

**“The United Nations: Is It Worth Reforming?”**  
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J. Brian Atwood

It is a real pleasure to be here in Northfield. I thank the Stassen United Nations Fund and its benefactors, especially Mr. Robert Matteson, Harold Stassen’s friend, a former professor here at Carleton College and the person who created the lecture series.

I confess that before coming to Minnesota, I did not know much about Harold Stassen the statesman, the proponent of a strong United Nations, the aide to President Eisenhower who oversaw the UN in its early days on behalf of the United States. I knew most about Stassen the perennial candidate for the Republican nomination for President. Like many, I did not fully appreciate the contribution of this former Governor of Minnesota.

It was his friend, the late Governor Elmer Andersen, who advised me to find a new Stassen Chair at the Humphrey Institute who “shared Harold’s passion for the United Nations.” We found that person in Professor Michael Barnett, an outstanding scholar who spent two years as a Council on Foreign Relations Fellow at the U.S. Mission to the UN. Dr. Barnett, who delivered this lecture last year, has contributed much to our understanding of the UN with his recent books, Eyewitness to Genocide and Rules for the World.

Is the United Nations worth reforming? That is the rhetorical question that found its way into the title of this lecture. Let me quickly eliminate any suspense. I cannot imagine a world without the United Nations, even in the sad state it is in today. We need the United Nations more than ever, and those of us who appreciate this need are obliged to struggle for meaningful reform of this vital institution. More on that subject later.

If the UN is in a sad state, so is the world. Increasingly, we are confronted by countries without leadership, without order, without governance itself. The chaos we increasingly face is being fired by common fuels: long-simmering ethnic, religious, and territorial disputes; proliferating military stockpiles built dangerously high during the Cold War and maintained by virtually unconstrained arms sales; endemic poverty affecting half the world’s population; rapid population growth, especially in poor countries; food insecurity exacerbated by drought and climate change; a growing number of natural disasters – tsunamis, hurricanes and earthquakes – the impact of which is much greater in areas where infrastructure is weak; and a large number of fragile new democracies and unstable undemocratic governments.

These phenomena challenge our analytical capacity and undermine traditional diplomacy. They also are overwhelming the international systems put in place 60 years ago, in particular the United Nations and the Bretton Woods organizations.

The building blocks of a successful Cold War foreign policy were military alliances, nuclear deterrence, international organizations, and a body of international law that formed a framework for cooperation, dispute resolution, and interstate relations. Geostrategic considerations dominated the policy approach, and relative power--measured in economic, political and military terms--was a constant yardstick of success.

We now are moving through a period characterized by a commitment to the exercise of unilateral power. Perhaps this is a result of American impatience. Perhaps it is frustration that the old paradigms no longer work. But the new world does not lend itself to unilateralism. Deterrence and geopolitical maneuvering may work against the Soviet Union, but not against Al Qaeda.

The Bush Administration, driven by the war on terrorism, has placed a premium of America's military power at the expense of international cooperation. It has adopted an "a la carte" approach to international law, embracing provisions that reinforce a short-term priority and rejecting provisions that do not serve our immediate purpose. I suggest that this approach has seriously set us back in the effort to address the issues we face in this chaotic world. It has made the essential factor—cooperation—much more difficult.

Cooperation comes in many forms. It can be at the level of the head of state, the level of government ministries, or at the level of ordinary citizens working for common purpose. It can be both bilateral and multilateral. Most of the challenges we face in this globalized world require multilateral cooperation. We need to engage with others at many levels to address global threats and prevent escalating crises.

We cannot prevent chaos, failed states, and terrorism with a top-down approach. New partnerships and new tools are needed to strengthen the indigenous capacity of people to manage and resolve conflict within their own societies. Technology should be better exploited and shared to empower individuals and enhance the networking of nongovernmental groups, increase food supplies, slow population growth, counter new and dangerous infectious diseases, and preserve natural resources. Sustainable development that creates chains of enterprise, respects the environment, and enlarges the range of freedom and opportunity over generations when pursued effectively and strategically can be the principal antidote to social disarray

Human beings cause social conflict, but conditions exacerbate tension among human beings. The condition of poverty breaks down social cohesion, causes deep alienation, and makes violent conflict more likely.

