

POLICY *focus*

RECIPES FOR RATIONAL GOVERNMENT

SEPTEMBER 2019

A Real World Primer on the United Nations

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Introduction

At the end of World War II the victorious powers founded the United Nations, with a noble goal: “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.” The UN’s charter mission includes encouraging and promoting global peace and prosperity, “fundamental human rights” and “fundamental freedoms for all.”

Unfortunately, the UN has not lived up to these grand dreams. Not only has it fallen far short, but too often, on too many fronts, the UN has actively undermined basic freedoms and human rights, pandered to dictators, and fostered conditions that fuel rather than prevent conflict.

These persistent UN failings track back to fundamental flaws in its design. The UN might sound like a democratic institution, because its 193 member states vote to determine its course. But a majority of these countries are not fully free and democratic; some are outright tyrannies. And unlike a democratic government, the UN is not accountable to any coherent and enforceable legal jurisdiction or any genuinely empowered constituency of voters. There is no mechanism for reliably ensuring the UN complies with its own charter.

Nonetheless, in the name of maintaining a peaceful world order, the U.S. has served since the UN’s founding as both host to its New York headquarters, and chief financial patron of the UN system, bankrolling with U.S. tax dollars an outsized share of the UN’s ever expanding budget. The result has been to sustain and entrench a global institution where the agenda and activities often run counter to U.S. values and interests.

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Why You Should Care

The UN has a significant effect on our lives, influencing policy on many fronts, from economic development, to debates on climate, matters of war and peace and nuclear proliferation.

- **The UN promotes central planning**, with its “development goals” and aid programs often carried out in cahoots with despotic governments whose misrule keeps their own people poor.
- **The UN legitimizes dictators**, welcoming them to the privileges of membership, with seats in the General Assembly and full voting rights, alongside the governments of democracies.
- **The U.S., not the UN, deserves credit** for world progress and relative peace since WWII. While the UN likes to claim credit, the real bulwark of peace and freedom has been the United States, with its Pax Americana, maintained over many decades at great cost to Americans in blood and treasure. It was America, not the UN, that won the Cold War. And it is America, not the UN, that is seriously grappling today with such predatory dictatorships as China, Russia, Iran and North Korea. It is important to understand that in navigating today’s increasingly perilous global landscape, the UN is more often a hindrance to the U.S. than a help.

Overview of the United Nations

Established in 1945 with 51 member states, the UN has since grown to include 193 members. Among the members that have joined since the founding are many former colonies that became independent nations, as well as countries that broke away as the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 (and was replaced at the UN by Russia).

Under the UN charter, membership is open to “peace-loving states” that accept the obligations of the charter and are able and willing to carry them out. The UN violated that charter condition from its first day, in conferring founding membership on Stalin’s Soviet Union, and again in more recent times as the 1991 admission of North Korea demonstrates.

Secretary-General

The most prominent figure at the UN is the Secretary-General, who runs the Secretariat, and whose job is described in the charter as “chief administrative officer of the Organization.” The Security Council recommends candidates for Secretary-General, who are appointed by majority vote of the full General Assembly to serve for a maximum of two five-year terms. Secretaries-General can leave a considerable imprint on the UN.

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The current Secretary-General is Portugal’s Antonio Guterres, who took office in 2017. He is the ninth man since the UN’s founding to hold the post (there has never been a woman Secretary-General). His resume includes six years as the president of the Socialist International, and roughly a decade as head of the UN’s refugee agency (UNHCR)—in which role he was found to

be managerially incompetent by the UN's own auditors. Since becoming UN chief, Guterres has racked up a record for praising China over its global initiatives, while sidelining or ignoring its gross human rights abuses.

Among the previous Secretaries-General was Austria's Kurt Waldheim, who served from 1972-1981. Waldheim's official UN biography does not mention his complicity in Nazi atrocities during World War II. But it was on his watch, in 1975, that the UN General Assembly approved its infamous "Zionism is racism" resolution (a slander repealed in 1991, thanks to extensive efforts by the U.S.).

General Assembly

The main body of the UN is the General Assembly, in which each of the 193 member states, including the U.S., wields one vote. Resolutions of the General Assembly are nonbinding, but can have a significant effect on world opinion and debates.

It is therefore troubling that the biggest voting blocs in the GA have often been headed by dictatorships. For instance, in recent years the leader of the 120-member Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)—accounting for almost two-thirds of the seats in the UN General Assembly—has been the ruinously misruled socialist country of Venezuela (preceded by Iran). This past July, Venezuelan dictator Nicolas Maduro, who has refused to cede power to the legitimate acting president, Juan Guaido, presided at a NAM ministerial meeting in Caracas. This meeting, notably attended by the foreign minister of terror-sponsoring Iran, received lavish praise from the sitting president of the UN General Assembly, Ecuador's Maria Fernanda Espinosa. She lauded Venezuela for its leadership.

By tradition, important UN seats are also parceled out to geographic voting blocs, which for some regions yields Orwellian results. Currently, the UN's flagship agency, the UN Development Program, includes on its 36-member executive board such paragons of warped development as Russia, China, Iran, Cuba and Saudi Arabia. The UN's children's agency, UNICEF, fields a similar litany of despotic board members: Sudan, Belarus, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan and China—which only recently ended a long-running "one-child" government policy that entailed forced abortions and sterilizations. At the UN's agency for women (UN Women), the 36 board members include Iran and Saudi Arabia—both notorious for their repression not only of their citizens in general, but of women in particular.

Similarly, the UN Human Rights Council is an egregious and chronic case of UN perversion. It is a magnet for dictatorships that join it not to pursue better politics on human rights, but to twist the definition of human rights to cast themselves as the good guys. Its current membership includes China, Cuba, Saudi Arabia and Somalia.

