

Lecture

by Paul Heinbecker

on Canada and Multilateral Engagement

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Check Against Delivery

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## Introduction

I am going to talk to you about the world we live in, and the UN 's and Canada's place in it.

More specifically, I am going to discuss:

- How the world is changing
- How the UN Is Responding to the Change
- And what this complexity means for global governance, including for Canadian foreign policy, and for the Canadian Forces in that policy

I am not going to talk about Canada's relationship with the US except tangentially.

That would be the subject for a whole other lecture.

### How the World Is Changing

*"When something happens in the world, the Americans ask, 'What should we do?', whereas in the FCO when something happens in the world, we ask, 'What should the Americans do?'"*

The answer apparently given by a British diplomat on completion of an exchange assignment with the US State Department to the question of the major difference between working at State and working at the British Foreign Office.

*"Those who used to chastise America for acting alone in the world cannot now stand by and wait for America to solve the world's problems alone."*

President Barack Obama addressing the UN General Assembly, September, 2009

The most important difference in the world views of Canadians and Americans is that Americans know that their country is a super-power and Canadians know that theirs is not. Pretty much everything in our respective foreign policies flows from that central reality. In the words of the 2002 US National Security Strategy, “The United States possesses unprecedented— and unequaled—strength and influence in the world. Sustained by faith in the principles of liberty, and the value of a free society, this position comes with unparalleled responsibilities, obligations, and opportunity.”

Read, “power”. It is obviously not an idle boast; in fact, it is probably an understatement. This power was hard won over generations and centuries, and is built on a uniquely American combination of values and interests, a belief in liberty above all combined with self-confidence, creativity, enterprise, responsibility, ambition and military capability. In today’s parlance, the US’s position in the world derives from a combination of “soft power”, “hard power” and “smart power”.

Power is a “zero sum” game and, unlike diamonds, it is not forever, if history is a reliable guide to the future. If power is transitory over the long run, though, capacity is decisive in the short run. Capacity, unlike power, is not a relative concept and, in any meaningfully foreseeable future, American capacity will remain unmatched.

American culture will remain pervasive. American science, especially medical science, will lead the world. The US, which has won the lion’s share of Nobel prizes, 320, will likely continue to do so. (The US won more prizes in 2009—nine-- than the Chinese have won in the history of the prize.) American universities have

established international standards for excellence and can be expected to continue to do so, even as others gain. Of the top 200 universities in the world, according to Times Higher Education 2009 report, fully 54 are American (13 of the top 20), twice the number of UK universities, the runners-up. (Canada, Japan and the Netherlands are tied for third, with 11 each in the top 200; China has six in the top 200, 11 counting Hong Kong, but none in the top 20.) The American economy, more than triple the size of runner-up Japan, according to the International Monetary Fund, will continue to generate enormous wealth. The US military is and will remain without peer in terms of sheer fire power for a very long time to come. The US spends more on its armed forces than the next 15 countries combined (eight of which are allies), according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI); the US outspends second-ranking China by seven to one. Beyond these tangibles, American values and the better angels of the American national character will continue to attract respect and admiration, if not always imitation.

The US economy is the foundation of American power in the world. The Great Recession of 2007-9 will have damaged that foundation to some degree, probably less than some detractors hope but possibly more than Americans realize. Enormous budget deficits now as a result of the stimulus programs and the economic recession mean budget cuts tomorrow for public policy spending, including for education, the key to American success. The US (and the UK) education systems will likely be hit harder than most countries by shrinking public spending and diminished endowment funds. The recession appears to have hit China and a number of countries in Asia less hard, which is likely to mean they will likely see their public expenditures less affected.

