

Assessing the United Nations

IS IT WORTH THE MONEY?

As the government of Bashar Assad slaughters thousands of civilian protesters in Syria, the United Nations stands impotent — blocked from intervening by Russian and Chinese vetoes in the U.N. Security Council. The inaction contrasts dramatically with the U.N.'s success in stopping similar atrocities during an anti-government resistance movement in Libya last year that led to the overthrow of long-time dictator Moammar Gadhafi. The stark difference between U.N. action and inaction in the two venues helps explain the wide range of opinions about the effectiveness of the global organization, created in 1945 to preserve peace after World War II. Some critics say the U.N. is too heavily influenced by countries run by dictators, while others say it is dominated by industrial democracies. Several countries are conducting studies to determine which U.N. agencies are most cost-effective, and some in the United States want to make all U.N. contributions voluntary. Meanwhile, many U.N. agencies quietly continue to feed the hungry, aid needy children and enable mail, telecommunications and aircraft to move smoothly across borders.

Emotion overcomes a Syrian boy during a demonstration at UNICEF offices in Amman, Jordan, on Feb. 20, 2012, demanding that the U.N. children's agency better protect children caught in the fighting in Syria's cities. Some 100 civilians a day, including women and children, are dying in a crackdown on dissenters by the Bashar Assad regime. Russia and China, strong allies of the dictator, vetoed U.N. resolutions condemning the attacks and calling for Assad to step down.



THE ISSUES

- 131 • Is the U.N. worth the money the world spends on it?
• Do undemocratic countries wield too much power in the United Nations?
• Should democracies leave the U.N. Human Rights Council?

BACKGROUND

- 138 **Dreams of Peace**
The U.N. goal was to prevent future world wars.
- 141 **Peacekeeping Begins**
U.N. peacekeepers were first sent to the Middle East.
- 142 **Cuban Missile Crisis**
The Cuban missile crisis unfolded via televised U.N. speeches.
- 143 **'Oil for Food' Scandal**
Corrupt U.N. employees helped Iraq divert U.N. food program funds.

CURRENT SITUATION

- 144 **Responsibility to Protect?**
Syria's crackdown on dissidents will test the new U.N. doctrine.
- 146 **Policing Iran**
U.N. inspectors say Iran probably is developing nuclear weapons.
- 146 **New Controversies**
Proposed U.S. legislation would make all U.N. payments voluntary.

OUTLOOK

- 147 **Thwarting Violence**
The U.N. has declared 2012 "the Year of Prevention."

SIDEBARS AND GRAPHICS

- 132 **U.N. Peacekeepers Span the Globe**
Current operations are on four continents.
- 133 **World Favors Greater UN Power**
U.N. forces should protect citizens, polls say.
- 134 **U.N. Actions Stir Outrage**
Top jobs go to anti-female, anti-Semitic countries.
- 137 **U.S. Contributes Most**
The United States provides 22 percent of the U.N. budget.
- 139 **Chronology**
Key events since 1944.
- 140 **Unsung Agencies Help Prevent Chaos**
Programs grease global gears.
- 145 **At Issue**
Should all UN payments be voluntary?
- 152 **Voices from Abroad**
Headlines and editorials from around the world.
- 149 **For More Information**
Organizations to contact.
- 150 **Bibliography**
Selected sources used.
- 151 **The Next Step**
Additional articles.
- 151 **Citing CQ Global Researcher**
Sample bibliography formats.



March 20, 2012
Volume 6, Number 6

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CQ Press is a registered trademark of Congressional Quarterly Inc.

CQ Global Researcher is printed on acid-free paper. Published twice monthly, except: (Jan. wk. 5) (May wk. 5) (July wk. 5) (Oct. wk. 5). Published by SAGE Publications, Inc., 2455 Teller Rd., Thousand Oaks, CA 91320. Annual full-service subscriptions start at \$575. For pricing, call 1-800-834-9020. To purchase a *CQ Researcher* report in print or electronic format (PDF), visit www.cqpress.com or call 866-427-7737. Single reports start at \$15. Bulk purchase discounts and electronic-rights licensing are also available. Periodicals postage paid at Thousand Oaks, California, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *CQ Researcher*, 2300 N St., N.W., Suite 800, Washington, DC 20037.

Assessing the United Nations

BY TOM PRICE

THE ISSUES

As shells fired by the Syrian army fell on Homs in late February 2012, resident Omar Shaker described his city's plight: "They bombed all the water tanks on the roofs of buildings. There's no water. Some people have gone without bread for days. If they don't die in the shelling, they will die of hunger."

"People don't care if it's the devil intervening to save us," Shaker said. "We need the world's help."¹

But help was not on the way. Despite pleas from the Arab League and Gulf Cooperation Council for United Nations action, Russia and China kept the U.N. on the sidelines by vetoing Security Council resolutions condemning the attacks on civilians and calling for Syrian President Bashar Assad to leave office. It was just one more frustrating example of the 193-member organization's too-frequent inability to stop bloodshed, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon lamented.²

The victors of World War II created the U.N. in 1945 "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war."³ Since then, however, more than 22 million people have died in more than 300 wars.⁴ Today, the initially hopeful "Arab Spring" protests — which overthrew despotic governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen — have cost thousands of lives, including more than 8,000 slaughtered in Syria by the Bashar Assad regime, according to the United Nations.⁵ Despite the U.N.'s many successes, the recent failures to keep the peace have hand-



A U.N. peacekeeper from Brazil patrols Petition Ville, Haiti, in 2010. The U.N. mission in Haiti — established in 2004 — was beefed up after the January 2010 earthquake destroyed much of the capital, Port-au-Prince. The U.N. spends about \$7 billion a year on peacekeeping missions — less than Wall Street pays out in yearly bonuses.

AFP/Getty Images/Hector Retamal

ed ammunition to critics who question the organization's value — a question that has been asked periodically throughout the U.N.'s existence.

Without the United Nations, there likely would have been more wars, and they probably would have lasted longer and claimed more casualties, says Swadesh Rana, former chief of the U.N.'s Conventional Arms Branch. Moreover, no nuclear, biological or radiological weapon has been used since the U.N.'s creation, says Rana, now a World Policy Institute senior fellow. And few, if any, U.N. member nations are engaged in cross-border armed conflict today, although there

are tense standoffs in various parts of the world, she points out. As many as 36 countries were engaged in such conflicts about 20 years ago, as the Cold War was winding down, she says.

The United Nations also has worked to fulfill — with greater or lesser success — the other promises of its charter, such as "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights" and "to promote social progress and better standards of life."⁶ Various U.N. agencies fight hunger and poverty, promote economic development, defend human rights, provide relief during and after wars and natural disasters, support education, nurture culture and carry out other humanitarian activities.

And even though the United Nations has many critics, few contend the world would be better off without it. The arguments involve whether the global body's strengths outweigh its weaknesses and by how much. Newt Gingrich, former speaker of the U.S. House and a candidate for the 2012

Republican presidential nomination known for his fiery rhetoric, called the U.N. "amazingly bureaucratic" and "very corrupt." While campaigning in January he said he would "cut out a substantial amount of American money going to the U.N."

Nevertheless, he added, "I am not for withdrawing from the U.N."⁷ In fact, with former Senate Democratic Leader George Mitchell in 2005, Gingrich co-chaired a study of the U.N. that concluded "an effective United Nations is in the interests of the United States."⁸

The U.N. is "sometimes frustrating to deal with," says Philippe Boloipon,

U.N. Peacekeepers Span the Globe

The United Nations maintains 16 peacekeeping operations on four continents, including a “special political mission” in Afghanistan, established in 2002 to help bring sustainable peace and development to the country. The oldest peacekeeping mission is in the Middle East, where military observers have been authorized since 1948 to monitor tensions between Arabs and Israelis. Peacekeeping, which costs \$7 billion this fiscal year, involves 98,653 uniformed personnel from 115 countries; the 19,000-strong contingent monitoring the post-war peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo is the largest.

Current U.N. Peacekeeping Operations



Source: “United Nations Peacekeeping,” www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/operations/current.shtml

a former French journalist who heads Human Rights Watch’s activities at U.N. headquarters in New York City. “Yet it’s an irreplaceable forum to advance human rights issues.”

That’s a common assessment: even pro-U.N. activists find the organization imperfect but necessary.

“It’s bloated,” says Tony Hall, former U.S. ambassador to the U.N. food and agriculture agencies in Rome. “There are tremendous bureaucracies. Some programs have had leadership issues.” But the World Food Programme and other relief agencies work effectively, he says, and “they can go into areas that [the United States] cannot

— into countries that we don’t have relations with.” In places like North Korea and Sudan, he adds, “as bad as those governments are, they have innocent people who need help.”

American Will Davis, director of the U.N. Development Programme’s Washington Office, says the organization exists “not because the U.N. is some perfect machinery that’s going to lead us to some utopian future, but because there’s really no alternative. It exists to attack problems that no individual country can tackle or has the political will to tackle on its own.”

Canadian Anne Bayefsky, a senior fellow at the conservative Hudson In-

stitute think tank who favors abolishing the U.N., calls attempts to reform it “almost a perennial joke.” She and other critics complain that undemocratic countries wield too much power and subvert U.N. ideals. “Most of what we expected from the U.N. — mainly protecting peace and security and human rights — can be done better by a redesigned multilateral institution run by and for democracies in the interests of democracy,” she says.

But others argue that the U.N.’s universal membership — which includes repressive as well as democratic governments — is essential for its actions to have global credibility. “Working to

find agreement with countries that have disparate worldviews has always been a difficult endeavor,” former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said. “Nevertheless, it is important and worthwhile.”⁹

Hall, a longtime human-rights activist and former member of Congress, views universal U.N. membership the same way he views bilateral diplomacy. “Should we have an embassy in North Korea?” he asks rhetorically. “I believe we should. If we’re able to discuss at the table, we should always sit at the table.”