Some would argue that poverty is inevitable. I would agree that some level of poverty is inevitable. But 1.2 billion people living on less than one dollar a day is not inevitable. Almost half the world's population living on two dollars a day or less is not inevitable. These are dangerous conditions of poverty. These are levels that represent a serious national security threat.

The United States once led the world in the battle against poverty. We were once virtually the only donor, and our knowledge and technology prevented massive deaths due to hunger and illness. We created the Green Revolution in agriculture and cut the number of infant deaths by one-half.

We can exercise that same level of impactful leadership today, but we cannot do it alone. We will have to do it through and with the United Nations and in cooperation with other donor and developing nations. The United Nations—an effective UN—is an essential vehicle of international cooperation and an indispensable ally in the war against chaos.

A few years ago, I was asked by Secretary General Kofi Annan to serve as a member of a nine-member panel to examine UN peace operations—peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. Our report, named after our chairman Lakdhar Brahimi, was as strong a critique of the UN system as any ever released.

We pointed to the proliferation of mandates coming from the Security Council and the absence of resources. There was too little intelligence and threat analysis and too little advance planning. There were too few trained military personnel and too few experienced personnel in the chain of command. There was no permanent peacebuilding unit to manage post-conflict transitions. Most importantly, we pointed out, as have subsequent studies, the Secretary General had been assigned the bulk of the responsibility with none of the necessary authority and few resources. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that his office was set up to fail.

In the midst of our deliberations, at a meeting in Geneva, we received word that UN peacekeepers in Sierra Leone had been captured and were being held hostage. Nothing better underscored the importance of deploying a UN force strong enough to deter aggression against it. We did not want the blue helmet to be a symbol of weakness. We were unanimous in approving a recommendation that the Secretary General be given authority to hold back resolutions authorizing troop deployments until he could certify that sufficient numbers of troops and equipment were available to deter or repel any attack against them.

It was revealing that, while the Security Council endorsed all other recommendations of the Brahimi Report, it would not endorse this one. The Permanent 5—the nations on the Security Council who held the veto—did not wish to give the Secretary General this authority—the authority to delay a deployment until he could certify that a UN force possessed the needed firepower to repel an attack against it.

There are many statements emanating from Washington these days about UN reform—about management reform, a new human rights committee, the need for a more precise definition of terrorism, a new ethics office, a chief operating officer, a peacebuilding commission. All of these initiatives would strengthen the UN. But none would strengthen the organization more than giving the Secretary General real authority to implement Security Council mandates effectively, as he sees fit, and real authority over personnel and budgets.

Unless and until the United Nations adopts this recommendation, its call for reform will ring hollow. We will have a Secretary General with great moral authority in the world and huge responsibility for issues involving war and peace, but no real power to act. Meanwhile, political leaders with a thinly disguised anti-UN bias wrap themselves in pro-reform rhetoric and call for the Secretary General's resignation, threaten to withhold US dues payments, and throw monkey wrenches into efforts to reach agreement on real reform.

There is no better example of this lot of characters than our Ambassador to the UN, John Bolton. In my view, given his previous record, sending Bolton to the UN is like sending an anti-semitic to Israel or a white supremacist to Nigeria. Without Senate confirmation, Bolton was given a recess appointment. He was sent into the fray at the UN at a crucial moment during sensitive multilateral negotiations over the document on UN reform to be presented at the recent summit meeting on UN reform. He pulled the draft document back and insisted on a line-by-line negotiation, re-opening issues that had long been settled. He gratuitously crossed out references to the Millennium Development Goals, to which the US has long been committed, thereby angering the developing nations who make up the bulk of the General Assembly. The consequence of this action was well described in a *New York Times* editorial:

With Washington jealously protecting the prerogatives of the Security Council, where it holds a veto, others chose to be equally jealous in protecting the prerogatives of the General Assembly, where the influence of poorer and weaker countries is greatest.

