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The U.N. at a Fork in the Road; the United Nations, the United States and Canadian  
Foreign Policy

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Check against Delivery

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“Pride go’eth before... a fall”, according to the Old Testament

In the Autumn of 2001, the United Nations seemed to be riding high. On December 10, Secretary General Annan accepted the U.N.’s 9th Nobel prize. Since then the U.N.’s optimism has faltered in the face of the disdain for it on the part of the world’s only super-power and the sometimes self-destructive behaviour of its poorer members. A lot of the difficulties are laid, rightly, at the door of the U.S., the U.N.’s most powerful and dominant member. Beginning with the advent of this Bush administration, and especially since 9/11, and even until a few days ago, the U.N.’s evident solidarity with the U.S. post 9/11 and its broadly effective partnership in the U.S. war on terrorism has been met by a steady drumbeat of doubt and disrespect from Washington.

Such American hostility to the U.N. is a relatively new phenomenon. Until recently, virtually all U.S. presidents valued, or said they valued, the United Nations. It is worth going back to the beginning and reminding ourselves that skepticism of the U.N. was not always the basic operating principle of U.S. administrations. In his younger days a member of the USA’s league of Nations delegation, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was the driving force internationally for the creation of a United Nations. Truman was equally convinced of the need.

Steven Schlesinger ( son of Arthur Schlesinger ) wrote in *An Act of Creation* that Truman carried a verse from Tennyson in his wallet:

“Till the war-drum throbbed no longer, and the battle-flags were furl’d.  
In the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World.”

- Truman’s first act as president was to maintain the dates of the founding meeting of the U.N. at San Francisco;
- four days after taking office in April, 1945, he directed his San Francisco-based negotiators “to strive for an organization to which all nations would delegate enough powers to prevent another world war.”
- Senator Connolly, one of two Senators on the US delegation (to ensure Senate support, unlike for the League of Nations), said on departing for San Francisco, “The United States has a ... lofty duty to perform in leading the peoples of the earth away from the concept of the rule of the sword.”
- President Eisenhower later recalled that “with all the failures that we can check up against it, the UN still represents man’s best-organized hope to substitute the conference table for the battlefield.”
- Kennedy called in 1963 for the United Nations to become “ a genuine world security system . . . capable of solving disputes on the basis of law”

- Richard Nixon said “ the U.S. will go the extra mile...in doing [its ] part in making the U.N. succeed.
- Speaking at the inauguration of the Reagan Library, president Clinton recalled that Mr. Reagan had said that the U.N. stood as a symbol of the hopes of all mankind for a more peaceful and productive world.

For most of the U.N.’s existence, then, the United States clearly saw its security best assured collectively.

In the meantime, the world has changed, the U.S. has changed and the U.N. has changed but, regrettably, the U.N. has not changed enough.

In the U.S., a conviction has been taking hold that the U.S. is exceptional. This U.S “exceptionalism”, the idea that the U.S. (Ronald Reagan’s shining city on a hill) is different and better, both morally and qualitatively, than the rest of us, justifies a new approach to world affairs. Adherents of this view have held that in the post 9/11 world of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, U.S. security is best, in fact, only assured by the U.S. acting free of the constraints of international law, multilateral institutions and quarrelsome allies.

Coalitions of the “willing” (Posse’s) are, or were, in: alliances based on values are, or were, out. The international community had no legitimacy to impart to U.S.-made decisions. In this vein, Richard Perle, co-author with Canada’s David Frum of a current book on terrorism and, until this Spring the Chairman and now still a member, of the US Defence Policy Board, professed to see two benefits to the war in Iraq:

1. the disappearance of Saddam Hussein
2. and the end of the United Nations, at least of its idea of collective security.

“Thank God for the death of the UN” he wrote in the Guardian, last March.

There has been a lot of such wishful thinking about the U.N.’s eclipse, including in Canada, including in Alberta, mostly by people who are only partly informed of the facts. One thing is for sure—the U.N. has lost a good deal of support in the U.S. because it would not endorse the war in Iraq. And it has lost a lot of support internationally because it could not prevent the war. Still, the fact is that while the Iraq war did raise the profile of some of the U.N.’s inadequacies, it did not itself create them.

The U.N. suffers from old-think at a time when it is facing decidedly new challenges. Most important, there is a growing contradiction between a central tenet of the Charter- national sovereignty (Art 2.4) and the Charter’s most sacred purpose—“Saving succeeding generations from the scourges of war” – or , at least, of war. Because increasingly those wars start out being internal.

The U.N. has had its undeniable failures—notably Rwanda and Kosovo. It has countenanced behaviour that has brought discredit to the organization, notably the Durban Conference against Racism and its putting Libya in the chair of the Human rights committee. Some of the apologies for the U.N. have been almost equally as wrong-headed as the criticism of it has been..