The differential impacts of the financial crisis and the recession on the west seems certain to accelerate the eventual advent of a multi-centric world. The US banking and financial system has

suffered a major blow to its credibility. The reckless policies of the banks and the lax oversight of the regulators created trouble across the planet. The economic policies Washington is pursuing to get out of the crisis--deficit spending, low interest rates, the bailing out and outright purchase of banks and other industries--are the opposite of the austerity regimes the Americans imposed on others in the past, notably during the Asian financial crisis. As a consequence of both financial recklessness and policy inadequacies and inconsistencies, confidence in the quality and reliability of American international leadership is diminished. According to Nobel Prize winner Joe Stiglitz writing in *Vanity Fair* (July 2009), "While there may be no winners in the current economic crisis, there are losers, and among the big losers is support for American-style capitalism."

The very large budget, trade and current account deficits that Washington is racking up in response to the recession cannot be sustained with impunity even by a super-power. Fortunately for Americans, American debts are denominated in the world's main reserve currency, the US dollar, which allows Washington to evade some of the discipline of having to pay debts in a foreign currency, a benefit most of the rest of the world does not enjoy. That, also, allows the US to print dollars to pay its bills, an advantage that some foreigners have long lamented. There was resentment as far back as the days of former French President Charles de Gaulle, who called it "an exorbitant privilege". Nixon Treasury Secretary John Connally famously told a delegation of Europeans worried about exchange rate fluctuations that the American dollar "is our currency, but your problem

A further US advantage is that because of the enormous depth and "liquidity" (the ability of an asset to be converted readily into cash) of US financial markets, no other financial system has been large enough and reliable enough to absorb the huge quantities of money that foreign pension funds and other large entities have to

**invest.** In fact, after an initial slide, the US dollar actually appreciated in value during the 2007-8 financial crisis as some investors and governments suddenly looked for safe haven investments (and the US Treasury bill was still seen as comparatively safe) and others scrambled for liquidity to pay off debts (the US Treasury-bill is the most liquid asset in the world).

China has enormous reserves in US dollars, \$2 trillion by some estimates, and a great deal to lose if the dollar weakens. In the short run, China and the US are joined at the financial hip. If the Chinese shifted significant amounts of money from dollars to other currencies precipitously, or stopped buying US treasuries, the dollar would depreciate, and the value of China's vast holdings in dollars would depreciate with it. Further, Chinese exports to the US, a major factor in Chinese economic growth, would retreat, as they would be more expensive to the American consumer. Nevertheless, it seems obvious that holders of US debt, notably the Chinese, will not forever tolerate the erosion of the value of their investments through the inflation these practices can generate, or through devaluation to redress the enormous current account imbalance.

The Chinese have openly floated the idea of creating a new reserve currency, possibly based on the value of a "basket" of currencies, which might happen in the long run. Nevertheless, as Barry Eichengreen of the University of California, Berkeley, has observed in the September/October, 2009, issue of *Foreign Affairs*, "the dollar will remain the principal form of international reserves well into the future. It will not be as dominant as in the past, for the same reasons that the United States will not be as dominant economically as it once was. In the short run, the euro will gain market share, especially in and around Europe. In the longer run, the (Chinese) renminbi's role will also grow, especially in Asia. But for as far as one can see clearly into the future, the dollar will remain first among equals." As goes the dollar, so goes America.

Any calculation of American standing must, also, factor in the damage done by American national security obsessions generally and the excessive, unilateralist behaviour of the Bush administration, those obsessions have driven. The Bush administration's disregard for international law, which previous administrations had helped to create, and its unilateral re-interpretation of the law as regards torture have been especially corrosive. A leading Singaporean diplomat and scholar, Kishore Mahbubani, described the US as being exemplary in implementing the rule of law at home but a leading international outlaw in its refusal to recognize the constraints of international law" (*Foreign Affairs* May-June 2008).

Mahbubani is far from alone in that view. Stephen Kull, editor of WorldPublicOpinion.org and director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) and the Center on Policy Attitudes (COPA) of the University of Maryland, told the US Congress in 2006 that polling of international attitudes towards the US during the Bush administration showed "... the lowest numbers that have ever been recorded". The election of new leadership in the US, while welcome in most countries around the world is not in itself sufficient to compensate for eight years of lawlessness by Washington. The actions of the Obama administration will need to speak louder than its words, welcome as those words are as indicators of change.

