

BETWEEN THE UN AND THE US — REFORMING ONE, RESTRAINING THE OTHER

Paul Heinbecker



On its 60th anniversary, even UNophiles believe the United Nations needs reform, despite the fact that some of the contemporary criticism of the world body is a manifestation of woeful or, worse, willful ignorance, even of self-seeking animosity. The UN reflects the divisions of the international community on the major issues of our day and mirrors the absence of consensus on the appropriate responses. There is widespread dissatisfaction with the aging, unrepresentative Security Council, which is still the most important political/security body on earth, writes Paul Heinbecker. Nor is the General Assembly an efficient forum, although the UN's funds, programs and agencies are usually well respected. "Fundamentally, the UN's strength, universal membership, has also become its weakness," writes our former ambassador to the UN. "Its membership has swollen to 191 countries, making the achievement of consensus on reform a Sisyphean task." The Bush administration's decision to defy the UN on Iraq put 60 years of the development of international law into jeopardy. Nonetheless, an effective UN and a constructive US are perhaps more important to Canada than to any other country. We can have an impact on both, but that will require deepened engagement in New York and speaking truth to power in Washington.

À l'occasion du 60^e anniversaire de l'Organisation des Nations unies, même ses plus fervents partisans reconnaissent la nécessité de la réformer, bien que les critiques dont elle est la cible dénotent parfois une ignorance déplorable ou, pire, délibérée. Quand il ne s'agit pas de malveillance. L'ONU est le reflet aussi bien des divisions de la communauté internationale sur les grands problèmes actuels que de l'absence de consensus sur les solutions à leur apporter. L'obsolescence et la faible représentativité du Conseil de sécurité suscitent en outre une insatisfaction grandissante. Et l'Assemblée générale a perdu en efficacité, bien que ses fondations, programmes et agences forcent généralement le respect. « La force initiale de l'ONU, c'est-à-dire sa composition mondiale, s'est transformée en faiblesse, croit notre ancien ambassadeur aux Nations Unies. Avec un effectif gonflé à 191 pays, il est devenu aussi difficile d'y dégager un consensus qu'à Sisyphe de pousser son rocher. » La décision de l'administration Bush de défier l'ONU sur la question irakienne a ainsi mis en péril 60 années de droit international. Cela dit, il est sans doute plus important pour le Canada que pour tout autre pays que l'ONU soit efficace et les États-Unis constructifs. Et il nous faudra pour ce faire raffermir notre engagement à New York et parler franchement à Washington.

Predictions of the demise of the United Nations are, as Mark Twain characterized reports of his own death, greatly exaggerated. Ambitions for a new world order mediated by American imperial power are running aground in the inhospitable realities of Iraq. Canada, as one of the most multicultural and cosmopolitan of states, a good glob-

al citizen in word and often in deed, with citizens from and stakes in every corner of the globe, needs an effective multi-lateral system of governance. With our prosperity inextricably linked to the rich and dynamic US market, Canada equally needs an effective bilateral relationship with the United States. Sound relations with each are fundamental

Canadian interests. Purposeful efforts are required on both fronts.

It was not long ago that fate had seemed to smile on the United Nations. In December 2001, Secretary-General Kofi Annan accepted the UN's eighth Nobel Prize for its "work for a better organized and more peaceful world."

The shame of the UN's failure in Rwanda was receding in the collective consciousness, if not conscience. The guns were silent in Bosnia, and the UN was back in charge in Kosovo after sitting out the war. Following rocky starts, the UN's military interventions in East Timor and in Sierra Leone and between Ethiopia and Eritrea were succeeding and saving lives. In the fall of 2000, 75 heads of government — record attendance at the time for a diplomatic conference — had come to New York and established very ambitious international economic and social development targets, the Millennium Development Goals. The subsequent "Monterrey Consensus," achieved at the 2002 conference on financing for development, seemed to express a new financial compact between rich and poor. The secretary-general had personally put HIV/AIDS back at the top of the international agenda, persuading (some say coercing) drug companies and governments to cooperate and, himself, raising hundreds of millions of dollars for the cause.

