



The Best Intentions: Kofi Annan and the UN in the Era of American World Power

James Traub

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A man who had won the Nobel Peace Prize, who was widely counted one of the greatest UN Secretary Generals, was nearly hounded from office by scandal. Indeed, both Annan and the institution he incarnates were so deeply shaken after the Bush Administration went to war in Iraq in the face of opposition from the Security Council that critics, and even some friends, began asking whether this sixty-year-old experiment in global policing has outlived its usefulness. Do its failures arise from its own structure and culture, or from a clash with an American administration determined to go its own way in defiance of world opinion?

James Traub, a *New York Times Magazine* contributor who has spent years writing about the UN and about foreign affairs, delves into these questions as no one else has done before. Traub enjoyed unprecedented access to Annan and his top aides throughout much of this traumatic period. He describes the despair over the Oil-for-Food scandal, the deep divide between those who wished to accommodate American critics and those who wished to confront them, the failed attempt to goad the Security Council to act decisively against state-sponsored ethnic cleansing in Sudan. And he recounts Annan's effort to respond to criticism with sweeping reform—an effort which ultimately shattered on the resistance of U.S. Ambassador John Bolton.

In *The Best Intentions*, Traub recounts the dramatically entwined history of Kofi Annan and the UN from 1992 to the present. In Annan he sees a conscientious idealist given too little credit for advancing causes like humanitarian intervention and an honest broker crushed between American conservatives and Third World opponents—but also a UN careerist who has absorbed that culture and can not, in the end, escape its limitations.

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