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Does the United Nations Advance the Cause of Freedom?

The Honorable John R. Bolton

NILE GARDINER, Ph.D.: Good morning. I'd like to welcome you to the fourth Margaret Thatcher Freedom Lecture at The Heritage Foundation. Ambassador John Bolton is the author of the forthcoming book *Surrender Is Not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations and Abroad*, and is currently Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. He served as the United States' Permanent Representative to the United Nations from August 2005 to December 2006, prior to which he was Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security.

During his time at the U.N., Ambassador Bolton was a forceful advocate of American interests, a powerful voice for U.N. reform, and a staunch defender of the cause of liberty on the world stage. He was an outspoken critic of corruption, mismanagement, waste, and inefficiency. He shook up an institution that has for decades been resistant to change and cast a revealing light on an elite U.N. establishment that has long thrived in a culture of complacency and secrecy. His commitment to both the advancement of U.S. interests and the cause of international freedom and security was unwavering, and he dramatically raised the profile of issues ranging from peacekeeping abuses to the need for increased transparency, accountability, and effectiveness at the United Nations.

While campaigning for a higher human rights standard at the U.N., Ambassador Bolton also worked tirelessly to push for greater action by the U.N. Security Council and the international community regarding the genocide in Darfur. He played a key role in Security Council negotiations, pressing for greater

Talking Points

- United Nations reform is hindered by a large majority of the member states who pay very little to the organization yet benefit greatly. These countries do not want the U.N. to change. The United States should lead an effort to shift U.N. funding away from assessed contributions toward voluntary contributions. We should pay for what we want and get what we pay for.
- U.N. efforts in development are hindered by a statist or redistributionist mindset that has been rejected by economists and policy-makers almost everywhere else in the world. While the U.N. does some good humanitarian work, many U.N. agencies ignore basic rules and procedures to ensure that humanitarian supplies are not diverted toward unintended purposes by despotic regimes such as North Korea.
- The U.N.'s record on terrorism and on proliferation is one of ineffectiveness. It functions little better on political and humanitarian issues like the genocide in Darfur.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
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protection for refugees fleeing Sudanese-backed Janjaweed militias, and for targeted sanctions against Sudanese officials implicated in the killing.

While serving at the U.N., Ambassador Bolton was not afraid to speak his mind and upset the status quo, nor was he unwilling to call a dictator a dictator, expose the rampant hypocrisy of the U.N.'s human rights apparatus, or condemn the actions of dangerous rogue regimes. As Ambassador, he famously described the U.N. as hopelessly out of touch and stuck in a twilight-zone-style "time warp" where "there are practices, attitudes, and approaches that were abandoned 30 years ago in much of the rest of the world." Effective diplomacy requires forceful leadership and the willingness to back up tough words with action. As former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher observed in a letter of support for John Bolton's nomination to be U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., "[A] capacity for straight talking rather than peddling half-truths is a strength and not a disadvantage in diplomacy. In the case of a great power like America, it is essential that people know where you stand and assume you know what you say."

Please join me in welcoming Ambassador John Bolton.

—Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., is Director of the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom in the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies at The Heritage Foundation.

THE HONORABLE JOHN BOLTON: Does the United Nations advance the cause of freedom? The answer is, in my view, minimally or occasionally or—perhaps, more precisely—accidentally, at times. You could come at this question in a lot of different ways. Let's come at it empirically, because there is a lot of ground to cover, and necessarily there will be a lot of things I won't be able to get to. But the sheer magnitude of the substantive areas that the U.N. tries to deal with in a way is a revealing insight into its inadequacies, because there are so many things that it does poorly. One could say that if it were structured effectively, it would just try to do a few things and at least try to do them well. But it doesn't, and that is part of its basic problem.

Let's cover some of the important areas, because I think that the deficiencies of the organization, which reveal themselves in many different ways, also show why fundamentally, despite the rhetoric of the United Nations Charter about the organization advancing, as it's called there, "in larger freedom" all of its other objectives, that the organization as presently constituted and governed is simply not up to the task.

Economic and Humanitarian Concerns

Let's just take the economic and humanitarian area to start with. Looking at the work that the U.N. does in this field that is so important for the developing world and large populations even in developed countries, here you find that the U.N. is locked in a mindset that is statist and redistributionist at a time when these concepts have been largely rejected by economists and policymakers, at least at a rhetorical level, almost everywhere else in the world. This really is the best example, I think, of the time warp that still engulfs the United Nations. Contrary to the sort of UNICEF [the United Nations Children's Fund], Halloween trick-or-treat view of the U.N.—as people motivated strictly by altruistic considerations and sacrificing their own interests in support of larger objectives—in fact, what mostly goes on at the U.N. is an effort to either intimidate or persuade the developed world to transfer resources to the less-developed world.