Scant months later, the Security Council split over Iraq and some of the UN's harshest critics happily began writing its obituary. Richard Perle, a prominent member of the US Defence Intelligence Advisory Board, writing in *The Telegram* in the immediate afterglow of the US invasion of Iraq, wrote "Thank God for the death of the UN." International public support for the UN was sagging, in the US because the world organization did not support the war in Iraq, and in the Muslim world especially, but

elsewhere as well, because it did not prevent it. The UN, at least the Secretariat, reeled from its tragic personnel losses in Iraq and became increasingly burdened by the Oil for Food program scandal. Further, the sheer weight of the world's most intractable problems was draining

September 11, 2001, did not "change everything," but it did change some things, especially United States foreign policy. A country that had pursued invulnerability by means of a high cost, high-tech defence found itself unexpectedly vulnerable to a low cost, low-tech attack, with horrific consequences. How much worse might the destruction have been if the terrorists had had access to weapons of mass destruction (WMD)? In response, the US administration propounded a national security strategy positing not just pre-emption, which is foreseen in international law, but prevention, which is not.

for a long serving secretary-general and his increasingly fatigued staff of their energy.

It is evidence of the UN's resilience that it has persevered in the face of such difficulties and, even, begun to rally. Member countries have rediscovered that multilateral cooperation is a necessary means to some important ends. The UN is not irrelevant, as President Bush implied in his UN General Debate statement in September 2002, but indispensable to the good management of international relations. As a consequence of the Iraq experience, it has become evident that the general concurrence of the world expressed through the UN remains necessary in order to confer legitimacy on acts of war and that that legitimacy is a prerequisite to broad-based, effective cooperation in the management of war's aftermath.

In an integrating world, it is more evident than ever that overarching economic and social problems, such as climate change and communicable diseases, can best and often only be resolved globally. Most governments have come to the realization that the UN *per se* is central to such global cooperation. All of this is not to say that the

UN is sufficient unto itself. Nor that the universality of membership of the UN, which is integral to the organization's unique legitimacy, lends itself to efficiency. Nor that the UN is ready for the new challenges of a new era. Nor, more fundamentally, that a constitution written in and for another age, i.e., the

Charter, which has come over time to contradict itself, can go on forever unamended. Reform is clearly and urgently needed. Much is riding on the outcome of negotiations culminating in New York this fall, on both the substance of the UN's mission and on its management of it. Proposals for change abound, from the 101 recommendations of the independent High Level Panel appointed by the secretary general, to the extensive Third World development ideas of the Sachs Millennium Development Report to the helpful suggestions of the US Gingrich-Mitchell report to the unhelpful UN-bashing of the US Congress.

Although by no means the only member dissatisfied with the UN, the discontent of the United States has been the most prominent and most consequential. In contemplating the way ahead, it is worth remembering that antipathy to the UN has not been a basic operating principle of past US administrations. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, early in his career a member of his country's League of Nations delegation, was the driving force internationally for the creation of a world body, against the judgement of some of America's major wartime allies.

President Harry Truman was equally convinced of the need for such a world body, and made its establishment literally his first priority. President John F. Kennedy called in 1963 for the United Nations to become “a genuine world security system...capable of solving disputes on the basis of law.” President Richard Nixon said the US would go the extra mile to make the UN succeed. More recently, speaking at the inauguration of the Reagan Library, President Bill Clinton recalled that Ronald Reagan had said that the UN stood as a symbol of the hopes of all mankind for a more peaceful and productive world. For most of the UN’s existence, then, United States administrations have seen an effective UN as in American interests and constructive participation in the UN as a civic duty. It is not evident that either proposition remains true today.