Power is not like energy, neither created nor destroyed. Power lost, is lost. Still, those who anticipate a precipitous decline in the United States, who would bet against the US, are near certain to be disappointed, as others have been in the past. Our neighbours' resilience and capacity for re-invention should never be underestimated, and comes as no surprise to Canadians. Who remembers "the decline school" of the late Eighties, whose thesis was that Japan was overtaking America? That thesis was promoted by

some as an argument against Canada's concluding a free trade agreement with an eclipsed United States. In the two decades that followed, Japan faltered, the US surged, and Canadian prosperity soared.

The day of Chinese or Indian parity likely lies well into the future. But it is towards parity that the world is headed. The enormous populations of the world's two most populous states, China and India, each quadruple the size of the United States, are becoming both better educated and more prosperous. This change is beyond the control of American foreign policy, just as the rise of the United States was beyond the control of the European empires in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. If China continued to grow at an average growth rate of 9.75% annually, about the pace of the past 10 years, and if the US grew at the rate of 2.54%, also the pace of the past 10 years, Chinese GDP would catch up to American GDP in 2026. US GDP in 2026 would be about \$22.4 trillion and Chinese GDP would be about \$23.5 trillion. History does not proceed in straight lines and simple projections are likely to be misleading. As countries develop, their growth rates tend to slow and converge downward towards developed country levels of growth. The Japanese and Soviet advances and retreats are the most obvious examples. History, also, illustrates that the further ahead into the future the projection, the more uncertain the outcome is. Even so, the celebrated BRICS study by Goldman Sachs concludes with confidence that Chinese GDP in US dollar terms will overtake the US in 2041. It is safe to say that the US will remain pre-eminent but, for good or ill, will become progressively less predominant, economically..

We in the West forget all too easily, if we ever really knew, that China or India not being major powers is the exception in history, not the rule. As observed by Kishore Mahbubani of Singapore National University and former Singapore Permanent Representative at the United Nations, and a member of the International Board of

Governors of CIGI, Asians have long been regarded in the West as just consumers of world history, reacting tactically and, with the obvious exception of Japan, defensively to the surges of Western commerce, power and thought. Now the Asians are again producing history—and economics-- as they did for eighteen centuries before the rise of the West. In that sense it is more accurate now to speak not of the “rise” of Asia, but of the re-emergence of Asia, in regional and world affairs. In any case, Asia is back, and is certain to become ever more significant in world affairs.

The pace of change has been nothing less than astonishing. Consider this observation by American economist Larry Summers, the Director of the White House's National Economic Council in the Obama administration, as related in Mr. Mahbubani's book “The New Asian Empire: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East”

They called it the Industrial Revolution [in Europe] because, for the first time in all of human history, standards of living rose at a rate where there were noticeable changes in standards of living within a human life span – changes of perhaps 50 percent. At current growth rates in Asia standards of living may rise 100 fold, 10,000 percent within a human life span. The rise of Asia and all that follows it will be the dominant story in history books written 300 years from now with the Cold War and rise of Islam as secondary stories.”

To quote Bob Dylan, “The times they are a changin’”.

### **How the UN Is Responding**

*The UN was not created in order to bring us to heaven, but in order to save us from hell.*<sup>1</sup>

Dag Hammarskjöld, late UN Secretary General

The world's aspirations for the United Nations have often exceeded the organization's grasp. The result is that the UN is admired sometimes more for its ideals than for its accomplishments, for what we want and need it to be, than for what it has sometimes done, and been. Still, with a few tragic and indelible exceptions, especially Rwanda and Srebrenica, the world body has fulfilled its mandate acceptably well, in fact, in some respects exceptionally well. It has responded to rapidly changing times faster and better than most observers realize.

