When the G8 meets at Gleneagles its agenda will, as usual, be overflowing with issues urgently requiring a solution, or at least some significant progress; and its anterooms will be full of representatives of the main developing countries who are increasingly recognised as an essential part of the discussion if that progress is to be made. Like a golden thread running through every one of these issues will be the need for strengthened and reformed international organisations to help negotiate, legitimise and deliver solutions. Whether talking about the effects of the tsunami or the environment, AIDS, WMD proliferation or the problems of Africa, it always comes back to the need for more effective, more efficient and more equitable international organisations. And none amongst them needs reform more urgently than the United Nations. Because the United Nations, for all its faults and weaknesses, remains indispensable.

**Why action is needed**

It is now nearly two years since Kofi Annan stood at the rostrum of the UN General Assembly and stated flatly that the UN was “at a fork in the road” – that it could not just go on muddling through, as it had done in the 15 years since the end of the Cold War. No one contradicted him, because no one doubted he was right. For all its successes, and there have been plenty – in Namibia, in Mozambique, in El Salvador, in East Timor, in reversing Saddam Hussein’s aggression against Kuwait – the ratio of failures to successes had swung the wrong way. Paralysis over Security Council decisions on the use of force in Kosovo and Iraq, failed peacekeeping operations in Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda, serious administrative weaknesses in the UN Secretariat and the Security Council, which have subsequently come to light in the oil-for-food imbroglio – all have undermined the organisation’s credibility and its ability to carry out the increasingly complex mandates which the membership has piled onto it, without giving it the backing in resources and in political
The problems of security and development are two sides of the same coin

support which it needs when the going gets rough.

**Coming to crunch time**
The reform process which Mr Annan set in hand that day is now reaching the point when decisions will have to be made, either positively, to back his proposals, or negatively, by default. A panel report containing more than 100 recommendations, many of them far-reaching – probably the most ambitious makeover of the UN since it was founded in 1945 – is on the table. So is a powerful analysis of what is needed if there is to be any chance of the organisation achieving by 2015 the Millennium Development Goals the UN set itself at the turn of the century for dealing with poverty, disease, malnutrition and environmental degradation. Mr Annan himself has drawn the threads of these two reports together in an agenda for decision at a summit meeting in New York in September. The buck is now moving inexorably to the point at which it always has to stop in that most intergovernmental of organisations; the governments of the member states – all 191 of them.

One thing has become clearer than ever before: we are not here talking about two agendas, one for development and one for peace and security; we are talking about a single, broad agenda, within which the problems of security and development are two sides of the same coin. It is not a question of trading off progress on development against progress on security, a kind of grand bargain between groups of countries with different interests. What is needed is a coherent set of policies to deal with the whole of that broad agenda and the resources required to implement it.

Nor is it sensible to look at all this as some titanic clash between the forces supporting multilateralism and those which favour a unilateral approach. In reality, there is not one of the threats and challenges that face the international community which can be effectively handled by individual states acting alone, nor one which can be managed entirely through the action of international organisations. So there is a need to overcome the tensions of recent years and to build a new consensus which can harness the efforts of nation states, particularly the most powerful amongst them, and those of the international organisations to which they often pay lip service but too seldom provide with the resources and political backing they need if they are to serve the international community effectively.

**New tools for new problems**
The threats we all face, in the security field in particular, have changed quite fundamentally since the end of the Cold War removed the shadow of confrontation between two nuclear-armed superpowers, and the actuality of proxy wars around the world between their surrogates which were regarded as off-limits to the UN. Now international terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the risk of a combination of these two threats, and the appalling problems caused by the weakness and collapse of states – a phenomenon that has cropped up in every continent – have taken the place of these earlier threats. The interconnections between each of these new threats and the links too with poverty, disease and the environment demand a systematic re-think of how best to counter them.

**Next steps**
So what are the main prescriptions for what needs in every case to be a strategy for prevention? First, there needs to be a comprehensive strategy against terrorism, which addresses the causes of it as well as
suggest guidelines to help the Security Council to reach decisions on the use of force which should increase predictability and deterrence while recognising that there can be no push-button certainty about such decision-taking. These guidelines should include a willingness by the international community to assume a responsibility to protect human security where individual governments have proved unwilling or unable to do this themselves.

Alongside these policy prescriptions there are some important institutional changes to match – enlargement of the Security Council from 15 members to 24 on one of two models with a view to increasing its representativeness; a fundamental re-shaping of the UN machinery for handling human rights to make it more effective and more credible; and major reforms in the UN Secretariat to equip it better for the tasks ahead and to make it more accountable to the membership, while giving the Secretary-General more scope for allocating the personnel and resources he is given.

The UN cannot do everything. That is why another crucial part of the reform proposals includes a much better integrated working relationship between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations, with stronger support for those like the African Union which are making major efforts to confront threats to peace in their region but lack essential resources in training, logistics and finance. And, when prevention fails, the UN High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change and the Secretary-General

the US needs the UN; but fitting those two imperatives together has never proved easy in the past and will not be so now. The UN cannot and should not just become an instrument of the foreign policy of any of its members, even the most powerful among them; but equally, to be effective, it has to move forward on a basis which has general backing.

Forward from Gleneagles
The G8 meeting is not the place to take decisions on any of these matters. But it can and needs to play an essential role in shaping the decisions to be taken in New York in September and in giving real momentum to the UN reform process. Without reformed and strengthened international organisations enjoying the active and energetic support of their principal member governments, the warm words and aspirations of the G8’s communiqué will remain just that, the follow-up hobbled by inadequate co-ordination and the absence of a broad consensus on the way ahead. For a world facing many complex new threats and challenges, and as yet inadequately organised to find collective responses to them, that would be a miserable outcome.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick was the United Kingdom’s Permanent Representative to the UN from 1990 to 1995.