The US, whose domestic exercise of power is governed by a system of checks and balances, progressively came to realize that, with the demise of the Soviet Union, American power no longer faced check or balance abroad. Instead of ratcheting back expenditures at the end of the Cold War, as the US had done after virtually every other major conflict, Washington capitalized on the opportunity Saddam Hussein presented them in illegally invading Kuwait to continue its military build-up and increase its already vast number of bases abroad, with consequent effects on US foreign policy. American will and capacity for international leadership thus continued undiminished at a time when others, particularly other industrialized countries, were content to see Washington lead if it wanted to, in part because of the US’s sheer capacity to do so, in part because they saw no international threat to themselves or, less nobly, because of obligations to others requiring heavy investments in military capability, they preferred to spend their money and effort on domestic program needs. As a conse-

quence of the leadership role others readily conceded to the US, and because of the considerable costs and risks of Washington’s self-appointed mission to propagate democracy, many on both sides of the political aisle came increasingly to see the US as bearing a disproportionate burden and meriting exceptional dispensations from international law.

The notion of America-as-exceptional harks back to the Puritan landing at Plymouth Rock and has ebbed and flowed in the American psyche ever since. De Tocqueville observed it in nineteenth century America and Margaret MacMillan discerned it in her recent study of the

In attacking Iraq against the will of the international community, and in mishandling the occupation, the US did itself, and the UN, incalculable harm. Nevertheless, it would simply be wrong to lay all the UN’s misfortunes at Washington’s door. Rote apologies for the UN are almost as damaging as mindless attacks on it. The UN Charter was written in and for a different age and treats national sovereignty as an absolute and constant good.

Paris peace talks of 1919. US “exceptionalism” gained modern currency in the 1980s when President Reagan borrowed from the Bible and from Puritan John Winthrop for his favoured portrayal of the United States as the “shining city on a hill,” the exemplar of democracy.

As Harold Koh of Yale, a former US assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor has written, American “exceptionalism” unquestionably has had its positive as well as its negative characteristics. The US has exercised exceptional leadership, for example, in the development of postwar institutions, in the promotion of human rights and the development of inter-

national law and in the preservation of stability, particularly in Northeast Asia. But from Iran in the 1950s, to Vietnam in the 1960s, to Chile in the 1970s, to Iraq in the 1980s, the US has chalked up some exceptional errors. In its more self-serving expressions of exceptionalism, the United States has also questioned the applicability to itself of the UN Charter and of international law writ large, alienating many others in the process. It has also progressively eroded the equality principle that most UN members consider integral to the democratic character of the UN Charter, much as the legal equality of American states is integral to the US Constitution, even if in both

cases actual power correlations are otherwise. The US abuse of the UN Security Council and the Charter in giving effect to its opposition to the International Criminal Court was seen by many as exceptionalism taken to unacceptable lengths, an unvarnished and unapologetic assertion of one law for the goose and another for the gander.

It was not always thus. At the end of the Second World War, when the US bestrode the world even more colossally than it does today, President Truman told the assembled UN delegates in San Francisco that “[w]e all have to recognize that no matter how great our strength, we must deny ourselves the license to do always as we please.” Now, many in the US seem to expect to lead, not by example, but by exemption.

September 11, 2001, did not “change everything,” but it did change some things, especially United States foreign policy. A country that had pursued invulnerability by means of a high cost, high-tech defence found itself unexpectedly vulnerable to a low cost, low-tech attack, with horrific consequences. How much worse might the destruction have been if the terrorists had had access to weapons of mass destruction (WMD)? In response, the US

administration propounded a national security strategy positing not just pre-emption, which is foreseen in international law, but prevention, which is not.

The war in Iraq was actually preventive — to bring down a tyrant with potentially malignant intentions and capabilities — but was presented as pre-emptive, to stop a tyrant who already had WMD. A pre-emptive attack should, in theory, be based on unsailable evidence that an adversary has not just the capability but the imminent intent to do great harm. This presumes very high quality, if not irrefutable, intelligence on the part of the attacker, which was catastrophically absent in the Iraq case. Perhaps more ominously, the new national security strategy of the United States postulated a military capacity and an intent to dominate which, if carried to their logical conclusions, could eventually generate major, preventive wars, directly violating international law and US treaty obligations under the Charter.