As the U.N. stumbles in trying to address ongoing violence in the Middle East, here are some questions diplomats and others are asking about the institution’s value to the world:

Is the U.N. worth the money the world spends on it?

During his brief campaign for the Republican presidential nomination, Texas Gov. Rick Perry suggested that “it’s time for us to have a serious discussion about defunding the United Nations.”¹⁰

U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., calls the U.N. “big, bloated” and “dysfunctional.”

But former U.N. executive Rana calls the organization’s budget a bargain. The U.N. spends about \$7 billion a year on 16 peacekeeping missions scattered around the globe, she notes — or about \$1 for each of the world’s 7 billion inhabitants. The rest of the U.N.’s activities — from hunger relief to facilitating international air travel — costs about \$8 billion, or another \$1.15 per person.

Other advocates point out that the U.N.’s peacekeeping expenses make up less than half of 1 percent of global military spending.¹¹ It costs more to run the New York City School system.¹² Wall Street pays out more in yearly bonuses.¹³

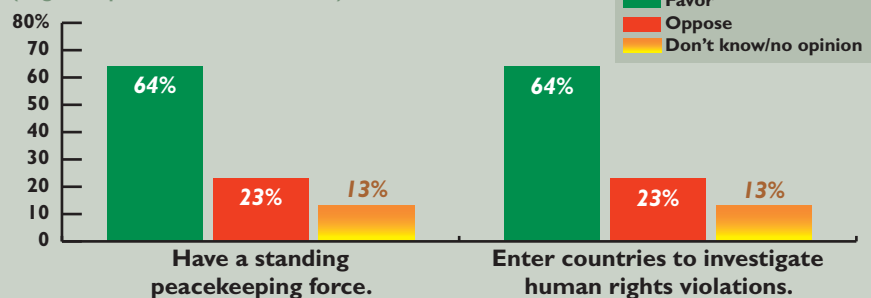
However, critics don’t focus solely on how much the organization costs. They also question whether the money

World Favors Greater UN Power

An overwhelming majority of people surveyed around the world wants the United Nations to have more power, such as to investigate human rights violations or authorize military force to prevent genocide or defend countries that have been attacked.

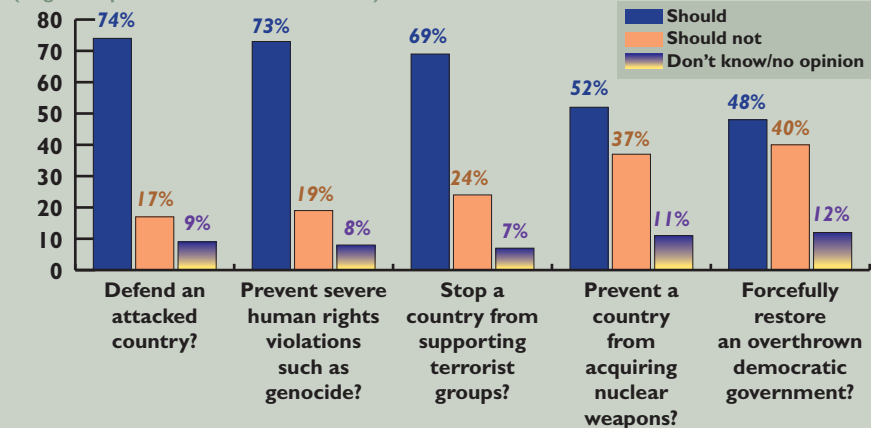
Do you favor or oppose authorizing the U.N. to:

(Avg. of responses from 14 countries*)



Should the U.N. Security Council be able to authorize military force to:

(Avg. of responses from 10-12 countries**)



* Argentina, Armenia, China, France, India, Israel, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Russia, South Korea, Thailand, Ukraine and the United States.

** China, France, India, Israel, Mexico, Palestinian territories, Poland, Russia, South Korea, Thailand, Ukraine and the United States.

Source: “World Publics Favor New Powers for the UN,” WorldPublicOpinion.org, May 2007, www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/btunitednationsra/355.php?nid=&id=&pnt=355&lb=btun

is well spent. “There’s very little scrutiny paid to whether [U.N.] activities are living up to expectations,” says Brett Schaefer, a fellow at the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom at the

conservative Heritage Foundation think tank in Washington.

The U.N. tends to add new activities — or “mandates,” in U.N. parlance — without assessing whether older

U.N. Actions Stir Outrage and Ridicule

Some top jobs go to anti-female, anti-Semitic governments and individuals.

The next time a liberal asks why conservatives don't respect the United Nations, *National Review* advised its conservative readers last year, "you could tell them this: North Korea is chairing the Conference on Disarmament. If that's not good enough, you could add this: Iran is a member of the Commission on the Status of Women. That should answer their question."¹

The U.N. certainly provides plenty of fodder for its critics to condemn or ridicule.

As Australia's nationwide newspaper, *The Australian*, asked in a headline: "Is the UN Stark Raving Mad?" The paper condemned North Korea's chairmanship of the disarmament conference as "a case of lunatics taking over the asylum. The wacky regime that constantly violates the U.N.'s nuclear controls, is the target of U.N. sanctions, and is the leading proliferator of nuclear technology to Iran and Syria is now putatively in charge of the organization responsible for negotiating multilateral arms control agreements."²

Under the headline "The depraved United Nations," *Jerusalem Post* columnist Isi Leibler complained of Iran's election as a General Assembly vice president and charged that the U.N. had been captured by "dictatorships and tyrannies" and "transformed into a platform for promoting genocide."³

Human rights activists also expressed disbelief in 2010, when Iran was elected to the 45-member U.N. Commission on the Status of Women and Saudi Arabia to another agency — U.N. Women — charged with promoting women's rights. Shirin Ebadi, the Iranian woman who won the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize for her campaigns for women's rights, said it was "a joke" for countries that oppress women to be placed on

such panels. Iranian laws discriminate against women in divorce cases and require testimony from two women to equal testimony of one man in court, she said, and the women's rights situation in Saudi Arabia "is even worse."⁴

Saudi Arabia forbids women to drive, restricts their use of public facilities when men are present and requires them to get permission from male relatives to participate in many activities. The monarchy recently announced that women would be allowed to vote in 2015. According to Human Rights Watch, Iran restricts what women can study in college and requires a male guardian's permission to marry.⁵

Equally jaw-dropping: Syria was appointed to two human-rights-related committees of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) even as the Syrian government was killing protesters in its own country. Astonishingly, UNESCO's Arab members selected Syria for the posts in November, shortly before the country was suspended from the Arab League because of its violent attacks on demonstrators. Other countries quickly launched a campaign to expel Syria from the panels.⁶

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., chair of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, called Syria's appointments a "stunning display" of "irresponsible and dangerous behavior" and "an affront to those suffering at the hand of tyrants all around the world."⁷

Possibly the greatest outrage and ridicule have been generated by the activities of Princeton Law Professor Richard Falk, the U.N.'s special rapporteur for human rights in the Palestinian territories. Falk is accused of anti-Semitism and has suggested that the Bush administration may have been complicit in the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and

mandates continue to be needed, Schaefer says.

For example, he points out, "The Economic Commission for Europe was designed to transition Europe from World War II. The commission continues to exist, with over 100 employees and a budget of over \$50 million, even though no one can demonstrably say what contribution it makes to a mission that has been overtaken by events." The commission says its "major aim" is to "promote pan-European economic integration." Yet most of Europe already belongs to the European Union, a wealthy economic and political confederation with 27 members.

The U.N.'s first two peacekeeping missions — in the Middle East (1948) and on the India-Pakistan border (1949) — still have boots on the ground after being deployed more than 60 years ago, Schaefer notes, because the conflicts they were commissioned to resolve are still simmering: the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the India-Pakistan dispute over Jammu and Kashmir. "The presence of the operations for six decades argues that they are not contributing to the resolution of those problems," he adds.

Moreover, he says, because U.N. dues are assessed according to a nation's wealth — resulting in most of the dues

being paid by a handful of developed countries — most members aren't motivated to police U.N. spending.

The world's 10 wealthiest countries pay 72 percent of the U.N.'s core budget and an even larger share of peacekeeping expenditures. The United States funds 22 percent (\$569 million) of the core budget and 27 percent of peacekeeping costs. The 39 countries with the lowest assessments altogether cover less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the core budget — or \$23,631 each.¹⁴

Schaefer does not oppose all U.N. spending. "Some peacekeeping activities are worthwhile," he says, pointing to the current operation that oversees

the Pentagon. He wrote the foreword to *The New Pearl Harbor*, by David Ray Griffin, a retired American professor of the philosophy of religion and theology who suggests that the World Trade Center towers were destroyed by “controlled demolition” rather than by hijacked airplanes.⁸ Falk himself has written about a “large and growing grassroots constituency” that believes the truth about 9/11 “is not yet known, or . . . is known but being actively suppressed.”⁹

And last year Falk caused controversy when he posted a cartoon on his blog depicting a dog — wearing a sweater labeled “USA” and a yarmulke with a Star of David — chewing a bloody skeleton and urinating on Lady Justice.¹⁰

While acknowledging that many of these appointments are outrageous, U.N. supporters downplay their significance. Some positions rotate, so North Korea — for instance — simply got its turn to chair the disarmament conference for a brief time. Iran and Saudi Arabia can be outvoted on the women’s panels, supporters note, and other U.N. bodies are more important.