I know first hand that the UN has all the internal contradictions, conflicts, rigidities and frailties that might be expected of a 60-something, quite human, institution, and that it can be even more exasperating up close than it is at a distance. I, also, know from personal experience that the world body remains far more innovative, effective and important than politically motivated "UN-bashers" would have us believe, and even than most UN-apologists appreciate.

At San Francisco, in 1945, the gathered delegations gave the UN four crucial, transcendent missions

- to save succeeding generations from war,
- to protect human rights,
- to foster universal justice, and
- to promote social progress and better standards of living.

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<sup>1</sup> A similar comment is often attributed to Henry Cabot Lodge former US delegate to the UN: "This organization is created to keep you from going to hell. It isn't created to take you to heaven". Perhaps they both said it.

By and large, the UN has succeeded in fulfilling all these mandates – or, more accurately, we the member states have, collectively, succeeded in doing so, because the UN is us. Over the decades, through the UN we have spawned an extensive body of international law, treaties, norms, practices and institutions that govern most facets of interstate relations, bringing greater order, stability and progress to global affairs, and greater modernity, dignity and security to peoples' lives.

With its Charter, and the international law and treaties built onto the Charter, the UN has become the world's central operating system, the motherboard of global governance. The UN performs its own core functions and, at the same time, also enables a myriad of sub-systems to work as well, both within the ambit of the UN organization, for example, UNICEF, and beyond. The UN makes it possible for other organizations and groups to function more effectively, notably NATO. The NATO treaty deliberately and specifically refers directly to Article 51 of the UN Charter as the legal basis of its collective defence commitment. Politically, NATO needs the approbation of the UN to bolster the legitimacy of its operations in Afghanistan, and elsewhere. The UN, also, makes it possible for ideas such as the Millennium Development Goals and the global fight against HIV-AIDS to be sub-contracted out efficiently. The reverse is, also, true. The product of other entities, notably the G-8 and G-20, can be imported into the UN for consideration by the entire membership. The members of such restricted groups can bind themselves but they can only commend their decisions to others, not command compliance. Absent the UN, and its universal membership and legal framework, smaller, privileged groups, including the G-8 and the G-20, would be much more controversial and their legitimacy even more contested than they already are. They would, also, be less effective.

Most fundamentally, the UN and its Charter provides the rule book for the conduct of international relations which all states more or less use. The cliché, for all its overuse, is true: if the UN did not exist, we would have to invent it. Whether this generation could muster the requisite vision and political will to do so, as the post-war generation did, fortunately is moot.

Rigidities, frailties, accomplishments, innovations and all, the UN remains indispensable. Further, people around the world sense that truth and continue to accord the organization their general approval. Polling conducted for the BBC World Service in 2006 by GlobeScan and the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland, and by others since, found that people in every country polled, including the United States, had more positive views of the UN than negative and, in many cases, much more positive views.

Some governments have taken the UN for granted, or have been just plain oblivious to its weaknesses and needs, leaving it up to inertia or fate to fix things. Some, with advanced cases of imperial hubris and strategic myopia, would have just abandoned the UN, and looked to their own strengths to see them through. The first course would have condemned the UN to an existence increasingly on the periphery of humanity's vast need. The second would eventually have condemned the world to repeat history, but in infinitely more dangerous circumstances.

The West will not dominate the next 65 years as it did the past 65. Now is the time to reinforce, not jettison, the rule of law that is codified in the UN Charter, to inculcate a culture of law and partnership in international relations. The US, the *primus inter pares* of the world body, under the leadership of President Obama, has signaled its intention to do both. But the US cannot do it alone.

Achieving a culture of rule of law, also, requires world leaders to recapture a common or, at least, a compatible vision of the future, and of the place they see for the UN in it.

