



## **The Peacebuilding Commission and the Future of US-UN Relations**

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I'd like to thank UNA-USA for inviting me to join this panel on "U.S. Priorities for the United Nations." I should begin by stating the obvious. US-UN relations are once again – as occurs so often – in a period of crisis. I was in New York on Tuesday, where I listened to UN Deputy Secretary-General Mark Malloch Brown castigate the Bush Administration and Congress for what he termed a shortsighted and cynical strategy. Even as the United States turns to the UN to accomplish a variety of indispensable tasks, from peace in Darfur to stability in Haiti, he complained, American political leaders fail to defend it from incessant and irresponsible attacks from the likes of "Rush Limbaugh and Fox News." Such a strategy, he noted, could only discredit the UN in the eyes of the American public and weaken a key arrow in Washington's foreign policy quiver.

I was struck by the spectacle of a sitting senior UN official publicly rebuking its most powerful member state and most important founder. The immediate source of Malloch Brown's ire is Washington's return to a tactic of the 1990s - the threat to withhold its share of the UN budget to ensure that the world body implements management reform. A sword of Damocles hangs over the UN: unless the membership approves the reforms proposed by Secretary-General Annan this spring, the administration will refuse to approve additional funding. Other member states, particularly in the G-77, are balking at this demand, and even Washington's allies in the reform effort are skeptical of such heavy-handed tactics.

But Malloch Brown's broader critique was even more persuasive. In recent years American leaders have tended to focus in public only on the UN's failings -- and to treat it as a convenient scapegoat for the foreign policy failures of its member states. The result is to undercut the domestic political support needed for continual (rather than episodic) and constructive engagement with the world body.

The organizers of this conference asked me to do two things today: First, summarize the UN's evolving role in post-conflict reconstruction, in the aftermath of the September High Level Summit in New York. And second, to offer some broader thoughts on America's famously ambivalent and fractious relationship with the United Nations, including some principles that might guide a healthier engagement in the years ahead, principles that both Democrats and at least moderate Republicans might be able to endorse.

### **The Scorecard of the September Summit**

First, some words on the High-Level Summit: It was not the "train wreck" that many people had anticipated, but it was in some respects a lost opportunity. This is particularly true when it comes to Security Council reform. The United Nations will keep chugging down the same tracks. But it will still be a 1945 steam engine headed along the same path, but it could have been an Acela – or at least a diesel –

built for modern times and challenges. There is lots of blame to go around. Kofi Annan himself is partly culpable: The SG unwisely raised the stakes, describing this as a make or break summit, a defining moment, “fork in the road,” and loading the agenda with a huge number of issues. But the United States must shoulder some of the blame too, for remaining curiously disengaged until the last minute – and then – under the leadership of its dyspeptic UN ambassador John Bolton -- submitting a long list of eleventh-hour demands that emboldened a number of spoilers (Egypt, Pakistan, Venezuela, others) to roll back painstakingly negotiated agreements.

The final consensus document was a disappointment compared to what might have been, given the creative ideas and momentum for reform over past year or so. The biggest disappointment was that nothing was accomplished on Security Council reform. So we are stuck with the Great Powers of 1945, with no place for Japan, India, Brazil, or Germany. On this question, the membership “kicked the can” down the road. Reforming the Council remains critical to improving the legitimacy of the UN in the eyes of the developing world. But it will require more constructive engagement from the United States.