Today I am asserting three simple truths:

1. multilateral cooperation is indispensable and
2. the UN is central to multilateral cooperation
3. The UN is flawed and needs fixing, now more than ever, U.N. reform is necessary, possible and in everyone's interests.

It took the Second World War to create the U.N.; perhaps the Iraq war will be stimulus enough to change it.

Multilateral cooperation- not multilateralism- not ideology. Multilateral cooperation is a complement to bilateral cooperation, an not alternative. We do not have to choose between the U.S. and the U.N. Multilateral cooperation is a means , not an end--but an extremely important means.

Consider

- e.g. terrorism; UN's 12 conventions and capacity-building
- e.g. arms control and disarmament; nuclear non-proliferation regime
- e.g. health threats; can't bomb SARS
- e.g. climate change, ozone holes
- e.g. international trade & investment rules

The UN is central to multilateral cooperation

**Consider also:**

UNICEF- 575 million children inoculated  
WFP- 77 million people fed  
UNHCR- 22 million housed  
UNMAS- 65 million sq. meters cleared  
UNFPA- reproductive health in 140 countries

This work has been belittled by some as mere international social work— but it is social work with very real human and security benefits. The U.N. is a powerful idea and it can be more than the sum of its parts. Sometimes regrettably it can be less than the sum of its parts. To know what the U.N. is, it is important to be clear what it is not.

The UN is not a world government.

SG not a head of state

SC not a cabinet

GA not a Parliament of Man

Nor is the U.N. Charter an international constitution, although it has some of the attributes of a constitution, including its resistance to change. The Charter, written in and for a different age, is not fully up to the challenges the U.N. faces. The fundamental reform issue facing the UN as an entity is determining when to intervene in the internal affairs of a member state.

- intervention for humanitarian purposes
- intervention for security purposes ( e.g. terrorism, WMD )
- intervention for political purposes (overthrow of democracy)

Unfortunately, the Iraq war conflated these issues – and made consensus on reform both more urgent and more remote.

(Excerpts from the speech of SG Annan to this year’s general debate:)

“Some say...[that] since an armed attack with weapons of mass destruction could be launched at any time...states have the right and obligation to use force preemptively”

(The SG clearly was referring to this US Administration)

“This logic represents a fundamental challenge to the principles on which, however imperfect, world peace and stability have rested for the last fifty-eight years...”

The Secretary General went on to say that this could result “in a proliferation of the unilateral and lawless use of force, with or without justification.” Finally, 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.”

Third Point: UN reform—even radical change-- is possible because it is in everyone’s interests – including the USA’s interest that the organization functions. Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Kennedy, arguably Reagan, certainly Bush I – all believed an effective UN was in the US interest – US dominated the UN for 50 years. It is not clear whether Bush II agrees or not. Certainly there is plenty of evidence that some leading members of his Administration, notably Vice-President Cheney, disagree.

9/11 has triggered a revolution in American foreign policy – WMD + terrorism = doctrine of prevention (not preemption) doctrine. That revolution puts seventy years of the development of international law, much of it under U.S. leadership, in jeopardy. But the Iraq war, especially the aftermath, clearly shows that even the U.S. cannot afford to live in opposition to the rest of the world.

As Robert Kagan argued in a New York Times article earlier this week, no one has made this argument more presciently than that quintessential realist, Henry Kissinger.

" America's "special responsibility, as the most powerful nation in the world," Kissinger wrote, "is to work toward an international system that rests on more than military power - indeed, that strives to translate power into cooperation. Any other attitude will gradually isolate and exhaust us."

Regrettably, the war in Iraq has had precisely that effect. But in recent days, we have seen encouraging signs of a renewed openness in Washington to the U.N., even a new appreciation of the U.N.'s qualities. And a renewed responsiveness on the part of the U.N. Very few member countries see any advantage in the vortex of Iraq. It has also made U.N. reform both more important and more difficult, even as it has enormously damaged the standing of the U.S. itself.

All of the certitude about weapons of mass destruction and terrorist connections has only deepened the suspicions of the world community about the purposes of U.N. reform, especially as regards intervention for humanitarian purposes. It has also fueled doubts about the United States. And little wonder. Consider the evidence:

- 1) O'Neil – Former Secretary of the Treasury, in the Price of Loyalty said that Rumsfeld pushed the idea of regime change in Feb 2001 as a way to transform the middle east.
- 2) Consider President Bush's 2003 state of the Union speech assertion about Iraq's importation of uranium from Africa, a canard that took the IAEA a day or so to disprove.
- 3) Consider the testimony of Secretary of State Powell, with C.I.A. Director Tenet sitting behind him in the U.N. Security Council.

I personally sat and listened to the Secretary make a long, detailed explication of Iraq's weapons and terrorist ties, virtually not one word of which has been born out by the facts.

Consider the explanation given by Wolfowitz, U.S. deputy secretary of Defence that they put the emphasis on WMD because bureaucratically that was all they could agree on.