Even though we have mechanisms like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization that we have carefully set up to handle their respective issues, the motivation for many countries in the Non-Aligned Movement (which has never, by the way, fully answered Daniel Patrick Moynihan's question at the end of the Cold War, "What are you non-aligned about?") or the G-77 (which now actually has 130 countries as members) is to try to bring authority and decision-making power into the United Nations away from these other agencies. They do so in such a fashion that almost guarantees an instinctive and correct American response to reject that approach.

So, where the U.N. actually could have a role in advancing economic policies that enhanced freedom, that enhanced opportunity, that enhanced economic development, the mindset of the U.N.

itself as played out in its conference rooms and corridors is actually exactly to the contrary. Even in the area of humanitarian assistance, where the U.N. does some good work, there are deficiencies that are potentially crippling in their implications. We've seen that recently in the case of North Korea.

You know, it really was Herbert Hoover who began the tradition of humanitarian assistance in the United States when he set up (during World War I) the Commission for Relief in Belgium—essentially a private effort, but one that for the first time mobilized a lot of sentiment in the United States to provide humanitarian assistance in case of war. And one of the things that Hoover was intent upon was that the delivery of humanitarian supplies, basically food and medicine, into Belgium would not be diverted by the Germans to their own military use. He insisted that the volunteers for the Commission for Relief in Belgium could track the food, could monitor its distribution, and could verify that indeed it was being used for humanitarian purposes. And where he did not feel confident that the Commission could do that, he simply suspended deliveries.

This has become a basic rule for not only American humanitarian activities, but in the international community as a whole, and it is the kind of rule that, at least in theory, the U.N. itself should follow. And yet we have seen in the case of North Korea what the *Wall Street Journal* has called “the cash for Kim program,” that the U.N. Development Program and other agencies of the U.N. have willfully, over a sustained period of time, ignored these rules, allowed the North Korean government to acquire hard currency—which it desperately needs to keep itself in power—and to keep its programs of weapons of mass destruction going. Over years and years of this kind of activity, the U.N. Development Program has simply not followed rules that have been accepted since the time they were promulgated by Herbert Hoover almost 90 years ago.

The Oil-for-Food Scandal

Now, in monetary terms, I would say this doesn't compare to the Oil-for-Food scandal, which I think will remain for some time the Mother of All Scandals at the U.N. But it reflects the same lack of atten-

tion to the very humanitarian objectives that motivate countries to make contributions to these programs. You know, the worst part of the Oil-for-Food Program was not that there was waste and fraud and corruption—although there was certainly plenty of that. The worst part of it was that the United Nations—and I include here the members of the Security Council, including the United States—allowed Saddam Hussein to take what should have been a program devoted to providing minimal resources for the people of Iraq and allowed him and the Baath Party to make it into an instrument to enhance the Baath Party's control over the Iraqi people; in other words, to have this humanitarian assistance diverted to political purposes, just as in the case of the Cash-for-Kim program.

I well remember sitting in Secretary of State Colin Powell's daily staff meeting when the person from the U.S. Agency for International Development reported that as Coalition forces were moving north toward Baghdad, the entire distribution system of the Oil-for-Food Program was disappearing along with the retreating Iraqi army (or what was left of it), thus making it much more difficult for Coalition forces to provide the humanitarian assistance we knew we would have to for the civilian Iraqi population. And the reason the Oil-for-Food Program was disappearing with the Iraqi military was that it was an arm of the Baath Party, and they had no intention of remaining in the liberated Iraq after the protection of Saddam Hussein's army had disappeared.

This was something that occurred under our noses over a substantial period of years; the U.N. knew about it, everyone knew about it, and they simply didn't act. That is a stain on the U.N. Frankly, it is an embarrassment to the United States as well. And so the cases of Iraq and North Korea are emblematic of problems that are far more deeply embedded in the United Nations system, as Paul Volcker found in his investigation of the Oil-for-Food Program. If you're interested in all the details, you can read almost anything Claudia Rosett has written on the subject. She's done a fantastic job of going into great detail—something the mainstream media has studiously ignored—about the deficiencies of Oil-for-Food.

Political Concerns

Let's turn for a minute to the political side of things at the United Nations. Just take a few examples: One is the new Human Rights Council that was created last year. We in America had achieved a real milestone by the focus on the inadequacies of the previously existing U.N. body, the U.N. Human Rights Commission, and I think we had convinced everybody—we had even convinced Kofi Annan—that the Human Rights Commission was an embarrassment for the U.N. itself, that it was so manifestly unable to address human rights issues in an objective and realistic fashion that it had to go. We came at the reform effort recognizing that in a membership organization like the U.N. there is no way to guarantee a perfect outcome on human rights. But we had a series of procedural changes that we proposed, no one of which would have been dispositive, but which taken together cumulatively would, we felt, produce a different membership on the Human Rights Council. Therefore, we hoped, it would produce different outcomes such that we wouldn't have the spectacle of Libya being the Chairman of the Human Rights Council, or a Council that serially passed resolutions condemning Israel and the United States.