Undermining the UN, an obstacle to preventive wars, would in some American minds be neither an incidental nor an unwelcome consequence of American policy. It is not only the far right in the United States that has been expressing its dissatisfaction with the UN. More moderate Americans have also been voicing disappointment with everything from the UN's criticism of Israel to its paralysis on Darfur. Some have called for an Alliance of Democratic States that would either enhance the effectiveness of the world organization or replace it. The common values of an Alliance of Democracies, it is argued, would confer a legitimacy on its decisions that would attract the respect of Americans, which the UN, a supposed rogues' gallery of despots, human rights abusers and mini-states, had definitively lost. This thesis confers too much rectitude on democracies, which are capable of self-serving action and chicanery and which have, contrary to repeated assertions, frequently been far from peace-loving. In any case, the UN membership is already two-thirds free or partly free. Resistance to US poli-



CP Photo

Where the world meets: In the General Assembly, with its 191 members, striking a consensus "on any issue is a Sisyphean task," writes Paul Heinbecker, former Canadian ambassador to the UN. Yet the UNGA has passed half a dozen counter-terrorism treaties and as many human rights accords.

cy on Iraq was led in the Security Council by democratic governments. Further, it is precisely the non-democracies that must be persuaded if progress is to be made, for example, when human rights are at stake. Nonetheless, an effective caucus of democracies within the UN could be helpful in offsetting the influence of other groups.

The need for UN reform notwithstanding, there was little in the reaction of the international community to the tragic events of September

11 to warrant putting into jeopardy 60 years of the development of international law, most of which previous US administrations had promoted (and all of which was significant to Canadian interests). After the Al Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington, the UN General Assembly and the Security Council acted sympathetically to the United States and with dispatch. On September 12, 2001, the General Assembly, which is not a decision-making body, issued a unanimous declaration of solidarity with the

American people. Within days of September 11, the UN Security Council, whose decisions are legally binding in international law, proscribed cooperation with terrorists, ordering member states to deny them both safe haven and the use of national banking systems to finance their operations. The Council also established an oversight committee to monitor member states' compliance and to promote capacity-building in the poorer states. Many governments, the Canadian government included, sent troops to Afghanistan to fight the Taliban and Al Qaeda alongside the

world public opinion. In asserting that the road to a Palestinian-Israeli settlement runs through Baghdad, US foreign policy became, in the eyes of many, the problem.

Washington, with the bottom falling out of its standing in the Arab world, its Iraq enterprise in jeopardy and the November 2004 elections at risk, came to see the utility of greater UN engagement. And, in fact, the UN played an indispensable role in the creation of an interim Iraqi government. Washington appeared to recognize that it needed the cooperation of the UN and its members. What was less clear was the

Washington, with the bottom falling out of its standing in the Arab world, its Iraq enterprise in jeopardy and the November 2004 elections at risk, came to see the utility of greater UN engagement. And, in fact, the UN played an indispensable role in the creation of an interim Iraqi government. Washington appeared to recognize that it needed the cooperation of the UN and its members.

Americans. Many also committed themselves to spending substantial sums to lift Afghanistan out of its failed-state status so that it would not again become a rear operating base for terrorists. Afghanistan became the largest recipient of Canadian funding, both in the Official Development Assistance and military categories.

By portraying the war against terrorism in indiscriminate and monolithic terms, Washington gave itself mission impossible. Terrorism is a heinous tactic but a tactic nonetheless, not a tangible enemy directly susceptible to defeat by military means, not least because it has no fixed address and its proponents can be found everywhere, including the West. By giving itself a hunting license to attack Iraq, despite the most tenuous of links between Al Qaeda and the Iraqi regime and the absence of hard evidence of the existence of weapons of mass destruction, Washington compounded its challenge. By running roughshod over the objections of the great majority of UN members, the US diminished itself in

extent to which a weakened UN could help retrieve such a flawed enterprise.

In attacking Iraq against the will of the international community, and in mishandling the occupation, the US did itself, and the UN, incalculable harm. Nevertheless, it would simply be wrong to lay all the UN's misfortunes at Washington's door. Rote apologies for the UN are almost as damaging as mindless attacks on it. The UN Charter was written in and for a different age and treats national sovereignty as an absolute and constant good.

