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# Intriguing opening for UN summit

**Analysis**  
By Richard Black  
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**Rumour has it that John Bolton, President Bush's controversial appointment as US ambassador to the UN, doesn't like the world body very much and would prefer it to slim down and do less.**

If so, his strategy is straightforward - just get his boss to turn up more frequently.

With Mr Bush giving one of the opening addresses at this World Summit, many ordinary UN staff have been told to take the day off.



"Don't come in unless you have to" was the advice, "as we won't be able to cope".

Mr Bush and his first lady came into town on Tuesday, with roads closed and huge quantities of security personnel - US news organisations speak of 4,000 - deployed in the UN area in the east of Manhattan.

The Bushes will be gone by Thursday, and UN staff are welcome back, working away behind the scenes on security, development and health issues while the summit gathers the media spotlight.

**'Head-to-head'**

The World Summit is designed to be a defining one in the UN's 60-year history - to vote through reforms, to initiate new action on human rights and peace-building, and to re-enforce commitments to reducing poverty and stimulating development in the world's poorest nations.

But the opening sequence of speakers brought to mind nothing so much as one of those fixture lists with which football authorities sometimes seek to boost early-season interest.

Everton v Liverpool on the opening day of the season? Barcelona hosting Real Madrid? Brazil going to Argentina first up? Just chance, mate, honest.

Here, after the appropriate ceremonial marking of one UN year closing and another opening, we saw Secretary General Kofi Annan take the stand, followed closely by the man whom many observers regard as his and the organisation's nemesis, George W Bush.

The draft outcome document on which some delegates doodled as they listened is redolent with dual interpretations. What nuances would the two leading protagonists from the multilateralist and unilateralist corners draw on in their allotted 10 minutes?

## Annan's warning

Mr Annan's opening gambit was a tightly constructed defence of the UN, which he said "remains fully engaged in conflict resolution, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, defence of human rights, and development around the world".

But, he said, deep divisions between member states were preventing the UN - and, by extension, the broader international community - from coming together to meet threats and seize opportunities.

"The clear danger," he continued, is that "states of all kinds might increasingly resort to self-help, leading to a proliferation of ad hoc responses that would be divisive, destabilising, and dangerous".

A stronger challenge to the unilateralists in the auditorium it would be harder to imagine. So how would Mr Bush respond?

## Bush 's speech

His initial words spoke of his country's latest national tragedy, Hurricane Katrina, which he said had "demonstrated the awesome power of nature and the greater power of human compassion".

And, in an early donning of the velvet glove, he alluded to the international nature of that compassion, with aid and support coming from about 50 different nations.

Just before coming into the General Assembly, Mr Bush had put his name to the Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism.

And he urged other countries to sign up too, saying that would-be terrorists must be denied the ability to "kill on the scale of their hatred".

## Goals' support

One of the most divisive issues during the intense pre-summit discussions had been the place of the Millennium Development Goals, the set of targets agreed at the UN five years ago, in the outcome document.

Would they be referred to as the acknowledged definitive response to poverty and its associated ills, or removed altogether, as Mr Bolton had urged?

The eventual wording is a compromise, with phrases like "internationally agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals" used frequently.

But in his speech, Mr Bush was unequivocal: "We are committed to the Millennium Development Goals," he intoned, which made one wonder what all the fuss in the last three weeks was all about.

## Modernising

As so often with these big set-piece summits, the real work was done long before the Bushes and Blairs arrived, by the "Sherpas" who have thrashed the views and demands of more than 190 nations into a workable compromise of an outcome document.

Yet it is here and now that the media and the activists have come - and how!

The opening day saw a tide of journalists pouring into UN headquarters which rivalled in size, though not in speed, the East river running alongside.

UN media staff gave me estimates of numbers ranging from 2,500 to 4,000.

The result was a two-hour queue to get through security, a tense time with the opening session looming ever closer, deadlines pending and no possibility of coffee to stave off the jet-lag.

Built in the years after World War II, the UN headquarters building is showing signs of age, and cannot really cope with this modern deluge, despite the energy and smiles of its staff.

The narrow escalators recall a time when no gentleman was complete without a cigarette. The slightly Art Deco cafeteria should by rights contain a Sinatra crooning by a potted palm.

Kofi Annan believes he has a blueprint for reform which will bring the organisation, if not the building, into the 21st Century, despite the instincts of John Bolton and other critics.

He made plain today, however, his belief that member nations have flunked the test which he set them, by pulling back from some of the more radical elements in his package, unwilling to cede control and power from nation state to supra-national institution.

While Mr Bush called on the General Assembly to act on terror, in a side room an African minister was bemoaning the fact that only a third of her population has access to a decent toilet.

Deep divisions among member states indeed, Mr Annan.

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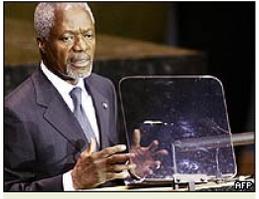
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**“ We have not yet achieved the sweeping and fundamental reform I... believe is required ”**

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan



**Proposed reform package (107K)**

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