

The United Nations

The United Nations was established more than 60 years ago to help bolster international peace and security and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. An honest assessment of the organization inescapably leads to the conclusion that it has fallen far short of the hopes and aspirations of those who helped create it in 1945.

Although the United Nations system has had its share of successes and does perform some useful tasks, the system suffers from confused purposes and competing interests among the member states, which make it an unreliable means of addressing threats to international peace and security, an ineffective advocate for development and economic growth, a limited medium for resolving international problems, and an uneven and unfair arbiter of human rights. The U.N. has also proved susceptible with distressing frequency to mismanagement, ineffective practices, and politically driven efforts to undermine effective action.

Overall, it is hard to deny that the U.N. is seriously flawed and is in desperate need of reform. It is time to rethink and reshape U.S. engagement with the United Nations so that it better serves both U.S. interests and the organization's own stated purposes. If the United States is to benefit from the U.N., it must lead an effort to remove redundancy of mandates in the U.N., establish clear lines of authority and responsibility, and improve transparency and accountability. It must also seek to improve U.N. responsiveness to the demands of its major donors by introducing competition into the U.N. system by moving more budgets to voluntary funding.

As a general strategy, the United States should continue to lead the international community by working through the U.N. when it can be effective, but it should also be open to establishing or working through alternative mechanisms, coalitions, partnerships, alliances, and organizations to act when the U.N. proves unable or unwilling.

Notes

RECOMMENDATIONS

United Nations

1. The U.S. should not offer unconditional support to the U.N. When the U.N. assumes tasks and responsibilities that it is poorly positioned to carry out effectively, the result can be worse than inaction. It can result in genocide, as in the extreme cases of Rwanda and Darfur where the international community mistakenly believed that the U.N. could address the situations. It can result in diplomatic dead ends, such as the Kyoto Protocol. It can shield human rights violators from scrutiny. By its inaction, it can provide cover for states, such as Iran and North Korea, to acquire or proliferate weapons of mass destruction. The U.S. should restrain those U.N. activities that it lacks expertise, authority, or capacity to address effectively.

2. The U.S. should not, however, reflexively dismiss the U.N. Some problems and issues merit U.S. engagement and cooperation with the U.N. The U.N. can serve as a useful forum for multilateral meetings and peacekeeping operations, humanitarian missions, and political efforts. The U.S. should be open to working through the U.N. to address joint concerns, but the U.S. must not allow solutions to be held hostage by an irrational adherence to past practice or subject its foreign policy and security decisions to the vagaries of U.N. support.

3. The U.S. must press for reform and unabashedly force the U.N. to confront its weaknesses. Waste, corruption, and abuse in the U.N. are far too common, as evidenced by reports of sexual abuse by peacekeepers, tainted procurement contracts, and scandals like the Oil-for-Food program. Failing to demand that U.N. activities are undertaken effectively and efficiently does a disservice to the U.N.'s purpose and fails to respect the American people, whose tax dollars finance a large share of its activities. The U.S. government needs to ensure that every agency and body in the U.N. system is transparent, accountable, and well managed.

4. The U.S. should use its influence to press for reform. As only one nation among 192 U.N. member states, the U.S. is generally not in a position to impose reforms to advance these objectives. As the largest financier of the U.N., however, it can use its contributions to press for reform. This means working with Congress to use financial withholding to leverage key reforms. The State Department must also communicate clearly to delegations and capitals when an issue important to the U.S. is before the Security Council and the General Assembly and indicate that voting against the U.S. will have ramifications in terms of bilateral relations and assistance.

5. If the U.N. or its affiliated bodies prove obstructive, the U.S. should not shy away from proposing and pursuing alternatives. Multilateralism is a process, not an end in itself. If the U.S. and other nations operate only through the U.N., they hand the spoilers the means to frus-

trate their efforts. If other non-U.N. options are more promising—whether bilateral, regional, or multilateral—they should be pursued.