Beyond Council reform, 7 main issues were on the table, and most were watered down:

- **Non-Proliferation:** Here, the consensus document was incredibly weak. Participants failed to make any commitment to disarmament, prevent transfer of WMD to terrorists or ratify critical treaties.
- **Development:** the document limited itself to a general recapitulation of support for development goals. There was no major new aid commitment.
- **Terrorism** was condemned, but the document eliminated a proposed definition suggesting that any attacks on civilians were unjustified. The goal had been to make it impossible for terrorists to portray themselves as freedom fighters, but this hope was dashed.
- **Management Reforms:** Washington’s hopes for greater transparency, auditing, and efficiency were blocked by resistance within the G-77 -- particularly to giving the Secretary-General greater executive power to hire/fire, etc.
- **Human Rights Council:** The UN membership agreed to replace the dysfunctional and discredited Commission on Human Rights, but in ensuring negotiations, the size of the Council kept expanding, and membership criteria were weakened. In the end, the United States voted against the new council and declined to run for a seat.
- The high-level event did endorse the so-called “**Responsibility to Protect**”, subsequently approved by the Security Council, establishing the principle that sovereignty is not sacrosanct and that the Security Council should be prepared to act when countries either commit or fail to prevent the commission of genocide or crimes against humanity on their territories. Although it is a moral rather than legal obligation, it represents an important normative shift in world politics.

### **Peacebuilding Commission**

One of the few high points of the otherwise disappointing outcome document was the endorsement of a new UN Peacebuilding Commission. In December, the UNSC and UNGA passed paired resolutions establishing the new organ. The reform for the first time creates a standing forum – including key member states, international financial institutions (IFIs), and UN agencies -- to advise the Security Council on efforts to stabilize and reconstruct war-torn societies. The Commission will meet in two forums:

- An Organizational Committee of 31 members, as well as the SG and the IFIs;
- Country-Specific configurations for particular crises, including the country itself, regional actors and organizations, financial, troop, and civilian police contributors, UN field reps, and IFIs.

The PBC was created to respond to gaps in existing international efforts to assist countries in making the transition from war to peace and to ensure sustained diplomatic and donor attention to the difficult challenges of peace and recovery. Such an entity is urgently needed: Experience shows that nearly one half of all countries emerging from war fall back into violence within five years, so helping countries make a transition to peace is one of the best ways to prevent future conflict. Building peace is a complicated business, however. UN-led peace operations are increasingly multidimensional, involving not only blue-helmeted peacekeepers but also a wide range of humanitarian, political, and development actors. Up to now, the international community's efforts to build sustainable peace have been woefully fragmented, and the attention of the Security Council tends to wander after the initial crisis phase passes.

The Commission will have important responsibilities, including:

- Advising the Security Council on coherent, integrated strategies for post-conflict transition and peace-building that unite the security, political, and development components of these operations
- Giving countries in transition a forum to engage international counterparts
- Improving coordination among the wide range of international actors involved in post-conflict operations, including member states, International Financial Institutions, UN agencies, and regional organizations
- Mobilizing resources and ensuring predictable financing, through a new Peacebuilding Fund – a voluntary, replenishable financial window that can permit rapid resource mobilization rather than waiting for pledging conferences.
- Bringing together the expertise and talent now widely dispersed within the UN system, through the mechanism of a new Peacebuilding Support Office. The PBSO will provide analytical and technical support for the Commission, ensure that strategies formulated with national actors are informed by realities in the field, and be responsible for monitoring and evaluation of the Commission's work.

I'm happy to say that the United States has since autumn 2004 been a strong proponent of the Peacebuilding Commission. I was at the State Department's policy planning staff at the time this decision was taken, and although there was some initial U.S. resistance to creating another "UN bureaucracy", those of us who believed that it was imperative to do so were able to win the day. We were helped by the disastrous failures associated with U.S. postwar planning for Iraq and the momentum to create similar post-conflict structures within the US government. As the U.S. got its own house in order, it was difficult to oppose efforts on the part of the United Nations to do the same.

Since the Commission was endorsed, UN member states have spent the past several months wrangling and jockeying over what countries should sit on the Standing Committee of the Commission. Finally, on May 8, simultaneous resolutions within the UNGA and ECOSOC finalized the list of countries, including

- 7 from the Security Council (the P-5 and 2 elected)
- 5 of the top 10 financial contributors
- 5 of the top 10 troop contributors
- 7 representatives of ECOSOC
- 7 representatives of the General Assembly (none from Western Europe, 1 from Eastern Europe, 3 from Latin America, 1 from Asia, and 2 from Africa).

