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Without the United Nations, diplomacy would be done retail, one capital and one issue at a time. For most countries, including the United States, assuring security and promoting prosperity would be much more complex and much less efficient. Washington would sideline New York but Beijing, Brussels, Tokyo, New Delhi, Moscow and Brasilia would all grow enormously in diplomatic significance.

One mooted multilateral alternative to the UN, an organization of democracies, would be limited in its utility by its exclusion of non-democracies, which constitute one-third of the UN's membership and probably two-thirds of its problems. Nor would a democratic caucus deliver identity of interest or, as the Iraq war showed, certainty of agreement.

The worst impact of a UN dissolution would be on the UN Charter and its norm against aggression, i.e., the heart of international law. Power would come again to trump principle, triggering the resurrection of balance of power diplomacy, which ended the last time in catastrophic losses in two World Wars, and which is unproven in combating terrorism.

It is not obvious how the Security Council's deliberative and decision-making roles would be replaced. "Coalitions of the willing", thinly disguised American enterprises, have scarcely been either coalitions or willing. Or successful. How would international legitimacy be conferred on international intervention? Without it, who would want to help pick up the pieces afterwards? Nor would NATO membership likely acquiesce in the organization becoming Globocop.

Were the UN General Assembly to disappear, international norm-building would go with it, handicapping human rights and democracy promotion, environmental protection and counter-terrorism efforts in the process. Some of the hundreds of treaties the Assembly has spawned would survive but their treaty-implementing bodies, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), would atrophy. Without the IAEA, the Non-Proliferation Treaty regime, the key to dissuading scores of states from developing their own nuclear weapons, would be an early casualty. Further, were post-UN diplomacy unable to replicate the Security Council's prohibitions against the financing and harboring of terrorists, the dreaded WMD and terrorism nexus would be brought closer.

Were the Charter institutions of the Secretary General and the Secretariat to disappear, conflict prevention would become less effective and post-conflict peace-building would become more difficult. In the absence of the UN's core headquarters functions, its Funds and Programs might well wither, leaving the many millions of people who would once have been sheltered by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and sustained by the World Food Program to fend for themselves. The inoculation programs of UNICEF would disappear and millions of children would once again perish from preventable childhood diseases. The WHO might atrophy, making the entire world

vulnerable to globe-trotting viruses and bio-terrorism. The ozone hole would grow and climatic events would worsen.

There is blame enough for the UN's diminished reputation to go around, although the unsanctioned Iraq war was a major shock to the system. Washington could do itself and all other democratic countries an incalculable favour, nevertheless, if, while in the diplomatic driver's seat in a temporarily uni-polar world, it would refrain from deprecating the UN and disparaging international law. We are going to need the UN's rules of the road when new hummers appear on the inter-state system.