

# Background

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## U.S. Foreign Aid Recipients Show Little Support for America When Voting at the United Nations

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**Abstract:** *Since 2000 about 95 percent of U.N. member states that receive U.S. assistance have voted against the United States most of the time in the U.N. General Assembly on non-consensus votes. The U.S. should inform aid recipients that their support—or lack of support—for U.S. priorities in the U.N. and other international organizations will directly affect future decisions on allocating U.S. assistance. In order to strengthen and broaden support for America’s policies in the U.N., the U.S. should also seek to build coalitions of like-minded nations that are firmly committed to political and economic freedom. Over the long term, U.S. aid could facilitate the expansion of these coalitions by encouraging more countries to become freer, both politically and economically.*

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The United Nations is a profoundly political body. Its 192 member nations seek to advance their various, often competing interests, leading many nations to oppose U.S. diplomatic initiatives and efforts to advance U.S. interests. This makes countries’ voting practices in the U.N. General Assembly a useful metric both for gauging their ability and willingness to support U.S. priorities and for evaluating the U.S.’s effectiveness in using the available foreign policy tools to gain support for its policy positions.<sup>1</sup>

U.N. member countries’ voting patterns in the General Assembly reveal that:

- U.S. assistance to U.N. member countries has not led them to support U.S. diplomatic initiatives in the U.N. reliably. On the contrary, most recipients

### Talking Points

- U.N. General Assembly resolutions, while non-binding, influence public perceptions in many countries and are often characterized as expressing the “will of the international community.” The U.S. needs to pay attention to General Assembly votes and increase support for U.S. policies.
- U.S. foreign assistance has not induced aid recipients to support U.S. policies in the U.N. About 95 percent of recipients have voted against the U.S. most of the time on non-consensus votes since 2000.
- The U.S. should inform development aid recipients that their support—or lack of support—for U.S. priorities in the U.N. and other international organizations will directly affect future U.S. assistance.
- The more economically and politically free a country is, the more likely it is to support U.S. positions in the U.N.
- To bolster support in the General Assembly, America should seek to build and strengthen coalitions among economically and politically free nations.

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of U.S. assistance vote against the United States more often than they vote with the U.S.

- Economically free countries are more likely than less free countries to vote for U.S. positions.
- Politically free governments are also more likely than less free countries to vote for U.S. positions.

It is time to rethink U.S. engagement with the United Nations and reshape U.S. policy to better serve American interests, protect U.S. sovereignty, and increase the U.N.'s ability to fulfill its stated purposes of promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms and maintaining international peace and security.

To bolster international support for U.S. diplomatic initiatives, particularly in the General Assembly, the U.S. should seek to build and strengthen coalitions among economically and politically free nations that share many values and principles with

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***The United States needs to lead in establishing alternative mechanisms, coalitions, partnerships, alliances, and organizations to act when the U.N. proves unable or unwilling to do so.***

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America. When the issue is important, the U.S. should also be willing to use its political and financial pressure to garner support from countries that would not generally support U.S. policies. Therefore, the State Department should adopt a policy of letting aid recipients know that undermining U.S. priorities at the U.N. will make Americans, especially Congress, less inclined to continue providing aid to them.

Finally, while the United States needs to continue to lead the international community in working through the U.N. when it can be effective, it also needs to lead in establishing alternative mechanisms, coalitions, partnerships, alliances, and organizations to act when the U.N. proves unable or unwilling to do so.

