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BOUTROS-GHALI, Boutros Youssef

Egyptian politician, sixth Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) 1992-1996 and first Secretary-General of the International Organization of La Francophonie 1997-2002

By **Flora Pidoux** · Version 23 September 2019

Was born 14 November 1922 in Cairo, Egypt and passed away 16 February 2016 in Cairo, Egypt. He was the son of Raghib Youssef Boutros-Ghali, manager of the family estate and farmer, and Safeya Sharoubim, philanthropist. In the early 1950s he married Lilly Louise Kahil, archaeologist, whom he divorced after a few years and he was remarried to Leia Nadler. He had no children.

Biography

Boutros-Ghali came from a land-owning and well-established Coptic Christian family in Egypt which was close to power circles and highly educated. His paternal grandfather, Boutros Ghali, served as Egypt's Prime Minister from 1908 to 1910, several of his uncles served in government and his maternal grandfather, Mikhail Sharoubim, was a prominent historian. Boutros-Ghali was fluent in Arabic, French and English. He was educated at the French secondary school and spoke Arabic and French at home. Amidst the Cold War he considered French a more neutral language than English and coined the expression 'le français langue non-alignée' (Spencer 2015: 89). He received a Bachelor of Law from Cairo University in 1946 and pursued his studies at the University of Paris in France, where he received diplomas in public law in 1947, economics in 1948 and international relations in

1949, from the Institut d'études politiques de Paris, and a doctoral degree in international law in the same year. His doctoral thesis *Contribution à l'étude des ententes regionales* focused on regional cooperation. Between 1949 and 1977 he was professor of international law and international relations at Cairo University, writing articles and books on international relations in French and on Egypt's foreign policy and the Arab world in English. He also authored a book about the UN written in Arabic. Across 1954-1955 he was a Fulbright research scholar in the United States (US) at Columbia University in New York. In 1960 he founded the weekly *Al-Ahram al-Iqtisadi*, which he edited until 1975, and in 1965 he established *Al-Syassa al-Dawliyah*, a political quarterly on international affairs, which he edited until December 1991. From 1963-1964 he was Director of the Centre of Research of The Hague Academy of International Law and in 1967-1968 he was visiting professor at the Faculty of Law of the University of Paris. He assumed administrative functions, such as in 1965 as President of the Egyptian Society of International Law, in 1975 as President of the Centre of Political and Strategic Studies Al-Ahram, in 1978 as a Curatorium member of the Administrative Council of The Hague Academy of International Law and as Scientific Committee member of the Académie mondiale pour la paix in Menton, France and in 1979 as associate member of the Institute affari internazionali in Rome, Italy. He was a member of the International Commission of Jurists, the Institute of International Law, the International Institute of Human Rights, the African Society of Political Studies and the Académie des sciences morales et politiques in Paris and acted as a member of the Committee on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations of the International Labour Organization (ILO) from 1971 to 1979 and the International Law Commission of the United Nations (UN) from 1979 to 1991.

Boutros-Ghali started his political career in 1974 by joining the Central Committee and Political Bureau of the Arab Socialist Union. In October 1977, when more Christians were brought into Egyptian politics, he became Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and accompanied President Anwar Sadat on a state visit to Israel. Known for supporting peaceful coexistence with Israel, Boutros-Ghali's Coptic origins were interpreted as a sign of fairness. His marriage to a Jew (his second wife Leia was the daughter of a Jewish candy maker) was viewed as a potential asset. Boutros-Ghali took an active part in the framing of the 1978 accords negotiated at Camp David in the US between Sadat, Israel's Prime-Minister Menachem Begin and US President Jimmy Carter, which resulted in the 1979 peace treaty. Accused of treason for negotiating with Israel, he described the diplomatic process and his experience in his memoir *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem* (1997). He disassociated himself from some of Sadat's initiatives, as Egypt was accused of marginalizing the Palestinian question and, in exchange for peace, straying too far from the Arab stance. Boutros-Ghali led several Egyptian delegations, in 1979, 1980, 1982 and 1990, to the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Non-Aligned Movement, the Summit Conferences of French and African Heads of State and the UN General Assembly. He helped settle disputes in Africa and participated in the negotiations leading to the release of anti-apartheid fighter Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990. Boutros-Ghali is considered the architect of Egypt's African and Non-Aligned policies, having visited every African state during his time in office. Despite his accumulated experience, his national career stalled as the position of Foreign Minister is traditionally reserved to a Muslim candidate and because of his role in brokering peace with Israel.