More significant, they point out, the United States, U.K. and France hold three of the five permanent seats on the organization’s most powerful body — the Security Council — where any one of them can block a Security Council action with a veto.

— Tom Price

¹ “The Week,” *National Review*, Aug. 15, 2011.

² “Is the UN Stark Raving Mad?” *The Australian*, July 4, 2011, p. 15, www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/is-the-un-stark-raving-mad/story-e6fg71x-1226086716084.

³ Isi Leibler, “Candidly Speaking: The depraved United Nations,” *The Jerusalem Post*, Sept. 8, 2011, www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Article.aspx?id=237091.



AFP/Getty Images/John Thys

Iranian human rights advocate Shirin Ebadi, who won the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize for her campaigns for women’s rights, said it was “a joke” for countries that oppress women to be placed on key U.N. human rights panels.

⁴ Bill Varner, “Iran, Saudi Arabia Seats on UN Women’s Board Would Be a ‘Joke,’ Ebadi Says,” *Bloomberg*, Nov. 9, 2010, www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-11-09/iran-saudi-arabia-seats-on-un-women-s-board-would-be-a-joke-ebadi-says.html.

⁵ “World Report 2012: Iran,” Human Rights Watch, www.hrw.org/world-report-2012/world-report-2012-iran; Alexia Bedat, “Women’s Rights in China, Saudi Arabia and Iran,” Testimony to the UN Human Rights Council, UN Watch, Sept. 15, 2011; Varner, *op. cit.*

⁶ Kareem Fahim and Steven Erlanger, “Aid official and priest are killed in Syria,” *The International Herald Tribune*, Jan. 27, 2012, p. 4.

⁷ “Ros-Lehtinen Says Selection of Syria for UNESCO Human Rights Panel Affront to Victims Around the World,” U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, Nov. 22, 2011, http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/press_display.asp?id=2099.

⁸ David Ray Griffin, “Was America Attacked by Muslims on 9/11?” www.davidraygriffin.com/articles/was-america-attacked-by-muslims-on-911.

⁹ Richard A. Falk, “9/11: More than meets the eye,” *The Edinburgh (Scotland) Journal*, Nov. 9, 2008, www.journal-online.co.uk/article/5056-911-more-than-meets-the-eye.

¹⁰ Gil Shefler, “US, Jewish groups demand Falk resign over blog entry,” *The Jerusalem Post*, July 10, 2011, www.jpost.com/International/Article.aspx?id=228618.

South Sudan’s secession from Sudan and the creation of a new nation there. “It addresses a present crisis, and it greatly contributed to the transition to independence.”¹⁵

The U.N. also has “noncontroversial, useful” agencies that facilitate the global economy and fight disease, he adds.

Similarly, some of the U.N.’s strongest supporters acknowledge its flaws while arguing that it makes profound contributions to peace, relief and development. The U.N. delivers “mixed results,” says Martin Rendón, vice president for public policy and advocacy at the United States Fund for UNICEF, a support organization that

raises money for the U.N. children’s program. “It’s not on target to meet all the goals that have been set. But fewer people are hungry today, and fewer people are poor today because of the U.N.

“In the 1980s, we used to say that 40,000 children were dying every day from preventable causes,” he continues. “Now we say it’s 21,000.” That’s still too high, he says, but moving in the right direction.

UNICEF offers “very good value for the money,” according to a U.K. study of multilateral aid programs released in November. Several other U.N. agencies — including the U.N. Develop-

ment Programme, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), U.N. Peacebuilding Fund and the World Food Programme — were rated as providing “good” value.¹⁶ The study prompted the United Kingdom to stop providing funding for four U.N. agencies and warned four others that they also will lose funding if they don’t improve.

Overall, the U.N. is worth what the U.K. spends on it because it is “able to work in many more countries than the U.K. can reach on its own — and at a scale beyond any single country — on a broad range of activities the U.K. could not tackle by itself,” says Alan Duncan, the U.K.’s minister for international de-



AFP/Getty Images/Mahmud Turkia

Libyans dance in the streets of Tripoli on Oct. 20, 2011, following the capture of longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi by opposition forces. After Gadhafi launched a brutal crackdown on dissenters last spring, the U.N. Security Council authorized “all necessary measures” to protect Libyan civilians. With protection from NATO aircraft, the opposition forces overthrew the regime and killed Gadhafi.

velopment. “Some agencies are worth every penny, and others need to be helped to improve or they will see their funds reduced or cut” entirely.

Do undemocratic countries wield too much power in the United Nations?

At its birth near the end of World War II, the United Nations was dominated by the industrial democracies and their allies. Four of the five permanent, veto-wielding members of the Security Council — the United States, the United Kingdom, France and the anticommunist nationalist government of China (which now controls only Taiwan) — were democracies or allies.

Today, free countries hold a minority — 45 percent — of the seats in the U.N. General Assembly, according to Freedom House, a human rights group. About a third are “partly free” and a quarter are “not free.”¹⁷

That helps to explain why undemocratic countries — including some of the most repressive — seem to ex-

ercise so much power, according to Bayefsky, of the Hudson Institute. “The current U.N. bears little resemblance to the original drafters’ vision,” she says. “Democracies don’t control what happens in the General Assembly. They play a largely defensive role in the Security Council.”

That’s because of the U.N.’s one-country-one-vote policy, which means the tiny Caribbean Island of Saint Lucia (which has a population 170,000 and pays \$23,631 a year in U.N. dues) has the same General Assembly vote as the United States, according to Kim Holmes, a Heritage Foundation scholar who was assistant secretary of state for international organization affairs in the George W. Bush administration.¹⁸

Because there are few criteria for U.N. membership, Holmes said, totalitarian and authoritarian regimes have the same voting power as free nations. As a result, “the all-too-frequent clash of worldviews between liberty and authoritarian socialism” often has stymied effective action, she said.

According to Bayefsky, “Islamic states and their cronies form an automatic General Assembly majority” that enables them to pass resolutions condemning Israel while blocking or delaying actions against despotic regimes.¹⁹

U.N. supporters acknowledge the unwelcome actions of authoritarian states but argue that the real power resides in the wealthy industrial democracies and in the Security Council, where any one of the five permanent members — the United States, U.K., France, Russia and China — can veto any action.

“Every time [Iranian President Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad speaks at the U.N. General Assembly, my blood boils, too,” says Peter Yeo, executive director of the Better World Campaign, which advocates for the United Nations in the United States. “But we have to look at the totality of the activities being undertaken by the U.N. and see that, on the whole, it serves American interests.”

Davis, at the U.N. Development Programme’s Washington office, suggests “paying close attention to what it is they’re dominating.” Authoritarian countries don’t control what’s important, he adds.

Many democratic governments agree. When controversy erupted over North Korea’s becoming chair of the U.N. Disarmament Conference, for instance, the United States reacted with a shrug. “It’s a consensus-based organization, so nothing can be decided just because the chair is a country that we have issues with,” State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said. The U.S. government chose “not to make a big deal out of this, because it’s a relatively low-level, inconsequential event.”²⁰

Similarly, South Korean officials noted that the chairmanship rotates and “have not considered any action with regard to it.”²¹

Sounding like Americans who insist the Founding Fathers intended Congress to be inefficient, Adam Chapnick,

deputy director of education at the Canadian Forces College, said the United Nations is “working exactly the way its founders intended. They anticipated that some parts of the U.N. would be dysfunctional, but, curiously, they believed that dysfunction could serve a useful purpose in the long run.”

The Security Council was to hold the real power, according to Chapnick, author of *The Middle Power Project: Canada and the Founding of the United Nations*. As the U.N. was being organized, Chapnick said, U.K. Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden said the General Assembly would “enable representatives of the smaller powers to blow off steam.”²²

Around the world, the United States is widely seen as the U.N.’s powerhouse. “The U.S. basically controls the U.N. and can almost always make the U.N. do what the U.S. wants,” said a majority of people polled in six predominantly Muslim states — Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Iran, Indonesia and Azerbaijan — plus the Palestinian Territories and Nigeria, where half the population is Muslim. Agreement ranged from 68 percent in Egypt to 53 percent in Turkey and a plurality of 43 percent in Indonesia. Only in Azerbaijan, a former Soviet republic, did a plurality (49 percent) agree with the alternative: “Through its veto the U.S. can stop the U.N. from doing things, but the U.S. cannot make the U.N. do things the U.S. wants.”²³

Should democracies leave the U.N. Human Rights Council?

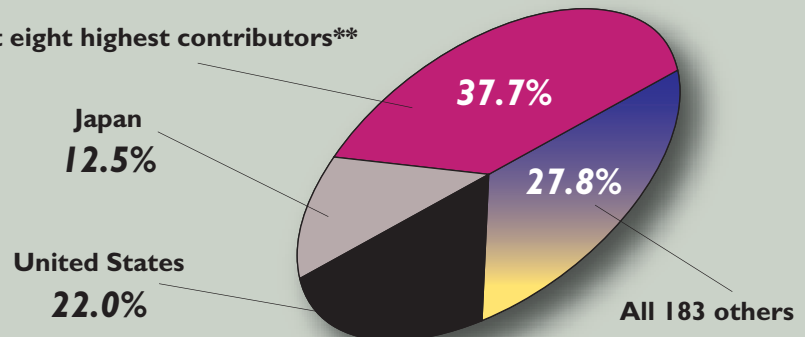
Last year, about three months before Libya launched a brutal attempt to suppress Arab Spring demonstrations, Libyan officials sat for their Universal Periodic Review by the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva. During the hearing, any U.N. member could comment on Libya’s record. Many lined up to do so, including some of the world’s worst human rights violators.