Consider the report of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace:

- in Iraq, WMD was not an immediate threat
- Inspections were working
- Terrorism connection was missing

- War was not the best or only option

That was precisely the view of the Government of Canada.

Consider the conclusions of the report published last week by the *US Army War College*:

- 1) The invasion of Iraq was a strategic error.
- 2) It was a distraction in the war on terrorism.
- 3) The war on Terrorism is un-winnable - redefine and focus on Al- Qaeda.

Consider Kenneth Pollach's article in this Month's Atlantic Magazine, entitled 'Weapons of Misperception' "I never believed that it was necessary for the US to go to war as early as 2003 ....the threat was not imminent."

It is clear that the US has an uphill job to reestablish trust in the positions it takes on international issues, including on U.N. reform. All of this is not to say that the U.N. is not reformable. Hostility and suspicions notwithstanding, U.N. member states are well aware that the organization must change. No one believes the U.N. will still be the same as it is now at its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The Secretary General has established a blue ribbon panel to examine UN reforms both what the UN does and how the UN does it in particular in that order. Clearly the US action in Iraq was the stimulus for the SG's initiative. Some think that this reform attempt is the UN's last chance to make itself relevant to both the greatest and the smallest.

It is possible to imagine a fragmentation of the UN:

- WHO does health
- UNICEF does children
- UNDP does development
- Etc

Imagine such a fragmentation but not welcome it. Because such fragments would be less than the sum of the parts the U.N. would no longer be a powerful, action-galvanizing idea. Much, much better to run the risks of reform than to settle for the alternative. But for reform to succeed, U.N. member states must surmount their doubts about each other and about the U.N. itself.

Canada has the standing to contribute to this effort. When I spoke for Canada at the U.N., I was always given a respectful hearing. Largely because others rightly saw Canada as one of the very few countries where tolerance and generosity towards minorities and foreigners was the norm. Our years of peacekeeping and trying to put the protection of people at the heart of our foreign policy has gained us considerable respect. Our decision to stay out of the war has gained us substantial political credit with the less powerful among the

U.N.'s members. And with many, probably most of the more powerful, as well. We need to use this stored up political capital to work with the Third World countries, the Africans above all, to persuade them that adapting the idea of national sovereignty is in their interest. It is the Africans who most need intervention. We also can work to persuade the Latin Americans, who hear echoes of the Monroe Doctrine in Iraq, that a less rigid interpretation of national sovereignty is not the threat to them they believe it to be.

We also need to help the Secretary General rebalance the international agenda. We need to help him ensure that the pressing insecurities of the poor four-fifths of humanity—poverty and disease, especially HIV-AIDS and malaria- the real weapons of mass destruction, are also addressed. If we can help the U.N. on this score, we also help the Americans in the process. They need the U.N. to adopt to changing times, to become more relevant to their worries about the nexus of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. They cannot achieve their security goals on their own. For their part, the Americans need to recapture the spirit of Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy and others – to work with the UN not against it, to adapt the U.N., not try to destroy it.

In recent days, we have seen encouraging signs of a renewed openness in Washington to the U.N., even a new appreciation of the U.N.'s qualities. And that shift has been met by a renewed responsiveness on the part of the U.N. to help them. Very few member countries see any advantage in the vortex of Iraq. Canada can help both direct in the reconstruction in Iraq and on the war against Al Qaeda and indirectly through an effective independent foreign policy. To be effective we need to put both our innovative and imaginative diplomatic service, our very knowledgeable NGOs and our world-class academic community to work –collaboratively. We need to harness the enormous talent in this country better. And ultimately we need the courage of our own convictions. We need to be true to our own values.

For these circumstances, that old diplomatic strategist William Shakespeare had good advice:

“To thine own self be true  
And it must follow, as the night the day  
Thou canst not then be false to any man” especially not to yourself

Thank you.



## Canada and the United States: What Should Canada Do

Rule of thumb for successive Canadian Governments has been not too close  
{ Martin trying to end chippiness not too far }

2) We need to manage relations, not let them take their own course- hence Mr Martin's creation of a Cabinet Cttee on US affairs that he will chair

3) We need to understand what works with Washington. Influence in Washington comes from having an effective personal relationship with the President-The world's biggest agenda but still only 24 hours in his day. (Mulroney's secret-invested in his relations with all leaders). It also comes from coming from mattering on the world scene; the U.S. can't run the world alone. Mattering on the world scene requires an effective foreign policy-that in turn means investing seriously in defence, and in foreign aid, and in diplomacy foreign policy has to be a "must do" not a "nice to do".

4) We need to recognize we will inevitably differ on some things-values determine interests in foreign affairs-Canadian and American values diverge--but "complementarity"

5) We need to make our own judgments

Some say no choice; but there is also a choice;  
The issue is not choice but price

For these circumstances, that old military strategist William Shakespeare had good advice:

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Thank You