As a consequence, over time a contradiction has arisen between the most basic purpose of the UN, "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war," and one of its cardinal tenets, state sovereignty. Because most of today's wars, the Iraq war being a significant exception, arise within the borders of existing states, the inhabitants often cannot be protected without intervention from outside. There is no consensus on how to respond to this new reality. Equally, there is no agreement on how to reform the aging, unrepresentative

Security Council, still the most important political/security body on earth.

Fundamentally, the UN's strength, universal membership, has also become its weakness. General Assembly membership has swollen to 191 countries, making the achievement of consensus on, e.g., UN reform a Sisyphean task. As the UN has expanded and the world economy has been globalized, disparity between the richest and poorest has deepened. Poverty eradication and development became the near exclusive compass points of the South, which often dismissed security as an issue of little consequence, of interest primarily to the North. The poorer countries, feeling vulnerable to the more powerful states, especially to the sole superpower, banded ever more resolutely together in the hoary Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and G77.

Combined with the strong preference for consensus decision-making in the General Assembly, this herd instinct made lowest-common-denominator outcomes the norm and provided a ready tool for political mischief, which was happily exploited by spoilers in the service of long dead ideologies and activists and reactionaries with often dubious political objectives. Further, faced with the impossibility of moving the Security Council on Middle Eastern issues, largely because of the US veto, the Arabs under Palestinian leadership made the General Assembly their default forum. They have ready allies in much of the South, which has only relatively recently emerged from occupation and/or colonialism and which identifies with the Palestinians' powerlessness and plight.

Meanwhile, regional groups, which are indispensable to the efficient administration and management of the business of UN bodies, have themselves sometimes produced destructive electoral outcomes, notably in the stunningly counterproductive election of Libya to the chair of the Commission

on Human Rights. Under these various pressures, the General Assembly has come to be seen in some countries, notably in the US, but also in Canada, as more theatre than parliament, with performances that are usually ignored outside the UN's immediate precincts, except where they censure Israel.

It is evident in the Security Council that there is very little international agreement on what the most important issues are. Most fundamentally, there is little common understanding of the threat, including terrorism and correspondingly little agreement on how to

Global problems can only be solved through overarching cooperation. From security to trade to finance to the environment to human rights, in sum, the complex of treaties, conventions, norms, institutions and formal and informal networks that the world has created, and continues to create, is integral to international order and prosperity. Multilateral cooperation, not multilateralism as an ideal or end in itself, is essential.

respond. Some of the most dangerous confrontations attract only episodic Security Council engagement: the China-Taiwan issue, the Korean peninsula division and the South-Asian nuclear standoff. While the number of interstate conflicts has declined in recent years, the proportion of intrastate conflicts has increased and it is here that the contradictions inherent in the UN Charter itself have become a central issue. The loss of life caused by civil wars in Africa, and by poverty and disease, dwarfs terrorism casualties in the West. None of this is to say that the UN has failed definitively and that it is time to walk away from it. Warts and all, it has succeeded. There were fewer inter-state wars in the second half of the 20th century than in the first half, despite a nearly four-fold increase in the number of states. While the Cold War destroyed the post-war consensus, hobbling the security vocation of the UN for many years, and the prevention of World War Three owed at least as much to nuclear deterrence and collective defence through NATO, there is no doubt that the world

would have been a much bloodier place without the world body. The UN gave birth to concepts such as peacekeeping, which buffers protagonists so that interstate wars do not reignite, and to peacebuilding, which reinforces institutions so that states do not again fail. During the Cold War, it helped two heavily armed camps avoid a nuclear Armageddon and pioneered arms control treaties and verification, notably, the Non-Proliferation Treaty regime. Beyond its security vocation, the UN has served as a midwife at the births of 140 new countries

Most fundamentally, the UN has developed a body of international law

that stigmatizes aggression and creates a strong norm against it. Few outside the ambit of American exceptionalists doubt that the rule of law is preferable to the law of the jungle. A world governing itself by freely accepted laws is likely to be safer and more stable than one run by the self-appointed and self-interested powerful. In 40 years' time, would Canadians be content to grant similar, exceptional dispensations from international law to China as they might concede to the US now? Would Americans?