In late May the 31 members of the Organizational Committee held an informal meeting in New York, for a discussion of critical start-up issues. Officials from the IMF, the World Bank, the European Commission and the UN Secretariat also attended. This first gathering was auspicious. According to reports, the participants recognized that the PBC's real work will occur in country-specific committees.

Accordingly, they shared a sense of urgency on the need to get down to substantive work as soon as possible, in order to establish the Commission's credibility.

As a matter of principle, the members of the PBC have embraced the notion that peacebuilding cannot be imposed from outside but must emanate from national governments and be shaped by local context: there is no "one-size fits all" template that can be imposed on every case. The role of the PBC should thus be to empower those on the ground to succeed, and to ensure that those *locally-owned* strategies are informed by quality analysis. Ideally, the relationship between the Peacebuilding Commission and the recovering country should take the form of a "compact" between national and international actors, with the Commission providing a forum for all relevant actors to endorse strategies and formulate an implementation plan.

The first formal meeting of the Commission will take place later this month. The membership of the Commission in its actual country specific configuration has not yet been determined. The relevant Security Council Resolution leaves open the possibility that this forum could include all 31 members of the Organizational Committee, the afflicted country itself, regional organizations, international financial institutions, and neighboring countries – a structure that could easily get very unwieldy. The Commission has not yet decided on what country to engage first. Liberia, Burundi, and East Timor have all been mentioned as possibilities (Haiti is another possibility, but may be seen as too intractable).

### **The US-UN Relationship Going Forward**

Before closing, I'd like to shift gears and – as the organizers suggested -- offer a few reflections on the current state of US-UN relations and the possibilities for a more constructive relationship in the future. It might be best to state the obvious: the United States has long had an ambivalent attitude toward the United Nations. The world body was largely an American creation, and opinion polls show strong public support for it. Yet, US-UN relations are complicated by four enduring structural factors: The first is the natural desire of any country, particularly the most powerful, for maximum freedom of action, a sentiment reinforced by the self-perceived U.S. role as the ultimate guarantor of world order. A second factor is America's exceptionalist political culture, which is often used to justify protecting U.S. sovereignty from perceived incursions of international institutions and to hold the country apart from obligations that are binding on others. A third factor is the widespread perception that the United Nations contains too many dictatorships that do not share our democratic values or our vision of the world. A final factor is a separation of powers that designates Congress as co-author of U.S. foreign policy, complicating our assumption of international commitments – including treaties – and providing a platform for 535 members of the legislative branch to serve, however constructively or destructively, as mini-secretaries of state. As a result of these dynamics, U.S.-UN relations have frequently been fraught and characterized by episodic embrace and rejection.

Even considering this background, the acrimony and tensions of the past five years have been extraordinary. The Bush administration came to office exhibiting skepticism toward multilateral cooperation and a preference for ad hoc coalitions over standing international institutions that departed from fifty-five years of bipartisan political tradition. Those pragmatists in favor of actually nurturing institutions -- and of being prepared to engage in the give and take inherent in multilateral diplomacy -- repeatedly lost battles within the interagency. The reigning ethos flipped from the 1990s: On the big issues, it was no longer multilateral when we can, unilateral when we have to, but something closer to the reverse. The crisis over Iraq underlined this impression, persuading many other countries, rightly or wrongly, that the United States perceived legitimacy as stemming solely from domestic rather than international sources.

Is there any way to envision a more productive US-UN relationship? I'm not sure that one can be achieved under the current administration. But presuming a new administration, willing to return to some of the tenets that previously guided US-UN relations, what principles might one encourage?

**First and most importantly, the United States must commit itself to sustained engagement with the UN.** What the UN needs, is "tough love". This implies not only an insistence on accountability and performance, but also a willingness to continually nurture it as a key pillar of world order and an important tool of U.S. foreign policy, so that it is capable when we call upon it. The United States remains the leading contributor to the UN's regular budget, at 22%, and to its peacekeeping budget, at 27%, and is generous in its voluntary contributions. Our goal should be to get our money's worth, through continual rather than fitful or episodic engagement.