United Nations and Human Rights

1. The U.S. should push the U.N. to stand for human rights and freedom. The U.N. should stand up for human rights, human dignity, and the inalienable rights of persons everywhere to freedom. When citizens protest corrupt elections or despotic rulers the international community should stand with them.

2. The U.S. must oppose the “Defamation of Religions” resolution at the U.N. Proposals to ban “defamation of religions” are a clear violation of Americans’ First Amendment guarantee of free speech and internationally recognized rights to freedom of expression and religion. It is essential that the U.S. oppose efforts to increase the acceptance and application of the Defamation of Religions agenda in the U.N. General Assembly and at the U.N. Human Rights Council.

3. The U.S. must press for significant reform of the Human Rights Council. The Council largely ignores human rights abuses in places like China, Zimbabwe, Cuba, and North Korea in favor of politically motivated attacks on Israel. The Council has allowed human rights abusers to serve as members. Without serious and strict membership standards, the council will continue to disappoint.

United Nations and International Peace and Security

1. The U.N. Security Council should not be expanded. A number of countries seek to expand the Security Council to reflect the makeup of the modern world, to “democratize” the Council, or as a quid pro quo for other reforms. The problems of the United Nations are myriad, but few if any would be resolved by expanding the Security Council. Even a modest expansion would make the Council more unwieldy, contribute to gridlock, dilute U.S. influence in the Council, and likely result in a Council less supportive of the United States on many key issues.

2. The U.N. should define and forcefully confront terrorism. Eight years after September 11, 2001, the U.N. has yet to adopt an authoritative definition of terrorism. It is not enough for the U.N. to speak out against terrorism; it must actively combat groups that promote terrorist ideals and aims. U.N. efforts to assist in the war on terrorism are crippled if the organization cannot even decide what terrorism is.

3. Traditional peacekeeping should be supported. Traditionally, U.N. peacekeeping has involved deployments into relatively low-risk situations such as truce monitoring. The U.N. is suited to these limited operations and has enjoyed some success.

4. Robust U.N. peace enforcement operations should be opposed. As troubling situations have arisen in recent years, many of them in Africa, the Security Council has found itself under pressure to respond and establish a peacekeeping operation. Involving the U.N. in robust peace enforcement missions can be a recipe for disaster, as seen in Rwanda, Srebrenica, and Somalia. The pressure to “do something” must not trump sensible consideration of whether a U.N. presence will improve or destabilize the situation or other careful planning to ensure success.

5. The U.S. must press for reform of U.N. peacekeeping. Increasing demands on U.N. peacekeeping have revealed serious flaws. Specifically, audits and investigations over the past few years have revealed substantial problems with mismanagement, fraud, and corruption in procurement for U.N. peacekeeping, and incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse by U.N. peacekeepers and civilian personnel have been shockingly widespread. Without fundamental reform, these problems will likely continue and expand.

FACTS AND FIGURES

United Nations

- The United Nations was established in 1945. There are currently 192 member states.
- A majority of the U.N. member states are neither politically nor economically free, according to *Freedom in the World 2009* published by Freedom House and the *2009 Index of Economic Freedom* published by The Heritage Foundation and *The Wall Street Journal*.

U.N. Budgets and U.S. Funding of the U.N.

- Since the U.N.’s founding, the United States has been its largest financial supporter. In 2009, the U.S. was assessed by the U.N. with 22 percent of the U.N. regular budget and just under 26 percent of the U.N. peacekeeping budget.
- The U.S. pays more than all the other Security Council permanent members combined.
- The 16 highest assessed countries pay, in the aggregate, over 80 percent of the U.N.’s budget.
- The 128 least assessed governments combined pay roughly 1 percent of the budget.
- Under U.N. rules each country has equal say in adopting the budget. That means that two-thirds of the General Assembly membership (128 out

of 192 total member states) that pay, in the aggregate, 1 percent of the U.N. budget can override objections from the U.S. and other major contributors.