Global problems can only be solved through overarching cooperation. From security to trade to finance to the environment to human rights, in sum, the complex of treaties, conventions, norms, institutions and formal and informal networks that the world has created, and continues to create, is integral to international order and prosperity. Multilateral cooperation, not multilateralism as an ideal or end in itself, is essential. For example, while the UN is often an object of uninformed criticism on terrorism, the UN General Assembly has passed a dozen basic

counter-terrorism treaties. As these treaties have been progressively absorbed into domestic legislation around the world, norms and standards of international behaviour have been established and performance and compliance enhanced. What is true for terrorism is equally true for human rights, where the UN has passed six core treaties, including on women's rights; for arms control and disarmament, where the UN is at the heart of the nuclear nonproliferation regime, including its weapons inspection capability; for health, where the World Health Organization is central to the effort to control and eradicate communicable and other diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and SARS; for the environment where the UN has generated seventy-six treaties, including the ozone treaty so important to the health of Canadians, and so on.

Beyond rules, norms and laws, there is an alphabet soup of UN institutions, IAEA, ICAO, IPU, ITU, WMO, WIPO, among many others, that help the world manage one aspect or another of international interchange.

The UN is also indispensable to international humanitarian operations. For example, UNICEF has inoculated 575,000,000 children against childhood diseases, the World Food Programme fed over 100,000,000 people last year alone, the UNHCR has protected 22,000,000 refugees and internally displaced people, and the UN Mine Action Service has facilitated the destruction of over 30,000,000 landmines, which has saved countless limbs and lives. Last but not least, the UN has led the largest relief effort in history in response to last year's Asian tsunami

At a time when it is facing decidedly new demands, the UN suffers from diplomatic sclerosis. The fundamental political and legal challenge facing the world body is to determine when and under what conditions the international community is justified in

intervening in the internal affairs of member states. Officials from countries that gained their independence in the living memories of their citizens see sovereignty as a crucial bulwark against once and future domination and are understandably reluctant to risk creating new pretexts for interference by others. Their worries are at once entirely comprehensible but totally unhelpful in protecting their citizens. The UN is wrestling with this reality as it considers the Canadian-sponsored report, "The Responsibility to Protect", commissioned in the wake of the UN failures in Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo.

The tragic losses of September 11 raised a related challenge. Does the nexus of WMD and terrorism provide another justification for outside intervention in a state's internal affairs? Secretary-General Annan put this issue starkly, in his seminal address to almost one hundred heads of government gathered in New York for the 2003 General

Debate: "[s]ome say..since an armed attack with weapons of mass destruction could be launched at any time...states have the right and obligation to use force pre-emptively." The secretary-general clearly was referring to the Bush administration. "This logic represents a fundamental challenge to the principles on which, however imperfect, world peace and stability have rested for the last 58 years..." He told the leaders assembled that "we have come to a fork in the road and that we must decide whether radical changes are needed."

The secretary-general has done his part to respond to changing needs, putting on the table far-reaching reform proposals that discomfit many, perhaps all. All UN members but particularly the developing countries are going to have to come to a new understanding of the limits of state sovereignty and the advantages of sharing and pooling it, if the UN is to be effective.

In the developing world, there is a historically understandable, albeit irrational, fear of too much outside intervention, but an all-too-true and present reality of too little, as Rwanda tragically demonstrated, and the conflicts in the Congo and Sudan continue to confirm. The United States will need to resist atavistic interpretations of sovereignty, which fuel exceptionalist policies and frequently encumber the negotiation and even preclude the ratification of treaties.

Security is not the only major problem facing the UN. The yawning gap between rich and poor belies many Western countries' charitable self-images, bedevils multilateral cooperation and undermines international security. The international community is not on track to achieve the economic and social goals leaders set themselves at the Millennium Summit; the recent G8 meeting at Gleneagles will only help somewhat.



CP Photo

The Security Council in session over Iraq. American exceptionalism was nowhere more apparent than in its decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein without an enabling resolution of the Security Council authorizing "all necessary means" to affect regime change in Baghdad.