U.S. Contributes Most to UN

The United States contributed 22 percent of the U.N.’s core budget in 2011 — or \$582 million — more than any other nation and nearly as much as the amount given by 183 other members combined. Japan ranked second with a contribution of about 13 percent. Dues are assessed according to a nation’s wealth, but every country — regardless of how much it contributes — has a single vote in the General Assembly.

Contributions to U.N. Core Budget, 2011*

Next eight highest contributors**



Total U.N. Budget, 2011
\$2.6 billion

* Does not include peacekeeping expenses or independently funded agencies like UNICEF.

** Germany, U.K., France, Italy, Canada, China, Spain and Mexico

Source: “Assessment of Member States’ Contributions to the United Nations Regular Budget for the Year 2011,” United Nations Secretariat, December 2010, pp. 2-7, www.un.org/zh/members/contribution_2011.pdf

According to the council’s report on the hearing, Syria “commended [Libya] for its democratic regime,” and North Korea praised Libya “for its achievements in the protection of human rights.” Saudi Arabia commended Libya for “the importance that the country attached to human rights.”²⁴

Four days earlier, the council had examined the United States, and North Korea had complained of “persistent reports of human rights violations committed by the United States at home and abroad.” Iran, Nicaragua, Cuba and other less-than-free states weighed in with similar critiques.²⁵

The comments illustrate how the review process has been, in the words of Heritage Foundation scholar Schaefer, “hijacked by countries seeking to shield themselves from criticism . . . laughably

affirming their commitment to fundamental human rights and freedoms.”²⁶

In testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Hillel Neuer, executive director of U.N. Watch, an independent monitor of the U.N., quoted Human Rights Watch executive director Kenneth Roth, who likened the predecessor Human Rights Commission to “a jury that includes murderers and rapists, or a police force run in large part by suspected murderers and rapists determined to stymie investigation of their crimes.”²⁷

Only 20 of the council’s current 47 members (42.5 percent) are rated “free” by Freedom House. Fifteen (32 percent) are rated as “partly free” and 12 members (25.5 percent) as “not free.” The human rights group includes four council members on its 20-country list

of the “worst of the worst” — China, Cuba, Saudi Arabia and Libya, which won a council seat when Gadhafi was in power.²⁸

Calling the council “fundamentally illegitimate,” House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen says democracies should be “pushing for a massive structural overhaul or create an alternative body with real standards for membership. The council has continually undermined its own credibility by ignoring human rights abuses in Cuba, China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela

the panel in 2009. They cite recent actions, such as the council’s condemnation of Syria’s crackdown on demonstrators; its move to investigate human rights violations in Iran, Libya and Côte d’Ivoire; and its program to assess freedom of assembly around the world.³⁰

Perhaps most dramatic, the council passed a resolution last June to end discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. It commissioned a report by the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, which, when it was issued in December, catalogued anti-gay

East and North Africa, says the council’s actions “send a signal to countries that often state that LGBT rights are not compatible with their culture or religious beliefs, and therefore it’s irrelevant to their human rights framework. It affirms the universality of humans’ rights, regardless of their sexual orientation or sexual identity.”

Looking at the broader picture, Philippe Dam, a Frenchman who advocates for Human Rights Watch at the council’s headquarters in Geneva, sees “positive trends,” which he attributes in part to U.S. involvement. The “most repressive [council members] have been more isolated in recent votes,” Dam says. Democracies in Latin America, Africa and Asia have become more active, he adds.

Democracies must stick with the council, said former U.N. Secretary-General Annan, or “we leave the field free to tyrants to call the shots.”³² ■



AFP/Getty Images/STR

Protesters march in the Jan. 6, 2012, funeral procession of a man killed outside his home in the besieged Syrian city of Homs. He was among more than 8,000 people killed during a crackdown on anti-government dissenters in the past year. The efforts by Russia and China to block Security Council action on the crisis have sparked international outrage.

and many other countries,” she charges, while it “focuses disproportionately on the democratic, Jewish state of Israel.”

Since its creation in 2006, the council has seen about half of its country-specific resolutions aimed at Israel, Schaefer said. He joined Ros-Lehtinen in calling for democracies to “begin exploring the option of creating an alternative, effective human rights body outside of the U.N. system.”²⁹

Not all human rights activists agree. Some say the council performs better than the Human Rights Commission that it replaced, and they see improvement since the United States joined

laws and practices around the world and called for their repeal.³¹

The council’s stand will help activists respond to governments that say “we have poverty and people starving, so we cannot focus on LGBT [lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender] rights,” says Grace Poore, a Malaysian who coordinates the Asia and Pacific islands work of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission. “We’ll see if it actually trickles down and translates into something on the ground.”

Hossein Alizadeh, an Iranian who is Poore’s counterpart for the Middle

BACKGROUND

Dreams of Peace

Hope ran high after World War II, as the victorious gave birth to the United Nations. They had beaten back world conquest by the most brutal regimes in modern history, and they now had created an organization designed to guarantee that such a conquest could never threaten again.

In 1944, even as fighting continued to rage worldwide, diplomats from the United States, the United Kingdom, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) and Nationalist China met to plan a peaceful future for the planet. In the Dumbarton Oaks mansion, atop a hill in Washington’s historic Georgetown neighborhood, they hammered out plans for the U.N.³³

Continued on p. 116

Chronology

1940s *As World War II ends, U.N. is founded to pre-serve peace.*

1944

Diplomats from United States, U.K., U.S.S.R. and Nationalist China meet to plan new body to end wars.

1945

U.N. Charter is signed; Food and Agriculture Organization begins to address U.N.'s humanitarian goals.

1946

U.N. Children's Emergency Fund is created to serve children suffering effects of World War II.

1948

Israel declares statehood; Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt and Syria attack Israel; fighting stops after U.N.-brokered truce a month later, but resumes and ends again; U.N. deploys its first military observer group to monitor the truce.

1950

U.N. mediator Ralph Bunche wins Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating 1949 Arab-Israeli armistices; U.N. observers monitor India-Pakistan truce in dispute over Kashmir.

1950s-1970s

Cold War proceeds; free and communist countries support allies in proxy wars.

1950

U.N. sends troops to defend South Korea after invasion from Communist North Korea.

1953

Armistice ends Korean War.

1956

Egypt nationalizes Suez Canal; U.K., France and Israel capture canal; invaders agree to U.N. withdrawal demands; U.N. peacekeepers oversee pullout.

1961

World Food Programme is established to provide emergency food relief and fight chronic hunger.

1962

Cuban missile crisis sparks fear of nuclear war; U.N. serves as stage for debate while U.S. and U.S.S.R. resolve confrontation.

1963

Security Council endorses arms embargo against South Africa in effort to end white minority rule.

1966

U.N. Development Programme is created to promote economic development in poor countries. U.N. imposes economic sanctions against white-ruled Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in Southern Africa.

1967

Egypt blockades Israeli oil supply route, sparking "Six-Day War;" Israel seizes Golan Heights, Sinai, Gaza, East Jerusalem and West Bank. . . . Security Council says peace will require Israeli withdrawal from occupied land and Arab recognition of Israel's right to exist. Neither occurs.

1969

U.N. Population Fund created to provide reproductive health services to the poor and victims of conflict and disaster.

1973

After surprise attack by Egypt and Syria, Israel pushes Arab troops back across 1967 cease-fire lines. United States and U.S.S.R. broker truce without U.N. help.

1990s *Cold War ends. U.N. focuses on smaller conflicts, atrocities.*

1990

Iraq invades Kuwait; U.N. authorizes liberation of Kuwait.

1991

U.S.-led coalition liberates Kuwait.

2000s-Present

Terrorism, civil wars replace nation-vs.-nation warfare.

2001

Al Qaeda terrorist attacks in the United States prompt U.N. to authorize military action against Afghanistan, which harbors the terrorists.

2005

U.N. condemns terrorism; says it has responsibility to protect citizens from "genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity" if their own governments fail to protect them.

2011

"Arab Spring" erupts across North Africa and the Middle East. . . . Security Council authorizes NATO bombing to protect civilians after Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi cracks down on anti-government demonstrators; Gadhafi is overthrown and killed.

2012

Arab League calls for U.N. action against Bashar Assad regime in Syria after it kills thousands of protesters. Russia and China veto Security Council resolution. . . . Iran is suspected of defying U.N. strictures against nuclear weapons, raising specter of military attack by Israel or United States.

Unsung Agencies Help Prevent Chaos

From the mail to outer space, U.N. programs grease the global gears.

The United Nations usually commands public attention during times of conflict, controversy or tragedy — when its peacekeepers stand between enemies on a cease-fire line, when its relief workers rush to the aid of disaster victims or when nations debate how U.N. power should be deployed.

But much of the 67-year-old organization's work is done quietly and without controversy, by agencies supplying what Will Davis, director of the U.N. Development Programme's Washington Office, calls "the grease between the gears in an ever globalizing world."

"Every time we board an aircraft for a trip abroad, we entrust our safety to the International Civil Aviation Organization," said S. Jayakumar, Singapore's former senior minister. "Any time we call a friend or family in another country, we rely on the International Telecommunications Union."¹

Some U.N. agencies — such as the Universal Postal Union and the International Telecommunications Union — were established in the 19th century and were incorporated into the U.N.'s portfolio after its founding. Other bodies — such as the Office for Outer Space Affairs — were created to deal with new challenges.

U.N. agencies that deal with peacekeeping, hunger and disease are well known. Here are some of the important, but lesser known, U.N. agencies:

Office for Outer Space Affairs — If Newt Gingrich were elected U.S. president and established a colony on the Moon,

as he has vowed to do, this office, created in 1958 to advise the U.N.'s new Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, likely would address questions of ownership and appropriate lunar activity. International treaties say no nation can claim ownership of a celestial body and all space activity must be peaceful.