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Security Council

The Security Council bears primary responsibility at the UN for maintaining world peace and order. Unlike the General Assembly, it has the power to pass resolutions that are officially binding. The Council has 15 members, five of which hold permanent seats and wield veto power over the Council's resolutions. These five are the U.S., Britain, France, China and Russia, all nuclear powers. The remaining 10 seats are filled on a rotating basis by member states elected by the General Assembly to two-year terms on the Security Council.

Because of the veto powers held by the Permanent Five, the Security Council is often gridlocked on major issues. In particular, it is impotent to address directly the growing threats to peace posed by two of its own veto-wielding members, Russia and China. But the deeper problem with the Security Council is that for all its majesty within the UN, it has no serious ability to enforce its own resolutions. Enforcement is left to individual UN member states. This means, for example, that even when China votes in favor of sanctions against North Korea, within China's borders it is left to China to enforce those sanctions—which China has a long record of violating. The result is that despite stacks of Security Council resolutions, all approved by China, imposing sanctions since 2006 on North Korea's missile and nuclear programs, North Korea has amassed a nuclear arsenal.

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Scandals, Fraud, Waste and Abuse

Scandals at the UN have ranged from financial scams to raw anti-Semitism to grotesque complicity with dictators. Among the most notorious was the Oil-for-Food scandal, in which from 1996-2003 the UN promised to oversee Saddam Hussein's oil sales out of UN-sanctioned Iraq, with the goal of ensuring that the profits were spent on food and medicine for the Iraqi people. Instead, the UN to its own huge financial benefit became complicit in, and helped cover up for, Saddam's global web of tyranny-sustaining graft, kickbacks, money-laundering and weapons purchases, all of it paid for with billions filched from oil revenues that the UN was supposed to ensure were dedicated to humanitarian relief.

Among a plethora of other UN scandals, one of the most disturbing is the chronic problem of UN peacekeepers raping or sexually exploiting people they are dispatched to protect, including minors. This phenomenon surfaced in news reports more than 15 years ago, and the UN to this day, despite an official policy of "zero tolerance," has failed to stop it. There have also been alarming abuses, such as the 2007 "Cash-for-Kim" scandal in which the UN was discovered turning over cash and potential weapons technology and materials to North Korea. And there have been cases of jaw-dropping hypocrisy, such as the recent case of the jet-setting Norwegian head of the UN Environment Program—which advocates that the rest of us cut

down on air travel—being forced to resign when UN auditors discovered that over 22 months he'd incurred \$488,000 in travel expenses.

The UN Budget and U.S. Tax Dollars

Since the UN's founding, the U.S. has been by far the single biggest contributor to its budget, including 22 percent of a regular General Assembly budget that for 2019 totals roughly \$3 billion. But the General Assembly budget is just a small fraction of the UN's system-wide budget, for its multitude of agencies and offices, which by the UN's own most recent figures, for 2017, totaled a staggering \$53 billion. To this, according to the UN, the U.S. in 2017 contributed \$10.5 billion, or close to one-fifth. That's more than double the closest contender, Germany, with \$4 billion, and more than 10 times the contribution of China, now the world's second-largest economy, which chipped in \$1.4 billion.

What does the U.S. get for all that taxpayer money? In some important ways, less than nothing. Along with the security costs and gridlock involved every September in hosting the UN General Assembly's annual opening debate in midtown Manhattan, the U.S. gets to be the chief financial patron of the UN's dictator-infested councils and anti-American prejudices. State Department records of UN voting practices show that in 2017, the most recent year for which State offers data, the voting coincidence of the UN's other 192 member states with the U.S. position was a mere 31 percent.

A former Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, summed up this noxious scene—and its implications—quite neatly while still on the job in December 2017. She was responding to a vote in which the General Assembly, in opposition to the U.S., overwhelmingly condemned President Trump's decision to move the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Telling the assembled envoys, "Unlike in some member countries, the United States government is answerable to its people," Haley reminded them that "the U.S. is by far the single largest contributor to the United Nations and its agencies... As such, we have an obligation to acknowledge when our political and financial capital is being poorly spent... and if our investment fails, we have an obligation to spend our resources in more productive ways."

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What You Can Do

Get Informed

Learn more about the UN. Visit:

- [UN Watch](#)
- [The Heritage Foundation](#)
- [U.S. Mission to the UN, Management and Reform Section](#)

Look Beyond Propaganda

Approach the news with a critical eye, and trust your instincts: if it sounds like Orwellian nonsense from the UN, it probably is.

Educate the Next Generation

Model UN programs exist to teach youth about the UN's noble charter, but more important and relevant to their future are the broken realities.

Donate Wisely

If disasters or wars abroad inspire you to donate your money for relief, consider turning to private charities that operate with greater efficiency, more transparency and a genuine moral compass, versus the opaque, despot-infested and self-serving bureaucracies of the UN.

Remain Engaged Politically

Let your elected representatives know what you think of U.S. tax dollars flowing to the UN, its agenda and its programs.

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ABOUT INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S FORUM

Independent Women's Forum (IWF) is dedicated to building support for free markets, limited government, and individual responsibility.

IWF, a non-partisan, 501(c)(3) research and educational institution, seeks to combat the too-common presumption that women want and benefit from big government, and build awareness of the ways that women are better served by greater economic freedom. By aggressively seeking earned media, providing easy-to-read, timely publications and commentary, and reaching out to the public, we seek to cultivate support for these important principles and encourage women to join us in working to return the country to limited, Constitutional government.

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