

THE U.N.'s 50th ANNIVERSARY: TIME FOR REFORM, NOT CELEBRATION

The Clinton Administration and many other governments worldwide have been turning up the rhetoric for the United Nations' 50th anniversary. The celebration is set to culminate early next week when most heads of state, including President Bill Clinton, address the U.N. General Assembly. Amid all the standard accolades for the U.N., the President is bound to raise the issue of reform. Even Ambassador Madeleine Albright, who is second to none in her enthusiasm for the U.N., says the world body is an "elephantine" organization in need of reform. But to reform the U.N., the Clinton Administration will have to do more than talk. Among other steps, it will have to:

- ① **Cut funding for U.N. peacekeeping,**
- ② **Eliminate funding for big U.N. conferences, and**
- ③ **Eliminate funding for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).**

Working Around the Edges. In large part because the 104th Congress is increasingly skeptical about the value of the U.N., the Clinton Administration has given U.N. reform a sense of urgency. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, in a September 25 address to the General Assembly, declared that "The U.N. bureaucracy should be smaller, with a clear organizational structure and sharp lines of responsibility." Christopher then went on to propose a "concrete agenda" of reform which includes ending programs that have achieved their purpose, consolidating overlapping programs, downsizing regional economic commissions, adopting a moratorium on big conferences, streamlining the Secretariat, extending the scope of the Inspector General to the entire U.N. system, and expanding Security Council membership. Several other proposals would affect peacekeeping, including subjecting proposed missions to more rigorous scrutiny.

These measures, while welcome, would change the way the U.N. operates only marginally. Expanding the scope of the Inspector General will matter little as long as the office remains what Senator Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS) and Representative Lee Hamilton (D-IN) call a "disappointment." Former Under-Secretary General for Administration and Management Dick Thornburgh wrote in 1993 that "The United Nations...is almost totally lacking in effective means to deal with fraud, waste and abuse by staff members." It appears that the Inspector General, recently established and lacking essential powers, has not been the remedy.

The sincerity of the Clinton Administration's commitment to some of these reforms is doubtful. The moratorium on big conferences, for example, is odd given that the Administration has boasted frequently of its participation in these events. Vice President Al Gore went to the Cairo Conference on Population and Development in 1994; the Vice President accompanied Hillary Clinton to the Copenhagen Social Summit last March; and Mrs. Clinton and Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala attended the recent Fourth Women's Conference in Beijing. The Clinton Administration's opposition to these wasteful talkfests rings hollow.

Toward Real Reform. Instead of waiting for the U.N. bureaucracy to act, the U.S. should take the lead in pressing for needed reforms. Specifically, the U.S. should:

✂ **Cut funding for U.N. peacekeeping.** U.N. peacekeeping has grown considerably in size and scope over the last several years. There now are 16 peacekeeping operations worldwide, and the U.S. peacekeeping bill is some \$1.1 billion a year, up from only \$64 million in 1988. Many U.N. peacekeeping missions have floundered, most notably in Somalia and Bosnia. Generally, these are “second generation” peacekeeping missions in which U.N. forces enter hostile environments in the hope of forging peace and providing humanitarian aid. These misguided efforts have brought the U.N. close to financial ruin. The U.N. peacekeeping account is now nearly \$1 billion in the red.

Despite opposition from the Clinton Administration, Congress has moved to reduce America’s contribution to U.N. peacekeeping. The House in June cut one peacekeeping account to around \$425 million, which is some \$100 million less than last year. (The U.S. funds peacekeeping through several accounts.) A Senate bill—the Foreign Relations Revitalization Act of 1995 (S. 908)—gradually reduces the annual U.S. contribution to peacekeeping to some \$200 million by 1999. If implemented, these reductions would ensure that the U.N. sticks to traditional peacekeeping operations, such as in Cyprus, and would put a stop to the risky and senseless expansion of U.N. peacekeeping operations to include “peace-enforcement.”

✂ **Eliminate funding for big U.N. conferences.** These conferences cost millions of dollars and typically are long on rhetoric and short on achievement. The Social Summit, for example, focused on “Creating Jobs” and “Building Solidarity,” two objectives well beyond the capabilities of a one-time gathering of national and international bureaucrats. The 1996 City Summit to be held in Istanbul will develop a “global plan of action” to address every conceivable urban problem, including crime and transportation inadequacies. If the U.S. is truly interested in ending support for blatantly counterproductive programs, it should withdraw its funding for the City Summit now.

✂ **Eliminate funding for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).** The UNDP is one of a bewildering array of specialized agencies in the U.N. system. It is charged with, among other objectives, “contribut[ing] to a sustainable expansion of the world economy.” Essentially, the UNDP is a foreign aid program. These activities are beyond what should be the scope of the United Nations: acting primarily as a forum for discussion of international security matters while undertaking such other focused activities as humanitarian relief efforts. Moreover, the notion that foreign aid can promote economic development has been proven fallacious. The countries which have lifted themselves out of poverty, such as Chile and Hong Kong, have done so largely because they were deprived of foreign aid, not because they received any money from the U.N.

The Clinton Administration recognizes that the U.N. badly needs reform. Even the President, who once embraced “assertive multilateralism,” has come to recognize that the U.N. wastes U.S. taxpayer dollars. The Administration is misguided, however, in thinking that its reforms go far enough. Much more needs to be done. The Congress has the opportunity to promote the establishment of a realistic U.S.-U.N. relationship, one in line with the U.N.’s limited accomplishments and potential. With its American funding reduced, the U.N. will be forced to adopt discipline in taking on peacekeeping missions and reduce the number of its wasteful undertakings. Otherwise, the current U.S. reform campaign will be yet another wasted opportunity on the long road to reforming the U.N.

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