



# Truman National Security Project

## United Nations

**Point #1** UN dues are a great buy for our security. For only \$1.42 per American per year we get tens of thousands of peacekeepers in major conflict zones, deliver food relief to millions, and fight disease around the globe.

**Point #2** The UN works. It has eradicated of smallpox, while peacekeepers have allowed 57 million in 45 countries to participate in free and fair elections.

**Point #3** The U.S. will sometimes want to act without the constraints of the UN, but U.S. and UN interests - fighting AIDS, peacekeeping, etc - are often in line.

### Background

The United Nations (UN) is an international organization, consisting of 192 member states, whose main objective is to maintain international peace and security by institutionalizing friendly relations among nations based on the principles of equal rights, non-aggression, and the rule of law. However, UN activities extend well beyond this central goal. The UN also aims to solve social, cultural, economic, political, and humanitarian problems, and to further the principle of human rights around the world.

In addition to its own institutions, the UN works with approximately thirty affiliated organizations in order to accomplish its objectives. The UN was established in October 1945, after the signing of the UN Charter by fifty nations, including the five permanent members – the United States, China, the United Kingdom, France, and the Soviet Union (now Russia). The United States was a primary supporter of the creation of the United Nations in the aftermath of World War II.

### Structure

The UN is organized into six administrative bodies:

**1.) Security Council.** The Security Council consists of fifteen members. The five permanent members consist of: the United States, China, the United

Kingdom, the Russian Federation, and France; and ten elected members which each serve two-year terms, five being replaced each year. The non-permanent members are chosen based on regional groups. The five permanent members are given the right to veto any Security Council resolution, preventing the adoption of a proposal even if the proposal has received a majority of votes.

The Security Council is in charge of establishing peacekeeping operations, international sanctions, and authorizing military actions. Together with the General Assembly, the Security Council elects Judges for the International Court of Justice. Security Council resolutions are binding on all member states.

**2.) General Assembly.** The General Assembly is the representative organ of the United Nations. All 192 member states belong to the General Assembly. It is the center of deliberation and decision-making on most international issues, as well as on UN budget assessments. The General Assembly receives and considers reports provided by the Security Council, as well as other organs. The General Assembly is also in charge of electing the Secretary-General, based on recommendations provided by the Security Council. General Assembly resolutions, although useful gauges of international opinion, are not binding upon member states.



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**3.) Economic & Social Council.** The Economic & Social Council is responsible for formulating policies related to promoting higher standard of living; identifying international economic, social, and health problems; facilitating international cultural and educational cooperation, and encouraging universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. For most of its history, the Council acted primarily as a forum for discussion, but reforms pushed and promoted by the U.S. and others in the 1990s helped result in better coordination of human rights, anti-poverty and anti-AIDS activities. The Council's 54 member governments are elected by the General Assembly for overlapping three-year terms. Seats on the Council are allotted based on geographical representation. The council is accountable for 70% of the human and financial resources of the entire UN system.

**4.) International Court of Justice (ICJ).** The ICJ is the principle judicial court for the UN, established in June 1945. The purpose of the ICJ is to settle international disputes based on international law, and to give advisory opinions on legal matters. The United States withdrew from compulsory jurisdiction in 1986, accepting the court's jurisdiction on a case-to-case basis. Chapter XIV of the United Nations Charter authorizes the UN Security Council to enforce World Court rulings, but this is subject to the veto of the permanent five members of the Council. The Court is composed of 15 judges, who are given terms of nine years. They are elected by the General Assembly and the Security Council.

**5.) Trusteeship Council.** The Trusteeship Council was established to assist non-self-governing territories attain self-sufficiency and independence, while also preserving international peace. All of the original "trust territories" have now gained independence or attained self-government by becoming sovereign nations or joining neighboring countries. The Trusteeship Council suspended operation in 1994, upon the independence of Palau. Although it continues to exist on paper, its future role – and continued existence – remains uncertain.

