

# Lecture

by Paul Heinbecker

## on Canada and the United Nations

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**Check Against Delivery**

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## **Introduction**

**I am going to talk to you tonight about the world we live in, and the UN 's place in it 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**
- **What this change means for Canadian foreign policy, especially vis-à-vis the United Nations.**
- **I will , also, touch on the significance of the election of Barak Obama.**

**And I will leave some time for Questions and Answers.**

## **The “Rise” of Asia—and of Others, or It's the World, Stupid!**

The world is changing, dramatically, before our eyes, and most of that change is being driven by Asia.

We in the West forget all too easily,

if we ever really knew,

that China and India not being major powers is the exception in history.

As observed by Kishore Mahbubani, a former colleague of mine in New York and a member of the International Advisory Board of Governors of the Centre for International Governance Innovation (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.

But, now the Asians are again producing history as they did for eighteen centuries before the rise of the West.

In that sense it is more accurate to speak not of the “rise” of Asia, but of the “return” of Asia, to the forefront of regional and world affairs.

China, Japan and India currently rank 2nd, 3rd and 4th in the world in terms of Gross Domestic Product at Purchasing Power Parity.

India and China are still developing countries with wide swathes of impoverished people

But, overall, both are enjoying extraordinary unprecedented prosperity.

Consider this insight from Mr. Mahbubani’s new book:

“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 within a [single] human life span—changes of perhaps 50 percent.

At current growth rates in Asia, standards of living may rise 100 fold or 10,000 percent within a human life span.”

India is expected to reach developed nation status (\$20,000 per capita income in terms of purchasing power parity) in 2028, i.e., within the lifespan of some in this room.

On current trends, China will get there earlier.

Japan, with a population of 128 million, 10<sup>th</sup> in the world, ranks 2nd in GDP, at market rates.

According to the latest WTO statistics (for 2006), China ranks 3rd in international trade (\$1,761 billion) and Japan ranks 4th.

China, India and Japan rank 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> respectively in the world in military spending [on a purchasing power parity basis (the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2007 yearbook)].

India is the third leading contributor to UN peacekeeping missions, with 8,179 troops, behind Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Japan is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading contributor to the UN 's budget.

I cite all these statistics to reinforce the point that Asia has become a determining factor in international relations, and is likely only to grow more significant as time goes by.

And that is not the whole story of global change, of course.

The European Union, with a combined GDP of almost \$17 trillion, is the world's largest economic entity.

The EU is capable of making enormously constructive contributions to world affairs.

It is a huge spender on engineering and technological innovation and a leader in environmental research and development.

Six of the ten leading exporters and importers in world merchandise trade in 2006 were European.

Germany was the world's leading exporter and second leading importer;

for the most part German firms have succeeded in staying ahead of the innovation curve.

The EU, which counts two nuclear powers, and 10 other countries that have the money and the technology to give themselves nuclear weapons if they want to, accounts for \$256 billion of military spending, cumulatively second only to the US.

The EU is cumulatively the largest aid donor, providing 75% of the total aid transferred to poorer countries (Source: OECD).

Europe's next door neighbour Russia is "back", thanks to rampaging commodity prices, especially oil,

and its own blend of democratic autocracy that delivers legitimacy through rising standards of living.

Russia's economy ranks 10th in the world, just behind Canada's in GDP terms.

Russia's military, with in excess of 14,000 nuclear warheads, remains the second most powerful in the world.

And, as events in Georgia confirm, Russia intends neither to be taken for granted nor to be dominated.

At the same time, Russia's reaction to the Georgian provocation was probably excessive and certainly self-serving,

It probably does not signal a return to the Cold War,

however much some in the Republican Party in the US and in the media might long for it

Latin America is no longer a continent apart in political terms,

It is demanding and getting a prominent place at the top tables, such as the Doha (trade) Round, the Bali Climate Change process, and, increasingly, the UN Security Council.

Clearly, times are changing, and quickly.

It is not our grandfathers' world, or even our fathers'.

Still, even if the world is becoming increasingly integrated economically and multi-power politically, the United States will remain the pivot of the international system for a long time to come.

American culture will remain pervasive.

