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# The Decline and Fall of the United Nations: Why the U.N. Has Failed and How it Needs to be Reformed

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Nile Gardiner

*M*acalester College has a strong history of internationalism and takes great pride in both its scholarship and its truly global focus. It is also an institution that welcomes diversity of ideas and open debate, the hallmarks of what higher learning is all about in this great nation of America.

It is fitting that Macalester has chosen the United Nations as the topic of discussion for its 2006 Roundtable, as the U.N. faces some of the greatest challenges in its history, ranging from the humanitarian crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan to the threat of a nuclear-armed North Korea. The year also marks the end of Kofi Annan's decade-long tenure as U.N. Secretary-General and his handover of power to South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki Moon.

In a recent interview with the London *Daily Telegraph*, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton described the U.N. as hopelessly out of touch and stuck in a Twilight Zone-style "time warp" where "there are practices, attitudes and approaches that were abandoned 30 years ago in much of the rest of the world."<sup>1</sup> There are many Americans who would agree with Mr. Bolton. In a March 2006 poll conducted by Gallup in the United States, 64 percent of respondents said the United Nations was "doing a poor job," the most negative rating for the U.N. in its history. Just 28 percent had a positive image of the U.N.'s job performance. At the same time, however, 68 percent of those surveyed supported the U.N. playing "a major role" in world

affairs, with 26 percent supporting the view that the U.N. should play a "leading role."<sup>2</sup>

The Gallup poll highlights the rather schizophrenic approach the American public takes toward the U.N. There can be little doubt that the U.N.'s image has taken a beating in the past few years in the United States, from the halls of Congress to the towns and cities of Middle America.

The Oil-for-Food and Congo peacekeeping scandals have had a devastating impact on the U.N.'s reputation, reinforcing the view that the world body is riddled with corruption and mismanagement, as well as a complete lack of discipline in its peacekeeping operations. The spectacular failure of the hugely discredited U.N. Commission on Human Rights (now the U.N. Human Rights Council), populated with some of the world's worst human rights violators, has added to the U.N.'s poor image. In addition, the tensions between Washington and Turtle Bay over the war in Iraq have contributed to bringing U.S.-U.N. relations to their lowest point in a generation.

At the same time, however, there remains a consensus in the United States, whether on Capitol Hill or in Kansas City, that the U.N. still has an important role to play, for now at least, in both international security matters and humanitarian efforts. While disenchantment with the U.N. is rising significantly, there is at this time no significant chorus of calls for the U.S. to immediately walk away from the U.N. Both Congress and the Executive Branch have focused heavily in the past year on advancing the reform of the United Nations, rather than deserting the institution altogether. Washington has looked to the U.N. Security Council to play a role in the Iranian and North Korean nuclear issues, as well as the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping to help prevent further mass killing in the Sudan. The U.N. may not be loved, but it is still seen as a valuable forum and tool for advancing U.S. interests on the international stage.

Despite its myriad failings and glaring inadequacies, the United Nations is still viewed, in the immediate term, as an institution that merits U.S. investment and cooperation. How long this at times fraught relationship will last, however, remains to be seen, and the world body is to a large degree on probation. There is growing impatience in the White House over the slow pace of U.N. reform, and both the House and Senate have been discussing the possibility of withholding a portion of U.S. funding for the U.N. On the international stage, while the United States is expected to take the Iranian nuclear question to the

Security Council, there is little optimism over the Council's ability to enforce or even agree to a strict sanctions regime. Nor is there a great deal of faith in the U.N.'s ability to halt the genocide in the Sudan. In short, although the United States is actively engaged with the U.N., and wishes it to succeed, there is relatively little confidence in its overall ability.

The next couple of years will be an important period that may define the future relationship between the United States and the United Nations. A great deal depends on the institutional and management reforms that must take place if the U.N. is to become an effective body, and the willingness of the Group of 77 (G-77) nations to support these changes. If the reforms are not implemented, there can be no doubt that Washington will respond with budget cuts. In addition, the long-term willingness of the United States to work through the Security Council in addressing major threats to international security will depend heavily upon how the Council responds to the threat posed by Iran and North Korea. If the U.N. proves impotent in the Sudan, as it did over Rwanda and Bosnia, it will be viewed as an irrelevance in terms of humanitarian intervention. Similarly, if the new U.N. Human Rights Council does not succeed in exorcising the demons of the former Human Rights Commission, there can be no prospect of the U.S. seeking a seat in future years.

Despite a series of well-publicized scandals and significant international failures, U.S. taxpayers and policymakers are still willing to give the U.N. one more chance. If, however, the United Nations fails to rise to the challenge, it will become an irrelevance, with gradual U.S. disengagement a strong possibility. The future of the U.N. is largely in the hands of the Secretariat and the General Assembly, especially the G-77.

There is a popularly held view, especially in the developing world, that the United States dominates the U.N., and that reform is merely an exercise in enhancing American power. This is, of course, a myth. U.S. power within the U.N. is limited, and all too often the U.N. is used as a multilateral vehicle with which to rein in the American superpower, especially by strategic competitors such as Russia, China, India, and France. However, the U.N. without the United States is a greatly weakened organization, financially, politically, and strategically. Without the presence of the world's greatest power, the U.N. would be an impotent body, lacking in legitimacy, financially insecure, and doomed to go down the same path as its predecessor, the League of Nations.

The U.N. needs the United States, and it is in the interests of the world body to undergo thorough reform, to make it an effective and relevant world organization for the 21st century. The U.N. needs America more than America needs the U.N.