When Boutros-Ghali, who had already engaged in attempts to obtain a leadership position in the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the ILO, campaigned to become UN Secretary-General, President Hosni Mubarak appointed him Deputy Prime Minister for Foreign Affairs in May 1991 and entrusted him with special diplomatic missions, among them the OAU summit in June. In accordance with the rotation principle an African candidate was sought and African leaders suggested that he should present himself. Boutros-Ghali received the support of French President François Mitterrand, who wanted a French-speaking Secretary-General. Despite his diplomatic experience and Western style, the UK and the US worried that, at 69 years of age, he was too old for the job, as well as too arrogant, close to France and preoccupied with Africa. They supported Canada's Brian Mulroney, but did not veto Boutros-Ghali's candidacy following Egypt's key role in the Gulf War of 1990-1991. China and Russia expected that he would act independently from Western

powers. Boutros-Ghali convinced the sceptics by promising not to seek re-election. On 21 November 1991 the Security Council nominated him with eleven votes in favour and four abstentions, among them the UK and the US. On 3 December the General Assembly confirmed this outcome by acclamation. On 1 January 1992 Boutros-Ghali succeeded Javier Pérez de Cuéllar as Secretary-General, becoming the first African and the first Arab to hold the position. He hoped to take full advantage of the unique opportunities provided by the post-Cold War era, anticipating that the UN would finally become the organization it was meant to be: an interventionist force to maintain international peace and security. He was confident that he would reinvigorate the UN, streamline the finances and solve bureaucratic problems. Relying on his experience, he devised a four-fold plan in several agendas and reports on peace, development, democratization and reform, which were to become his core objectives for the UN's fiftieth anniversary in 1995.

During the first UN Summit Meeting of Heads of State and Government on 31 January 1992 the President of the Security Council asked Boutros-Ghali to prepare recommendations to strengthen the UN's preventive diplomacy, peace-making and peacekeeping. His response was *An Agenda for Peace*, in which he added post-conflict peace-building to these three elements as a novel priority, suggesting the need to consolidate peace after conflicts. The relevance of reconciliation and forgiveness may be related to the strong religious education he had received at home (Lang 2007: 269). Boutros-Ghali presented a widened vision of peacekeeping, later known as second-generation missions, which had for cornerstone peace enforcement rather than the sole observance of a cease-fire and the protection of humanitarian relief supplies. He suggested that the UN should be provided with standby troops for emergency response and a 50-million-dollar peacekeeping reserve fund, deployable on request by the Secretary-General. He (1992: §64) promoted greater cooperation and delegation to regional organizations, to alleviate the burden on the Security Council and also to 'contribute to a deeper sense of participation, consensus and democratization in international affairs'. In 1995 he presented a supplement to the *Agenda*, which reviewed the lessons learned and criticized the ill-fitting reactionary forces deployed in conflicts that took place. In *An Agenda for Development*, which answered a 1992 request by the General Assembly, Boutros-Ghali identified development as a fundamental human right and the most secure basis for peace and security, which should involve multiple actors in addition to states. He saw human rights as the common language of humanity and asserted that all human rights stood on equal grounds. The report was part of a larger discussion on development, which included several UN conferences, covering human rights, the environment, population and development, women and trade. During these conferences he attempted to give the G77, a key group of developing states, equal visibility to that of Western states. He supported the underdogs and the exploited and saw himself as the champion of the Third World (Weiss et al. 2005: 339). Ban Ki-moon (2016) later declared that these 'global gatherings captured the imagination and gave the world exciting new policies, directions and purpose'.

