
The UN, the U.S., and the World

By

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Good afternoon. I am delighted to be here.

As some of you may know, I was scheduled to be in San Diego seven months ago, at the World Affairs Council. Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on your point of view, the Federal Government shut down, and I was grounded.

I hope very much that we will not see a repeat of that kind of gridlock this year, because I dread having to explain to my diplomatic colleagues who is doing what to whom and why. At the UN, the last time around, even those who represent democratic governments were confused about what was going on in Washington. Those who represent non-democratic governments were totally mystified. And all the Iraqis wanted to know is when I was going to be furloughed.

So I am very happy to be here with you. This is a terrific event. I understand you have already heard from Winston Lord about Asia.

My assignment—which I welcome—is to discuss with you the United Nations and why our leadership there matters. To put the issue most bluntly, when it comes to the United Nations—what's in it for us?

The starting point is basic. America is a global power with global interests. Our economy depends on trade. Our workers, farmers, and students compete with those from around the world. Our families are vulnerable to illegal drugs, pollution, and deadly diseases that originate beyond our borders. Transnational crime is on the rise. And our security is threatened by international terrorists, by the chance that small conflicts could spread, and by the possibility that nuclear weapons might fall into the wrong hands.

As a nation, and as individuals, we will do better and be safer in an environment where our values are widely shared, markets are open, military clashes are constrained, and those who run roughshod over the rights of others are brought to heel.

But we cannot create this kind of global environment on our own.

Certainly, to safeguard our most vital interests, we need to keep our armed forces strong—and as President Clinton has pledged—we will.

We need to conduct vigorous diplomacy in strategic areas of the world—and under the direction of Secretary of State Christopher—we are.

But we also need to strengthen institutions—such as the UN—that allow people from around the world to work together.

The UN is unique because it is the only multi-purpose organization in which virtually every nation on Earth has a voice. And when that voice speaks as one, as it did during the 1980's in protesting apartheid and, more recently, during Operation Desert Storm, it carries enormous credibility.

The UN performs many important functions but its most conspicuous role—and the primary reason it was established—is to help nations preserve peace.

One means of doing this is through the International Atomic Energy Agency, one of the specialized agencies of the UN system. The IAEA has played a central role in the effort to prevent nuclear materials from being stolen or diverted into the construction of nuclear arms. Its success in that effort is vital to us all.

The value of the UN, itself, in responding to aggression and preventing conflict is real, but limited. During the Cold War, its ability to act was hindered by rivalry between the superpowers.

However, after the Berlin Wall fell, and this era of relative cooperation dawned, new opportunities arose for settling conflicts. Many saw in the UN a relatively cost and risk free solution to the job of maintaining world order.

In 1992, President Bush said that:

Never before. . . have the UN's Blue Helmets and Blue Berets been so engaged in the noble work of peacekeeping. . . and so compelled to step up to the task of peacemaking, both to resolve hot wars and to conduct that forward-looking mission known as preventive diplomacy.

The following year, the Secretary-General spelled out an Agenda For Peace that went far beyond the traditional UN role of monitoring cease-fires with the consent of the parties involved. The new menu for action included humanitarian relief, disarming troops, repatriating refugees, and laying the groundwork for national reconstruction. Soon, the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations had been transformed into a 24 hour a day operation. And the number of UN peacekeepers rose from 10,000 in 1991 to 75,000 in 1994 before dropping back to fewer than 30,000 today.

The results of this activity have been mixed.

In Cambodia, a landmark election was held under UN supervision—and more than 90 percent of eligible voters went to the polls; hundreds of thousands of refugees returned to their homes; and the killing fields that were once the scene of genocidal violence are used now to grow food.

In El Salvador, the UN brokered a peace agreement that ended a dozen years of brutal fighting, and stayed on to help reform the Army and permit democratic institutions to take root.

In Namibia, Mozambique, and we hope—now Angola—the UN is helping to end decades of civil strife and to direct local energies to building true nations, based on law and dedicated to social progress.

And, in Haiti, the UN has continued the work a U.S.-led multinational force began, by monitoring the first transfer of power from one freely-elected leader to another in the history of that country. Last February, I was in Port au Prince for the inauguration of the new President. And as I looked around the crowd, I could not help but think that many of those cheering people would have ended up on leaky rafts headed for our shores if we, and the UN, had not acted to restore democracy.

Although UN peacekeepers have accomplished much, there is a limit to what we can expect them to do. As we saw in Somalia and Bosnia, the challenge of keeping a peace is far simpler than that of creating a secure environment in the midst of ongoing conflict. In the absence of full agreement among its principal members, the UN is not well-equipped on its own to manage operations in which robust military action is required. It is vital, therefore, that we tailor UN missions to UN capabilities.

At our insistence, the Security Council now applies rigorous guidelines to the start of any new peace operation. We are demanding good answers to questions about cost, size, risk, mandate, and exit strategy before, not after, we vote.

We are also working with other countries to improve the UN's ability to respond rapidly to emergency situations. This serves our interests, because we know that the better able the UN is to contain or end conflict, the less likely it is that we will have to send our own forces overseas.