In the negotiations over the creation of the new Human Rights Council, however, we found a sustained opposition by many of the Non-Aligned Movement countries—opposition by China and Russia and others. And what happened in the course of this negotiation, which will be more fully recounted in my book, if you're interested, was that our friends in Europe, step by step by step backed away one after the other from the procedural reforms that we had proposed. Although many people point to the problems we face in the U.N. because of dictatorships and rogue states and the policies they pursue, let's not forget that our friends in Europe are often part of the problem, too. And on the Human Rights Council, they were very much a part of the problem, as they left us increasingly isolated in defending these procedural reforms that we felt were so necessary.

I knew that the game was up when the Europeans gave way on the last important change we wanted to make, which was a rule that said that no

country under Security Council sanction for gross abuses of human rights or support for terrorism could be a member of the Human Rights Council. How's that for a radical proposition? It wasn't a judgment call, it wasn't our preference who couldn't serve, it was just a hard and fast rule: If you're being sanctioned by the Security Council for abusing human rights, you cannot be on the Human Rights Council. The Europeans gave that up and I knew that at that point there was no hope. We actually had to have an extensive debate within the U.S. government over whether, nonetheless, we would vote in favor of this new body, because after all, if we voted against it we would be—What's the worst thing you can think of?—*isolated*.

Now, for many diplomats, this really is a form of hell, because it indicates that you're separate from all the other diplomats. I personally viewed it as a badge of honor that the United States was willing to stand on principle and say, "This effort at reform has failed and we're not going to dissemble about it, we're going to tell the truth. We're going to tell the truth by voting 'no.'" And ultimately, that was the decision that was made. The United States and only three other countries voted against the resolution creating this new Human Rights Council, basically predicting that it would be no better than—and might even be worse than—the previous Human Rights Commission. I'm sad to say, roughly a little over a year later, that's exactly what has happened. And the consequence of giving in to the combined pressure from those who didn't want to see reform, and by acquiescing in what turned out to be no reform at all, is that as a practical matter, we will not revisit the U.N.'s human rights decision-making mechanism for the foreseeable future, because people will say, "Well, we already had our reform; what's the need to go back for it?"

So, in a way, we have locked in a problem for the U.N. that is simply going to get worse year by year. In fact, just in the past week, we saw evidence of this. There's an excellent article by Anne Bayefsky (who's done outstanding work over the years on U.N. human rights issues) about the international conference the U.N. has put together for 2009. It's a reprise of the Durban Conference in 2001 on racism, which was a complete debacle, and the Non-

Aligned Movement has decided that they want to revisit it; it was such a success from their point of view. They are using the Human Rights Council as the preparatory committee for this operation, and Anne Bayefsky reported this week that as they begin the preparations they've made the following decision: For the preparatory work for this Durban II, as some are calling it, Libya will be the chair of it, Cuba will be the Rapporteur, and Iran is on the Executive Committee. Another triumph for human rights in the making, we can certainly see that!

The Non-Aligned Movement, earlier this week, showing their great devotion to human rights, has voted to set up a new human rights center for the Non-Aligned Movement to be headquartered in Tehran. I'm really looking forward to that one. That's the voice of the Non-Aligned Movement that we hear in the United Nations day after day. If there were real devotion to human rights and democracy in the U.N., then I think you would see a lot more support for something that's not going to happen in the near future, and that's Taiwan becoming a U.N. member. You know, this is a problem that could have been resolved back in 1971 when the representation of the People's Republic of China was substituted for that of Taiwan. The then-American Ambassador, George H.W. Bush, had a proposal that would have both Chinas seated as members of the U.N.; Chiang Kai-shek's government on Taiwan rejected that possibility at the time—a mistake, in retrospect, to be sure, but something that could be corrected now.

Taiwan is a vibrant democracy; I can tell you having just been there for a week for the first time in seven years since, as a senior State Department official, I wasn't allowed to go to Taiwan because it might offend Beijing. Can you imagine that? They're in the middle of their own presidential election now. It's quite closely contested, and there's little doubt that the people of Taiwan understand what it is to live in a democracy. That's not something that the United Nations is going to respect. I wish that I could single out the U.N. as being the problem there. Of course, our State Department is a problem as well. I personally think we should grant full diplomatic recognition to Taiwan, but in the State Department I think it's more likely they'll grant dip-

lomatic recognition to the dictatorship in North Korea before the democracy in Taiwan.

International Peace and Security

A third area of U.N. activity is international peace and security. Now, this is something that, for the United States today and for the foreseeable future—in the areas of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction—we have to be greatly concerned about. But if you look at the U.N.'s record on terrorism and on proliferation, this is another sad story of ineffectiveness. And it goes to the point that the U.N. is never going to be any better than its membership; that's the best that it can achieve. More often, we fall into the defects of the culture of the U.N. in a way that's reflected, I think, recently and most acutely in the tragedy in Darfur, in contrast to the higher priority issues of Iran and North Korea and other rogue states seeking nuclear weapons. I think, much like during the Cold War, when the Security Council was gridlocked by the struggle between East and West, it will be largely futile to hope that the Security Council will do much in the field of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism.