This essay examines the reasons why the United Nations has failed in the past decade, and puts forward recommendations for reform as well as U.S. policy regarding the institution. It also asks whether the world body can survive in the increasingly dangerous and divided world of the 21st century.

### **I. U.S. Involvement in the United Nations**

It is often suggested that the United States does not pull its own weight when it comes to the United Nations, and is a reluctant and unenthusiastic member. This was the main theme of a controversial speech given by Deputy U.N. Secretary-General Mark Malloch Brown in New York in June 2006.<sup>3</sup> In remarks described as “the worst mistake” by a U.N. official in a quarter century, Malloch Brown warned of the “serious consequences of a decades-long tendency by U.S. Administrations of both parties to engage only fitfully with the UN.” He condemned “the prevailing practice of seeking to use the UN almost by stealth as a diplomatic tool while failing to stand up for it against its domestic critics.”

The U.N.’s Number Two person chastised the Bush Administration because it had not sufficiently “highlighted” where the U.S. and the U.N. are “constructively engaged” and instead “abandoned” the topic to conservative sections of the U.S. media that promulgate “unchecked UN-bashing and stereotyping.” What is needed in response, he declared, is for America’s leaders to support the U.N., “not just in a whisper but in a coast to coast shout, that pushes back the critics domestically, and wins over the skeptics internationally.”

The speech was also an extraordinary intervention in domestic American politics. In what can only be described as the first political stump speech made by an international civil servant on U.S. soil in a critical U.S. election year, Malloch Brown rallied his largely partisan audience with these stirring words:

Back in Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt’s day building a strong, effective UN that could play this kind of role was a bipartisan enterprise, with the likes of Arthur Vandenberg and John Foster Dulles joining Democrats to

support the new body. Who are their successors in American politics?  
Who will campaign in 2008 for a new multilateral national security?

Malloch Brown's controversial speech is part of a growing trend toward intervention in U.S. political affairs by U.N. officials. Kofi Annan sparked a major controversy in September 2004, just weeks ahead of the U.S. presidential election, when he described the war with Iraq as an "illegal" violation of the U.N. Charter, in an interview with the BBC. Annan followed these remarks with a further intervention on the Iraq issue in November 2004, when he wrote a letter to U.S., British, and Iraqi leaders appealing for Coalition forces to hold back from retaking the insurgent-held city of Fallujah.

More recently, the Secretary-General tried to influence the American political debate on immigration in a June 5, 2006 editorial for *The Wall Street Journal*.<sup>4</sup> Although it eschewed specific mention of the United States, Annan's article, as well as the release of new U.N. research on migration, was timed for maximum impact on the immigration issue, and arrived just as the House and Senate were working to reconcile major immigration legislation. Such interventions are inappropriate for U.N. officials and should be rebuffed by both political parties as improper intervention in U.S. domestic politics.

Malloch Brown's speech was not only a highly politicized polemic, it was also a spectacularly unfair assessment of America's commitment to the United Nations. The United States has been the United Nations' biggest contributor since its founding in 1945, contributing over \$5 billion annually to the world body. The U.S. gives around \$400 million a year toward the U.N.'s routine operating expenses—22 percent of the U.N.'s regular annual operating budget and more than the combined contributions of France, Germany, China, Canada, and Russia. In addition, it provides over \$400 million a year to the U.N.'s specialized agencies.

The U.S. contributes 48 percent of the World Food Program budget, 31 percent of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees budget, and 17 percent of the UNICEF budget. The United States is the world's biggest contributor to U.N. peacekeeping operations, funding 27 percent of its total worldwide peacekeeping budget. The U.S. now contributes over \$1 billion a year toward U.N. peacekeeping activities. Between 2001 and 2005, the United States contributed \$3.59 billion toward U.N. international peacekeeping operations.

To further illustrate this point, the United States is the biggest financial contributor to the U.N. Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), providing about one-third of its \$746 million operating budget. The U.S. contribution to the U.N. peacekeeping mission in the Congo has been substantial. If 2005 figures are included, the U.S. has contributed roughly three-quarters of a billion dollars (\$759 million) toward MONUC since 2000, according to State Department figures.<sup>5</sup>

## **II. The Failure of the United Nations**

The history of the United Nations over the past twelve years has been dominated by scandal, division, and failure. From the disaster of the U.N. peacekeeping missions in Rwanda and Bosnia in the mid-1990s to the U.N.'s slow response to the Sudan genocide, the U.N.'s recent track record has been spectacularly unimpressive. The tenure of Kofi Annan, which began in January 1997 and ended in December 2006, has been one of the least successful of any Secretary-General. His successor will inherit a largely poisoned chalice, a U.N. whose image has slipped to an all-time low.

The U.N.'s failure has been multifaceted and cannot be ascribed to one single cause. It is partly a failure of leadership, combined with poor management, discipline, and widespread inefficiency, as well as a deep-seated culture of corruption. It is also due to a lack of moral clarity on the international stage—an unwillingness to confront acts of genocide or totalitarian regimes, coupled with a ready willingness to accommodate tyrants and dictators. It has led to a loss of faith in the U.N.'s ability to stand up even for its own Universal Charter of Human Rights or protect the world's most vulnerable people, including victims of ethnic cleansing and refugees seeking protection under the U.N. flag.

Whatever the causes of the U.N.'s failure and weakness, there can be no doubt that it is an organization in a state of crisis, unsure of its future, mired in scandal, suffering from a lack of direction, and morally ambiguous in outlook. In other words, it is a world body that is increasingly ill-equipped for the demands of the 21st century, and working its way towards irrelevance unless it undergoes a transformation. The U.N. today is best described as a sickly patient awaiting a blood transfusion.