American science, especially medical science, will lead the world.

American universities will continue to set international standards for their excellence.

The American economy, unless it collapses under the weight of the problems of unregulated finance, will continue to generate unprecedented wealth for its people, and for its economic partners.

Militarily, the US will remain without peer in terms of sheer hard power.

But American dominance will inevitably diminish as other powers rise.

A more cooperative approach, with a much larger quotient of diplomacy, will be necessary if the US is to regain its standing in the world.

And if the world is to be a peaceful place.

The US will need see the world in decidedly less unilateralist and militaristic terms and in a decidedly more cosmopolitan light.

This is why Barack Obama is a man for this season.

The election of Obama signals that America is capable of serious change and of keeping faith with its vast promise.

Further, Obama's view of the world is inherently cosmopolitan.

Because he was born of a Kenyan father and a globe-trotting mother,  
because he spent childhood years in Indonesia,  
even because part of his US upbringing was in offshore Hawaii,  
he is arguably the most worldly candidate ever to win the US  
Presidency.

That will have implications for the image of the US in the world, for  
US foreign policy, for Canada and for the UN.

### **The United Nations; Irrelevant or Indispensable?**

Some argue that the divisions at the UN make resolution of the  
world's problems more difficult.

I think the reverse is more true—

the enormous lack of solidarity between North and South and between  
the US and the rest, especially during the Bush administration's tenure,

and the near total absence of consensus on many major issues,

bedevil UN decision-making and constrain its effectiveness.

The world is almost as divided politically as it is integrated  
economically,

with consensus scarce on almost every major issue,

So many major global issues seem at an impasse:

- the Arab-Israeli conflict,
- nuclear weapons proliferation and disarmament,
- international terrorism (we cannot even agree on a definition),
- Iraq, Iran, Darfur, the Congo (again), Afghanistan,
- the international financial crisis, and what to do about it,
- the Doha round of trade talks,
- climate change,
- and the volatility of oil prices,
- etc.

Why do these problems persist, other than because of the evident imperfections of human nature?

There is no simple answer, but the response would likely include all of the following.

First, and most basically, there is a profound lack of trust and human solidarity that makes solutions elusive—

that is the case in the Middle East where 60 years of conflict have poisoned relations and impeded compromise.

The invasion of Iraq has only made things worse, Senator McCain's optimism notwithstanding.

Many Americans, including the Bush Administration, thought that 9/11 changed everything.

Around the world, many others thought that the unilateral US invasion of Iraq changed everything.

The absence of trust and solidarity also plagues the Darfur conflict, where humanitarian principles cry out for intervention but where colonial legacies and contemporary distrust prevent it.

Second, many of the most pressing problems are global in scope and require global solutions.

But the policy authority and resources for tackling these problems remains vested in states—

that is the case for climate change and terrorism.

Third, there is a disconnect between the distribution of authority and the distribution of military and economic power in the world.

India and Japan are outside of the Security Council; China and India are outside the G8.

Very few global issues can be resolved effectively without involving all three of them, and others.

Fourth, there is a gap between legitimacy and efficiency.

The UN's unique legitimacy flows from the universality of its membership,

But “universality” makes for a terribly inefficient and frustrating reality when making and implementing collective decisions.

Conversely, the G7/8 forum facilitates decision-making but its restricted membership renders its conclusions unrepresentative and,

to the extent that they impinge on non-members, lacking in legitimacy.

Nor, without the world’s emerging countries taking part, are those decisions effective.

Fifth, under the Bush Administration, there has been a retreat from international law and treaties, particularly as regards climate change, human rights and arms control and, especially, nuclear disarmament.

Under the influence of the Neo-cons, the US put its faith near totally in US military power, rather than in treaties, alliances and cooperation.

Finally, and not least significant, the world has shifted on its axes, from East-West during the Cold War to North-South now.

The North cares primarily about security.

The South cares primarily about development

And even security means different things to different people.

Consider what security looks like from the perspective of the poor.

