In 2005, the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, launched the most ambitious program of reform to the United Nations since the end of the Second World War. Institutionally, Annan proposed radical changes to the structure and operation of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights. Politically and legally, he sought a review of the existing rules governing the use of force, the adoption of the 'responsibility to protect' and the conclusion of a comprehensive counter-terrorism treaty. Developmentally, he asked that richer nations renew and extend their commitment to assist in meeting the Millennium Development Goals and take further measures to reduce global inequality.

This paper, and the book on which it is based, describes the concerted efforts to implement these reforms and the politics of the reform process. It concludes that very little of the ambitious reform program materialized. Several reasons for this failure will be examined. The most important of these is that on almost every major issue, the nations of the global North and global South could not reach any meaningful agreement. Without anything approaching consensus, not much of significance could be achieved.

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The views expressed in this seminar are those of the presenter and do not necessarily represent the views of The Australian National University.