## A. Human Rights Failures

The United Nations has let down millions of the world's weakest and most vulnerable people in Africa and the Balkans. Its failure to prevent the slaughter of thousands of Muslims at Srebrenica in 1995 or the mass killing of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994 are shameful episodes that will haunt the United Nations for generations.

There are echoes of Bosnia and Rwanda today in the killing fields of Darfur in the Sudan, a tragedy that the U.N. initially refused to categorize as genocide. More than 200,000 people have lost their lives, many of them at the hands of the *Janjaweed* militias, backed by the Sudanese government. Sudan, a country with an appalling human rights track record, was an active member of the now-defunct U.N. Commission on Human Rights from 2002 to 2005. It used its membership to help block censure from the United Nations. Zimbabwe, another African country with a horrific record of abusing the rights of its citizens, sat on the Council from 2003 to 2005.

The Commission reached its low point in 2003, when Libya was elected Chair with the backing of 33 members, with just three countries voting against. It was eventually replaced in 2006, amidst much fanfare, by the new United Nations Human Rights Council. Unfortunately, the 47-seat body is not a significant improvement over its hugely discredited predecessor. The Council's lack of membership criteria renders it open to participation and manipulation by the world's worst human rights abusers. Tyrannical regimes such as Burma, Syria, Libya, Sudan, and Zimbabwe all voted in favor of establishing the Council, in the face of strong U.S. opposition. The brutal North Korean dictatorship also gave the Council its ringing endorsement. When Council elections were held in May, leading human rights abusers Algeria, China, Cuba, Pakistan, Russia, and Saudi Arabia were all elected.

The United States was correct in its decision not to seek a seat on a Council tainted by the odor of despotism and tyranny. While making every effort to push for reform within the U.N., the United States must seek the creation of a complementary human rights body outside of the U.N. system that would be composed solely of democratic states that adhere to the basic principles of individual liberty and freedom.



## **B. UNESCO and Hugo Chávez**

The Human Rights Council is far from being the only U.N. body to serve as a platform for despots and dictators. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) awarded its 2005 José Martí International Prize to Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. Cuban President Fidel Castro personally handed the award to his leading imitator as an estimated 200,000 people in Revolution Plaza watched.

The Martí prize is intended to recognize those who have contributed to the “struggle for liberty” in Latin America. Chávez is clearly not among this group, and the award was a major embarrassment to the United Nations, illustrating a longstanding lack of moral clarity within the world body on issues of individual freedom and liberty.

Founded after the Second World War, UNESCO was established “to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world.”

UNESCO has had a controversial history. The United States boycotted the organization for eighteen years, from 1985 through 2003, in protest over its budgetary mismanagement and radical agenda, including policies opposed to democracy and freedom of the press. The United States rejoined UNESCO on the understanding that it was undergoing significant financial and management reform and had “resumed efforts to reinforce founding principles.”

The award to Hugo Chávez was an affront to the founding vision of UNESCO and the latest blow to the U.N.’s rapidly declining reputation on human rights and democracy. Aside from Burma, Sudan, Iran, and Zimbabwe (all members of UNESCO), the U.N. would have to struggle to find two more repressive regimes than Venezuela and Cuba to glorify.

## **C. Peacekeeping Failures: The Congo Peacekeeping Scandal**

The U.N.’s human rights failure has been compounded by a series of peacekeeping scandals, from Bosnia to Burundi to Sierra Leone. By far the worst instances of abuse have taken place in the Democratic

Republic of Congo, the U.N.'s second largest peacekeeping mission, with 16,000 peacekeepers.

In the Congo, acts of barbarism have been perpetrated by United Nations peacekeepers and civilian personnel entrusted with protecting some of the most vulnerable women and children in the world. Personnel from the U.N. Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo stand accused of at least 150 major human rights violations. This is almost certainly just the tip of the iceberg. The scale of the problem is likely to be far greater.

The crimes involve rape and forced prostitution of women and young girls across the country, including inside a refugee camp in the town of Bunia in northeastern Congo. The alleged perpetrators include U.N. military and civilian personnel from Nepal, Morocco, Tunisia, Uruguay, South Africa, Pakistan, and France. The victims are defenseless refugees—many of them children—who have already been brutalized and terrorized by years of war and who looked to the U.N. for safety and protection.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan acknowledged that, "acts of gross misconduct have taken place." A draft United Nations report described sexual exploitation by its personnel in the Congo as "significant, widespread and ongoing." In the words of William Lacy Swing, Annan's Special Representative to the Congo, "We are shocked by it, we're outraged, we're sickened by it. Peacekeepers who have been sworn to assist those in need, particularly those who have been victims of sexual violence, instead have caused grievous harm."<sup>6</sup>

The sexual abuse scandal in the Congo makes a mockery of the U.N.'s professed commitment to upholding basic human rights. U.N. peacekeepers and the civilian personnel who work with them should be symbols of the international community's commitment to protecting the weak and innocent in times of war. The exploitation of some of the most vulnerable people in the world—refugees in a war-ravaged country—is a shameful episode and a massive betrayal of trust.

#### **D. Corruption: The-Oil-for-Food Scandal**

The scandal surrounding the U.N.-administered Oil-for-Food program has also done immense damage to the world organization's already shaky credibility. The Oil-for-Food debacle is undoubtedly the biggest scandal in the history of the United Nations, and probably the largest

financial fraud in modern times. It has shattered the illusion that the U.N. is the arbiter of moral authority in the international sphere.