**Second, effective multilateral cooperation implies doing the hard work of retail diplomacy, not only in New York but in member state capitals, and demonstrating a willingness to engage in give and take and accepting the middle ground rather than holding to maximalist positions in a take it or leave it manner.** One of the sources of resistance to US demands on reform is that the perception in many countries that the U.S. commitment to the United Nations under this administration is nakedly self-interested and insufficiently flexible. One of the realities of multilateral diplomacy is that if we want other countries to be with us on the issues we care about, we have to be willing to bend on occasions to the preferences of others, particularly when it does not cost much.

**Third, the continued international legitimacy of the United Nations depends on Security Council Reform:** The legitimacy of the UN is waning as the 1945 balance of power it reflects increasingly seems out of alignment with the current distribution of power. As Malloch-Brown pointed out on Tuesday, the so-called "G-4" aspirants to permanent membership – Japan, Germany, Brazil and India – already contribute more to the UN's budget than the "P-4" – the permanent council members minus the United States. Nothing is more important than Council reform, and yet the United States shrank from exercising leadership in this process.

**Fourth, for all the talk of financial waste, the UN remains a good deal for U.S. taxpayers.** It is astonishing how much energy is spent arguing over the size of the UN budget, given the small amount of money we are talking about. The administration's budget request for the UN is a few billion dollars. Compare that to the hundreds of billions of dollars we have already budgeted for Iraq. In fact, we spent more on U.S. military operations in Iraq last week than we spent on UN peacekeeping all of last year. Moreover, the UN is a pretty good bargain for U.S. taxpayers -- since it allows us to share the bill. Instead of spending 100 cents for every dollar we spend on a variety of global public goods, we can spend about 25 cents and get a dollar of results. And at a time of huge fiscal deficits, we could use this kind of burden sharing.

**Fifth, the United States usually gets better results inside the tent than outside it:** Agreement to create a UN Human Rights Council was one of the better outcomes of the High Level summit. Although the criteria and hurdles for membership were not as stringent as the US would have wanted, it was a great mistake for the nation that produced Eleanor Roosevelt to vote against the new body and to decide not to run for a seat. If President Bush is serious that the UN should devote itself to the advance of human freedom – as he said in his recent press conference with Tony Blair -- it cannot remain outside this body.

**Sixth, remember that there is not one "UN" but several.** American critics often tar the UN with too broad a brush, forgetting that it has several components of varying power and importance: a General

Assembly, a universal body with little power, given to passing symbolic and sometimes irresponsible resolutions; the Secretary –General, a post that varies enormously with the individual; a Secretariat, where pockets of excellence compete with bloat and cronyism; the specialized agencies and programs, most of which do good work and advance broad US goals, but some of which have outlived their usefulness; and the Security Council, without whose agreement few major decisions can occur. When critics complain about the “UN”, let’s at least get them to specify which UN they mean. We also need to be wary of critics who blame “the UN” for the failings of its member states.

**Finally, let us all remember that multilateralism must be a means to an end, not an end in itself:**

Like other countries, the United States will continue to pursue multilateral cooperation not out of altruism but cost-benefit calculation. In most cases, enlightened self-interest will dictate a multilateral approach, since it can expand rather than restrict US options, permitting us to achieve otherwise unreachable goals, share burdens and risks, and win legitimacy for our purposes. Our recurrent challenge will be to engage the UN while remaining vigilant against the admitted pathologies of multilateral institutions, among them inertia and paralysis, insufficient accountability, and lowest-common denominator policymaking. A policy of enlightened self-interest will imply both more self-restraint on the part of the United States and a greater commitment to UN stewardship: actually taking the time, energy and resources to nurture the institution so that it can perform the increasing functions we require of it.