Partly as a consequence, the period since the end of World War II is the longest uninterrupted peace between major powers in history, the Korean “Police Action” possibly excepted. Indeed, according to the report of the independent UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2005, 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. The UN has served as mid-wife in the births of more than 100 of these states since 1945, the great majority of which came into being peacefully. However bloody the world has been in the last 65 years, and it has been very bloody—over 40 million have died as a result of conflicts, but “only” about one-fourth in wars between states (Milton Leitenberg, Cornell University, Peace Studies Program, 2006)-- it is fair to say that it would have been much worse without the UN.

Despite the impression of conflict left almost daily by our electronic media, especially, including the web-based media, between 1992 and 2003 the number of armed conflicts around the world dropped by 40%, according to the 2005 Human Security Report of the University of British Columbia and, latterly, of Simon Fraser University. The Report, also, stated that the number of battle-deaths per year has declined dramatically. Further, the average number of battle-deaths per conflict has, also, been falling dramatically, albeit unevenly, since the 1950s. In 1950, for example, the average armed conflict killed 38,000 people; in 2002 the figure was 600, a 98% decline. Terrorism is the only form of political violence that appears to be getting worse but the losses, while high profile and tragic, pale in comparison to the losses in armed conflict half a century ago. Even fatalities from one-sided violence by states on civilians, i.e., internal

conflicts, while horrific, have been in decline in the present decade, as compared to the 1990s (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute report of 2009).

The Report argues that the single most compelling explanation for these changes is found in the unprecedented upsurge of international activism, spearheaded by the UN, which took place in the wake of the Cold War. Since the end of the Cold War, UN member countries have been much readier to authorize the use force to stop internal conflicts than they were previously. From 1945 until 1989, there were 13 UN military operations. Since then, there have been approximately 45 such military interventions, and the UN's annual peacekeeping budget has grown to over \$6 billion. And the Blue Helmets have been complemented by preventive diplomacy and Peace-Building. Over the years, peacekeeping has evolved from a primarily military model of observing cease-fires and the separation of forces after inter-state wars, to a complex operation comprising the military, police and civilians, working together to help lay the foundations for sustainable peace.

As treaties and rules have been progressively absorbed into domestic legislation around the world, norms and standards of international behaviour have been established and upgraded. Perhaps most consequential has been the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the International Atomic Energy Agency, which have helped limit the spread of nuclear weapons and assisted East and West to avoid a nuclear Armageddon

A similar sort of assimilation into national practice has taken place with respect to human rights agreements.

The same dynamic applies broadly to the UN's work on the environment, where a similar process of domestic assimilation of

international standards has been taking place. The UN or its constituent bodies have concluded 45 treaties on the environment from the Kyoto Protocol to the Montreal Protocol on ozone depletion

The same is true for terrorism. The UN General Assembly has passed thirteen counter-terrorism treaties on issues as diverse as skyjacking and nuclear terrorism.

A growing proportion of the world body's work these days is operational, far removed from the plush carpets and hushed discourse of the corridors and delegates' lounge of UN headquarters in Manhattan. It is the gritty, often dangerous but rewarding and hugely necessary work of helping the world to feed its hungry, shelter its dispossessed, minister to its sick and educate its children. It is a very big job. In 2008, the UN High Commission for Refugees protected 31 million people--refugees, the stateless, the internally displaced, returnees and asylum-seekers--the equivalent of the population of Canada. In 2008, the World Food Program (WFP), operating in 78 countries, fed over 102 million people, that is, three times the population of Canada; in 2009, the WFP expects to reach about 105 million people.