But even in the case of Darfur, where there are no substantial American interests of any concrete fashion, where President George W. Bush has made it one of his priorities to try to relieve the suffering and gross abuses of human rights the people of Darfur are suffering, we find that in the Security Council, China, Russia, and other members are protecting the government in Khartoum. This is really something that I think recalls, for many people, the tragedies of Rwanda, where the U.N. stood by and allowed that to happen as well. Now, I don't mean to underestimate the enormous logistical and operational difficulties of trying to do something about Darfur. Nobody should have any illusions about how hard that is. But if the United Nations can't handle the big issues like proliferation and terrorism, can't it at least handle on a political basis these issues like the genocide in Darfur? And at least so far, the answer is "Not very well."

U.N. Management

Now, the next major area of the U.N.'s record I think we need to look at is the area of management. I mentioned the Oil-for-Food scandal. This was a case where management simply collapsed, where

Paul Volcker reports that the involvement or the oversight of the Secretary-General on this huge program—the largest program the U.N. ever undertook—was essentially completely nonexistent. And Secretary-General Kofi Annan recognized he had a huge problem on his hands and he did come up with a package of what I would call minimal reforms; reforms that, by and large, the U.S. supported because we thought they were first steps worth taking. They were certainly not the solution, but they were certainly worth supporting at least as a token of good faith, even though when we got Kofi Annan to understand the importance of this sort of reform, his effort and our effort to support it failed in the General Assembly.

And let me just tell you briefly what happened. Going through the U.N. General Assembly's Budget Committee and then into the General Assembly itself, we had huge debates going on hour after hour about these reforms. And finally, when it became clear that even the European Union couldn't find a way to compromise with the Non-Aligned Movement, which was unalterably opposed to almost all these reforms, we did something that rarely happens in the General Assembly: We had a vote on the budget. Now, the conventional wisdom is that you don't need to vote on the budget because you should try to reach decisions by consensus. What this turns out to mean is not that the U.S. is able to exert its influence, but that we surrender case after case to this overwhelming majority. Because why? Because we don't want to be *isolated*.

But finally, on the critical issue of Annan's suggested reforms, we insisted that there should be a vote, and the reforms were defeated by a substantial majority. There were 51 or 52 votes in favor of the reforms and 120-plus votes against the reforms. So that was more than a two-to-one loss. Here's the critical fact: The 50 countries that voted in favor of the reforms contribute 90 percent of the U.N.'s budget. The 120 countries that voted against reforms contribute 10 percent of the U.N.'s budget. There's your explanation right there: The countries that don't pay the money are perfectly satisfied with the way U.N. management works because they are the principal beneficiaries and they don't want it to change. More recently, in both Oil-for-Food and Cash-for-Kim

scandals, we've seen the satisfaction with the status quo playing out even more graphically, and even some of the reforms that Kofi Annan and supporters of the U.N. have trumpeted as important steps forward have proven to be inadequate.

Whistleblowers and Cash-for-Kim

Most recently, in the Cash-for-Kim question we see the unbelievable spectacle, very rare in U.N. circles, of a whistleblower coming forward to say, "I can provide evidence from my own personal experience as to how the U.N. Development Program failed to meet U.N. standards and procedures in the case of North Korea." And where the new U.N. Ethics Office can issue a report saying there's a *prima facie* case that this whistleblower was fired in retaliation, and where the U.N. Development Program will simply refuse to cooperate with the U.N.'s Chief Ethics Advisor. They are about, I think, to demonstrate in yet another case that's just being reported now of another whistleblower at the U.N. Development Program that they're going to resist efforts there as well.

I have to say this is a big disappointment for me personally—to see the new Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon, not fight to protect whistleblowers. He did an amazing thing when he came into office in January. He made public all of his finances, as he had been required to do as South Korea's Foreign Minister, but which he was exempt from doing as the Secretary-General of the U.N. Kofi Annan for 10 years refused to make his finances public, which set an example for everyone else in the U.N. I didn't like making my limited finances public when I was an office holder in the United States, but I did it, and it's not too much to expect the U.N. to go through the same thing. Ban Ki Moon really made a difference.

This time, however, he has failed, and I think the signal that it sends to whistleblowers throughout the U.N. system—that there really is not adequate protection for you when you come forward—will produce exactly the result that we would all predict, which is to say that whistleblowers simply won't provide their information and a lot of the mismanagement and corruption will continue and we won't even find out about it. That's a pretty depressing prospect, I have to say.

There is a bigger picture here that goes not to the substantive problems that I've been discussing and not to the questions of management and structure that are so important in any operational institution. There's a bigger question here, and that is what exactly the U.N. and its funds and programs and specialized agencies should be. There are many in the world, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs), many in the media, many academics, many international civil servants, who are coming increasingly to the view that the U.N. has a life and legitimacy independent of its member governments, that the organizations themselves somehow have acquired legitimacy beyond what their member governments are capable of conferring. This has been reflected in a variety of different ways, particularly through some of the statements and actions of senior leaders of various parts of the U.N. system

A Secular Pope?

