



# Executive Memorandum

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## SETTING THE TONE FOR AMERICA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED NATIONS

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This year has seen a remarkable swing in America's relations with the United Nations. Relations at the beginning of the year were the best since the early 1990's. The U.S. and the U.N. reached an agreement in December 2000 on reducing America's share of the U.N. budget, and both houses of Congress passed legislation authorizing payment of \$582 million in arrears to the organization in February.

Since then, however, the Bush Administration has been roundly chastised by U.N. officials, domestic critics, and some of America's allies for being "isolationist" or "unilateralist" because it disagreed with the prevailing opinion at the U.N. on several key issues. The Administration's rejection of the Kyoto Protocol on global warming and the International Criminal Court sparked outrage internationally. In July, the Administration declared its opposition to aspects of the *U.N. Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects* that would have violated the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Most recently, the Administration sent only a low-level representative to attend the *World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance* as a protest to objectionable language in the draft declaration, including "the 'Zionism is racism' proposition [and] slavery and compensation." Many pundits interpreted the ejection of the U.S. from the U.N. Human Rights Commission and the International Narcotics Control Board in May as punishment for the Administra-

tion's position on the Kyoto Protocol and a missile-defense system.

The President's speech to the General Assembly on September 24 offers a unique opportunity to elucidate U.S. actions on international treaties, explain his judicious approach to global issues, and to establish a new reciprocal relationship with the U.N. distinct from that of the Clinton Administration.

An Agenda to Promote American Interests at the U.N. Activists at the United Nations and their supporters in the U.S. proceed from the premise that any American policy that does not have the support of the "international community" is wrong or morally inferior to a multilateral policy. This premise flourished under the Clinton Administration, to America's detriment. It emboldened America's adversaries and spawned numerous international agreements (such as the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto Protocol) that not only are flawed and against America's interests, but are against the world's interests as well.

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The Bush Administration should reject the notion that multilateral actions or policies are by definition morally superior, realistic, or effective. As demonstrated by America's lonely support of Israel and condemnation of communist abuses during the Cold War, the policies of one nation can be superior to those of the "international community." Such a stance would be a more forthright reflection of reality. For all the rhetorical support of multilateral consensus, every nation bases its foreign policy on its interests; where national interests and those of the international community collide, national interests take precedence. America's European allies are frequently guilty of ignoring their own unilateralist tendencies while condemning the United States.

**A Champion of Liberty.** America should strive to replace the notion of international consensus as the guiding principle at the U.N. with expansion of liberty. Numerous discussions, documents, treaties, and proposed actions are based on the premise that people around the world have a "right" to everything from clean water to education. Declaring these rights has not purified any water or educated any children, and U.N. target dates for accomplishing its goals are rarely, if ever, met.

What is accomplished, however, is a debasement of the definition of rights that provides an alarming justification for the expansion of international bureaucracy and erosion of every person's and nation's fundamental right to liberty. Whether their goods are achieved or not, international agreements provide justification to illegitimately expand the authority of international law, organizations, and bureaucrats to impose arbitrary "rights" as obligations on sovereign governments.

The Bush Administration should promote liberty as its overarching policy objective at the U.N. Such a belief already serves as the basis for the Administration's discrimination among international agreements. The Administration has categorically rejected those that threaten the liberty and constitutional rights of Americans, such as the ICC, while supporting those that would enhance the liberty of individuals, such as free trade.

An international system based on and accountable to sovereign nations, rather than a supranational system that dictates to nations, must be the cornerstone of America's policy on international organizations. An overarching international authority on various policies reduces the ability of nations to depart from the policy set by the "international community," as demonstrated by recent efforts to combat tax competition through the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). An international authority will never push for liberty because it will be leashed by the opposition of the majority of the international community who are not free politically or economically.

America was founded as a rejection of external restrictions on liberty. This belief is expressly stated in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. The Administration should work with available allies on an issue-by-issue basis to advance its interests in the United Nations and feel no shame in rejecting treaties designed by and for nations that have little adherence to liberty, but great dedication to opposing it. Being a force for liberty will not be popular at the U.N. or among the left in America. But if the U.S. does not champion the cause, no nation will.

**Conclusion.** If the Bush Administration is to blunt international agendas that run counter to America's interests, it must reassert U.S. leadership at the United Nations. International agreements must be viewed through the prism of America's economic and security interests. Both depend on the expansion of individual and national liberty—a treaty that threatens either should not be supported. President Bush should seize the opportunity offered by his speech to the U.N. General Assembly on September 24 to declare that the expansion of liberty, while clearly in America's interest, is also in the interest of every individual and nation, and should be the central policy of the United Nations.

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