- Natural disasters killed nearly 25,000 people in 2006, the vast majority in poorer countries. (Source: Red Cross),

[http://www.ifrc.org/Docs/pubs/disasters/wdr2007/WDR2007 - English.pdf](http://www.ifrc.org/Docs/pubs/disasters/wdr2007/WDR2007_English.pdf))

- In 2004, 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,

- and indirectly responsible for perhaps 200,000 more, predominantly in the poorer countries.

(Source: Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, Switzerland (Keith Krause); [smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/issueareas/victims/victimcost](http://smallarmssurvey.org/files/portal/issueareas/victims/victimcost))

- Intra-state conflict caused the deaths of 100's of thousands more, notably in Africa.
- Pregnancy-related complications killed more than 535,000 women, 99% of them in the Third World.  
(Source: WHO Report, [http://www.icrw.org/docs/Maternal\\_Mortality\\_2005.pdf](http://www.icrw.org/docs/Maternal_Mortality_2005.pdf))
- Malaria killed one million people last year, mostly in the poorest countries,  
(Source: Centre for Disease Control & Prevention, World Malaria Report 2005, [www.cdc.gov/malaria](http://www.cdc.gov/malaria))
- and HIV-AIDS killed over two million people in 2005, again overwhelmingly in the Third World  
( Source:UNAIDS/WHO AIDS Epidemic Update, November 2007)

Where you stand on security depends on where you live.

One consequence at the UN is that suspicion prevails and fundamental disagreements reign even on what the institution should do.

The United Nations remains the principal instrument of international governance, albeit often more respected for what it represents than for what it does.

I know first-hand that the United Nations has all the problems you would expect a 60-year-old institution to have.

I also know that the institution remains far more important and useful than the politically motivated “UN-bashers” would have you believe.

While the world’s aspirations for the United Nations have often exceeded the organization’s grasp, it has, nevertheless, served us reasonably well, and sometimes, very well.

We should not forget that a hundred years ago, the only protection against aggression was power.

The only checks on would-be aggressors were the costs of fighting and the risks of failing.

In the intervening decades, the UN gave birth to a body of international law that stigmatized aggression and created a strong norm against it.

Although the Cold War saw international law breached by both sides, the norm against aggression was much more respected than not.

Through the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN has assisted East and West avoid a nuclear Armageddon.

The UN has helped the world to feed its hungry, shelter its dispossessed, minister to its sick and educate its children.

More mundanely, the UN has regulated the world's air travel, coordinated its mail services, overseen its patents system, regulated its shipping and apportioned its electromagnetic spectrum, among many other unsung but necessary tasks.

the UN is not going to hell in a hand basket,

But obviously, all is not well with the UN, either.

Managing this world is harder than it looks.

The world has not yet fully assimilated former Secretary General Kofi Annan's insight

that there is no security without development,

no development without security

and no security or development without human rights protection,

And that multilateral cooperation is essential to the achievement of all three.

The worst failing has been the conscience-shocking failures of the UN in Cambodia, the Balkans, the Congo, and Rwanda.

In Rwanda, while 800,000 people were being systematically slaughtered, Security Council members, notably the United States, played legal word-games in order not to trigger their obligations under the Genocide Convention.

Former Secretary Powell called Darfur a genocide, but the victims wait on the unhurried collective conscience to act.

And for all the criticism of the west, it is the Africans who are trying to block the international Criminal Court from prosecuting Omar al-Bashir, the President of Sudan, and other senior officials.

The UN secretariat has forced the world to confront the unfolding tragedy of Sudan but the reactions of member countries have been, literally, unconscionable.

The old Human Rights Commission had become a caricature of itself, with human rights abusers seeking membership so they could deflect attention from themselves, often to Israel.

It has been replaced by a Human Rights Council, albeit with disappointing results so far, a modest improvement at best.

The United Nations has had some management failures and scandals, too, although fewer and less serious ones than the Wall Street Journal and a handful of right wing American Senators,

led by Senator Coleman of Minnesota, and some fevered neo-cons would have you believe.

To put the matter in perspective, sensationalist headlines notwithstanding, far less money went missing in the Oil-for-Food program than in Canada's own sponsorship scandal.

One UN official is accused of defrauding the program of \$140,000; one or two others are accused of irregularities.

None has been convicted.

Even that amount of corruption is unacceptable, of course, but the figures do help to place the scandal in perspective.

