-ordination, and the new role of the Secretary-General as the chair of the UN Development Group.**
47. **We welcome, and wish to see encouraged, moves by the UN to reach out in partnership to non-governmental bodies, to civil society and to the private sector, in pursuit of its goals.**

Human rights

48. **We welcome the Secretary-General's efforts to increase the coherence of the UN's human rights agenda and embed this work across the organisation. We urge the Government remain a strong advocate for the UN's human rights agenda at the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, in the face of the "global pushback against human rights" described by the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Co-ordination.**
49. **Despite the less than satisfactory record of the UN Human Rights Council we believe that the US decision to leave it is deplorable. We underline the importance of the post of High Commissioner for Human Rights and urge the Government to work for the choice of someone who will play a leadership role in this field.**

Migration

50. **We welcome work to develop a global compact as a first step towards a more co-ordinated multilateral approach to migration. A successful global compact should aim to set the 'rules of road' rather than establish binding, legal commitments on migration.**

Cyber-security

51. **The Government should use the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly to advocate further international discussions on the development of common principles for activity in cyberspace, exploring where possible the application of existing international law.**

UN peacekeeping

52. **We welcome the commitment of the Secretary-General to improving the UN's response to sexual abuse by peacekeepers, as highlighted in our 2016 report, *The UK and the UN: Priorities for the new Secretary-General*. There remains more to be done, and we urge the Government to continue to advocate more effective action in this respect.**

UN reform

53. **We restate the recommendations of our 2016 report, *The UK and the UN: Priorities for the new Secretary-General*, which called for a strengthening of the role of the Secretary-General, both in terms of international conflict resolution and in the internal management of the UN and its agencies. We welcome recent progress, including the creation of the role of Secretary-General for Strategic Co-ordination to drive greater coherence in the organisation's work.**
54. **We remain concerned by the continued fragmentation within the UN system. The operation of UN agencies in siloes, the limited authority of the Secretary-General over these bodies, and the reality that many UN agency staff consider their allegiance to be to their agency rather than the UN as a whole are still handicapping the achievement of effective responses to the main international challenges. We urge the Government to work with other member states to rationalise UN structures, and to foster greater coherence among UN agencies and officials.**

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF MEMBERS AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members

Baroness Anelay of St Johns [joined 12 June 2018]
 Lord Balfe [resigned 12 June 2018]
 Baroness Coussins
 Lord Grocott
 Lord Hannay of Chiswick
 Baroness Helic
 Baroness Hilton of Eggardon
 Lord Howell of Guildford (Chairman)
 Lord Jopling
 Lord Purvis of Tweed
 Lord Reid of Cardowan
 Baroness Smith of Newnham
 Lord Wood of Anfield

Declarations of interest

Baroness Anelay of St Johns [joined 12 June 2018]
None relevant to the inquiry

Lord Balfe [resigned 12 June 2018]
None relevant to the inquiry

Baroness Coussins
Vice-Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the United Nations

Lord Grocott
None relevant to the inquiry

Lord Hannay of Chiswick
Co-Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the United Nations
Co-convener of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Global Security and Non-Proliferation

Baroness Helic
Co-Director of J.D.H Office Ltd with UNHCR Special Envoy, Ms Angelina Jolie

Baroness Hilton of Eggardon
None relevant to the inquiry

Lord Howell of Guildford (Chairman)
None relevant to the inquiry

Lord Jopling
Member of the UK delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly

Lord Purvis of Tweed
None relevant to the inquiry

Lord Reid of Cardowan
None relevant to the inquiry

Baroness Smith of Newnham
None relevant to the inquiry

Lord Wood of Anfield
Chair, United Nations Association UK (since 2016)

A full list of Members interests can be found in the registrar of Lords' interests:
<http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-interests/register-of-lords-interests>

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF WITNESSES

Evidence is published at www.parliament.uk/intl-relations and available for inspection at the Parliamentary Archives (020 7219 3074).

Alphabetical list of all witnesses

Mr Fabrizio Hochschild, Assistant Secretary-General for
Strategic Co-ordination, United Nations

[QQ 1-14](#)