Let's take the example first of Kofi Annan. A few years ago, his press and media types were spreading the word that looking at the world as it is today, looking at the U.N., looking at the figure of the Secretary-General, that the Secretary-General, and Kofi Annan in particular, constituted kind of a secular pope. Now, I'm a Lutheran, and I don't even believe in a religious pope. But if I did, I would certainly be even more opposed to the concept of a secular pope, especially one that heads a church called the United Nations. This is an issue of legitimacy that is very fundamental. We rejected when we declared our independence the view that legitimacy came to rulers from above. We didn't like the divine right of kings, or as it's called in many Asian kingdoms "the mandate of heaven." We said, "We're going to reverse this. It comes in the other direction: Legitimacy comes from the expression of the will of the people channeled in constitutional ways."

Kofi, by declaring himself a secular pope, I guess expected something to fall out of the sky and give him this legitimacy. But it reflects, in all seriousness, an attitude that many senior U.N. officials have—that they are at least separate from responsibility to the member governments, and in some cases, and this is a good example, above and superior to the member governments. This needs to be corrected very fundamentally, and I think it's something that

the United States is going to have to do. I don't think our European friends will do it. After all, they have been going through an exercise for decades conferring authority on the European Commission in Brussels, reducing their own national sovereignty, their democratic sovereignty in Europe, and apparently not thinking very much about it.

This problem is not simply an inconvenience to the United States. Just to take one statement that Kofi Annan made over the entire course of his 10 years as Secretary-General—and this is almost a direct quote—"The Security Council is the sole source of legitimacy for the use of force in the world. The Security Council is the sole source of legitimacy." Now, what that means, obviously, as he has said, is that our use of force in Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein was illegal, and indeed any American use of force, even in self-defense, even what the U.N. Charter itself guarantees to us, is illegitimate unless the Security Council has approved it. That's the kind of thing that, if left unchallenged over time, affects not only other countries around the world, it affects our own polity. And it's demonstrated by the effect it had on John Kerry in 2004 when he said our foreign policy, and especially the use of force, had to pass a global test to be legitimate.

Let's be clear: Legitimacy for the United States comes from the people exerting their preferences through our constitutional system, and it is extremely important for us to challenge assertions by others that that is illegitimate or that they have an independent or greater source of legitimacy in international organizations than the member governments are capable of conferring on them.

This example of Kofi Annan is replicated time and time again. Last year, Deputy Secretary-General Mark Malloch Brown decided he was going to opine on the deficiencies of the American people, especially everybody between the Atlantic Coast and the Pacific Coast, whom he said essentially weren't smart enough to avoid brainwashing by FOX News and Rush Limbaugh, and that if only the Bush Administration would say how wonderful the U.N. was that support for the U.N. would be much higher than these poor slob out in the middle of the country who had such limited access to news as from sources like Limbaugh and FOX. The Deputy

Secretary-General of the U.N. is an international civil servant. He works for the member governments; he is part of an international organization, an organization of national governments. For him to comment on the deficiencies, not of our government, but of our people, was not just wrong and inappropriate, it was *illegitimate*. And we need to speak up when that happens.

There is another example that is going on right now in the form of Mohamed ElBaradei, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), somebody I worked hard but inadequately to stop from getting a third term as Director General of the IAEA. This is a man who, having won the Nobel Prize, is now, I think, trying for a fourth by essentially acting as an apologist for Iran, ignoring decisions of the IAEA Board of Governors, ignoring decisions even of the Security Council, as part of his effort to find his solution to the threat posed by Iran's nuclear weapons program.

And what did I find yesterday, to my surprise, as support for this view, which was a minority view—I don't think you'll be surprised my view was a minority view within the State Department. But who do I find yesterday supporting this but the editorial board of the *Washington Post* in an editorial entitled "Rogue Regulator: Mohamed ElBaradei Pursues a Separate Peace with Iran." And I'll just read to you the first paragraph from that editorial:

For some time, Mohamed ElBaradei, the Egyptian diplomat who heads the International Atomic Energy Agency, has made it clear he considers himself above his position as a U.N. civil servant. Rather than carry out the policy of the Security Council of the IAEA board for which he nominally works, Mr. ElBaradei behaves as if he were independent of them, free to ignore their decisions and to give his agency and use his agency to thwart their leading members, above all the United States.

I have to say, I wish I had written that. I'm very glad the *Washington Post* did; I hope the *New York Times* reads it, and I hope the State Department reads it, too.

Now, what are we going to do about this? What should we be doing? I've studied the U.N. for a long

time. I was Assistant Secretary of State in the first Bush Administration with responsibility for U.N. matters; I've written and studied it during the wilderness years of the Clinton Administration; I've served in the second Bush Administration for six years; I've had the opportunity to look at it from a lot of different perspectives. And I think that there's simply one thing left for the United Nations. If our country is ever to have the influence and the role in the U.N. that it should—and let me be clear, I'm not proposing this as a kind of platonic way to make the U.N. better; that's a fine result if we could obtain it—my objective is to increase the influence and authority of the United States in the world and in the U.N. system.