The office, which adopted its current name in 1992, also monitors space debris, which poses a growing threat to space vehicles, and maintains a register of objects launched into outer space.² In 2009, at the request of countries worried about space debris, it prepared "Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines," which urge space agencies to remove spacecraft from orbit once their missions end.

The office also staffs a round-the-clock hotline to act on requests for satellite imagery during disasters and prepares reports on international space law.³

Universal Postal Union — Negotiated by representatives of 22 nations in 1874, the Treaty of Bern established the General Postal Union to replace a series of bilateral postal agreements with a single system for moving mail from country to country. The name was changed to the Universal Postal Union four years later. It became part of the United Nations system in 1948 and continues to serve as the primary forum for cooperation among postal systems, setting rules for international mail exchange, mediating disputes, providing advice and offering technical assistance.⁴

Continued from p. 114

The following April — as the Allies conquered Italy and Germany and pressed toward victory over Japan — an expanded cast of 50 nations convened in San Francisco to write the U.N. charter, which was approved on June 25.

The next day, speaking at the charter's signing, U.S. President Harry S. Truman defined the new organization's task as keeping the world "free from the fear of war." A month later, as the U.S. Senate ratified the charter by a vote of 89-2, Democratic Sen. Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi proclaimed it "a great document which we believe will usher in the millennial dawn."³⁴

The charter created two very different bodies to govern the new organization.

The General Assembly, where each nation cast one vote, would pass budgets, conduct debates and vote on nonbinding resolutions. The 11-member Security Council, with five permanent members who each could exercise a veto, was charged with maintaining peace and could authorize sanctions and the use of force. As U.N. membership grew, the council was enlarged to 15 in 1965.

The vetoes belonged to the four nations that met at Dumbarton Oaks, plus France. But the real point of the veto was to require the United States and the Soviet Union to agree on major U.N. actions. The world was dividing into two camps — the industrial democracies and their allies against the Soviet Union and its communist satellites. The United States and

its allies dominated the 51-member organization. (Poland was added at the last moment.) But it would be impossible for the organization to act effectively if the two leaders were split on U.N. decisions.

To show that it was more than a military alliance, the U.N. established the Food and Agriculture Organization to increase farm productivity, improve the nutrition and lives of rural populations and contribute to world economic growth. In 1946, the U.N. created the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, its initial task to provide urgent relief to children suffering from the effects of the war. Funded voluntarily, UNICEF received its first substantial government contributions from the United States and Canada in 1947 and saw its first

International Telecommunication Union — Founded in 1865 as the International Telegraph Union (ITU), this is the U.N.'s oldest agency and possibly the one that has had to cope with the most change. In the early years after the telegraph's 1844 invention, telegraph lines did not connect between nations, so messages had to be transcribed, translated if necessary and retransmitted at each international border.

As they did with international mail, countries at first developed bilateral and regional agreements to standardize equipment and connect lines. The International Telegraph Convention, signed in Paris on May 17, 1865, established the union to address technological issues and establish international tariff and accounting rules.

As new technologies developed, the union had to establish international standards for telephones, wireless telegraphy, radio, television, space communication, mobile communication, digital communication and, now, media convergence. Reflecting its expanding responsibilities, the ITU became the International Telecommunication Union in 1932 and became a U.N. agency in 1949. In 1989, it accepted responsibility for helping developing countries establish modern telecommunication systems.⁵

International Civil Aviation Organization — While the postal and telecommunication unions ensure that communications flow across borders, the International Civil Aviation Orga-

nization (ICAO) makes sure pilots and air traffic controllers around the world can understand each other and that aircraft and airports are safe.

Created in 1944 at a conference in Chicago and becoming fully operational in 1947, the ICAO promulgates uniform global standards and regulations for training and licensing of air and ground personnel, communication, air traffic control, aircraft airworthiness and navigation. The organization also serves as a forum for discussion of international aviation issues.⁶

— Tom Price

¹ "United Nations: Exaggerated hopes, exaggerated fears," *The (Singapore) Straits Times*, Oct. 1, 2003.

² For background, see Konstantin Kakaes, "Weapons in Space," *CQ Global Researcher*, Aug. 16, 2011, pp. 395-420.

³ "United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs," www.oosa.unvienna.org/oosa/en/OOSA/index.html; David Adam, "Property rights on the moon," *The (London) Guardian*, Oct. 24, 2005, p. 25; Neil MacFarquhar, "U.N. Weighs How to Answer a Knock on Earth's Door," *The New York Times*, Oct. 8, 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/10/09/world/09nations.html; Heidi Blake, "Satellites threatened by orbiting rubbish dump," *The (London) Daily Telegraph*, May 27, 2010, p. 23.

⁴ "Universal Postal Union," www.upu.int/en/the-upu.html.

⁵ "ITU's History," International Telecommunication Union, www.itu.int/en/history/overview/Pages/history.aspx.

⁶ "About ICAO," www.icao.int/Pages/icao-in-brief.aspx.

national fundraising organization established — the U.S. Fund for UNICEF.

Peacekeeping Begins

The Middle East conflict between Arabs and Jews became the new organization's first major military crisis — a conflict that persists today. The United Kingdom controlled Palestine under a League of Nations mandate, and Jews wanted a homeland there for the hundreds of thousands who had survived the Nazi Holocaust but been driven from their homes.

In November 1947, the General Assembly approved partitioning Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. Confusion ensued later, when the United States reversed its position and

called for creation of a U.N. trusteeship in the region.

Britain removed its troops on May 14, 1948, and the Provisional State Council in Tel Aviv immediately proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel. Despite its earlier second thoughts, the United States quickly became the first country to recognize the new nation. Almost as quickly, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt and Syria launched the first Arab-Israeli war.

A U.N. representative negotiated a truce in June, and the international organization deployed its first military observer group to the region. U.N. mediator Ralph Bunche managed to negotiate armistices between Israel and its Arab foes in 1949, for which he won the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize — the first of 10 awarded to the U.N. and

its staff. The agreements left Israel in control of 20 percent more land than it received in the partition, while some 700,000 Arabs fled the territory.³⁵ On May 11, Israel joined the U.N.

By then, the U.N. had deployed military observers to the India-Pakistan border to monitor the uneasy peace between the two newly independent nations, who had clashed over control of the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

In 1950, with Mao Zedong's Communist Party in control of mainland China and the Nationalist government relocated in Taiwan, the Soviets attempted and failed to transfer the Nationalists' Security Council seat to the communists. (That didn't occur until 1971.) Soviet U.N. Ambassador Jacob Malik boycotted council meetings in protest.

The boycott proved bad strategy for the communists, however. When communist North Korea invaded South Korea on June 25, Malik was not present to veto the Security Council resolution that approved the U.N.'s defense of the south. Sixteen countries sent troops into the war under U.S. command.

1956. Egypt had nationalized the canal in July. In October, British, French and Israeli troops invaded — the Europeans to overturn the nationalization, the Israelis to attack anti-Israeli terrorist bases.

Britain and France vetoed Security Council resolutions — proposed by

Cuban Missile Crisis

In 1962, the Security Council served as a stage upon which the Cuban missile crisis unfolded, although U.N. action did not end the U.S.-U.S.S.R. standoff.

On Oct. 22, President John F. Kennedy announced in a somber televised address that the Soviet Union was erecting missile sites in Cuba, a communist island just 90 miles from Florida. He announced he had imposed a blockade of military shipments to Cuba, demanded that the Soviet Union remove the missiles and warned that "further action" would be taken if the missiles remained. He also declared that a missile attack in the Western Hemisphere would trigger "a full retaliatory strike upon the Soviet Union" and requested an emergency Security Council meeting.

The meeting began the next day and was watched by a television audience that feared the outbreak of nuclear war. Adlai Stevenson Jr., the U.S. ambassador to the U.N., introduced a resolution condemning the missile placement. Soviet Ambassador Valerian Zorin called for a U.N. denunciation of the blockade.

Two days later, the meeting reached its highest drama. After repeatedly challenging Zorin to deny the missile placement, while Zorin declined to respond, Stevenson declared: "I am prepared to wait for my answer until hell freezes over, if that is your decision. And I am also prepared to present the evidence in this room." He then unveiled photos of the missile sites, taken from a U-2 spy plane.

Private communications between Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev ended the crisis, with Khrushchev agreeing to withdraw the missiles and Kennedy agreeing to remove U.S. missiles from Turkey, although he would not link the two actions in public, so as not to be seen as giving in to Khrushchev.



AFP/Getty Images/Jens Schlueter

A Somali refugee and her child live in a squatter's hut outside the U.N.'s giant Dadaab refugee settlement near the Kenyan border with Somalia. Aiding refugees is one of the most important humanitarian activities undertaken by the United Nations. Some say the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees is one of several humanitarian agencies that functions effectively, because — unlike the U.N.'s regular budget — its funding is voluntary, so donor countries can stop giving money if the agency is seen as ineffective.

Three years of fighting resulted in the deaths of more than 450,000 U.N. troops, mostly South Koreans, and 500,000-1.5 million soldiers from North Korea and Communist China, which entered the war as U.N. troops advanced on the Chinese border. An armistice, signed July 27, 1953, left the North-South border near the 38th parallel, where it had been at the war's beginning. U.N. forces, mostly South Koreans and Americans, have been stationed at the tense demilitarized zone (DMZ) between the two countries ever since.

The U.N. deployed peacekeepers again after the Suez Canal crisis of

the United States and the U.S.S.R. — calling for an end to the invasion. But a precedent had been established earlier for General Assembly action when vetoes stymied the Security Council. Although General Assembly resolutions carried no enforcement power, the U.N. at that time was highly respected in Europe, and the U.K., France and Israel agreed to a ceasefire.

