

32. *United Nations*

The authority and influence of the United Nations have increased dramatically since the end of the Cold War. But behind the idealistic rhetoric lies an inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy that is frequently hostile to American interests. Although the United States derives relatively few benefits from the United Nations, it has always been the organization's largest financial contributor. Even more alarming, under the stewardship of the Clinton administration and other multilateralists within the foreign policy community, the United States has allowed an ever-expanding United Nations to play an unprecedented role in the formulation of American foreign policy and in global affairs generally.

A UN-oriented foreign policy is not in the best interests of the United States, however. It is imperative that the 104th Congress make a concerted effort to disengage American policy from UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and his army of bureaucrats. At the same time, Congress should take steps to curtail the size and mandate of the United Nations so that, in the long term, the organization can be transformed into a modest diplomatic forum, rather than the aspiring world government it sometimes resembles. To that end, the 104th Congress should

- **pass legislation that prohibits U.S. troops from serving in UN military operations,**
- **refuse to ratify the Law of the Sea Treaty and reject similar schemes if they arise,**
- **reduce U.S. funding of the United Nations by 50 percent and consider even deeper cuts after that initial phase,**
- **encourage the Clinton administration to initiate negotiations to roll back the UN empire so that it is confined to a diplomatic—rather than a governing—role.**

UN Peacekeeping: A Chronicle of Failure

Nowhere has UN incompetence been as evident—or as dangerous—as in its military operations. Yet military missions, euphemistically called

“peacekeeping” or “peace enforcement,” have been the United Nations’ primary area of growth over the past several years. In fact, in his blueprint for strengthening the United Nations, *An Agenda for Peace*, Boutros-Ghali went so far as to recommend that the United Nations establish a standing military force. When President Clinton took office, he too was enthusiastic about the idea of a standing UN army and seemed willing to contribute U.S. troops to the force.

Clinton’s enthusiasm dimmed after the United Nations’ disastrous performance in Somalia, where a UN “nation-building” mission cost 36 American lives—and an indeterminate number of Somali lives—and ended in failure. After the withdrawal of most of the American troops deployed for George Bush’s humanitarian relief effort in Somalia, Boutros-Ghali and his advisers transformed the operation from humanitarian aid to political reconstruction. In effect, the United Nations attempted to turn Somalia into a UN colony, in which UN “peacekeepers” battled indigenous leaders and ignored indigenous institutions. The results were devastating for both UN troops and the Somali population. As the last UN peacekeepers prepare to withdraw, Somalia is no closer to stability than it was before the ill-fated intervention.

The UN operation in Bosnia has been equally unsuccessful. The United Nations (and NATO) has paid lip service to the idea of the UN force as impartial peacekeepers; in reality, the United Nations has been at war with the Bosnian Serbs. It is fortunate that U.S. troops have not (yet) been involved in UN peacekeeping in Bosnia, but there is no guarantee that American troops will not participate in future UN operations in the Balkans or elsewhere.

Clinton has significantly tightened the conditions under which he says he will commit U.S. troops to UN military missions, but he has not ruled out U.S. involvement. In view of the dismal record of UN peacekeeping efforts, it would be irresponsible to involve American military personnel in those enterprises. The 104th Congress should prevent Clinton (and future presidents) from indulging in such recklessness by passing legislation that prohibits U.S. troops from serving in UN military operations. In most cases, American participation in UN missions will not advance U.S. vital interests. Conversely, in the event that vital national interests are at stake, allowing the United Nations to be involved in (much less lead) a military operation could be catastrophic.

Lose the LOST

U.S.-Soviet rivalry prevented the United Nations from having a significant influence on the vast majority of diplomatic and security issues during

the Cold War. But like most bureaucracies, the United Nations sought to expand its size, scope, and budget—and it achieved that goal primarily by enlarging its definition of "security" to include such matters as health, education, the environment, and economic issues. The Law of the Sea Treaty—which gives the United Nations vast control over the use and exploitation of the oceans' resources—is one result. The central planning embodied in the LOST (particularly in its provisions on seabed mining) would harm both the West and the developing world with mandates that would increase costs and depress productivity.