**6.) Secretariat.** The Secretariat provides information, facilities, and services needed by the UN; it is headed by the Secretary-General, and assisted by international staff, currently comprising 8,900 individuals spread among 170 countries.



## The Secretary-General

The Secretary-General of the United Nations is the head of the Secretariat, and is also the de facto spokesperson and leader of the United Nations. The Secretary-General is elected by the General Assembly on recommendations given by the Security Council. According to the UN Charter, the Secretary-General is the "Chief Administrative Officer," serving five year, renewable terms.

He or she may bring to the attention of the Security Council any issue which he or she deems a threat to international peace and security. The Secretary-General is also the chairman of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), which brings together the executive heads of all UN funds, programs, and specialized agencies. The Secretary-General is also responsible for meeting with world leaders and government officials, attending sessions of UN bodies, and producing annual reports and appraisals of future plans.



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**Ban Ki-Moon.** The UN's current Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, is the eighth elected Secretary-General, and is from the Republic of Korea. Before becoming Secretary-General, Ban was a career diplomat in South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in the United Nations. He graduated with a Bachelor's degree in International Relations from Seoul National University and with a Masters in Public Administration from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

## Ban's stated priorities as Secretary General include:

**Peacekeeping.** Improving the efficacy of UN peacekeeping operations, ensuring there are ample peacekeepers to keep up with the international demand for peacekeeping missions, and addressing the political problems that lead to conflict. He is particularly concerned with African countries, especially the Darfur conflict in the Sudan.

**The Middle East.** Expanding the UN's role as a credible peace-broker between Israelis and Palestinians. In Iraq, Ban seeks to promote national reconciliation and provide relief and assistance to civilians, particularly the nearly 4 million Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons who have fled due to violence.

**Nuclear Weapons.** Working against the spread of nuclear weapons, particularly by supporting the Security Council's activities regarding North Korea and Iran. Ban has been personally committed to facilitating the Six-Party talks aimed at ending North Korea's nuclear program, and encouraging the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

**Development.** Promoting the Millennium Development Goals, a set of eight goals established by the General Assembly in 2000, which aim to reduce poverty and fight disease, especially HIV/AIDS, around the world.

**Climate Change.** Through the Bali Conference in 2007, working to establish a new global response to the threat of climate change in order to replace the

Kyoto Protocol, which is due to expire in 2012.

**Human Rights.** The UN Security Council recently passed a resolution promoting the "Responsibility to Protect," or R2P, which obligates the international community to respond to instances of genocide, mass atrocities or humanitarian catastrophes. Creating a working system to enforce R2P is at the forefront of protecting human rights throughout the world.

**UN Reform.** Simplifying and streamlining rules, policies and processes, aligning UN practices with the best from both private and public sectors, and establishing high standards of ethics and accountability to win the public trust.

## United Nations Successes

**Peacekeeping.** With the end of the Cold War, UN peacekeeping operations have dramatically expanded, with the global demand for peacekeepers deployed throughout the world jumping from 10,000 in the 1980s to nearly 100,000 in early 2007. Operations have widened from "traditional" missions involving strictly military tasks, to complex "multidimensional" enterprises designed to ensure the implementation of comprehensive peace agreements and assist in laying the foundations for sustainable peace. Peacekeepers undertake a wide variety of complex tasks, from helping to build sustainable institutions of governance, human rights monitoring, and security sector reform, to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants. Peacekeepers have helped bring peace and democratic freedoms to countries as diverse as El Salvador, East Timor, and Mozambique.

Other peacekeeping accomplishments and facts include:

- Since 1948, the UN has conducted 63 peacekeeping missions. Total peacekeeping expenditures since 1948: \$54 billion. By means of comparison, this is approximately ten percent of U.S. defense spending in 2008 alone.