On 20 December 1996 Boutros-Ghali presented his *Agenda for Democratization* to the General Assembly, responding to its 1994 request for a plan to support democracies. He reiterated the necessity to improve global democracy, at all levels of governance, to increase the representativeness of every state and individual, in accordance with the Charter's 'We the peoples'. Democratization was the theme closest to his heart (1999: 318-319), but Simon Rushton (2008: 106) argues that while he acted as a norm entrepreneur in presenting democratization as a UN principle, he failed to retain the confidence of the membership and to impose this norm globally. For organizational reform of the UN, Boutros-Ghali appointed US Attorney-General Richard Thornburgh to review the UN administration. Following his ideas Boutros-Ghali streamlined the Secretariat. He opposed the creation of additional positions and cut existing ones, but member-states' opposition limited this reform. Regarding UN finances he feared for bankruptcy and ordered a report on UN financial operations from central bankers Paul Volcker and Shujiro Ogata. They suggested ways for a more efficient use of UN resources, including a unified peacekeeping budget. Boutros-Ghali froze the UN budget and supported the creation of the Office of Internal Oversight Services in 1994. He also

reminded member states of their obligations to pay their contributions, a demand particularly addressed to the US which then owed 1.3 billion dollars in unpaid assessments.

Boutros-Ghali led the UN in a difficult period marked by a profound transformation of the international scene following the end of the Cold War, which triggered crises and civil wars around the globe and paved the way for American hubris. Successes, such as peace accords in Cambodia in 1991, Mozambique and El Salvador in 1992 and Guatemala in 1996 and the creation of international criminal tribunals for Former Yugoslavia in 1993 and Rwanda in 1995, became overshadowed by numerous setbacks. His 1992 mediation effort for Cyprus, which had been invaded by Turkey in 1974, ultimately failed, in part because he criticized the Turkish position and was accused of siding with the Greeks. In 1992 the Security Council authorized an intervention in Somalia, run by the US military, to deliver food and aid to the country. This led to the traumatic death of 18 US soldiers and the withdrawal of US troops. In spite of its leadership, the US placed the blame on Boutros-Ghali. In 1994 the UN was held responsible for its inability to prevent the massacre of Tutsis in Rwanda, despite warnings from General Roméo Dallaire, who headed the UN peacekeeping contingent on the ground. Boutros-Ghali was accused of having fuelled the conflict as he had facilitated an arms agreement between Egypt and Rwanda's Hutu regime while acting as Egypt's Foreign Minister, which he explained as part of his responsibilities to support the Egyptian arms industry. His public statements were not always well received. While severe conflicts erupted in the Balkans following the partition of Yugoslavia he stated that the North-South divide was his priority and not what he called 'a rich man's war', which consumed most of the Security Council's resources at the expense of other conflicts. He opposed the bombing campaign in Bosnia by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, fearing for UN forces on the ground, and complained that the Security Council had not empowered the UN sufficiently. He requested 35,000 troops, but only got 8,000, and the UN blue helmets were only permitted to secure humanitarian aid convoys rather than impose peace. In return, he was accused of not having pushed hard enough. During a visit to Sarajevo in December 1992 he declared to the besieged citizens that he could give them a list of ten places with worse problems. He later dismissed Srebrenica, where 8,000 Muslims had been killed in a 'safe area', as 'a village in Europe' (*The Telegraph* 2016) and proceeded with his visit to Africa. In May 1996 he published a report on Israel's shelling of the UN compound at Qana, Lebanon which caused the death of one hundred Lebanese civilians. The report concluded that it was unlikely that the shelling of the compound was the result of gross technical error, which provoked the ire of Israel's Prime Minister Shimon Peres amidst his election campaign and of US President Bill Clinton, who had lobbied to not publish the report.

Boutros-Ghali's relations with the US grew increasingly tense, first with President George H.W. Bush, whose Republican Party was against the UN, and then with Clinton. Two visions of the UN's role clashed, as the US wished to make the most of their unipolar moment in the New World Order and tried to tell the Secretary-General what was expected of him, whereas Boutros-Ghali planned for the UN's revival, fought for equality of states and rejected the US government's globalizing neoliberalism. He was accused of seeking world government and became the symbol of everything that was wrong with the UN, as exemplified by US Senator Jesse Helms's 1996 article 'Saving the U.N.: A Challenge to the Next Secretary-General'. Boutros-Ghali grew frustrated by the lack of US diplomacy and its dismissive attitude towards formal rules. He found himself caught in US domestic politics, where he was turned into the scapegoat of the Somali mission's failure. The US was committed to blocking Boutros-Ghali's re-election, which he then sought despite his initial promise. Secretary of State Warren Christopher suggested a one-year extension to Boutros-Ghali's time in office as a consolation prize and US Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright, who hoped to become Clinton's Secretary of State during his second mandate, set up Operation Orient Express to block Boutros-Ghali's re-election (Salton 2017: 178) and offered him a private foundation in his name in Geneva in exchange for his departure. Boutros-Ghali turned both offers down. The US government resolved to veto his re-election, despite 14 favourable votes by the other members of the Security Council. The African states proceeded to put forward the name of Kofi Annan, then Special Representative to the Former

Yugoslavia, who had gained US government confidence. Boutros-Ghali (1996) described his term as having evolved following the words 'Enthusiasm. Disillusion. Realism', but he also believed that the UN had grown stronger.