The Reagan administration, recognizing the defects of the LOST, rejected the treaty in 1982. But Clinton administration officials negotiated some modest changes in the LOST and signed on; it now awaits ratification by the Senate. Despite the modifications, however, the treaty remains fundamentally flawed. The Senate should reject the LOST—and Congress should rebuff any other initiatives that call for UN management of "security" issues, should such schemes arise.

Save Money and Force Reform: Cut U.S. Funding of the United Nations

The United States currently contributes 25 percent of the United Nations' two-year regular budget; it also generally contributes an additional amount equal to 30 percent of UN peacekeeping costs. No other country contributes nearly as much of the UN budget as does the United States. Japan contributes 12.5 percent; Russia contributes 9.4 percent; Germany contributes 8.9 percent; France contributes 6 percent; 10 other countries contribute from 5 percent to 1.1 percent of the two-year budget. All other member states contribute less than 1 percent each. Indeed, nearly half of the United Nations' members make only the minimum contribution—0.01 percent of the two-year budget.

Regular budgets are approved by a two-thirds vote of the UN General Assembly; historically, that has often meant that countries that collectively contribute less than 2 percent of the UN budget control passage of budgets. Moreover, those countries tend to be the primary beneficiaries of UN largesse and therefore have every incentive to approve more and bigger UN programs. Since the 1980s the United States has insisted on "consensus budgeting" to ensure that the major contributors have some say about the budget; Washington has also withheld funding for specific projects. Nonetheless, American taxpayers continue to underwrite a large portion

of the United Nations' often wasteful and mismanaged (and sometimes anti-American) programs.

By mandating a 50 percent reduction in U.S. contributions to the United Nations, the 104th Congress would realize an immediate savings of well over \$1 billion per year. Perhaps more important, the reduction would force the United Nations to streamline its operations and cut programs. Candidates for elimination range from the obscure, such as the UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (which was established in 1955 to issue a single report but is still in business) to the notorious, such as UNESCO and the International Labor Organization. Abolishing such programs, and the entrenched bureaucracies that constantly seek to expand their authority, would be an important step toward the long-term goal of curbing the growth of the UN empire.

Toward a Diplomatic United Nations

If the United Nations has a legitimate role, it is as a diplomatic forum—a place where leaders from around the world can discuss grievances and disagreements. It might also act as a mediation service, assisting in conflict resolution during times of tension. That limited role would require only a small secretariat that would in no way resemble the horde of bureaucrats that currently occupies the United Nations. The opportunities for inefficiency and corruption would be greatly reduced, as would the cost of maintaining the institution. Such reform would also restrain the United Nations' increasing tendency to behave as if it were a world government.

A strong American position on the future of the United Nations is especially important because calls for UN reform have increased in recent years. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of member states has banded together in opposition to the dozen or so major financial contributors with calls for "democratization" and "revitalization" of the United Nations. In that context, "democratization" generally means shifting power from the Security Council—the main institutionalized protection of U.S. interests and influence—to the General Assembly—a body that historically has been hostage to Third World interests and intent on global redistribution of wealth. "Revitalization" means an expanded and strengthened United Nations and increased pressure to subordinate national interests to a UN-managed global order.

Given that context, "democratization" and "revitalization" would be contrary to U.S. interests. Because the United States is greatly outnumbered, it is important to use financial and political leverage to counter

"reform" efforts that would put the United States at a disadvantage. The United States should, whenever possible, work with other UN members to restrict the size and authority of the United Nations. But the perverse incentives that give small contributors large benefits will undoubtedly act as a brake on negotiations. An immediate 50 percent reduction in the U.S. contribution would provide impetus to a process of genuine, beneficial reform. To ensure long-term reform, however, the United States should plan to reinforce negotiations with additional reductions in the U.S. contribution in future years—a boon to both budget cutting and the protection of American interests.

Suggested Readings

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—*Prepared by Barbara Conry*