U.N. peacekeepers entered Egypt in November to oversee the withdrawal of the invasion forces. They remained as a buffer between Israel and Egypt until the Arab-Israeli war of 1967.

The 1960s saw the U.N. pushing against the remaining minority-white governments in Africa. In 1963 the Security Council endorsed a voluntary arms embargo against South Africa. In 1966 the General Assembly stripped South Africa of its mandate to govern South-West Africa, which later became Namibia. The same year, the Security Council imposed sanctions on minority-run Rhodesia, now known as Zimbabwe.

During the '60s, the U.N. also stepped up its humanitarian and development work. The World Food Programme was established in 1961, the U.N. Development Programme in 1966 and the U.N. Population Fund in 1967.

The U.N. failed to prevent or halt the war in Vietnam, however. Nor did it prevent the slaughter of more than a million Cambodians on that nation's "killing fields" by the brutal Pol Pot government. And its relevance was challenged in 1967, when Egypt (at the time called the United Arab Republic) demanded the U.N. remove its international military observers.

U.N. Secretary-General U Thant agreed. Egypt then blockaded the Strait of Tiran, cutting off Israel's main oil shipping route. The blockade, considered an act of war under international law, spurred an Israeli preemptive air strike on June 5 that destroyed most of the military aircraft in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and Syria. The U.N. brokered a cease-fire after Israel had rapidly won what became known as the Six-Day War, in which it seized control of the Golan Heights from Syria, the Sinai and Gaza from Egypt and East Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan. In November, the Security Council passed Resolution 242, which declared that peace in the Middle East required Israeli withdrawal from territory it captured in the Six-Day War and Arab recognition of Israel's right to exist, neither of which has occurred.

Arabs and Israelis fought again in 1973, and once again the U.N. sent peacekeepers to supervise the cease-

fire. The truce was arranged by U.S. and Soviet diplomats, however, an indication that the U.N. had little influence in the region, according to journalist/historian Stanley Meisler in his *United Nations: A History*.³⁶

The United Nations sent another peacekeeping force to the Middle East following a 1978 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, which was aimed at weakening the Palestine Liberation Organization, a Palestinian nationalist organization, elements of which had engaged in terrorist acts against Israel. Four years later, U.N. troops could not prevent Israel from entering Lebanon again after hostilities flared once more.

Amid the peacekeeping failures, the U.N. at least was able to claim success in its humanitarian efforts, when in 1980 the World Health Organization declared smallpox to have been eradicated from Earth, three years after the last case had been reported.

From 1988 to 1993, the U.N. initiated 14 peacekeeping missions, more than it had deployed in the previous four decades. But peacekeeping was not always successful, largely because the troops' "monitoring" mandate often forbids them from intervening in conflicts. In 1994, for example, peacekeepers in Rwanda did not prevent the ethnic slaughter of more than 800,000 people, mostly Tutsi, by the Hutu majority. And in 1995, Dutch peacekeepers could not protect Bosnian Muslims, some 8,000 of whom were massacred by Bosnian Serbs in Srebrenica.

The Security Council did act after Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, although the U.N. did not lead the military response. The Security Council authorized "all necessary means" to liberate Kuwait after U.S. President George H. W. Bush — at the invitation of the Saudi government — sent troops to Saudi Arabia to counter any further Iraqi aggression. But the war was fought by a U.S.-led coalition, not under the U.N. flag. After Iraq's quick defeat, the United States, U.K. and

France did not seek U.N. permission to establish no-fly zones to protect Kurds in northern Iraq and Shiite Muslims in the South.

To avoid a potential Russian veto in the Security Council, NATO skipped seeking U.N. authority in 1999, when it intervened to stop the Serbs from slaughtering Albanians in Kosovo. NATO bombing drove Serbs to negotiations. After an accord was signed, NATO and Russian peacekeepers maintained the ceasefire while U.N. administrators helped establish a government.

After the Sept. 11 attacks against the United States by Al Qaeda in 2001, the U.N. authorized military action against the Taliban government in Afghanistan, which had harbored the Al Qaeda terrorist organization that carried out the attacks. But President George W. Bush failed to win Security Council authorization to invade Iraq again in 2003 on the later-discredited grounds that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. The United States invaded anyway, with the support of countries in what Bush called the "Coalition of the Willing."

'Oil for Food' Scandal

The aftermath of the second Iraq war uncovered one of the U.N.'s worst scandals — in the so-called "oil-for-food" program.

After the first Persian Gulf War, the U.N. had imposed severe sanctions on Saddam Hussein's government. Beginning in 1996, to provide relief for its citizens, Iraq was allowed to sell oil and use the proceeds to buy food, medicine and other necessities and pay reparations to Kuwait. But after the second war, Saddam's government was discovered to have diverted funds from the sale, with the help of corrupt U.N. employees.

Marking the millennium, the U.N. and other international organizations agreed in 2000 to set what became known as the Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015.

They called for ending extreme poverty and hunger, providing universal primary education, promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, pursuing environmentally sustainable development, reversing the spread of major diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria and creating a global partnership for development.³⁷

At a U.N.-sponsored summit in 2005, world leaders for the first time unanimously condemned terrorism “in all its forms and manifestations, committed by whomever, wherever and for whatever purposes.”

They also agreed to a new doctrine, which would be used for the first time during the “Arab Spring.” Dubbed the “responsibility to protect” and abbreviated “R2P,” it declared that a nation has the responsibility to protect its population from “genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.” If a nation failed to do so, the U.N. had the responsibility to intervene.³⁸

In late 2010 and early 2011, as anti-government demonstrations sprang up across the Arab world, Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi launched an especially brutal crackdown on protesters. Distressed by the bloodshed and the threat of more, the Arab League asked the U.N. to impose a no-fly zone to restrict Libyan troop movements.

On March 17, the Security Council authorized “all necessary measures” to protect Libyan civilians. Two days later, U.S. war planes destroyed Libya’s air defenses and attacked Libyan troops and tanks. NATO then took over the operations, continuing to hamper Gadhafi’s forces. Protected by NATO aircraft and joined by defecting Libyan soldiers, opposition forces overthrew the Gadhafi regime and killed the long-time dictator.

Libya “changed the dynamic of the Security Council,” German U.N. Ambassador Peter Wittig says. “Quite a number of Security Council members adhere to orthodox political doctrine:

The Security Council should not get involved in affairs of U.N. member states.” But Gadhafi’s “ruthless brutality” forced even them to act.

While much of the world rejoiced at Gadhafi’s downfall, the reaction of Russia’s former ambassador to Libya helps to explain why Russia and China often oppose actions against oppressive governments. Vladimir Chamov complained that Russian businesses were harmed because Russia did not veto the Security Council resolution.

“Russian companies had agreed to very lucrative long-term contracts . . . which they could lose and have already lost — which in a sense can be considered the betrayal of Russia’s interests,” he said.³⁹

CURRENT SITUATION

Responsibility to Protect?

Reflecting on U.N. actions in Libya and other places last year, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared in early 2012 that “history took a turn for the better” in 2011. U.N. members seriously accepted the “responsibility-to-protect” doctrine, he said. “The results were uneven but, at the end of the day, tens of thousands of lives were saved.”

However, he continued, the world already faces “the next test of our common humanity” — in Syria. And, so far, the world is failing.

“Stop the violence, I told President Assad,” Ban said. “The path of repression is a dead-end. . . . Change now, act bold and make decisive reforms before it is too late, before more innocents die.”⁴⁰

Yet Assad refuses, and his forces have killed more than 8,000 dissidents and civilians since March 2011. The

atrocities now have risen to the level of war crimes, according to Navi Pillay, the U.N.’s High Commissioner for Human Rights. But, unlike in last year’s Libyan crisis, Russia and China have blocked U.N. action in Syria.⁴¹ Even as Syrian forces were firing on civilians in the city of Homs on Feb. 4, the two permanent Security Council members vetoed a resolution to support an Arab League plan that called for Assad to leave office. The other 13 council members voted yes. Russia and China also had vetoed an October resolution that condemned Assad’s crackdown. And Syrian officials cannot be brought before the International Criminal Court in the Hague without the Security Council’s approval.⁴²

Earlier, the six Gulf Cooperation Council states — Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates — called on the U.N. to take “all needed measures” to stop the violence in Syria.⁴³

The vetoes created “a sad day for this council, a sad day for Syrians and a sad day for all friends of democracy,” French U.N. Ambassador Gerard Araud said after the vote. Russia and China “made themselves complicit in a policy of repression carried out by the Assad regime.”⁴⁴

Unlike when addressing the Libya problem, the Security Council “failed to live up to its responsibility,” Germany’s Wittig lamented. “The people in Syria have been let down again.”⁴⁵

The stalemate exposed the U.N.’s “chief failing,” Ban said, which is “the reluctance to act in the face of serious threats. The result, too often, has been a loss of lives and credibility that haunt us ever after.”⁴⁶

It’s also put the “responsibility to protect” doctrine “in major crisis,” said Stewart Patrick, director of international institutions and global governance at the Council on Foreign Relations.⁴⁷

And although Syria may pose the U.N.’s most urgent crisis, the organi-

Continued on p. 146

Should all UN payments be voluntary?



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CHAIR, HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE

WRITTEN FOR *CQ GLOBAL RESEARCHER*,
MARCH 2012

the U.N.'s many problems stem from deep flaws in its very foundations. The Obama administration's tactical efforts for U.N. reform — while paying our U.N. dues in full without conditions — has failed to solve the organization's systemic problems. We need sweeping reforms. My bill, the United Nations Transparency, Accountability and Reform Act, conditions our U.N. contributions on shifting funding from an assessed to a voluntary basis.