The Oil-for-Food program became the hottest investigative issue on Capitol Hill in a generation. Investigators examined huge amounts of evidence relating to corruption, fraud, and bribery on an epic scale; French and Russian treachery; and the attempts of a brutal totalitarian regime to manipulate members of the U.N. Security Council.

Set up in the mid-1990s as a means of providing humanitarian aid to the Iraqi people, the U.N.-run Oil-for-Food program was subverted and manipulated by Saddam Hussein's regime, allegedly with the complicity of U.N. officials, to help prop up the Iraqi dictator. Saddam Hussein's dictatorship was able to siphon off billions of dollars from the program by oil smuggling and systematic thievery, by demanding illegal payments from companies buying Iraqi oil, and by kickbacks from those selling goods to Iraq—all under the noses of U.N. bureaucrats.

The program has been investigated by no less than five Congressional committees (two in the Senate and three in the House of Representatives). They are the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the Senate Subcommittee on Government Affairs, the House International Relations Committee, the House Subcommittee on Government Reform, and the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. Three U.S. federal investigations are still underway, by the General Accounting Office (GAO), the Department of Justice, and the U.S. Treasury.

In addition, the 18-month \$34 million U.N.-appointed Independent Inquiry Committee (IIC) documented a huge amount of evidence regarding manipulation of the \$60 billion program by the Saddam Hussein regime, with the complicity of more than 2,200 companies in 66 countries as well as a number of prominent international politicians.<sup>7</sup> The three-member Committee was chaired by former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker. The other two committee members were South African Justice Richard Goldstone and Swiss Professor of Criminal Law Mark Pieth.

According to the report, "Oil surcharges were paid in connection with the contracts of 139 companies and humanitarian kickbacks were paid in connection with the contracts of 2,253 companies." Companies accused of paying kickbacks to the Iraqi regime include major global corporations such as Daimler-Chrysler, Siemens, and Volvo. The Saddam Hussein regime received illicit income of \$1.8 billion under the Oil-for-Food program: \$228.8 million was derived from the payment

of surcharges in connection with oil contracts and \$1.55 billion came through kickbacks on humanitarian goods.

The 500-page report painted an ugly tableau of bribery, kickbacks, corruption, and fraud on a global scale. It amply demonstrates how the Iraqi dictator generously rewarded those who supported the lifting of U.N. sanctions on Iraq and who paid lip service to his barbaric regime. Oil-for-Food became a shameless political charade through which Saddam Hussein attempted to manipulate decision-making at the U.N. Security Council by buying the support of influential figures in countries like Russia and France.

The evidence presented was comprehensive, damning, and a wake-up call to those who naively believed that the Saddam Hussein regime could be trusted to comply with U.N. sanctions. Saddam's multibillion-dollar fraud, carried out with the complicity of prominent political figures across Europe as well as thousands of international companies, was halted only by the liberation of Iraq by the United States and Great Britain, in the face of determined opposition by France and Russia. It is not difficult to see why powerful political interests in Paris and Moscow were so fundamentally opposed to a war that would open the archives of Baghdad to close scrutiny and subsequently cause huge political embarrassment.

The report should prompt widespread soul-searching within the United Nations, whose administrators turned a blind eye to massive wrongdoing in a humanitarian program designed to help the weakest and most vulnerable in Iraq. The fact that the Baathist regime was able to get away with such a vast scandal under the noses of U.N. bureaucrats—and in some cases with their complicity—represents both spectacular incompetence as well as extremely poor leadership at the top of the world body.

The overall IIC investigation should not, though, be viewed as the final say on the Oil-for-Food scandal. It should be seen as an important but at times flawed and incomplete inquiry that left many questions unanswered in relation to the role of senior U.N. officials, including Kofi Annan and his chief aide, Iqbal Riza.

In future years, the Secretary-General should not be permitted to handpick the investigative committee into a U.N. scandal and then pass it off as "independent." Such inquiries will always be open to the possibility of political interference and manipulation by those being investigated. The United States should insist that future investigations into such scandals be completely independent of the Secretary-Gen-

eral. Upon appointment, chairmen of such inquiries should also be asked to disclose all potential conflicts of interest, whether business or political.

The Volcker inquiry was less than forthright in its analysis of possible wrongdoing and incompetence at the very top of the U.N. Secretariat, a point sharply highlighted by the resignation of former FBI agent Robert Parton, the IIC's lead investigator of the Kofi Annan/Kojo Annan issue. Parton resigned on a matter of principle, in protest at the Volcker Committee's unwillingness to take a harder line regarding the actions of the Secretary-General. Parton subsequently handed over thousands of pages of documents relating to the Annan investigation to the House International Relations Committee.

According to the second interim report released by the Volcker Committee,<sup>8</sup> Iqbal Riza, Kofi Annan's Chief of Staff, authorized the shredding of thousands of U.N. documents between April and December 2004. Among these documents were the entire Chef de Cabinet chronological files for 1997, 1998, and 1999—many of which related to the Oil-for-Food program. Riza approved this destruction just ten days after he had personally written to the heads of nine U.N.-related agencies that administered the Oil-for-Food program in Northern Iraq, requesting that they, "take all necessary steps to collect, preserve and secure all files, records and documents...relating to the Oil-for-Food Programme." The destruction continued for more than seven months after the Secretary-General's June 1, 2004 order to staff members "not to destroy or remove any documents related to the Oil-for-Food programme that are in their possession or under their control, and to not instruct or allow anyone else to destroy or remove such documents."