Assessed vs. Voluntary Contributions

I think there's one reform that we should focus on, and that is to shift the funding of the U.N. system away from the current system of assessed contributions toward a system of voluntary contributions. The way it works now is you take the U.N.'s budget or the budget of each of the specialized agencies and, through a complex formula, allocate percentages to each member government as to what they pay. The U.S. share of the budget in the U.N., and most of the specialized agencies, is 22 percent. We pay 27 percent of peacekeeping; that is the highest assessment by a long way. And the shares go down to an almost infinitesimal amount, so I gave you the statistic on that vote on Kofi Annan's reforms. The lowest assessed share for the regular budget—get this, we pay 22 percent—is 0.001 percent. Last year, just for the fun of it, I added up the assessed shares, starting from the bottom, to get to 97; there are 192 in the General Assembly, so 97 is a majority. So, starting at the bottom, I added up the 97 countries, the lowest assessments for the 97 countries, and it came to 0.23 percent of the total budget.

So, in other words, the lowest 97 countries, an *absolute majority* of the General Assembly, basically amount to less than one-third of 1 percent of the total budget. We're roughly 65 to 70 times more: We're paying more than a majority of the 97 countries of the 192. What that has created is a kind of entitlement mentality, and as long as they think we're on the hook for that amount of money, I don't think they're ever going to pay as much attention to us as they should.

My proposal is to shift the purely voluntary contributions, and this is based on another radical proposition: We should pay for what we want and get what we pay for. And if that's shocking to you, I'm sorry; I think this is something that is appropriate that American taxpayers can insist on. It will be a huge struggle in the U.N. It will be resisted; it may be impossible to do, and it may be that Congress is just going to have to make the decision on its own, as some members have already proposed to do. Senator Norm Coleman of Minnesota and others are proposing to defund the new Human Rights Council. I think that's exactly the right thing to do. That's the only way we're going to get anybody's attention.

But I think even having a debate on shifting from assessed to voluntary contributions would have a profoundly positive effect, just like a strong wind blowing often disinfects everything in its path. The strong wind of the debate—and it would be over a shift to voluntary contributions—might actually bring a number of subsidiary or small reforms along with it. But this is the one thing that the United States should push in the U.N. in terms of structural change and reform. It's not directly related to our political influence, but let me tell you, if those people thought that our money was going elsewhere, our political influence would increase right along with our influence over budgets and management structure and operations.

So, that's my conclusion about the United Nations, the accidental defender of liberty in the world, and I want to welcome the opportunity to answer your questions.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: I was wondering if you could tell us anything about a teeny tiny tax that the U.N. is putting on in France, I believe. And also, what would you recommend as the role for NGOs in the upcoming Durban prep talks?

AMBASSADOR BOLTON: Well, because of the actions that various U.S. Congresses have taken over the years, first in the 1980s and then in the mid-1990s, in withholding part of America's assessed contributions in an effort to get people's attention, a number of governments and scholars turned their attention to how to avoid this problem of democracy

at work in America, to try to find a way that would be an even better guarantee of funding for the U.N. system. And a number of them came up with a kind of international taxation that would funnel money into the U.N. or into some of its specialized agencies without this difficult, cumbersome business of, in our case, asking Congress to approve it.

Now, obviously that's a way of creating a funding stream for the U.N. that would make it more financially independent from the member governments, and this idea has risen and fallen and emerged in different forms over the years. It came up again about a year and a half ago and was reflected in this national tax by France on the purchase of international airline tickets—tickets purchased in France—which they plan to funnel through the French government to the United Nations. You know, a national government can tax for all kinds of reasons, good ones and bad ones. We could have a dollar tax on every international airline ticket bought in the United States to pay for the pandas at the National Zoo.

I think what the French are trying to do is provide a basis to show that this is doable in a wide variety of countries so that even if we could block such a tax at the U.N., if enough other countries do it, in effect you've created almost the same mechanism. So it's a sort of stealth idea that I think we need to watch out for, and something that is very contrary to the fundamental rationale, as I discussed before, of what an international organization is.

This is a subject for a whole other Margaret Thatcher lecture on non-governmental organizations and the process of what they call "norming" at the U.N. and other international conferences. There are a lot of groups out there, a lot of American groups included, that are trying to use the U.N. or the international system not just for questions that we would traditionally consider foreign policy questions, but to move issues that are essentially questions of national policy into the U.N. system. In the American case, I think it reflects a fairly sophisticated reading by many NGOs of their chances for success in Congress or at the state level. They have looked around and see that the politics of this country don't favor the outcomes that they want, so instead of beating their heads against the wall in domestic American politics, they find it much easier

to internationalize the question and have it resolved in international negotiations which are remote, distant, and hard to penetrate. They then bring these things back to U.S. treaties and say, "Well, look, everybody else has agreed to this, how can you not agree to it?"