Boutros-Ghali had an individualistic perception of the Secretary-General's leadership role, whose task of guiding the UN rests primarily on the officeholder's shoulders. His main task was to lead the international community in what he (1996: 88) called 'the context of both the world dialectic of globalization and fragmentation and the U.N. dialectic of an increasing burden and decreasing resources'. In his 1996 essay 'Global Leadership after the Cold War' he insisted that the Secretary-General's duty was to call attention to ignored conflicts. However, his 'abrasive manner' and behaviour (Chesterman 2007: 2) did not strengthen member states' confidence. He frustrated permanent representatives, when he preferred to settle matters directly with their heads of state and government or gathered the necessary support from the Security Council. 'Perhaps he was too direct for some', according to Samia Spencer (2015: 87), or 'he might have been too professorial for others; some definitely found him too independent', a goal that he considered among the highest virtues for any UN Secretary-General. Dedicated to his job, Boutros-Ghali gained the respect of his close aides, but failed to inspire loyalty from them. His inability to delegate and his frequent visits abroad made him unpopular among the staff, as files piled up on his desk, making the work stall in his absence. Due to his perceived aloofness and authoritarian leadership style he was known as 'the Pharaoh' (Chesterman 2007: 8) and 'widely perceived as stiff, autocratic, cynical and uncaring' (Pick 2016). To the despair of his wife, he did not participate in New York social life. Yet, in private or with people he found interesting, he could be charming and amusing.

Boutros-Ghali's term as UN Secretary-General ended on 31 December 1996, with Annan succeeding him. Boutros-Ghali then became the first Secretary-General of La Francophonie, an organization of French-speaking states aiming to protect the use of the French language. French President Jacques Chirac introduced him to the position and he travelled to Africa and Asia to campaign to be selected. During the organization's Summit Meeting of Heads of State and Government on 16 November 1997 in Hanoi, Vietnam he was elected. Boutros-Ghali turned the organization into a proper institution, as reflected in the new name of International Organization of La Francophonie, and gave it political responsibilities by including cultural diversity, the protection of human rights and democracy amongst the organization's priorities. He developed an economic programme which emphasized the fundamental link between peace, democracy and development, reiterated in the 2000 Declaration of Bamako, which still guides the diplomatic and political programmes of the organization. He widened the organization's mission to cultural and linguistic diversity to ensure the sustainability of the Francophone culture and as a means to international peace through dialogue between cultures and civilizations (Dyckmans-Rozinski 2018: 83-85), but had trouble with the French because he wanted to make alliances with other Latin language countries (Savio 2016). Abdou Diouf from Senegal succeeded Boutros-Ghali on 1 January 2003.

Boutros-Ghali, who published his memoir *Unvanquished: A U.S.-U.N. Saga* in 1999, remained active. He supported the UN from the outside as President of the Society for International Development from 1997 to 2000. In 2004 he was appointed as President of the Egyptian National Commission for Human Rights and promoted democratic governance as President of UNESCO's International Panel on Democracy and Development and as one of the leaders of the international campaign for the creation of a UN parliamentary assembly. From 2003 to 2006 Boutros-Ghali served as Chairman of the South Centre, a think tank devoted to the advancement of the development and rights of states of the developing world. He became Honorary President of the Belgrade-based European Centre for Peace and Development, which aimed at creating academic cooperation in the Balkans and Eastern and Central Europe. He advised Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sisi on political economy and foreign policy following his election in June 2014. All these activities were aimed at promoting what he had fought for during his time at the UN: peace, development and democracy. Boutros-Ghali received countless awards, honorary doctorates and honorary memberships in academies from

governments, universities and institutions around the globe. In early 2016 he died in a hospital in Cairo following a fall. He was given a national funeral with full military honours and is buried in the Boutrosiya Church alongside his family.

Archives

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