One could excuse this diplomatic blunder as the mistake of a rookie diplomat uninformed as to the special requirements of multilateral diplomacy. I think the weight of the evidence is that John Bolton knew exactly what he was doing. His idea of reform is to protect the capacity of the United States and to act unilaterally, unimpeded by the UN, and to pick and choose which UN resolutions and international laws it wishes to follow.

A few weeks ago, at an appearance at Yale University, Bolton said he thought that all payments to the UN should be voluntary rather than assessed. The United States, he said, should be able to pick and choose which programs it wished to finance.

Think about the implications of that statement. What kind of a commitment is that to an organization that is so central to world peace? That is like saying American taxpayers need only pay for programs that affect them personally. How many of you would like to pay tuition only for classes you like the best? Yes, I know, but Carleton wouldn't last very long would it?

The 2005 summit on UN reform is over now. A new statement of good intentions has been adopted. The *New York Times* called it "a fudge of feel-good phrases and pious wishes for future action..." Was this a failure to practice effective diplomacy; a failure to

recognize that poor nations view security differently, but with equal urgency? Or, was it sabotage?

Mark Malloch-Brown, the Security General's Chief of Staff, said it best: "...the U.S. and others who share the same reform agenda were not going to get what they wanted on management reform, on human rights or on terrorism, unless they showed sensitivity to the view of those many governments for whom development is the overriding priority—and vice versa."

Now once again, the Secretary General is left with responsibility for turning this "fudge" into meaningful reform. He has been asked to present proposals to the General Assembly on a variety of management changes.

I believe that Kofi Annan will make the most of this opportunity in the months remaining in his term. We can disparage this man because of the Oil for Food scandal, but we would not have known the extent of that scandal had he not ordered a thorough investigation.

Now Paul Volker's final report on that scandal has been released. Thousands of companies received payments from Saddam Hussein to look the other way. Two UN employees were found culpable and were dismissed.

The oil-for-food disaster was inevitable given the way the program was set up. There is no excusing the conduct of certain individuals within the UN system, but it was the Security Council that pushed this highly questionable program on the UN Secretariat. We knew—or should have known—that there was no way the UN could have followed the money trail given the program's need to work with Saddam Hussein's government.

Paul Volker's report helped push the reform process forward, which is precisely what the Secretary General wanted. This gave him the impetus to create a new ethics office, create new rules to protect whistle blowers, and to improve procurement practices.

Yet, there is little reward in being a Secretary General with much responsibility and no authority. Two years ago, Kofi Annan received the Nobel Peace Prize. This year, he is held responsible for scandal and asked to resign.

Kofi Annan is the same principled man he was two years ago. No Secretary General in my lifetime has tried harder to reform the UN. No one has spoken more eloquently in behalf of the world's poor, the victims of conflict and disaster. No one has cared as deeply for the ideals and the far-reaching goals of the United Nations.

Excuse me for digressing. I thought it was important for someone from the state of Minnesota to say these things!

Despite the problems in achieving the most ambitious goals for the summit, it was possible to reach agreement on some important new directions for the UN. For example:

--Nations agreed to a “responsibility to protect” victims of human rights abuses when governments are unable or unwilling to protect them. This was a very significant concession for sovereign nations, many of which have considered “non-intervention” to be the most important principle of international law. It remains to be seen whether this change will translate into political will in places like Darfur, Sudan, where atrocities are occurring daily.

--While a precise definition of terrorism could not be worked out, the summit was unanimous in condemning terrorism. Here we have the traditional problem best reflected in the question, “Is a freedom fighter a terrorist?” However, the universal condemnation of terrorism is an important first step in developing a strategy to combat all attacks on innocent civilians.

--There is a general agreement that the Human Rights Commission has been a failure and that a new human rights committee be established, its members to be elected by a two-thirds vote of the General Assembly. The theory here is that a nation whose own human rights practices are suspect could not win a two-thirds vote. While that remains to be seen, I believe this is a very positive change.

--The summit also agreed to create a permanent Peacebuilding Commission. This was something I personally pushed for on the Brahimi Panel. The United Nations badly needs permanent institutional capacity to work in post-conflict transitional situations. There is no need to reinvent the wheel each time we face one of these situations. Each transition team faces the need to manage humanitarian relief operations, the reconstruction of basic infrastructure, and transitional governance arrangements, including an election system and programs to bring about reconciliation among previously warring parties. This is a big step forward for the UN.