This happens in a wide variety of areas that you wouldn't normally think of as being the subject of international negotiations. I'm not saying this is concerted, but it's a pattern that happens over and over and over again. To me, it doesn't matter what your own personal opinion is on these issues; it's a question of whether they should be resolved on the national level or whether they should be resolved in international negotiations. One is gun control, where we obviously have a fierce debate in this country over what is the appropriate role of government, what is constitutionally protected. In the international community, when an American—and I've done this myself—cites our Second Amendment as a reason why we perhaps might not agree to a treaty that restricts private ownership of firearms, this is regarded as really a very offensive act, that we would worry about our own constitutional protections when they've got larger fish to fry, these high-minded people out there who are trying to "do right" by us.

You've got the question of the death penalty, another hotly debated issue in this country, where the United Nations Human Rights Commission, that wonderful body, has decided that the death penalty is inappropriate. So when Ban Ki Moon announced earlier this year that he supported the decision of the Iraqi tribunal that gave the death penalty to Saddam Hussein—and very appropriately, in my view—the U.N. system reacted in horror, for after all, it was the position of the U.N. as decided by the Human Rights Commission that the U.N. was against the death penalty. So, Ban Ki Moon reversed direction—another disappointment, I would have to say—and changed his view. But it's just simply not the responsibility of the U.N. to take on a position on an issue that is for national governments to decide. Where the United States is not imposing the death penalty because of some authoritarian government, we're having a very impressive democratic debate over this question.

These issues of norming go on and on and on: family rights issues, climate issues, almost anything you can think of. And the non-governmental organizations are among the leading proponents of taking more issues out of the purview of national governments and putting them into the international system. In the case of the U.S., because the NGOs are predominantly left wing, they see that they can't win in our political system so they'd rather talk to their left-wing friends around the world where they will do a lot better. From their point of view, it is a logical, sophisticated, and so far not unsuccessful strategy, and in the Democratic administration to come, I fear it will be even more successful.

QUESTION: You talked about China being the protector of Khartoum in the Security Council. I wonder if you've seen China's position evolve at all, whether the activism, the genocide, the Olympics has made any difference. And secondly, if you could just give two words about Burma, whether or not you think First Lady Laura Bush's efforts to get this back in the Security Council will work.

AMBASSADOR BOLTON: Well, in the case of China, I think that what's driving their policy is obviously their large and growing demand for oil and natural gas, and indeed, basic minerals of all kinds. That's the reason. You say, "What conceivable interest could China have in the Sudan?" The answer is that it has oil and natural gas interests that it has negotiated with the government in Khartoum and it wants to protect those interests. I think China is susceptible to embarrassment on this point, and I think that some of the steps we were able to take in the Security Council came when the United States was willing to say, "Whether you support a resolution creating a peacekeeping force for Darfur or not, we're going to press ahead for a vote." This can change their behavior. And I do think that pressure through the 2008 Olympics can have an effect as well.

But if you ask over the long sweep of the next several decades what is going to be more important to China, I think it will be driven by its basic economic interests. This is something that we need to understand, and it's one of the reasons why turning to the Security Council, for example, in the case of Iran's nuclear weapons program, has proven to be and will continue to prove to be ineffective, both

because of China's, and in the case of Iran, Russia's interest in selling advanced conventional weapons, ballistic missile technology, and nuclear power plants (in the case of Russia) to the government of Iran. And they're not going to cut that off. This is why I say the Security Council and the U.N. as a whole, at best, can be an accurate reflection of the world as it is. At worst, they are a reflection of the peculiar culture that develops in the U.N. cities around the world and especially in New York.

In the case of Burma, we had extraordinary difficulty in getting the issue of Burma even put on the agenda of the Security Council. We were able to force a vote on the question, and because it was a procedural vote, China couldn't veto it. Under the Charter, the veto does not apply to procedural votes. But I think it unlikely that anything substantive is going to get through the Security Council because of Chinese concern about the regime in Burma. Now, that doesn't bother me entirely, and in a sense I wish there were times when the United States was more willing to push something to a vote and make somebody else veto. Two of my happiest moments in New York were casting vetoes for the United States against Security Council resolutions that were grossly imbalanced in the case of Israel. I was happy to do it, and I was proud even that we were isolated to an extent.

I think two can play at this game. I think you can isolate China, and as I said before, the threat of isolation for them had a salutary effect on some of our earlier work on Darfur. I think we ought to do it more frequently, and in fact, I think we ought to be prepared, at least in some cases, to force them to veto as well, to show to people that we tried the diplomatic route. You know, the Bush Administration is repeatedly criticized for not engaging in diplomacy. If anything, we engage in too much diplomacy with rogue regimes like Iran and North Korea. We ought to put Russia and China on the spot more often, putting resolutions in the Security Council and saying, "Go ahead and veto it. If you're really prepared to risk it, we want to see that." I think that would define more clearly what their policies are and it would then unquestionably free us to do what we need to do outside the Security Council because we would have put the course of action there and the Council's ability to move ahead would have been blocked.