Significantly, Kofi Annan announced the retirement of Mr. Riza on January 15, 2005—the same day that Riza notified the Volcker Committee that he had destroyed the documents. Riza was immediately replaced by Mark Malloch Brown, Administrator of the U.N. Development Programme.

Riza was Chief of Staff from 1997 to 2004, almost the entire period of the Oil-for-Food program's operation, and undoubtedly possessed intricate knowledge of the U.N.'s management of it. He was a long-time colleague of Kofi Annan and served as Annan's Deputy in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations from 1993 to 1996.

The destruction of highly sensitive documents by Iqbal Riza was an obstruction of justice that demands congressional investigation. It gave the impression of a major cover-up at the very heart of the United

Nations and cast a dark cloud over the Secretary-General's credibility. It projected an image of impunity, arrogance, and unaccountability on the part of the leadership of the United Nations.

The Volcker investigation may have ended, but several other major inquiries will continue to gain momentum and reveal new findings relating to the Oil-for-Food scandal. These include the leading investigations on Capitol Hill led by the House International Relations Committee and the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, in addition to the Department of Justice inquiry. It will be many months, even years, before the full extent of the corruption and mismanagement within the United Nations is completely exposed.

### **E. Questions about the U.N. Tsunami Relief Effort**

The Oil-for-Food program is one of several U.N. operations to raise major concerns about transparency and accountability. The U.N.'s much-vaunted tsunami relief operation has also sparked doubts regarding its ability to manage a huge humanitarian project.

The tsunami disaster, which struck large sections of Southeast Asia, South Asia, and East Africa on December 26, 2004, claimed some 231,000 lives and displaced two million people. It prompted an outpouring of humanitarian help from around the world, with an estimated total of \$13.6 billion in aid pledged, including \$6.16 billion in government assistance, \$2.3 billion from international financial institutions, and \$5.1 billion from individuals and companies.<sup>9</sup>

The huge international relief effort was co-coordinated by the United Nations, and involved an astonishing 39 U.N. agencies, from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

When the U.N. took over the tsunami relief operation in early 2005, the world body pledged full transparency, in light of its disastrous handling of the Iraq Oil-for-Food program. The U.N.'s Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Egeland, boasted in an opinion editorial that, "only the UN has the universal legitimacy, capacity, and credibility to lead in a truly global humanitarian emergency."<sup>10</sup> Egeland had earlier criticized the U.S. contribution to the tsunami relief effort as "stingy."<sup>11</sup>

An investigation by the *Financial Times*, however, raised serious questions about the U.N.'s handling of the tsunami relief effort, in particular the way in which it spent the first \$590 million of its \$1.1 billion disaster "flash appeal." The appeal included nearly \$50 million from the United States.<sup>12</sup> The two-month *Financial Times* inquiry revealed that, "as much as a third of the money raised by the UN for its tsunami response was being swallowed up by salaries and administrative overheads."<sup>13</sup> In contrast, Oxfam, a British-based private charity, spent just 10 percent of the tsunami aid money it raised on administrative costs.

Unable to obtain figures from the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the *Financial Times* approached several U.N. agencies directly to establish exact numbers for tsunami relief expenditures. Many "declined or ignored" requests for information, while others offered incomplete data. The newspaper found that of the \$49 million spent by the World Health Organization as part of the tsunami appeal, 32 percent had been spent on "personnel costs, administrative overheads, or associated 'miscellaneous' costs." At the World Food Program (WFP), 18 percent of the \$215 million spent by the agency went toward "staff salaries, administrative overheads and vehicles and equipment."<sup>14</sup>

The *Financial Times* concluded that, "a year after the tsunami, pledges of transparency and accountability for the UN's appeal appear a long way from being realized. This is primarily blamed on dueling UN bureaucracies and accounting methods plus what in many cases appears to be institutional paranoia about disclosure."<sup>15</sup>

### **III. Reforming the United Nations**

The United States should press for immediate reform in three key areas: accountability and transparency, peacekeeping, and human rights.

#### **A. Accountability and Transparency**

The United States should call for the creation of an external watchdog body to oversee U.N. operations. The U.N.'s Office of Internal Oversight Services lacks the tools, expertise, public confidence, and above all, the independence to conduct effective, transparent, and impartial investigations into allegations of large-scale fraud and mismanagement within the United Nations. An external oversight body completely independent of the U.N. bureaucracy and staffed with non-

U.N. officials (but backed by a Security Council mandate) should be established to oversee major U.N. operations, including peacekeeping and humanitarian programs.

Congress should support the establishment of a U.S. oversight unit to monitor how American contributions are spent by the U.N. The United States should set up its own U.N. oversight unit specifically charged with monitoring the use of American contributions to U.N. peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. This should be funded by diverting part of the annual U.S. assessed contribution for the United Nations and could be located in the U.S. Mission to the United Nations.

Congress should also call for the U.N. to establish an independent archive facility to house copies of all major U.N. documents, to guard against the shredding of sensitive files by U.N. officials under investigation. The facility should be located at a separate site from the U.N. headquarters. Copies of significant U.N. documents and correspondence (for example, Chef de Cabinet and Secretariat files) should be deposited within a set period from time of production. Such a facility should be funded by cutting wasteful U.N. programs.

There should also be regular auditing of all U.N. finances and expenditures, conducted by a leading accounting firm. In addition, U.N. personnel charged with criminal behavior should be immediately stripped of diplomatic immunity, to open the way for prosecution. The legal costs of U.N. officials charged with criminal behavior should not be paid for by the United Nations, and should be the responsibility of the individual concerned.