The UN's role in responding to conflicts and other emergencies is especially important now, when we have so many of them. Like other eras of historical transition, ours is beset by political upheaval. The human costs are high. Over the past decade, the number of regional conflicts has quintupled and the population at risk is up sixty percent.

Americans are a generous people, but we could not begin to cope with such a crisis alone. Today, twenty-seven million people are under the care of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Last year, more than fifty-seven million people were fed by the World Food Program. Working with the Red Cross and other non-governmental organizations, UN agencies provide the shelter, food, medicine, and protection that help families displaced by violence or disaster to get back on their feet and resume normal lives.

The UN is also on the frontlines of the battle against the permanent emergencies caused by poverty and disease. Each year, the child immunization programs of UNICEF make the difference between death and life for three million boys and girls. The UN Development Program is coordinating efforts to increase economic and educational opportunities for women. And the citizens of every country are safer because the World Health Organization has won the war against smallpox, is winning the war against polio, and has begun an all out war against AIDS.

There are times when we forget that the UN is not about bureaucrats giving speeches, but about people reaching out to each other. Over the past several years, I have been to some very desperate corners of the world. I have spoken to families uprooted by violence from the homes in which they had lived for generations. I have seen urban neighborhoods constructed out of tin and cardboard, wedged into ravines, where nothing grows except the appetites of young children. I have seen mothers ravaged with worry that their sons or daughters would wander too far from the front gate and detonate a land mine. I have seen volunteers working day and night trying to re-assemble the skeletons of those victimized by genocidal violence in Rwanda so that the murderers may be brought to trial.

The UN is one instrument that we use to make this world a little less inhumane, a little less brutal, a little less unfair than it otherwise would be. Americans care about this, and we should. Because we know that desperation is a parent to violence, that democratic principles are often among the victims of poverty, and that lawlessness is a contagious disease.

This brings us to another important, and basic, function of the United Nations. And that is its role in creating a global consensus about what is right and what is wrong.

At the simplest level, this means setting standards that facilitate international communication and trade. You may think you have never benefited personally from the UN, but

if you have ever traveled on an international airline or shipping line; or placed a phone call overseas; or received mail from outside the country; or been thankful for an accurate weather report—then you have been served directly or indirectly by one part or another of the UN system.

A more dramatic example of the UN's norm-setting role is its use of economic sanctions against rogue states.

For example, at our insistence, and that of the British and French, the UN has imposed sanctions against the Government of Libya for its refusal to turn over for trial those suspected of sabotaging Pan Am 103. We are determined that the killers in that case be brought to justice.

In addition, since the end of the Persian Gulf war, strict economic and weapons sanctions have been in place against Iraq. Our purpose has been to prevent that country from once again developing weapons of mass destruction or threatening its neighbors with aggression.

Those sanctions have worked. Saddam Hussein's most cherished weapons programs are being dismantled. Missiles and missile launchers have been destroyed. And as we speak, a major biological weapons factory near Baghdad is being demolished.

In imposing sanctions, we had no wish to hurt the Iraqi people. We exempted food and medicine and offered Saddam Hussein a chance to sell oil to buy additional humanitarian supplies. Last month, after years of delay, Saddam finally accepted our offer, but the ruthless nature of his regime has not changed.

He continues to squander Iraq's money building palaces for his cronies. He continues to support international terrorism and to repress his own people. And he continues even this week to block UN inspectors and evade full compliance with Security Council Resolutions.

So the burden of proof remains not on us; but on Iraq. Before sanctions are lifted, Iraq must demonstrate through actions, not words, that its intentions are now peaceful and that it respects the law of nations. After so many lies, that proof will not come easy.

Saddam Hussein's complaints about the unfairness of all this remind me of the story about the schoolboy who came home with his face damaged and his clothes torn. When his mother asked him how the fight started, he said: "It started when the other guy hit me back."

The UN's role in bolstering the rule of justice and law is evident also in the work of the UN Commission on Human Rights, in the establishment of War Crimes Tribunals for Rwanda and the Balkans, and in the forum it provides for gaining agreement on matters as fundamental as child labor and the need to stop violence against women and girls.

Taken as a whole, UN contributions are important to us; they are among the building blocks of a safer and more just world. And yet, we each pay less than \$7 a year for the entire UN system, for everything from blue helmets for peacekeepers to polio vaccines for babies. That's about the price of a ticket to Mission Impossible or—if you must—The Cable Guy.

Now, there is a myth propagated by some that the United States is running around the world doing the bidding of the UN. In New York, much of the foreign diplomatic corps would argue that the reverse is closer to the truth.

Under the UN Charter, it is the Security Council that has responsibility for authorizing responses to lawless international behavior, including threats to peace. As a permanent member of the Council, we have great influence over what it decides. For example, Security Council support was vital in enabling President Bush to organize the multinational coalition that won the

Persian Gulf War. More recently, the Security Council helped President Clinton gain agreement from others to participate in restoring democracy to Haiti, and joined us in deploring the illegal shutdown by Cuba of two U.S. civilian aircraft.