Canada can help and is helping the UN to reform itself. As much by virtue of our values, of who we are as a society, as by what we do in the world, although that needs our urgent attention too, we do have the standing to contribute. Other countries rightly see Canada as one of the very few countries where minorities' rights are protected and diversity is valued, our treatment of Aboriginal Canadians apart. Our years of peacekeeping and putting the protection of people at the heart of our foreign policy have gained us considerable respect. Our position on the Iraq war has earned us substantial political credit with the less powerful among the UN's members and with many, probably most, of the more powerful, as well.

An effective foreign policy requires a beefed-up, combat-capable, peace-building-trained military, especially ground forces capable of intervening in conflict, a contemporary rather than a prospective financial commitment to poorer countries, and a diplomatic service with the resources to meet our own and others' expectations of us. Canada's recent International Policy Statement promises all of these. In the years to come, our will will need to match our wallet, which has never in Canadian history been better able to afford an effective foreign policy.

On the two overarching challenges the world faces, the conflicted UN and the isolated US, Canada, with its long tradition of bridge-building among different international constituencies, can help. Perhaps the most important such role for us is to help the world and the US reconcile their very considerable differences. This means taking the initiative to impart to others the particular insights into US motivations that we gain from geographic proximity and political and cultural propinquity with Americans. Equally, in an effort to alleviate American isolation and insecurity, and to be credible to others, we will have to "speak truth to power" in Washington. This means not shrinking from dealing frankly, albeit

courteously, with US administrations when we think they are wrong, as many Canadians believe they were on issues as diverse as Iraq, the International Criminal Court, Kyoto, and the development of still another generation of nuclear weapons and missile systems. It, equally, means not shrinking from supporting and defending American positions when we think the US is right, as for example, on North Korea, on Taiwan and on the propagation of democracy by example. Finally, it also means, not subordinating foreign policy imperatives to bilateral anxieties.

Reform of the United Nations system is necessary but not sufficient to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The weaknesses of other interna-

Canada can help and is helping the UN to reform itself. As much by virtue of our values, of who we are as a society, as by what we do in the world, although that needs our urgent attention too, we do have the standing to contribute. Other countries rightly see Canada as one of the very few countries where minorities' rights are protected and diversity is valued, our treatment of Aboriginal Canadians apart.

tional bodies needs remedying and the lacunae between them need filling. The Bretton Woods organizations, for example, have representation and voting rights anomalies. The World Bank has grown to dominate others in the field and its role vis-à-vis the regional development banks and especially vis-à-vis the UNDP needs recalibrating. Nor, in a floating exchange rate world, is the IMF's mandate clear, including vis-à-vis the more powerful countries which currently can and do ignore its prescriptions. NATO, a trans-regional alliance, is also struggling with the reality that neither the values of its members nor the threats they face are as common as they once were.

The G8, while effective in mobilizing the major industrialized countries on some key issues, is nonetheless handicapped in achieving broader objectives by virtue of its limited membership. Prime Minister Martin's proposal for a larger north-south group, more representative of power and population realities now and foreseen is one possible answer to this problem. Because heads of government have both the horizontal perspective and political authority that their individual ministers by definition lack, an L20 at leaders' level could facilitate breakthroughs on such intractable problems as public health and the Avian flu, trade and agricultural subsidies, terrorism and WMD the Millennium Development Goals and, not least, the reform of the UN. Such a group would complement rather than compete with the UN, which would retain its unique legitimacy by virtue of its universal membership, its statutory responsibility for peace and security and the centrality of its Charter to international law.

International organizations are notoriously difficult to reform, the UN perhaps most difficult of all. Still, no one can be confident that, absent a determined effort at innovation, the world organization on which we count for nearly every facet of international relations and global governance will muddle through. The system of laws, norms and treaties that the UN represents, backed up by formal and informal networks of officials, is crucial to Canada's well-being and independence. It is manifestly in Canada's interest to achieve UN reform.

Paul Heinbecker, Canadian ambassador to the UN from 2000 to 2004, is director of the Laurier Centre for Global Relations and senior research fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation at the University of Waterloo. Adapted from an article for Canada among Nations, 2004, from McGill-Queen's University Press.