Even Saddam Hussein's kick-back schemes and oil smuggling (outside the Oil-for-Food program, by definition) pale into insignificance compared to the disappearance of the \$9 billion that the UN turned over to the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority,

who lost it.

As Mark Malloch Brown said in his John Holmes Lecture, the real corruption was between the companies that bought Iraqi oil (and sold Iraq goods)

and Saddam Hussein, who organized an elaborate kick-back regime, with the knowledge, indeed the participation of some government, notably the Australian.

Overlooked in the recriminations stimulated largely by differences over the Iraq war and the Oil for Food Program, and derived in part from colonial hangovers, has been the fact that the UN has substantially re-invented itself, including in military terms.

Since the end of the Cold War, member countries have been much readier to authorize the use force to stop internal conflicts.

From 1945 until 1989, there were 13 UN military operations.

Since then, there have been approximately 45 military interventions under UN auspices, and the UN's annual peacekeeping budget has grown to over \$6 billion.

Partly as a consequence of UN prevention efforts and interventions, the number of armed conflicts around the world has declined by more than 40%, (the Human Security Report of 2005).

The UN has served as mid-wife in the births of more than 100 countries since 1945, the great majority of which came into being peacefully.

It has also supervised scores of elections and otherwise helped many members make transitions to democracy;

According to Freedom House, over two-thirds of UN member countries are now full or partial democracies.

The passage of a half dozen core human rights treaties and their progressive assimilation into domestic laws has made it possible for an increasing share of the world's people to live in dignity and safety.

An extensive international criminal justice system has developed under UN auspices, a major innovation foreseen nowhere in the original Charter.

Four ad hoc courts have been established to prosecute major crimes: the ICTY, the ICTR and the Cambodia and Sierra Leone hybrid courts, Together they constitute a major innovation, found nowhere in the Charter

A further major judicial innovation has been the creation of the

International Criminal Court (the ICC), currently presided over by Philippe Kirsch, a Canadian.

Now, the world's monsters can no longer sleep soundly in their beds, confident that they are immune to prosecution.

It is instructive, and in a way, encouraging, that from the jungles of Uganda Joseph Kony, head of the murderous Lord's Resistance Army of child soldiers, has attempted to seek immunity from prosecution by the ICC, as have Sudanese officials.

It was, also, to the UN that Lebanon turned for the investigation of the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri.

The UN has given birth to concepts we now take for granted such as sustainable development.

Scores of environmental treaties have been concluded under UN auspices, from protecting the ozone layer to climate change.

Perhaps the most visible recent UN innovation has been the creation of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the office that organized the massive international relief response to the Asian Tsunami,

and to numerous other humanitarian crises spawned by major natural disasters and complex emergencies.

Another potentially very important innovation has been the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission and a Peacebuilding Support Office to help countries back from the abyss of failure and conflict.

A standing police capability for the UN is being created, to complement UN military actions.

And, at the 2005 summit, the UN meeting at head of state and government level, endorsed, “the Responsibility to Protect”, the Canadian initiated idea launched in the aftermath of Srebrenica and Rwanda.

Thirteen counter-terrorism treaties have been concluded by the General Assembly, despite the UN’s regrettable failure to agree to a definition of terrorism,

and the UN Security Council has twice “legislated” the proscription of cooperation with terrorists by member countries.

All told, over 500 multilateral treaties have been concluded under UN auspices.

The point 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 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.

Polling conducted for the BBC World Service in 2006 by GlobeScan and the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland indicates

that while support for the United Nations on the part of the public around the world has flagged somewhat in recent years as the organization has struggled with intractable issues,

the 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.

The most important major international issues continue to be brought to the UN for deliberation, e.g., the Israeli-Lebanese war, and the Iranian nuclear program.

That the UN does not resolve all issues to the satisfaction of all its members and their publics is not a reflection so much on the UN's incompetence,

as it is on the intractability of some major issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, making consensus scarce.

The lesson to take away from this lengthy explication is that the UN 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.

## Canada and the UN

The UN is, or was, in Canadians' DNA.

