

EXCLUSIVE INTERNATIONAL COLUMN



Saving global order

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AS 2014 draws to a close, the values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are under threat. Around the world, personal liberty, human rights, and democracy are at risk – even in countries that have embraced democratic ideals. The international community is deeply divided, blocking progress on a host of global challenges, ranging from the crises in Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine to climate change and international trade.

Three factors – all likely to persist in 2015 – are driving these unsettling trends.

First, globalization may have delivered many benefits, but it has also eroded the capacity of societies to determine their own destinies. Many modern challenges – including tax avoidance, organized crime, cyber insecurity, terrorism, climate change, international migration, and financial flows, both licit and illicit – have one thing in common: the traditional instruments of a sovereign state have become inadequate to manage them.

Second, failed military solutions in Afghanistan and Iraq have played a large role in undermining the international community's unity, and eroding confidence in intervention in general, even as established powers cut budgets and emerging powers shy away from taking on new responsibilities. In 2014, leaders in

my native Africa and elsewhere challenged the objectivity and effectiveness of the International Criminal Court, the creation of which was a major milestone in the struggle to end impunity for national leaders.

Finally, we have failed to modernize the international system's institutional architecture. The most important institutions – the United Nations Security Council, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund – remain

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dominated by the European and American victors of World War II, countries that represent an increasingly small minority of the world's population and a shrinking share of its economic output. The failure to reflect the changing balance of global power brought about by the rise of China, Brazil, South Africa, and other emerging countries undermines both the effectiveness and the legitimacy of today's international system, particularly in the eyes of those who feel denied of proper

recognition. And yet, whatever the shortcomings of the international system, it is important to remember that never before in human history have so few people (as a proportion of world population) died from armed conflict. It may not make headlines, but the international system, with its rules and institutions, allows states to settle most of their disputes peacefully, most of the time.

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Looking to 2015 and beyond, the world desperately needs brave leaders who can take the long view. In a world where power ebbs and flows, it is in everyone's interest to adhere to a fair system of

rules that respect both national sovereignty and individual rights. The heads of the world's historical powers need to recognize that it is in their interest, too, to follow the rules, and to allow rising states to help write these rules. As I have often argued, the Security Council must be enlarged, and developing countries should be given greater voting rights in the Bretton Woods institutions: the IMF and the World Bank.

In exchange, the world's newest powers must begin to take on a greater share of responsibility for the global order upon which their success depends. They can no longer stand on the sidelines, denouncing the injustices of the past. Instead, they must join their peers in building the future.

We often hear talk about the shortcomings of the UN, which stands at the heart of the international system. Too seldom do we note its achievements and successes, of which there have been many. Rather than retreat from a system that has yielded exceptional results, we must use the international community's current crisis as a historic opportunity to reshape the existing order to better meet our modern challenges.

The writer is a former secretary-general of the United Nations, is the founding chair of the Kofi Annan Foundation and also chairs The Elders and the Africa Progress Panel. In 2001, he and the United Nations were jointly awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2014. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)