- The U.S. is charged (or assessed in U.N. terminology) 22 percent of this U.N. regular biennial budget, which works out to more than \$500 million in 2009. The least assessed countries, at 0.001 percent of the budget, are charged about \$24,000 per year.
- The U.S. will pay more than \$2 billion for U.N. peacekeeping activities in 2009. The 30-plus countries assessed the lowest rate of 0.0001 percent of the peacekeeping budget will be charged approximately \$8,000 each.
- Total U.S. contributions to the U.N. exceed \$5 billion annually.

The U.N. and Human Rights

- The Human Rights Council, the U.N.'s premier human rights body, was created in 2006 to replace the U.N. Commission on Human Rights.
- In its first three years the Human Rights Council has:
 - Discontinued consideration of the suppression of human rights in Iran and Uzbekistan;
 - Eliminated investigations for Belarus, Cuba, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Liberia;
 - Failed to address human rights violations in such countries as Belarus, China, Cuba, North Korea, and Zimbabwe;
 - Passed resolutions on the defamation of religion that support constraints on the fundamental rights of freedom of speech and expression; and
 - Condemned Israel in more than 80 percent of its country resolutions and half of its special sessions while ignoring far worse human rights situations elsewhere.
- Based on poor performance and lack of membership standards, the Bush Administration declined to seek a seat on the council and distanced the U.S. from its deliberations.
- The Obama administration ran for and won a seat on the Human Rights Council in 2009.

U.N. Security Council and Peacekeeping

- There are 15 members of the Security Council, including five permanent members (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States) and 10 members elected to two-year terms.
 - For 2009, the elected members were Austria, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Croatia, Japan, Libya, Mexico, Turkey, Uganda, and Vietnam.

■ At the end of June 2009, there were 16 U.N. peacekeeping operations and another two political or peace-building operations overseen by the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

- Eight of these operations were in Africa (Burundi, Central African Republic and Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Darfur, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sudan, and Western Sahara);
- One was in the Caribbean (Haiti);
- Three were in Europe (Cyprus, Georgia, and Kosovo);
- Three were in the Middle East (Lebanon, the Syrian Golan Heights, and a region-wide mission); and
- Three were in Asia (Afghanistan, East Timor, and India and Pakistan).

■ The size and expense of U.N. peace operations have risen to unprecedented levels. All told, including international and local civilian personnel and U.N. volunteers, the personnel involved in U.N. peacekeeping totaled more than 115,000 at the end of June 2009.

■ These operations involved the deployment of more uniformed personnel than were deployed by any single nation in the world other than the United States.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

U.N. Reform

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Brett D. Schaefer, "Resistance by the G-77 Means the U.S. Must Use Financial Leverage to Advance Reform at the UN," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 1057, May 3, 2006, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/wm1057.cfm>

Brett D. Schaefer and Janice A. Smith, "The U.S. Should Support Japan's Call to Revise the UN Scale of Assessments," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 1017, March 18, 2006, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/wm1017.cfm>

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Brett D. Schaefer, "U.N. Human Rights Council Whitewash Argues Against U.S. Participation," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2255, April 2, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/bg2255.cfm>

Steven Groves "Why the U.S. Should Oppose 'Defamation of Religions' Resolutions at the United Nations," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2206, November 10, 2008, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/LegalIssues/bg2206.cfm>

Brett D. Schaefer, "The United Nations Human Rights Council: A Disastrous First Year," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2038, June 1, 2007, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/WorldwideFreedom/bg2038.cfm>

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Brett D. Schaefer, "United Nations Peacekeeping: The U.S. Must Press for Reform," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2182, September 18, 2008, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/bg2182.cfm>

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Nile Gardiner and Brett D. Schaefer, "U.N. Security Council Expansion Is Not in the U.S. Interest," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1876, August 18, 2005, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/bg1876.cfm>

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