--In the field of development, the best that can be said is that the commitment to the Millennium Development Goals was reiterated. President Bush supported the goals in his speech and made what appears to be an offer to push for an elimination of tariffs and subsidies through the Doha round of international trade negotiations. Tony Blair also called for opening the markets of Europe and the United States to products from poor countries.

--While there seems to be consensus that the permanent membership of the Security Council should be enlarged to accommodate emerging regional powers and nations that contribute a high percentage of UN dues, no progress was made on this front. The United States opposed a “package” arrangement involving Germany, Japan, India, Brazil, and others, because it does not support German membership. This issue must be reconsidered soon.

This was a disappointing summit if only because our aspirations for meaningful reform were so high. Some progress was made, but much was left undone. For example, we made no progress on the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The United States, as

concerned as any nation about the spread of nuclear weapons, apparently is unwilling to embrace the goal of complete elimination.

Much of the management reform agenda remains in the hands of the Secretary General. He must propose to the General Assembly the details on such initiatives as a code of ethics to be enforced by his new independent ethics office. He will propose reforms to make sure the UN is making more efficient use of financial and human resources. He will make recommendations on policies and rules governing the UN's budgetary, financial, and human resources. He will provide an independent external evaluation of the UN's management systems and propose a new oversight advisory committee.

All of this moves us in the right direction, but the details are what always sinks the ship at the UN. If these recommendations are to produce real reform, the big powers need to get behind them. And getting behind the Secretary General does not mean threatening to cut off our dues payments. This threat will have the opposite effect, which may be exactly what the opponents of the UN want—stalemate and a weak and ineffective UN.

Is the UN worth the effort? I hope I have answered that question to your satisfaction. If not, let me tell you how a Republican friend of Harold Stassen made the case for a United Nations some 60 years ago.

Congressman Walter Judd of Minneapolis, a medical doctor who was the son of a missionary in China, toured the Midwest in the summer of 1943. He traveled with a young Democratic Senator from Missouri by the name of Harry Truman.

Several years later, at the Truman Presidential Library, Judd was asked why he was such a strong proponent of the United Nations. His answer was as uniquely American—indeed Midwestern—as it was profound.

Judd pointed to the Western territories of what had become the United States. He said that there were three stages of security for the people who moved into that land. The first was what he called “individual armaments.” “Every man,” he said, “carried a gun on his hip, but it didn't give him adequate security because two or three others could gang up on him.”

The second stage was “the formation of alliances.” This was the effort, Judd said, of “law-abiding citizens...to form alliances to counter the cattle thieves and highwaymen.”

The third stage was what Judd called “organized security.” “We joined together in communities,” he said, “that not only provided collective security, but also helped us to provide clean water for all, good schools, highways, public health, and a good police force.”

Then Judd referred back to the period of isolationism after World War I. He said, “America tried for twenty years to get along [in the world] without any of the three types of security. America wouldn't go into alliances with the nations whose interests were

nearest to ours; she wouldn't join with other countries to get organized security; and then she even gave up her gun," referring to the decision to dismantle much of our defense force in the 1920s.

Judd believed in collective security and the U.N. because he saw the American economy expanding beyond its internal markets. He saw the growing inter-dependence of nations and the need for rules to govern the conduct of governments. I believe that if Walter Judd were alive today he would be deeply concerned about the go-it-alone tendencies that risk compromising the very foundations of the United Nations system. And he would be the first to say that this is an American issue, not a partisan issue.

The principles for which the bipartisan team of Judd and Truman campaigned in 1943 still are valid today. If anything, our battles against chaos in all its forms make their arguments even more compelling.

The arsenal of weaponry and the might of our military force have little value in the effort to prevent infectious disease, or to stop the storms created by global warming, or to mitigate the conflicts caused by pervasive poverty. That arsenal, as impressive as it is, cannot alone defeat terrorism, as we are learning in Iraq and Afghanistan. For that, we need international understanding and cooperation. For that we need an effective United Nations. Thank you.