It is indelibly associated with Canada's golden diplomatic age, with people such as Pearson, Skelton, Robertson, Wrong and others who helped to build the post-war world.

Ever since Pearson's Nobel Prize for his work in 1956, Canadians have thought of themselves as peacekeepers

We have put a picture peacekeepers' images on our currency and built a major monument to them in Ottawa.

In the process, many Canadians have forgotten that our history began before 1956, and that our nation was forged in the trenches of Northern France and Belgium and in the battles of Normandy and Italy

The idea Canadians have about peacekeeping is a romantic one.

Lightly armed young men and women bringing peace to those less fortunate.

No warriors need apply.

But, when I was Permanent Representative to the UN I accepted , 107 posthumous medals for Canadians who gave their lives in peacekeeping, the most of any country—and that was before Afghanistan.

During the periods in office of Prime ministers Trudeau and Mulroney, Canada participated in every peacekeeping mission

When Mr. Chretien was Prime Minister, we participated in many PKO's but not all.

Still, a mini-golden age of diplomacy followed

A seat on the UN Security Council allowed us to promote a Human Security agenda, including:

- the protection of civilians in armed combat
- Responsibility to Protect
- the International Criminal Court
- Blood diamonds
- And, subsequently, keeping Canada out of the 24 Iraq war

Under the stewardship of Prime Minister Martin, Canada accomplished several important objectives.

One hundred and fifty-four heads of state, meeting as the UN General Assembly, endorsed the Canadian-sponsored report on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which calls for the protection of civilians from the predations of their own governments.

Mr. Martin also made the decision to support the UN-mandated military mission in Afghanistan.

Further, he promoted the innovation of the G20, as a complement of the G8.

The G20 is composed of twenty countries, comprising about 80% of the world's population and 90% of its economic output.

Mr. Martin also began to shift our votes at the UN more in support of Israel.

Prime Minister Harper endorsed and enlarged the mission to Afghanistan. He brought greater engagement to the file, particularly as regards the

integration of the military development and diplomacy dimensions of Canada's efforts. However, Canadian diplomacy vis-à-vis Afghanistan and Pakistan needs bolstering.

He also engaged in interest group politics, aligning Canadian Middle East policy more closely with that of Israel and the United States, privileging Taiwan over China, Macedonia over Greece and Armenia over Turkey, and made concessions to Quebec nationalist aspirations for representation abroad.

Regarding the UN Mr. Harper's lyrics have been right but the melody has been discordant.

Mr. Harper's commitment to Canada's Security Council campaign seemed less than full-hearted.

Our contribution to the UN's peace keeping activities continued to retreat in the face of opposition from senior military officers including the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier and the Vice Chief, Admiral Ron Buck.

For Canada's sake, it is time to push the re-set button on Canadian UN policy.

## **Conclusion**

So, to sum up, the UN is doing a far better job than its critics contend and even than its defenders know, but it is not as good a job as we need it to do.

Why doesn't the UN work better?

The simple answer is that it cannot command consensus in a divided world.

It is not because some members are more enlightened, or civilized, than others, although that is assumed in many cases and is even arguably true in some.

It is not because, in the case of the Human Rights Council, the structure needs tweaking, although that might help a bit.

It is mostly because the world is becoming increasingly complex and there is a profound lack of consensus within the international community on just about everything but gravity.

The UN is divided, even fragmented, perhaps to a greater degree than ever before, because the world is divided perhaps to greater degree than ever before.

Certainly more divided and fragmented than I remember it being at any time in my all too long career.

Reform of the UN proper will not come from our telling people to shape up, or to think straight.

It will not come from ratcheting up criticism of High Commissioner for Human Rights or pressuring Secretary General Ban, although that might sometimes be necessary.

Or from proposing yet another structural reform initiative.

Because the problem is not the personalities or the structure.

The problem is the politics.

UN failings are the consequence of disagreements not the cause of them

To put it in its vernacular, and to paraphrase Walt Kelly, in a venerable Pogo cartoon, the enemy is not the Secretariat, or the Security Council, or the Human Rights Council;

The enemy is us--the membership--all of us.

It is the issues that divide us.

It is the political games we play.

The UN can help us solve those problems, but first we have to want solved.