

UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION

Let me begin by thanking the UN Association and Stuart Ackman in particular for sponsoring this Building a Culture of Peace series. The UN Association is older than the UN itself and it has been a steadfast proponent of multilateralism and peace over the years.

Before I say a few words about the challenges of bringing peace and democracy to Iraq, I want to share some thoughts about the United Nations.

This has been a difficult period in the history of the United Nations, and, I am sad to say, the US government has led the charge in damaging this important institution. First we challenged the Security Council to accept our view of the threat Saddam Hussein's government constituted. When the Council refused to accept our timetable, we called the UN irrelevant. Security Council members France and Germany rivaled Iraq as newfound enemies.

We then claimed a unilateral right to preempt any potential attack, causing the Secretary General to wonder out loud whether suspicion of a

threat could transplant hard evidence under the UN Charter. And we are still looking for those weapons of mass destruction.

We then did an about face and asked the Secretary General to send a mission to Iraq to help with the transition. The UN mission was attacked by a suicide bomber. Many UN employees were killed, including Sergio Viera de Mello, a rising star and good friend of Kofi Annan.

The United States, now an opponent of the International Court of Justice, asked the Security Council last year to exempt its soldiers from any possible prosecution for crimes against humanity. The Security Council complied and exempted U.S. military personnel for one year. This year was different. Secretary General Annan urged the Security Council to reject the American request saying it would discredit the UN's claim to be a standardbearer for the rule of law. Facing a sure rejection of its request, the U.S. dropped its request. Will we now refuse to participate in UN peacekeeping missions as we have threatened? Not likely, as the Iraq mission will come under the UN flag as of June 30.

There is more. The United States asked the UN to select an interim Iraqi government. UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, a man with considerable

credibility in the Arab world was then pressured by the U.S. government to select individuals for these positions known to have ties to the U.S.

Brahimi made known his displeasure, which did not ingratiate him with Washington. Yet, Washington got what it wanted, a Prime Minister who had worked with the CIA in the past.

All of this leads me to conclude that the United States does not have a healthy relationship with the UN, an organization it helped to create some 60 years ago. It has been a long downhill slide since the UN and Kofi Annan received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2001.

Our relationship with the UN can best be described as a “love-hate.” While in recent years we have dwelled on the “hate” side of the equation, we have in other years chosen to ignore the weaknesses of an institution some of us have chosen to “love.”

It is time to see the UN for what it is and to focus on what we Americans and the rest of the world need in a world body. Some look back at the Clinton years as a golden age in terms of our relationship with the UN. Everything is relative I guess!

It was in fact not a golden age. While I was in the Clinton Administration, we spent too much time pandering to people like Senator Jesse Helms, an avowed opponent of the UN. We spent too much time begging Congress to allow us to pay our dues, too much time trying to lower our assessed contributions, and too much time criticizing the UN as ineffective. We spent very little time backing Kofi Annan in his effort to reform the UN to enable it to respond to the challenges of the modern global community we live in.

Meanwhile, our political leaders, Democrats and Republicans alike, continue to portray the UN as a foreign country rather than an organization of member states. We tend to see the organization set up to enforce and implement international law as an obstacle to narrow U.S. interests. We tend to exaggerate its institutional weaknesses and endlessly complain about the time it takes to get anything done.

It is time to recognize that we are part of the problem. I like the line used by former Ambassador Ron Spiers. He said “Blaming the UN for its failures is like blaming Fenway Park for the Red Sox.” Only a long-

suffering Red Sox fan would get the full meaning of that! The point is: we are the United Nations; the United States has more responsibility for making it work than any other nation.

A few years ago, I served on a panel at the request of Secretary General Annan to study and report on the future of UN peace operations. Lakhdar Brahimi chaired our group of “experts,” and we made recommendations for sweeping changes in the way the UN conducts peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations. The Security Council, including the United States, endorsed our recommendations. Yet, very few of the recommendations that cost money were implemented. Secretary General Annan made all the internal changes he could, but he was unable to find the resources for other vital reforms that would make the UN function better.

One example was the Panel’s recommendation that a new information and strategic analysis office be created to enhance the Secretariat’s ability to provide well-grounded advice to the Security Council. The Security Council endorsed this concept, but the special committee on finance asked that “existing resources” be used, resources that our panel had characterized as

wholly inadequate. Thus, in the words of a Stimson Center analysis on the implementation of the Brahimi Report, “the United Nations still has no single, co-located team dedicated to managing information, tracking multiple crisis and conflict trends, recommending preventive action based on those trends, or anticipating global UN requirements for either peacekeeping or peacebuilding.”

It should be noted that at the time the Brahimi Panel recommendations were being endorsed by the Security Council, the United States government was spending all its time and energy convincing other governments to allow it to reduce its assessed contribution. The United States won that “victory”, but one of the costs was meaningful reform of the UN.

One final thought before I get into Iraq: as a nation, we need to accept the concept that international law is vital to preserving our interests. Our government negotiates these laws carefully and meticulously over many years and then the US Senate has the opportunity to accept or reject the product of these negotiations. Once ratified, these treaties become the law of our land. The UN Charter is one such treaty. When the American

Government refuses to abide by international law, it undermines the concept of rule by law everywhere, including here at home.

The international legal regime we helped create governs commerce, communications, air travel, patents, human rights, the conduct of nations, the testing of nuclear weapons, and the use of military force as well as many other important matters. This should not be an a la carte menu wherein we select what suits us on a given day. If other nations were to chose that course, we would be outraged. Yet, representatives of the most powerful nation on earth have indeed stated to the world that we will be selective about which laws we will follow.