At the U.N. we pay too much and get too little in return, because those who call the shots don't pay the bills. The U.N.'s regular budget is funded through assessments based on a complicated formula that factors in "gross national income." The United States pays for 22 percent of the U.N.'s regular budget but only has one vote, while two-thirds of the other member countries combined pay for only 1 percent. Those countries vote together to pass budgets and set priorities, but the cost is passed on to the United States. As long as we continue paying our dues in full with no strings attached, we surrender our strongest leverage to stop wrongdoing, advance our interests and support our allies.

Voluntary funding will enable the American people to determine, through their representatives in Congress, how much of their hard-earned money goes to the United Nations and how it is spent. Voluntary funding already works well at several U.N. bodies, including UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP). Catherine Bertini, a former WFP director, has said: "Voluntary funding creates an entirely different atmosphere at WFP than at the U.N. At WFP, every staff member knows that we have to be as efficient, accountable, transparent and results-oriented as possible [or] donor governments can take their funding elsewhere."

With no consequences for abuse, the U.N. has taken our funding for granted. In the past decade, its budget has more than doubled. The Human Rights Council is dominated by rogue regimes like Cuba, China, Russia and Saudi Arabia and spends its time bashing Israel instead of addressing real human rights abuses. The Conference on Disarmament was chaired in 2011 by North Korea; Iran serves on the Commission on the Status of Women; and the Syrian regime serves on the executive board and human rights committee for the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Voluntary funding creates the incentive structure necessary to reform the U.N. and make it transparent, accountable, objective and effective.



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WRITTEN FOR *CQ GLOBAL RESEARCHER*,
MARCH 2012

despite its many flaws, failures and shortcomings, the United Nations often plays an essential role in supporting American foreign policy and national security interests. U.N. peacekeepers separate warring parties and create conditions for reconciliation at a fraction of the cost of deploying the U.S. military. U.N. Security Council resolutions have provided the legal basis for assembling an international coalition of countries determined to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. All of these important U.N. activities are funded by assessed dues.

In the name of U.N. "reform," some have argued that our government should move to a system of voluntary contributions, in which we would selectively pay for U.N. programs that we deem vital to our national interests. Such headline-grabbing proposals are totally unrealistic and run counter to the principles that governed the U.N.'s establishment. Transitioning to a system of voluntary financial support, as opposed to paying our assessed dues, would require a U.N. Charter revision and renegotiation of the treaty establishing the organization.

The U.N. Charter has been amended only four times in its 66-year history, most recently in 1973 when the body approved an enlargement of the Economic and Social Council to better reflect the growth in U.N. member states. For one member state to force through an amendment unraveling the financial stability of the organization would be greeted with near unanimous opposition. And aside from the political infeasibility, if the United States were to unilaterally abandon its treaty obligations over payment of assessments, it would undercut the financial underpinnings of the entire U.N. regular budget.

Other nations would respond in kind by adopting their own selective approach to financing the organization. U.N. programs vital to U.S. national security interests undoubtedly would face funding reductions. For example, the U.N. special political missions in Iraq and Afghanistan — which are funded through the U.N. regular budget, largely at the insistence of the United States — would almost certainly see severely diminished financial support from other U.N. member states and thus reduced legitimacy. Other U.S. priorities at the United Nations, such as the advancement of women's rights, the protection of human rights and counterterrorism cooperation would likely face reduced funding under a voluntary funding scheme.

A course of picking and choosing what one likes and doesn't like is best left for a food buffet, not for selectively funding U.N. programs and maintaining our standing within the international community.

Continued from p. 144

zation's agenda is crowded with other challenges as well. U.N. investigators are probing Iran's nuclear program and its human rights record. The Palestinian Authority is pressing for admission as a sovereign state. Some members of the U.S. Congress are pushing to make U.N. payments voluntary. Several countries are conducting systematic assessments of U.N. effectiveness. And, all the while, the U.N. carries out its ongoing peacekeeping, development and relief efforts.

Policing Iran

Early this year, a team from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) traveled to Tehran to probe Iran's suspected nuclear weapons program.⁴⁸ In late February, the team said it could not complete its investigation because Iran had blocked access to important records and sites.⁴⁹ An IAEA report last November had triggered international alarm bells after agency officials released satellite images, letters and other documents they said showed Iran has carried out activities "relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device."⁵⁰

While Iran contends it is working only on a peaceful energy program, some of its activities are specific to weapons development, the IAEA said. These include high-explosives testing, development of a detonator to trigger a nuclear charge, computer modeling of a nuclear warhead core, preparatory work for a nuclear weapons test and development of a nuclear payload for Iran's *Shahab 3* intermediate range missile, which can reach Israel.⁵¹

The Security Council, with the support of Russia and China, has authorized sanctions on Iran, although neither country has imposed sanctions themselves.⁵² The United States and Europe have ratcheted up sanctions on Iran's oil output and banking, however.⁵³

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has acknowledged that the sanctions are "painful and crippling." But Iran has not agreed to scrap its nuclear program. Instead, Khamenei and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad have threatened military reprisals and a blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, a major oil-shipping route. World leaders also worry that Israel might launch a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, at least one of which is in the process of being buried deep inside a mountain — out of the reach of Israeli missiles.⁵⁴

Unlike the nuclear inspectors, the U.N.'s new special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Ahmed Shaheed, has not been granted entry into Iran. But, from outside the country, he said, "I am able to gather a substantial amount of information which points to widespread abuse of human rights."⁵⁵

A report by Shaheed last October described horrific repression. The General Assembly in November denounced Iran for, among other things, torture, cruel and degrading treatment of prisoners, pervasive violence against women, restrictions on freedom of assembly and "severe limitations and restrictions on the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief."⁵⁶

In his own report last March, Ban said he was "deeply troubled" by reports of "increased executions, amputations, arbitrary arrest and detention, unfair trials and possible torture," as well as mistreatment of lawyers, journalists and human rights and opposition activists.⁵⁷ The judiciary also continues to sentence men and women to execution by stoning, he said.

New Controversies

Controversy has erupted inside the U.N. over the Palestinian Authority's campaign for membership. The authority's admission to the U.N. Educational,

Scientific and Cultural Organization last year triggered an automatic cutoff of U.S. funding under U.S. law and gave impetus to a congressional campaign to make all U.N. payments voluntary.

U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Ros-Lehtinen, who has introduced voluntary-payments legislation, argues that "U.N. bodies funded on a voluntary basis — such as UNICEF, the World Food Programme and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees — function better and are more deserving of funding because they recognize that, if they fall short, donor countries can and will stop giving them money."

The Heritage Foundation's Schaffer agrees that voluntarily funded programs tend to be "extremely useful activities" that are "more responsive to the member states" and their concerns. However, he adds, organizational expenses — such as maintaining headquarters, facilitating meetings and providing translations — are essentials that should be financed by all members.

Yeo of the Better World Campaign warns that Americans might be unpleasantly surprised by the impact of voluntary funding. Mandated dues "support U.N. missions that nobody else would fund," he says. "Which countries are going to line up for the U.N. to work in Iraq and Afghanistan?"

Duncan, Britain's minister for international development, says every country should contribute toward costs, just as taxpayers help pay for a country's defense and justice departments. But, the money must be spent "in a transparent manner and highly focused on results."

Britain, Australia and Norway are among nations that tie their voluntary contributions to the results of systematic evaluations of U.N. agencies. After their first round of reviews last year, for instance, Australian evaluators recommended maintaining or

reducing funding of some agencies while doubling contributions to UNICEF and substantially increasing support for the World Food Programme and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.⁵⁸

Other evaluations are being conducted by the 16-country Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network and the evaluation network of the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

While those evaluations proceed, 16 U.N. peacekeeping operations continue on four continents, and humanitarian and development missions are being conducted by such U.N. agencies as UNICEF, the High Commissioner for Refugees, the U.N. Development Programme and the World Food Programme.⁵⁹ ■

OUTLOOK

Thwarting Violence

Secretary-General Ban has declared 2012 “the Year of Prevention.” Instead of trying to end conflicts or atrocities after they begin, he wants the United Nations to mark his second term, which began in January, by thwarting violence before it happens in the first place.

That requires “strengthening our capacities for mediation, fact-finding and peaceful settlement,” he said, as well as building strong civil societies around the world. “Genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and other crimes against humanity . . . occur far less often in places where civil society is robust, where tolerance is practiced, and where diversity is celebrated.”⁶⁰

Ban promised that the U.N. would increase its efforts to promote human

rights and democratic values and practices and asked the Security Council to take better advantage of its power to investigate potential threats before they become crises.

Several public opinion polls indicate there is global support for strengthening the U.N. and expanding its authority. A poll in predominantly Muslim regions, for example, found that nearly two-thirds of respondents supported making the U.N. “significantly more powerful in world affairs,” and majorities backed using U.N. military force to stop a country from supporting terrorist groups, prevent nuclear proliferation and restore a democratic government that had been overthrown.⁶¹

Another survey, in countries that contain 56 percent of the world’s population, found majority support for empowering the U.N. to regulate international arms trade.⁶² And, in a poll of 23,518 people in 23 countries, majorities in all but two countries supported increasing the U.N.’s power.⁶³

Dam, the Human Rights Watch advocate, wants the U.N. to require members to cooperate with efforts to promote human rights and to single out those that don’t. States must be made to “pay a political cost for their lack of cooperation,” Dam says.