In its earlier years, the World Health Organization (WHO) led the successful program to eradicate smallpox. Now, the elimination of poliomyelitis is within reach. Since 1988, when the WHO and its private partners, including Rotary International, launched the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, polio infections have fallen by 99%, and some five million people have been spared paralysis. With the assistance of the WHO and UNICEF, the immunization of children for the six major vaccine-preventable diseases-- pertussis, childhood tuberculosis, tetanus, polio, measles and diphtheria -- has risen from 20 per cent of the world's children in 1980 to an estimated 81 per cent by the end of 2007. The two organizations are collaborating on a program to raise immunization coverage to at least 90 per cent in

every country over the next five years. Deaths from measles, a major killer, declined by 74 per cent worldwide and by 89 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa between 2000 and 2007. More than 100 million infants are immunized each year, saving more than 3 million lives annually. Meanwhile, the WHO has, also, been coordinating the world's response to SARS, the bird flu and the H1N1 virus. This work has been belittled in some unenlightened quarters as mere international social work. It is social work, but social work that delivers very real human and national security benefits. (Canadian dimension)

More mundanely

### **The Absence of Consensus**

#### *Security, the North-South Divide and Politics*

Security means different things to different people. For the US, post 9/11, and for some European countries, security has meant security against international terrorism. For the developing world, security means something else. Statistics explain the disagreement.

- In 2008, the US National Counterterrorism Center reported to the US Congress that there were a total of 11,770 terrorist attacks around the world, resulting in 15,765 deaths, the lion's share in Iraq and South Asia.
- Natural disasters killed nearly 25,000 people in 2006, according to the Red Cross, the vast majority in poorer countries, many casualties directly or indirectly a consequence of poverty. In 2004, the year of the Tsunami that figure was 240,000 people killed, most in the poorer countries.
- Small arms and light weapons were directly responsible for the deaths of about 100,000 people in 2003, according to the small

arms survey of the Geneva Graduate Institute of International Studies, and indirectly responsible for perhaps 200,000 more, predominantly in the poorer countries.

- Pregnancy-related complications, according to the WHO, killed more than 535,000 women in 2005, 99% of them in the Third World.
- Malaria killed one million people in 2005, mostly in the poorest countries, according to the World Malaria Report 2005 of the Centre for Disease Control & Prevention, ,
- and HIV-AIDS killed over two million people in 2005, according to the UNAIDS/WHO “AIDS Epidemic Update” of November , 2007, again overwhelmingly in the Third World.

It is not surprising that fundamental disagreements reign over even what the institution should do. These disagreements plague much decision-making in New York and inhibit the UN from playing the role the world needs it to play.

The underlying political reality of the North-South divide is that the poorer countries, feeling vulnerable to the more powerful countries, especially the United States, have sought strength in unity, banding ever more resolutely together in the hoary Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the G 77. The NAM dates from 1955 and is the brainchild of India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, former Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser and Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito. They are all long gone but their progeny lives on. The NAM comprises 118 developing countries; the G-77 has grown from 77 to 130 developing countries. There is much common membership, and either group can determine the outcome of any vote.

Members of the two organizations have proved willing to sacrifice important national interests to what they evidently perceive as their larger common interest of preserving unity in the face of power.

### *National Sovereignty and Genocide*

A related structural problem is posed by the UN Charter, itself, written in the aftermath of World War II. The Charter treats national sovereignty and the prohibition of interference in the domestic affairs of states as absolute and immutable. Over time a contradiction has emerged, however, between the most basic purpose of the UN, "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war," and the cardinal tenet of state sovereignty, because most contemporary conflicts arise within the borders of existing states, where governments are unable or unwilling to protect their own citizens, or are actually themselves perpetrating violence against them.

The worst single failure of the UN was its handling of the conscience-shocking genocide of 800,000 people in Rwanda.

### **The UN and the Bush Administration**

Despite the UN's manifest solidarity with the US post 9/11, its endorsement of and support for US military action in self-defence and its very largely effective partnership with the US in combating terrorism (notwithstanding the unease of some members that they were subordinating their human rights to US security fears, as with the UN no-fly lists), the organization endured a steady drumbeat of dissatisfaction, doubt and disrespect from Washington. The contempt culminated in the illegal invasion of Iraq, without a Security Council warrant to do so