## **B. Peacekeeping**

The Congo episode further undermined the credibility of the United Nations and raised serious questions about the effectiveness of the U.N.'s leadership. The U.N. has consistently failed to publicize, prevent, and punish the criminal behavior of its own personnel in trouble spots around the world. Congress should make it clear to the United Nations that continued robust U.S. funding of U.N. peacekeeping efforts will be contingent upon the elimination of all forms of abuse within its operations. Congress should withhold a percentage of the U.S. contribution to U.N. peacekeeping operations unless U.N. personnel responsible for criminal activity are brought to justice and safeguards are put in place to prevent future abuses.



The United States should call for a Security Council-backed fully independent investigation into the MONUC abuse scandal, to cover all areas of the MONUC operation. In addition, there should be independent investigations launched into allegations of abuse by U.N. personnel in other U.N. peacekeeping operations—including Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Burundi. Fully independent commissions of inquiry should handle all future investigations into human rights abuses by U.N. personnel.

The United States government should pressure U.N. member states to prosecute their nationals accused of human rights violations while serving as U.N. peacekeepers. The U.N. should lift diplomatic immunity for its own staff accused of criminal acts in the Congo, opening the way for prosecution. The Security Council should exclude from future operations countries whose peacekeepers have a history of human rights violations. The U.N. should publicly name and shame those countries whose peacekeepers have carried out abuses in the Congo.

Further, the U.N. should make publicly available all internal reports relating to the Congo scandal, and outline the exact steps it plans to take to prevent the sexual exploitation of refugees in both existing and future peacekeeping operations. Serious consideration should be given to the establishment of an elite training academy for U.N. peacekeeping commanders. This effort should be backed by the U.N. Security Council.

### **C. Human Rights**

In an ideal world, membership in the United Nations should be restricted to free democracies. According to Freedom House, just 89 of the U.N.'s 192 member states are "fully free" (46%). There can be little doubt, though, that any attempt to limit membership would be strongly opposed by the G-77 countries. U.S. interests are best served at present by building an alliance of democracies within the U.N. as well as developing human rights structures outside of the United Nations.

As human rights scholar Joseph Loconte has argued, Congress should appoint an independent Human Rights Ambassador to head a new U.S. Commission on Human Rights. It could be modeled on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, a quasi-governmental group that monitors religious liberty abroad and makes policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.<sup>16</sup>

The United States should mobilize a “Democracy Caucus” to protect human rights and expand democratic freedoms. The new U.S. Human Rights Ambassador would lobby other governments in the fledgling Community of Democracies, founded in 2000 in Warsaw, to establish their own human rights commissions and advisory bodies. They must be a morally serious coalition of the willing—operating both within and outside the official U.N. system—that offers a bright alternative to the existing Human Rights Council.

#### **D. The Case Against Expansion of the Security Council**

A major reform that would *adversely* affect the U.N., as well as American interests, is significant expansion of the Security Council. The United States has correctly set increased effectiveness of the Security Council as the benchmark for Council reform. As the war on terrorism continues to unfold around the globe, as greater urgency is paid to limiting the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and as the free world faces a growing threat from rogue regimes like Iran and North Korea, the U.N. Security Council can play an important and useful role. It is in the U.S. national interest to have a lean and effective Security Council that can help address these issues on the international stage. Unfortunately, the most prominent proposals to expand the Security Council will have the opposite effect.

Security Council expansion will make it far more difficult for the United States to work through the Council. With the exception of Germany and Japan, the voting records of the main contenders for additional permanent Security Council seats indicate that they will likely vote against the U.S. on most key issues. In other words, a larger Security Council, with these nations as permanent members, will likely be less supportive of U.S. policy priorities. Moreover, any enlargement of the Council would make it more unwieldy and subject to conflicting interests. It would contribute to gridlock that could paralyze the Council and decrease the probability that it could act quickly or effectively to address threats to international peace and security.

The U.N. Security Council’s legitimacy depends far more on its actions than its membership. The Security Council is by no means perfect as it currently stands. It is subject to delay and indecisiveness, as its failures in Iraq and Sudan clearly demonstrate. However, a larger Council would not solve these problems. On the contrary, it would further undermine the Council’s ability to act decisively because timely

action would fall victim to political impasse, conflicting interests, or debate among nations that have little to contribute to the Council's ultimate responsibility, the enforcement of international peace and security. However imperfect, the current composition of the Council is infinitely preferable to ill-considered expansion that will surely weaken its standing and ability to meet its mandate—ultimately making the Security Council less relevant and increasing the likelihood that crises will be addressed outside of the U.N. framework.

From the point of view of U.S. national interest, there is a clear-cut case against Security Council expansion. Analysis by the Heritage Foundation of actual votes (not including consensus votes) in the General Assembly over a six-year period (1999 to 2004) revealed that five of the leading candidates voted against the United States more than 70 percent of the time.<sup>17</sup> Only Germany (55 percent) and Japan (50 percent) voted with the U.S. at least half of the time. Brazil, the only contender from Latin America, voted with the U.S. just 29 percent of the time, while India, often touted as a major future ally of the United States, voted with the United States just 20 percent of the time. The records of the three leading African contenders for Security Council seats are equally poor. Nigeria and South Africa voted with the U.S. just 25 percent of the time, while Egypt—a huge beneficiary of American aid—sided with the U.S. in only 18 percent of the votes.

Of 191 members of the General Assembly (not including the U.S.), Germany had the best record among Security Council candidates, ranking 12th in voting coincidence with the United States. Japan ranks a surprisingly low 41st, but is still ahead of any other major country in Asia. Brazil ranks 80th, while Nigeria, South Africa, and India rank 104th, 106th, and 149th, respectively. Egypt ranks very near the bottom at 168th, behind Sudan and just ahead of rogue regimes such as Libya, Burma, and Syria.