Rick Leach, president and CEO of World Food Program USA, predicts that his and other U.N. agencies will engage more with the private sector. For instance, “UPS is helping us look at logistics operations,” Leach says, referring to the United Parcel Service. And the World Food Programme is purchasing more food from subsistence farmers and teaching farmers to become more productive, using funds and business expertise from the Bill and Melinda Gates and Howard Buffett foundations. The goal is to turn aid recipients into farmers who can support their families by selling their products in the private marketplace.

Others want to see the U.N. develop better management practices. Former Ambassador Hall says U.N. agencies need to hire external organizations to evaluate their operations, just as external auditors examine corporate books. “Institutions that do that and then follow through on the (recommendations) are your best.”

Schaefer, of the Heritage Foundation, wants the U.N. to finish a systematic evaluation of all its programs, a process that began in 2005. And the Better World Campaign’s Yeo wants U.N. executives to “more aggressively adopt best practices for the management of large institutions.”

However, Rana, the former U.N. executive, urges caution in applying corporate theory to the global public institution. “Reforms based on the corporate world do not necessarily apply well to the U.N. Secretariat,” she says. ■

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About the Author



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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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The global human rights advocacy group finds “some notable progress” in the operations of the U.N.’s highest-ranking — and highly controversial — human rights body.

“Multilateral Aid Review: Ensuring maximum value for money for UK aid through multilateral organizations,” U.K. Department for International Development, March 2011, www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/mar/multilateral_aid_review.pdf.

A British government evaluation of 43 multilateral organizations, including prominent U.N. humanitarian and development agencies, concludes that nine offer very good value for the money spent by U.K. taxpayers, 16 offer good value, nine adequate value and nine poor value.

“People in Muslim Nations Conflicted About UN,” University of Maryland Program on International Policy Attitudes, Dec. 2, 2008, www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/btunitednationsra/575.php?lb=&pnt=575&nid=&id=

Polling in Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Iran, Indonesia, the Palestinian Territories, Azerbaijan and Nigeria finds support for a strengthened United Nations and a belief that the United States dominates the organization.

Blanchfield, Luisa, “United Nations Reform: U.S. Policy and International Perspectives,” U.S. Congressional Research Service, Dec. 21, 2011, www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33848.pdf.

Congress’ nonpartisan research arm examines various attempts at reforming the United Nations over the years, congressional actions aimed at U.N. reform and potential U.S. policy considerations for dealing with the organization.

The Next Step:

Additional Articles from Current Periodicals

Funding

“Funding Shortfalls Threaten Global Anti-AIDS Efforts, UN Says,” Deutsche Presse-Agentur (Germany), Nov. 30, 2011.

The global campaign against HIV/AIDS is threatened by shrinking funds, according to the World Health Organization and other U.N. agencies.

“RF Pays US\$22-M for Budgets of UN Peacekeeping Operations,” Philippine News Agency, Oct. 29, 2011, phl.ph/2011/10/30/rf-pays-us-22-m-for-budgets-of-un-peace-keeping-operations/.

Russia has contributed a total of \$22 million to the budget of U.N. peacekeeping forces in Lebanon, Côte d'Ivoire and Darfur.

Otero, Jordan E., “House Panel OKs Funding Plan to Force U.N. Reforms,” *The Washington Times*, Oct. 14, 2011, p. A4, www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/oct/13/house-panel-oks-funding-plan-to-force-un-reforms/.

Republicans on the House Foreign Affairs Committee want to cut U.S. contributions to the United Nations unless mandatory dues are replaced with voluntary donations.

Singh, Yoshita, “Impossible to Continue Without US Funding: UNESCO Chief,” Press Trust of India, Nov. 3, 2011.

UNESCO's chief is pleading with the United States to continue its financial support of the world body.

Human Rights Council

“UN Suspends Libya From Rights Council,” The Associated Press, March 1, 2011, www.usatoday.com/news/world/2011-03-01-un-suspends-libya_N.htm.

The United Nations has suspended Libya from the Human Rights Council for “gross and systematic” rights violations under the regime of Moammar Gadhafi.

Annan, Kofi, “Despite Flaws, UN Human Rights Council Can Bring Progress,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, Dec. 8, 2011, www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2011/12/08/Kofi-Annan-Despite-flaws-UN-Human-Rights-Council-can-bring-progress.

Skeptics say the U.N. Human Rights Council has not lived up to its mandate, but a former U.N. secretary-general says abandoning it altogether is the wrong way to advance human rights.

Zavis, Alexandra, “U.N. Rights Panel Faults Syria Regime,” *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 3, 2011, p. A4, articles.latimes.com/2011/dec/02/world/la-fg-syria-un-20111203.

The U.N. Human Rights Council has concluded that Syria's security forces have committed crimes against humanity in their treatment of Arab Spring dissenters.

Peacekeeping

Bildt, Carl, “The Inspiration Behind U.N. Peacekeeping,” *Daily Star* (Lebanon), Sept. 9, 2011, www.dailystar.com.lb/News/International/2011/Sep-09/148290-the-inspiration-behind-un-peacekeeping.ashx#axzz1n8iKT7Aj.

A number of global developments, such as the Cold War and globalization, have altered the premise of U.N. peacekeeping.

Jacob, Jayanth, “India Wants UN to Take Fresh Look at Peacekeeping,” *Hindustan Times* (India), Aug. 15, 2011, www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/NewDelhi/India-wants-UN-to-take-fresh-look-at-peacekeeping/Article1-733357.aspx.

India is pushing U.N. member countries to adopt new guidelines for peacekeeping, starting with getting finances in order.

Kahn, Benjamin, “Don’t Paralyze the Peacekeepers,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 10, 2012, p. A27, www.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/opinion/dont-paralyze-the-united-nations-peacekeepers.html.

Nations that contribute troops to U.N. peacekeeping missions may have little in common with each other, and some may have little national interest in the outcomes of peacekeeping efforts.

Nyesiga, Dias, “UN Commends Country’s Peacekeeping Mission in Darfur,” *The New Times* (Rwanda), May 29, 2011, www.newtimes.co.rw/news/index.php?i=14640&a=9508.

Deputy U.N. Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro has expressed gratitude for Rwanda's efforts in the peacekeeping mission in Darfur.

CITING CQ GLOBAL RESEARCHER

Sample formats for citing these reports in a bibliography include the ones listed below. Preferred styles and formats vary, so please check with your instructor or professor.

MLA STYLE

Flamini, Roland. “Nuclear Proliferation.” *CQ Global Researcher* 1 Apr. 2007: 1-24.

APA STYLE

Flamini, R. (2007, April 1). Nuclear proliferation. *CQ Global Researcher*, 1, 1-24.

CHICAGO STYLE

Flamini, Roland. “Nuclear Proliferation.” *CQ Global Researcher*, April 1, 2007, 1-24.

Voices From Abroad:

KANAT SAUDABAYEV

Minister of Foreign
Affairs, Kazakhstan

A storied contribution

"Over the past 65 years, the United Nations has made an enormous contribution to peace and security on our planet and to the solution of many social, economic, humanitarian and other problems. It is in our common interests that the United Nations continues to demonstrate leadership in promoting peace and cooperation and sustainable progress on Earth."

*Speech before 65th session of
U.N. General Assembly
September 2010*

SYED YUSUF RAZA GILANI

Prime Minister
Pakistan

Using its power

"The U.N. must use its offices to achieve a fresh consensus on broad contours of this anti-terror policy. The U.N. must also spell out a strategy to address the rightful grievances of people."

*Associated Press of Pakistan
July 2011*

BAN KI-MOON

Secretary-General
United Nations

Peacekeeping must evolve

"We may be entering a new phase, with diverse and multifaceted situations where peacekeeping may play a role. Peacekeeping will need to

evolve to meet specific demands in a variety of environments and to flexibly and nimbly bring together multiple capabilities in a coherent and effective manner."

*India Blooms News Service
August 2011*

ED LUCK

Special Adviser
United Nations

Strong principles

"Today, the principle of human protection and responsibility to protect are so strong that even governments traditionally worried about sovereignty did not want to stand in the way of forceful council action."

*The Nation (Thailand),
March 2011*

SIMON ADAMS

Former pro-vice chancellor
Monash University
Australia

The U.N.'s failures

"From the killing fields of Cambodia to East Timor, Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo, mass-atrocity crimes were generally met with international diplomatic passivity. The United Nations proved incompetent or impotent in the face of monstrous human rights challenges."

*Canberra (Australia) Times
April 2011*

HANY BESADA

Senior Researcher, North-
South Institute, Canada

Response necessary

"The [Libyan] violence has created a massive humanitarian crisis, displacing hundreds of thousands of foreign workers and Libyans alike. Failure to develop an effective response to halt these events would render the R2P [Responsibility to Protect] doctrine ineffective and undermine the credibility of the United Nations."

*Korea Times (South Korea)
May 2011*

INGA-BRITT AHLENIUS

Under-Secretary-General
Internal Oversight Services
United Nations

Lacking accountability

"There is no transparency; there is a lack of accountability. Rather than supporting the internal oversight, which is the sign of strong leadership and good governance, you have strived to control it, which is to undermine its position. I do not see any signs of reform in the [U.N.] organization."

*Financial Post (Canada)
August 2010*

BABACAR GAYE

Military adviser
U.N. Mission in Sudan

Protect the Sudanese

"We could have and should have had more visibility to deter any violence against [Sudanese] civilians."

*The Guardian (England)
June 2011*

VLADIMIR PUTIN

Prime Minister, Russia

Learn from the past

"I very much hope that the USA and other countries will take dismal experience into account and not try to use the force scenario in Syria. . . . Having learnt from bitter experience, we oppose the adoption of UN Security Council resolutions that could be interpreted as a signal to military intervention in internal Syrian processes. . . . Russia together with China prevented in early February the adoption of [such a] resolution."

*Moskovskiy Novosti
February 2012*