Opponents of American participation and leadership in the UN should understand: we do not face a choice between acting through the UN and acting alone. An effective UN is one tool among many. If you're building a house; for some jobs, you'll need a wrench, for some a hammer, for some a screwdriver, for some all three. So in diplomacy, an instrument like the UN will be useful in some situations, useless in others, and absolutely essential for getting the whole job done.

Despite all this, we know that some Americans are simply never going to be comfortable with the UN. Either they fear it will evolve into a world government, which is nonsense; or they are upset by the fact that it is full of foreigners, which really can't be helped.

There are, however, more serious criticisms.

Here in California, and throughout our country, citizens are demanding a dollar's worth of value for every tax dollar we spend. Our contributions to the UN should be no exception. Unfortunately, the UN developed wasteful habits during the Cold War that have yet to be fully cured.

Part of the problem is that the UN, because it has so many members, is inherently hard to manage. I have often compared it to a business with 185 members of the board; each from a different culture; each with a different philosophy of management; each with unshakable confidence in his or her own opinions; and each with a brother-in-law who is unemployed.

As a result, the UN bureaucracy has grown to elephantine proportions. Now, that the Cold War is over, we are asking that elephant to do gymnastics.

That is why the Clinton Administration, with strong support from both parties in Congress, has been pushing so hard for UN reform.

That effort has already produced results. A UN Inspector General has been appointed to crack down on fraud and waste.

The UN's Undersecretary General for Management is a former CEO of Price-Waterhouse who is applying lessons in efficiency learned in the corporate world.

Last December, the General Assembly approved a "no-growth" budget that will result in a ten percent reduction in the number of UN Secretariat staff. A new efficiency board has been created. A high-level group on reform has been charged with developing a blueprint for the UN of the 21st century. And we have proposed a host of additional steps to make the UN smaller, better organized and more productive.

It is becoming clear, however, that we will not be able to gain support from other countries to make the kind of far-reaching changes we want unless we are able to pay our own UN bills. Currently, we are about \$1 billion behind.

As a result, in recent months, when I have tried to focus my colleagues on the reform agenda, I have found instead that the United States has become the agenda. Whenever I talk about how we can make the UN more efficient, I am told by friendly and not-so-friendly nations alike: if you want the UN to work better, why don't you pay what you owe?

The situation is so bad that the British Foreign Secretary accused us recently of seeking “representation without taxation,” a soundbite his countrymen have been waiting 200 years to use.

While it is possible that there are some in Congress who will never support funding for the UN; I am convinced that the majority would like to see us pay what we owe. As one Senate Committee chairman told me, “the sanctity of contracts is fundamental to Republican philosophy. It’s only those liberals who think you can have something for nothing.”

Accordingly, we are asking Congress to approve this year a five year plan for paying our arrears to the UN. As we expect Congress will insist, the actual payment of those funds would occur as the UN reforms, keeps its budget down, and cuts unnecessary staff. We will also be asking UN members to reduce from 25 percent to 20 percent the U.S. share of the UN’s regular budget. The way the UN works, this would have the effect of reducing our peacekeeping rate to no more than 25 percent.

The result of all this for the UN would be a more equitable and reliable system of financing. And for the American people, it would assure our continued leadership within a more effective UN at a reduced cost consistent with our effort to balance the budget. In other words, this is a true “win-win” proposition.

Especially, now that the Cold War is over, the UN has become a valuable contributor to goals that are at the heart of U.S. foreign policy, including peace, democracy, and human rights. In pursuit of these objectives, it gives us military and diplomatic options we would not otherwise have. And it helps us to influence events without assuming the full burden of costs and risks. That is why former President Reagan urged us to “rely more on multilateral institutions.” It is why former President Bush said recently that we should “pay our debts to the UN.” And it is why the Clinton Administration will continue to place a high priority on our leadership there.

We should never forget that the UN emerged not from a dream, but a nightmare. In the 1920’s and 30’s, the world squandered an opportunity to organize the peace. The result was Kristalnacht, the invasion of Manchuria, the conquest of Ethiopia, the betrayal of Munich—and the devastation of world war.

The generation that won that war viewed the horror, and said “never again.” They vowed to save future generations from the scourge of war. They recognized that, in the atomic age, people would have to learn to live together, or they would not live at all.

These were not naive people. They understood well the frailties of humankind, and the yawning gap between how we would like the world to be and how it is; between promised behavior and reality.

When Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg returned to Washington from the Convention in San Francisco where the UN Charter was drafted, he was challenged by those who thought it too idealistic, even utopian. He replied that:

You may tell me that I have but to scan the present world with realistic eyes in order to see the fine phrases (of the Charter) . . . reduced to a shambles. . . . I reply that the nearer right you may be . . . the greater is the need for the new pattern which promises . . . to stem these evil tides.

The Truman-Vandenberg generation understood that although the noble aspects of human nature had made the UN possible, it was the ignoble aspects that had made it necessary.

It is up to us in our time to do what they did in their time. To accept the responsibilities of leadership. To defend freedom. And to build and revitalize institutions like the UN that help keep the peace, extend the rule of law, promote social progress and protect American interests around the world.

Towards that end, the Clinton Administration has pledged its best efforts.