Significantly, support for U.S. voting positions in the General Assembly has fallen since 1999 (dramatically in some cases) for all the countries competing for Security Council seats. While Germany backed the United States in 70 percent of the votes in 1999, it voted with the U.S. just 45 percent of the time in 2004. Similarly, Japanese support for U.S. voting positions fell from 63 percent in 1999 to 43 percent in 2004. In 2004, Brazil and Nigeria voted with the U.S. just 15 percent of the time, and South Africa voted with the U.S. only 11 percent of the time. In 1999, these three countries voted with the U.S. 39 percent, 35 percent, and 40 percent of the time, respectively. Egypt's record was a pitifully

low 8.5 percent in 2004 (down from 29 percent in 1999). India has consistently voted against U.S. positions over the past five years, voting in opposition to the U.S. 80 percent of the time in 2004 and 78 percent of the time in 1999.

Every year the U.S. Department of State identifies votes of fundamental national interest in the U.N. General Assembly. Support for the U.S. voting position on key issues over the past five years among the key Security Council contenders has been low (Brazil, Nigeria, South Africa, India, and Egypt) to middling (Japan and Germany). South Africa and Nigeria voted against the U.S. position on key votes an average of 80 percent of the time between 2000 and 2004. India voted with the U.S. just 19 percent of the time, and Egypt just 16 percent. The Brazilian record was slightly better, voting with the U.S. 35 percent of the time. The U.S. did not receive a single vote of support from Nigeria, South Africa, India, or Egypt on any key vote in 2001. While the voting record of Germany and Japan is considerably stronger (Germany voted with the U.S. 64 percent of the time and Japan 66 percent of the time), their voting coincidence can hardly be considered reliable.

Worse than their actual voting records is the fact that these countries' opposition to U.S. priorities is increasing. Germany, Japan, Brazil, South Africa, and Nigeria have sharply reduced their level of support for the U.S. on key votes since 1999. In 2004, Brazil, Nigeria, India, South Africa, and Egypt voted with the U.S. on just two key votes. Germany's and Japan's records were slightly better, voting with the U.S. four times.

### **E. The Debate over John Bolton**

Finally, any discussion of the current state of the United Nations, and U.S. investment in the U.N., would not be complete without an assessment of the record of John Bolton, the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Few political figures in recent American history have so polarized opinion as John Bolton. Faced with Senate gridlock, Bolton was sent by President George W. Bush as a recess appointment to the United Nations in August 2006.

Over the past year, Bolton has proven a forceful advocate of American interests, a powerful voice for U.N. reform, and a staunch defender of the cause of human rights. He has worked closely with Congress, testifying no less than six times before House and Senate committees. Bolton has been an outspoken critic of corruption, mismanagement,

waste, and inefficiency. He has shaken up an institution that has for decades been resistant to change, and cast a revealing light on an elite U.N. establishment that has long thrived amidst a culture of complacency and secrecy.

In three key areas, U.N. reform, human rights, and international security, Bolton's record has been outstanding, and he has dramatically raised the profile of issues from peacekeeping abuses to the need for increased transparency, accountability, and effectiveness at the United Nations. John Bolton's commitment to both the advancement of U.S. interests and the cause of international freedom and security has been unwavering.

While campaigning for a higher human rights standard at the U.N., Bolton has also worked tirelessly to push for greater action by the U.N. Security Council and the international community over the genocide in the Darfur region of the Sudan. He has played a key role in Security Council negotiations pressing for greater protection of refugees fleeing Sudanese-backed *Janjaweed* militias and for targeted sanctions against Sudanese officials implicated in the killings.

During his tenure at the U.N., John Bolton has been a hugely valuable asset to U.S. foreign policy and has proven his critics wrong. Bolton may not be the most popular man at the United Nations, but he is greatly respected and viewed by both friend and foe as a formidable advocate for U.S. interests. U.S. participation at the United Nations is not about winning popularity contests or engaging in feel-good back-slapping exercises. It is about steadfast leadership and the advancement of clear principles and ideals. It is in the U.S. national interest to have a United Nations that is free of corruption, fraud, and mismanagement. And it is in the national interest to have a world body that actually stands for human rights, rejects terrorism, and advances rather than hinders international security.

Bolton has not been afraid to speak his mind and upset the status quo. Nor has he been unwilling to call a dictator a dictator, expose the rampant hypocrisy of the U.N.'s human rights apparatus, or condemn the actions of dangerous rogue regimes. Indeed, I would describe Bolton as a role model for the sort of Ambassador the United States needs at the U.N. Effective diplomacy requires forceful leadership and the willingness to back up tough words with action. As former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher observed in a letter of support for John Bolton, "A capacity for straight talking rather than peddling half-truths is a strength and not a disadvantage in diplomacy. In the case of

a great power like America, it is essential that people know where you stand and assume you know what you say.”

#### **IV. Conclusion: The Future of the United Nations**

Founded in 1945 with lofty ambitions to advance peace, prosperity, and security in the world, the United Nations can point to few significant achievements. Its two finest hours—the defense of South Korea in the Korean War and the liberation of Kuwait from Iraq—were both American- and British-led operations that frankly would have taken place even if the United Nations did not exist. Without the United States, the U.N. is little more than an emperor with no clothes.

The U.N.’s failures, from its inability to stop ethnic cleansing in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Sudan to widespread abuses by U.N. peacekeepers across Africa, are legion. Inaction, incompetence, and even abject inhumanity have all too often been the hallmarks of U.N. operations, which have frequently demonstrated a callous indifference to human suffering.