Opposition to the UN was strongest in the Congress and among Republicans. According to a 2005 Pew poll, Republicans were

twice as likely as Democrats [56% vs. 24%] to say the U.S. does not need to cooperate with the international body. In this they are reflecting a vocal, religious minority of US public opinion. According to Walter Russell Meade writing in *Foreign Affairs*, American fundamentalists

are downright hostile to the idea of a world order based on secular morality and on global institutions such as the United Nations. More familiar than many Americans with the stories of persecuted Christians abroad, fundamentalists see nothing moral about cooperating with governments that oppress churches, forbid Christian proselytizing, or punish conversions to Christianity under Islamic law. To institutions such as the UN that treat these governments as legitimate, they apply the words of the prophet Isaiah: "We have made a covenant with death, and with hell we are at agreement." It is no coincidence that the popular "Left Behind" novels, which depict the end of the world from a fundamentalist perspective, show the Antichrist rising to power as the Secretary-General of the UN.

### **The UN and Scandal**

well-documented cases of sexual depredations on powerless women and girls by UN peace-keepers, including by senior military officers and officials, and several cases of sexual harassment by very senior UN officials of women on their staffs.

### **Oil-for -Food**

As Mark Malloch Brown, former Deputy Secretary General, said in his John Holmes Lecture, the real corruption in the scandal was generated by the under-the-table dealings between Saddam Hussein and foreign companies that bought oil from Iraq and/or sold goods to Iraq.

## **What the UN Is and Isn't**

### *The Secretary General and the Secretariat*

No one is in charge of the United Nations. Literally. And no one is fully accountable for it.

is the chief administrative officer of the UN, according to Article 97 of the Charter, not the chief executive officer.

### *The United Nations General Assembly*

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) provides a unique forum for discussion of the full spectrum of international issues. It is the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the institution. When Churchill argued in 1954 that “to jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war”, he probably had the General Assembly in mind. The Assembly, also, plays a significant role in treaty-making and international standard-setting on everything from human rights to environmental protection to the codification of international law. It derives its unique legitimacy from the voluntary participation of all 192 Member States and the egalitarian principle of one country, one vote.

### *The General Debate*

Each year in September, world leaders in their scores descend on New York for the annual diplomatic “meet market” called the General Debate. This is the premier occasion each year for world leaders to let their counterparts know what is on their minds and to send policy signals and float trial balloons and gauge how they are received.

### *The Security Council*

The UN Security Council is a distinct body of the UN, existing in parallel to the General Assembly and the International Court of Justice. It is not the Cabinet of the UN. Nor is it responsible to the General Assembly, or even responsive to the latter in any meaningful way. The Security Council currently has 15 members: five permanent members with vetoes and ten non-permanent members without vetoes, the latter elected for two year terms by a vote of the entire General Assembly membership. It is arguably the most important political body in the world, equipped by Chapter VII of the UN Charter with the power to “legislate” in member countries, a power that even the august G 8 group of industrial country leaders does not have.

## **The Fraught Question of Security Council Reform**

### *Aristocracy or Accountability?*

For the countries that aspire to permanent seats, an unrepresentative and anachronistic Council, in terms of permanent seat distribution, is an illegitimate one. Worse, it is an ineffective one. In their view, the Council’s decisions would be respected more, and therefore implemented by others more readily and more fully, if the permanent members were more representative of the entire membership.

That does raise the question of which formula can reconcile equity and accountability, and therein lies the rub. Not everyone equates enlargement with reform.. Some member governments think the Council has a performance and accountability deficit as it is—Darfur being a current, tragic case in point—

Their position is partly a matter of principle—they are for accountability and against privilege--and partly a matter of self-

interest-- they presume they, themselves, will not get a permanent seat and in some cases, their regional rivals will

### *The Vexed Veto*

According to the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the following is the tally of vetoes cast from 1946 to 2008

Russia/Soviet Union	119
The United States	82*
The United Kingdom	30
France	18
China	7