One set of laws the American Government apparently believes it can rationalize is the Geneva Convention. In a legal opinion written by the Justice Department in 2002, the Executive power of the President in wartime was seen as superior to Congress' authority to "define offenses, including torture, under the laws of nations." In other words, the Torture Convention and the Torture Statue passed by the Congress to implement it cannot be read to include members of the Executive Branch, even though the statue speaks of "any person."

So, attempting to stand above both international and U.S. law, the memo goes on to define torture more narrowly than ever before. Torture occurs, therefore, only when the “intensity in pain” causes “organ failure, impairment of bodily function or ...death.” The Economist magazine interpreted that sentence as meaning that “sliding needles under fingernails or holding someone’s head under water to the point of drowning would not count as torture under the law.”

This opinion as well as one written more recently by the White House Counsel, must certainly have confused individuals at all levels within the US chain of command. Did policymakers give more priority to gaining information from prisoners than to respect for international conventions whose purpose is to protect the rights of prisoners of war, including American POWs? Has an environment been created by top officials that encouraged abusive practices? These are questions that must be answered fully and honestly. All official documents must be released to the Congress, not just those that seem to absolve our highest officials.

I cannot remember an issue that has damaged our international reputation as much as the current prisoner abuse scandal. Our national commitment to democracy, human rights, and international law now are being challenged across the world. America can only respond by revealing all we know and punishing those who are responsible, and not just a few enlisted soldiers at the bottom.

The Abu Ghraib prison scandal seriously compromises our efforts in Iraq. It has given our opponents a sledgehammer of an issue to use against us. It is the latest in a series of major blunders the US Government has made over the past year. Perhaps this is why 85 percent of Iraqis want us to leave.

In just a few days, on June 30, the authority to run Iraq will transfer from the United States to an interim Iraqi government. This new government derives its authority – and whatever legitimacy it has – from a United Nations Security Council resolution. This resolution calls for elections in Iraq by January 2005.

The good news is that some 85 percent of Iraqis favor these elections. Many see elections as the way to achieve sovereignty and independence

from the occupying force. Some see them as the way to achieve power. Others want their country to be free and democratic.

What do we do now? President Bush has established five goals:

1. Transfer power to an Iraqi Government;
2. Help establish security;
3. Continue building Iraqi infrastructure;
4. Encourage more international support;
5. Move towards elections.

Few would argue with these goals. If we had invited the UN in a year ago and been willing to give up American control each of these goals would have been far more easily achieved.

The big issue remains security. We have not had enough troops on the ground to deter or defeat the insurgents. Today's news reports of a major attack on Iraqi police units leaving 80 dead and 200 wounded underscore the potential of the insurgents and the weakness of the Iraqi Government. June 30 is days away and on that day, according to plans, our forces will be even less visible as we severely limit combat operations and retrench.

The new Iraqi Prime Minister has said he will declare a state of emergency. Will this be sufficient? No one I know believes it will be. It will take at least a year before there are enough trained Iraqis to take on the security responsibilities.

The United States is sending a very high profile Ambassador to Iraq, John Negroponte. It will be his job to defer to the interim Iraqi government, to allow them to overrule us on occasion, even in a very public way. We need to help the Iraqi Government achieve credibility as an independent entity. Negroponte is a real pro and he is fully capable of lowering his profile and acting deferentially. But will he be allowed to let the Iraqis overrule us on some crucial issues? So far, this Administration has shown little interest in losing control over anything. Yet, the irony is that they seem to be in control of virtually nothing in Iraq!

I do not share the view of a growing majority that the Iraqis are incapable of building a democracy. I believe this can be done over time and that there are several Iraqis who are willing to die for that cause.

I do agree that the rationale used by the Administration for invading Iraq – to spread democracy throughout the Middle East – was naive and dangerous. Efforts to promote democracy in the region have been severely set back as a result of this invasion and occupation.

The world is no safer and no more democratic as a result of US policy. Yet, it does little good to look back and second guess. It is the wrong time to withdraw. Eighty-five percent of Iraqis may want us out, but my guess is that most would like us to stay until elections can be held, if not longer. What Iraqis seem to want most is security. We haven't given that to them yet and it is becoming increasingly clear that only Iraqis can give themselves a secure environment.

We have done a lot of damage to our nation's reputation around the world by using force without UN sanction; by claiming that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction; by suggesting erroneously that there was a connection between Saddam, Al Qaeda and 9/11; by torturing and abusing prisoners of war; and by failing to plan for a transition in Iraq and arrogantly assuming all power to ourselves.

Could it be that we have learned some lessons? We have now turned back to the United Nations. Do we believe they can help, or are we looking for a scapegoat?

Much of what has transpired can be traced to the ambivalence many Americans feel toward the United Nations. Opposition to the UN, motivated by blind ideology, has caused great damage. In the end, our government has been forced to return for help to the only legitimate world body that exists.

Those who have more positive views of the UN have failed to demand more of it. The UN has a real need for internal reform. It must continue to pursue charges of corruption related to the Iraq Oil for Food Program.

The UN is far from perfect. Those who care about it should tell their government to stop being ambivalent about reform and to invest in a UN that can fulfill the vision of its founders.

It is time for Americans to end our love-hate relationship with the UN. We will never succeed in addressing the global challenges we face - -

including terrorism- - in the absence of international cooperation. The United Nations has a crucial role to play in creating a culture of peace.

Thank you.