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## United Nations Successes (Peacekeeping)

- The UN budgeted \$6.8 billion for peacekeeping in 2007-2008, which supports the work of 20 missions led by the UN Department of Peacekeeping. This is less than the cost of one month in Iraq and represents less than .5% of worldwide military spending.
- Peacekeeping missions have allowed more than 57 million registered voters in more than 45 countries to participate in free and fair elections.
- Peacekeeping missions have disarmed more than 400,000 ex-combatants in the last decade alone.

**Health and Relief.** Through affiliated organizations, such as the World Health Organization and the World Food Programme, the UN is a significant force in relieving poverty, hunger, and disease around the world. The UN's health and relief accomplishments include:

- In 2006 alone, the World Food Programme's emergency operations provided food aid for 63.4 million people caught up in various humanitarian disasters.
- The World Health Organization led a collaborative global vaccination program against smallpox – a disease that has plagued mankind for thousands of years – that effectively eliminated the disease in every corner of the globe. The last known natural smallpox case occurred in 1977. It was declared “officially eradicated” in 1979.
- Over a period of thirty years, the World Health Organization worked to eradicate “river blindness” from West Africa, preventing 600,000 cases and sparing 18 million children from experiencing the disease.
- By partnering with countries and donors around the world, the World Health Organization has



helped create a four-fold increase in the number of people receiving antiretroviral therapy (AIDS treatment) in low- and middle- income countries; the total number stands at 1.6 million persons.

## Critiques of the United Nations

**The Security Council.** The reform of the Security Council has been a key issue for many of the member states, who argue that the Security Council is a relic of the past, conforming to the power structure representing the world of 1945, during the formation of the United Nations. Criticism is aimed not only at the permanent membership, but also at the veto power given to the permanent members. Many member states see the veto power as not being in the interest of the organization. There has been some discussion about the possible expansion of the Security Council's permanent members to try to include countries such as Brazil, India, Japan, and Germany, as well as an African nation. However, such proposals remain controversial and seem unlikely to come to fruition in the near future.



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## Critiques of the United Nations

**Corruption.** The UN is often accused of corruption and inefficiency, and there is plenty of evidence to back the charge. The most prominent example of UN corruption is the Oil For Food Scandal. Before Saddam Hussein was overthrown in 2003, the Oil For Food Program allowed the Iraqi government to sell some of its oil – it was under UN sanctions at the time – and use the proceeds to buy food for its citizens. Although he partially accomplished this goal, Saddam Hussein was able to skim off some of the oil proceeds, while the former head of the program, Benon Sevan, has been accused of taking kickbacks for himself. Former Secretary General Kofi Annan’s son was also accused of receiving money from a contractor who worked through the Oil For Food Program. Beyond scandalous headlines, the UN has hesitated to undergo audits, and suffers from a bureaucracy whose functions are often opaque. Although this has not prevented the UN from scoring major peacekeeping and humanitarian successes, the need to root out corruption and bolster accountability is a challenge the UN has had difficulty meeting.

**The Human Rights Council.** The Human Rights Council, which is responsible for addressing human rights violations, is the successor to the UN Commission on Human Rights, which came under tremendous scrutiny for giving high-profile positions to member states, such as China and the Sudan, that routinely violate the human rights of their own citizens. The formation of the Council was opposed by the United States – and three other countries – on the grounds that the new Council did not provide adequate safeguards to prevent human rights abusing nations from joining the Council. In 2007 the U.S. Department of State declined to seek a seat on the Council, stating that the Council had lost its credibility due to its attacks on Israel and its unwillingness to confront various human rights abusers.



**Anti-Semitism.** The UN has a long history of treating Israel harshly. Although some Israeli actions have been worthy of criticism, Israel has faced much greater scrutiny than most other countries, even those guilty of much greater misdeeds. The worst example of anti-Semitism – not simply anti-Israel bias – in UN history is the 1975 “Zionism is Racism” General Assembly Resolution, which tacitly accused Israel of racial discrimination. The UN repealed the resolution in 1991 and in 2005 the General Assembly unanimously passed a resolution sponsored by Israel promoting Holocaust remembrance. Although this represents great progress and Israel continues to work to have a greater role in within the UN, the fact that the newly reformed Human Rights Council issued ten resolutions against Israel in its first year, while only issuing one against the genocidal regime in the Sudan, proves that an anti-Israel bias among certain member states continues to plague the UN.