\* Of which, 41 on the Middle East

### **Reinvention and Innovation**

*Peace-Keeping, Peace-Making, Peace Enforcement and Peace-Building*

Brahimi What they need t know

SerGen to refuse inadequate mandates

Lessons learned can, regrettably, over time become lessons forgotten again, as Brahimi himself has observed, in the latest volume of *Canada Among Nations*. The Security Council has begun again to issue mandates that are diplomatically appealing but militarily and politically unachievable and to deploy forces that are inadequate to the challenging situations they face in places like the Congo or

Darfur. The hybrid Un/African Union mission is a case in point. Too few countries, especially too few of the richer countries including Canada, offer troops, deployments take too long, force “multipliers” such as attack helicopters, communications technology, tactical airlift and technically skilled personnel are in short supply, funds for peace building and reconstruction are inadequate, etc. The UN’s capability to handle combat missions is doubted by some of the more capable militaries in the world, including Canada’s, including former Chief of the Defence staff Rick Hillier in his book “A Soldier First”.

The criticisms are or, at least, have been valid, but the more constructive response is to try to fix them, rather than to disparage the institution and walk away. There are strategic advantages in working through the UN with its greater international legitimacy, and capacity for peace-building that are absent in coalitions of the willing, for example, and even in NATO operations

As former Deputy Secretary General and former Deputy Minister of the Department of National Defence, Louise Frèchette, argued in a speech at the Elliot School of George Washington University, “performance would also improve if member states were prepared to inject serious money (but still a tiny fraction of what the war in Iraq cost ...) into preparing and supporting adequate numbers of soldiers, police officers and civilians and putting in place a real stand-by capacity.”

Peace-Building

*The Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*

*The Responsibility to Protect*

*Prevention*

*International Justice*

*Democracy and Human Rights*

*Sustainable Development and Environmental Treaties*

*Poverty Eradication*

### **The UN and the US: Friends Again?**

First and foremost, the UN needs a better relationship with Washington, and it looks as though it is going to get one. For the UN to succeed, the new US Administration has to believe in its efficacy. Happily, the Obama administration has signaled it does. In fact, the contrast of the Obama administration with its predecessor in this regard could not be starker. Rather than working with the UN, the Bush administration had directed a constant stream of deprecation, even vitriol, at the world organization, with even the President expressing doubt about its relevance.

. Bolton was presumably appointed to satisfy the Republican right, many of whose views on the UN he shared.

In contrast, president Obama appointed Susan Rice as Ambassador to the United Nations. A young high flyer

The point to draw from the preceding analysis is that from counter-terrorism treaties, to human rights conventions, to the support of democracy and promotion of the rule of law, to coordinating disaster relief, to fostering sustainable development, to establishing development targets, to improving health, to preventing conflict, to

employing military force, to rebuilding states emerging from conflict, to management reform, the UN has taken very significant strides into the 21st century. It is performing a role that is still valued by its members. The UN is not the corrupt, incompetent, basket-case of an organization that its critics maintain. It is doing a far better job than its critics contend and even than its defenders know. But, it cannot simply command consensus in a divided world and like any 60 year old institution, it needs ongoing updating and innovation to cope with new problems.

Progress needs to be made on a series of issues that, left unresolved or at least inadequately addressed, are counterproductive to the conduct of international relations and corrosive to the health of the institution. First and foremost is the Palestinian issue, which tends to colour everything else at the UN. Nothing would transform the confrontational diplomacy at the UN faster than a fair settlement that both sides could accept. But, there are other challenges as well. A consensus needs to be developed on what the world will do about the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan and how. More consequential UN effort is necessary on Darfur. The nuclear non-proliferation agreement needs shoring up. The Doha Trade Round, that is, the development round, needs to be successfully concluded. Efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals need reinforcement. Climate change negotiators need to find some equitable way of cutting emissions and covering the costs of mitigation and adaptation. The arms transfers into Africa, especially, need to be controlled. Not all of these issues will be resolved around a UN table. But their resolution, or at least real progress on them, will transform the institution and give it new life.