QUESTION: Ambassador, I would like to hear comments on U.N. peacekeeping operations, especially on member countries that are contributing troops to these operations because there are countries that have gross human rights abuses. My second question is the recent announcement that there is some kind of agreement between the U.S. and North Korea. What's your opinion on that? Are you happy?

AMBASSADOR BOLTON: No, I'm not happy. I'll come back to that; let me do peacekeeping first. You know, I think the Security Council itself has failed in many respects on peacekeeping. This is not something I blame on the Secretariat to the U.N., I blame it on the Security Council for creating peacekeeping operations but then not adequately overseeing them, and for being involved in trying to resolve the underlying political dispute that gave rise to the peacekeeping operation in the first place. Many U.N. operations have taken on a near-perpetual life and I think that's a real mistake. What I would do is to try and have the Security Council more active, and I would take operational authority for peacekeeping away from the U.N. Secretariat and vest it in the Security Council's own Military Staff Committee.

The Military Staff Committee was created in the Charter to mirror the joint command between the United States and United Kingdom in World War II; it never went anywhere because of the Cold War. But it provides a mechanism for real militaries to combine to increase the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations rather than simply delegating it to the Secretariat, where time and time again a peacekeeping operations mandate, which is normally six months long, will come up. The Security Council will roll it over, they'll listen to a report by the special representative of the Secretary-General who will drone on for an hour, nobody will pay the slightest bit of attention to him, we'll all vote 15 to nothing in favor of extending the mandate another six months, and then go and have lunch at some swank New York restaurant and consider that we'd done a good day's work.

This is a fundamental abdication of authority by the Security Council. Just to be clear here, I think many of the problems of peacekeeping—and I include in that the procurement fraud that we've seen rife in peacekeeping operations, the sexual

exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers, which I think is one of the worst stains on the United Nations, that people being sent to protect some of the most vulnerable populations in the world taking advantage of the very people they're being sent to protect—are failings of the Security Council as much as of the Secretariat, and that's where responsibility should be put.

In terms of the North Korea situation, I just think it is wrong to believe that Kim Jong Il will ever voluntarily give up his nuclear weapons. They are his trump card; he's not going to be chatted out of them, even for being taken off the list of state sponsors of terrorism or for the extension of full diplomatic relations by the United States. He is going to do what he has consistently done for the last decade or more, which is promise to give up his nuclear weapons and lie about it.

Absent substantial verification capabilities by the international community, I simply don't trust North Korea's word. Fred Iklé, a former Under Secretary of Defense, once said that the only thing you can say about North Korea is to look at their boundless mendacity. And they're on the verge of doing it again and we're falling prey to it. I think—and I've heard the President say this in many different conversations—that we are allowing this prison camp with nearly 20 million people in it to continue to exist in North Korea. The solution to the problem ultimately is the reunification of the Korean peninsula; just as Germany was reunited, so too Korea will be reunited, and the sooner the better.

QUESTION: I liked your idea very much of voluntary contributions. Could we propose something like this: Either you go with us and you make a voluntary contribution—that would be a necessity—or we will drop out with our money and our building.

AMBASSADOR BOLTON: Well, the most shocking thing that ever happened to the U.N. system since 1945 was when Ronald Reagan withdrew from UNESCO. It was a shock across the U.N.; nobody thought we would do it, nobody thought we had the spine. They probably talked to too many people

from the State Department. But Reagan had the guts to do it and it did have a profound effect.

One of the most important lessons I learned was during the George H.W. Bush Administration. In 1989, we were trying to keep the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from becoming a member of the World Health Organization (WHO). Now, you might ask why they are spending their time doing that. Well, to be a member of the World Health Organization or most other parts of the U.N. system, you have to be a state; that's what the charter of the U.N. says. And the PLO, instead of trying to create facts on the ground by negotiating with Israel, was trying to create facts on the ground in the U.N. And if the U.N. system admitted the PLO as a state, well, then, of course it would be a state, right? This was something we saw as a grave threat to the U.N., because if the PLO had been admitted, I don't have the slightest doubt that Congress would have substantially cut or perhaps eliminated the U.S. assessment to the World Health Organization and any other U.N. body the PLO joined.

So, Secretary James Baker at the time, obviously coordinating with the President, made a public statement that he would recommend to the President that we terminate U.S.-assessed contributions to any U.N. agency that elevated the status of the PLO. It was a very dramatic threat, the first time, I think, that the executive branch of the U.S. government had ever threatened to withhold contributions from the U.N. system. It achieved its result: The PLO was not admitted to the WHO, it was not admitted to any other U.N. agency, and it went off and found other ways to be mischievous in pursuing its objectives.

But we stopped it in the U.N. system because we used the threat of withholding money, and I think that's a profound lesson. I think that's why the move toward voluntary contributions is a prerequisite. If other countries think that the programs that the U.N.'s agencies are implementing are so important and so worthwhile that even if we're not part of them, I'm sure they'll put the money up, won't they? I'm sure they will.