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## US-UN Relations



The United States has a history of withholding dues from the United Nations for a wide variety of reasons, typically to push for certain reforms. The withholding of dues tends to break down along partisan lines, with Republicans favoring withholding and Democrats opposing it:

- Congressional Republicans held up more than \$1 billion in U.S. funding for the United Nations in the 1990s.
- In 2005, the United States withheld dues that were allegedly funding abortion clinics in Africa. Supporters of the Bush administration also sought to withhold dues that funded contraceptive programs whose purpose was to combat AIDS.
- In 2005, the House of Representatives voted to withhold approximately \$244 million in U.S. dues in order to force the UN to cut its bureaucracy, redirect its budget, and tighten its accountability. Called the “Henry J. Hyde United Nations Reform Act,” it was opposed by the Bush administration, which argued that Congress was usurping the President’s authority to conduct foreign policy.
- According to Madeleine Albright, who co-signed a letter sent by eight former ambassadors to the United Nations, “Withholding our dues to the UN is the wrong methodology. When we last built debt with the UN, the United States isolated ourselves from our allies within the UN and made diplomacy a near impossible task.”
- In 2008, the U.S. was \$2.4 billion behind in its treaty obligations to the United Nations. In June 2009 the House of Representatives and the Senate included full payment of U.S. dues and arrears to the United Nations in a supplemental budget request.

**The UN: U.S. Partner or U.S. Adversary?** Although the United States has been a consistent supporter of the United Nations, the relationship between the U.S. and the UN is often characterized by ambivalence. Due to the decisions of the Bush administration to invade Iraq without an explicit resolution from the Security Council (the administration claimed that previous resolutions provided ample authorization) and appoint UN critic John Bolton as U.S. ambassador to the UN, relations between the U.S. and the UN have been strained in recent years. U.S.-UN relations were also strained when the Clinton administration, unable to get authorization from the Security Council, worked with NATO outside the UN to carry out air strikes in Kosovo in 1999.



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## U.S.-UN Relations Continued...

In addition to its wish to push for specific reforms, American politicians and citizens have criticized the UN for three major types of reasons:

- The UN constrains American power by giving foreign nations a “veto” over American policy. Although this is not an accurate claim, it is a popular one. The UN cannot force the U.S. to do something it opposes, and the UN has no means of preventing the U.S. from doing something it believes to be in its own interest.
- As permanent members of the Security Council, China and Russia wield veto power that prevents the UN from taking certain actions, such as deploying peacekeepers to prevent genocide in Darfur, which has typically been opposed by China. Although this does not prevent the United States from acting on its own, it is seen by some as evidence that the UN is a broken institution unable to cope with the world’s struggles. On the other hand, while the Security Council is sometimes unable to act due to divisions among its members, it has proven itself in others, such as authorizing the 1991 Gulf War and thereby driving Saddam Hussein’s Iraq out of Kuwait. It is unlikely that any international organization could consistently foster cooperation between powerful countries with different interests.
- The UN is a forum for anti-Americanism. While a great deal of anti-American rhetoric does issue from UN bodies and member states, the United States wields a great deal of power in the UN. Moreover, the UN commands great respect in many parts of the world, so when the U.S. is able to work through the UN, American actions are seen as more legitimate – such as 1991 Gulf War or the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan – which can in turn save the U.S. money and, in the case of military action, lives.

Due to the United States’ legitimate desire to act without constraints to protect its own security, as well as its commitment to working through the UN to gain legitimacy and promote common goals, such as the eradication of AIDS and the deployment of peacekeeping missions, relations between the U.S. and the UN are certain to continue to be characterized by both cooperation and disagreement.

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