The United Nations has gained a well-earned reputation as an institution rife with corruption and dominated by a sleazy political culture of “see no evil, hear no evil.” The several investigations into the massive Oil-for-Food scandal opened up an unpleasant can of worms. Clearly, the United Nations is in fundamental need of wholesale reform and new leadership. Much of the blame should be placed on the leadership, including the Secretary-General.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, marked a watershed moment in the history of the love-hate relationship between the world’s biggest superpower and an international body determined to rein in a Goliath. America did not look to the U.N. in responding to the biggest attack on its soil since Pearl Harbor. Indeed, the United Nations was largely an irrelevant bystander as U.S., British, and other allied forces stormed Afghanistan, the safe haven of Al-Qaida.

The U.S.-led war on terror has become a major wedge dividing the United States and the U.N. establishment. The U.N. cannot even agree on a definition of terrorism, let alone take an aggressive stance against it. America’s approach to fighting terrorism, from the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay to the practice of rendition of terror suspects, has become the subject of extreme criticism from U.N. human rights bodies, such as the Human Rights Committee and Council on Human Rights, as well as other supranational institutions like the Council of

Europe. Indeed, the war on terror has become a huge target for the U.N.'s human rights apparatus, which is increasingly posing a major problem for the United States. Tensions between the United States and the U.N. over the treatment of suspected terrorists will greatly complicate any future cooperation between the two in the battle against Al-Qaida.

The Iraq war was another watershed in U.S.-U.N. relations. Washington only half-heartedly went to the Security Council in 2002 when it confronted the barbaric regime of Saddam Hussein, and only after intense pressure from British Prime Minister Tony Blair. The liberation of Baghdad was conducted without the blessing of the Council, after the most acrimonious of debates, which pitted Washington and London against Moscow, Paris, and Beijing. To this day, Secretary-General Kofi Annan continues to bitterly refer to the Iraq war as an "illegal" violation of international law, much to the anger of the Bush Administration.

Despite the rifts over Iraq and the war on terror, the United States still remains committed to working with the U.N. However, how long that commitment lasts depends upon the degree to which the institution is reformed and the extent to which the world body serves as an ally or an obstacle in the war on terror and the battle against rogue states, such as Iran, Syria, and North Korea. Patience is beginning to run out, and it is likely that animosity toward the U.N., both inside the Beltway and across America, will probably increase rather than decrease in the years to come. The U.N. is becoming more of a hindrance rather than a help in the fight against Al-Qaida.

The United States is likely to increasingly clash with the United Nations over the battle against Islamic extremism, the interpretation of international law, the defense of Israel in the face of intimidation by Iranian and Syrian-backed militias, the approach to foreign aid, and the definition of human rights. The next decade will be marked by continuing U.S. engagement with the U.N., but growing frustration and mutual distrust between Washington and Turtle Bay.

The United States will bypass the U.N. when it is seen to be obstructing U.S. interests, and will turn to coalitions of the willing in order to deal with specific threats to international security and even humanitarian crises. At the same time, America, together with close allies, may develop more bodies outside of the U.N. system to handle global issues. The United Nations will have to compete in a global marketplace of international institutions. Its privileged position as the domi-

nant world body in areas such as human rights, humanitarian relief, and international development could be challenged, both by other multilateral institutions or ad-hoc coalitions. The U.N., with its myriad agencies and vast bureaucracy, may struggle to compete in a 21st-century world that demands immediate responses to clear and present threats and crises.

Whether the U.N. goes the way of its predecessor, the League of Nations, and sinks into the abyss of history as an irrelevant failure depends upon its willingness to be reformed, as well as its ability to aggressively confront the challenges of today, whether it be the threat of global terrorism, the aggressive actions of a dictatorial regime, or the mass slaughter of one ethnic group by another. Terrorism, tyranny, and genocide remain the three great evils of our time, and the United Nations will be judged by how it responds to them. If it is not up to the task, then it will be time to take a bow and give way to a successor. ●

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## Notes

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4. Kofi Annan, "In Praise of Migration," *The Wall Street Journal* (5 June 2006).
5. Nile Gardiner, "The United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC): A Case for Peacekeeping Reform," Congressional Testimony, March 1, 2005.
6. Ibid.
7. Paul Volcker, Independent Inquiry Committee into the United Nations Oil-for-Food Programme, "Manipulation of the Oil-for-Food Programme by the Iraqi Regime," October 27, 2005.
8. Paul Volcker, Independent Inquiry Committee into the United Nations Oil-for-Food Programme, "Second Interim Report," March 29, 2005.
9. Figures quoted in "Responses to the Boxing Day Tsunamis," *Financial Times* (23 December 2005).
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11. See Bill Sammon, "UN Official Slams US as 'Stingy' Over Aid," *The Washington Times* (28 December 2004). In response to Egeland's statement, it should be noted that the U.S. Congress approved \$656 million towards post-tsunami relief and reconstruction in May 2005. Total U.S. assistance to countries hit by the tsunami amounted to \$840 million in 2005. Nearly 600,000 tsunami victims have benefited from U.S. support. Private U.S. donations amounted to more than \$1.8 billion. See "U.S. Assistance Exceeds \$840 Million One Year After Tsunami," U.S. Agency for International Development Fact Sheet, December 21, 2005.
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14. Ibid.
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16. Joseph Loconte and Nile Gardiner, "A New Vision for Human Rights," *The Boston Globe* (17 June 2005).
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