## **U.S. Aid Fails to Advance U.S. Policies Effectively**

The American public has recognized the difficulty of working through the U.N. to advance U.S. interests and has expressed frustration with the systematic shortcomings that plague the organization. As a recent Gallup poll noted, "Americans have never held the United Nations in particularly high esteem." Since 2003, an average of only 32 percent of Americans have agreed that the U.N. is "doing a good job," with the lowest approval rating of 26 percent recorded in 2009.<sup>2</sup>

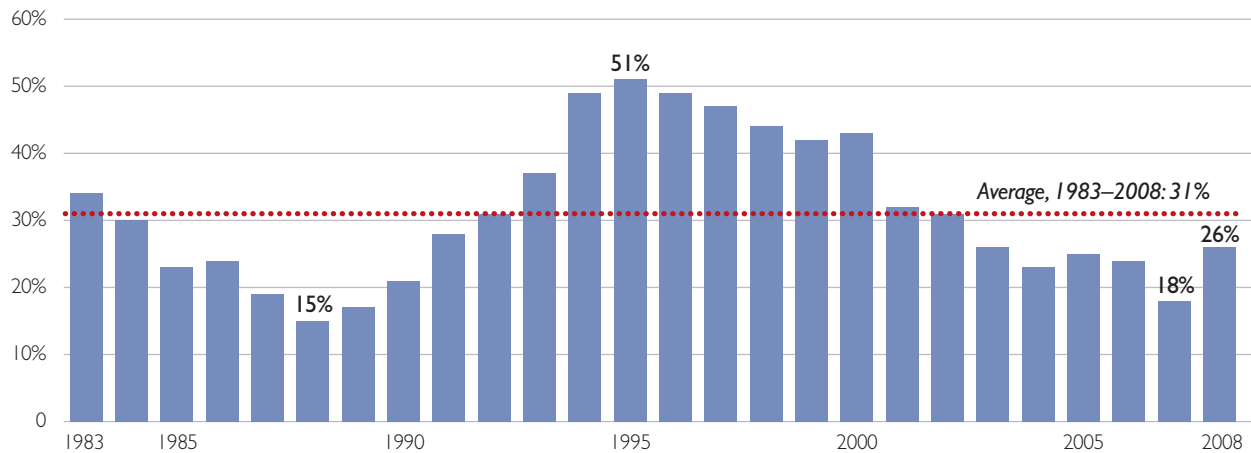
A key reason for the U.N.'s poor reputation is that Americans generally perceive the organization as hostile to U.S. policies and priorities. Analysis provided in the U.S. Department of State's annual *Voting Practices in the United Nations* report demonstrates that there is substantial factual basis for this perception.

One measure of the influence that U.S. foreign assistance programs have in promoting U.S. priorities is how often aid recipients vote with the U.S. in the General Assembly. Historically, the U.S. has been largely unsuccessful in eliciting support for its positions in the General Assembly.<sup>3</sup> Following the Cold War, the U.S. enjoyed a honeymoon in the U.N. during which support for its positions on non-

1. The General Assembly conducts discussions and adopts resolutions on peace and security, terrorism, disarmament, economic and social development, humanitarian relief, and human rights. Most General Assembly resolutions are adopted by consensus without a formal vote because they lack substance or are non-controversial. Thus, actual votes on General Assembly resolutions are a good measure of a country's support for U.S. diplomatic priorities because the resolutions typically involve matters of substance that engender disagreement.
2. Gallup, "Americans' Rating of United Nations Improved, but Still Low," February 19, 2010, at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/126134/Americans-Rating-United-Nations-Improved-Low.aspx> (March 22, 2010).
3. This paper considers both non-consensus "all" and non-consensus "important" votes. In the 2008 session, the General Assembly adopted 74 (28 percent) of 266 resolutions without consensus. This analysis of General Assembly voting patterns ignores consensus decisions because they generally do not adopt substantive language and contribute little to support for U.S. positions. See U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Organization Affairs, *Voting Practices in the United Nations*, 2008, March 31, 2009, pp. 1–3, at <http://www.state.gov/p/io/rls/rpt/c29990.htm> (February 24, 2010).

## U.N. Non-Consensus Votes Match U.S. Votes about One-Fourth of the Time

Percentage of All Non-Consensus Votes in the U.N. Coinciding with the U.S. Vote, 1983–2008



**Note:** Data include only non-consensus votes adopted in the U.N. General Assembly.

**Sources:** Authors' correspondence with the U.S. Department of State, and U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Organization Affairs, *Voting Practices in the United Nations*, 2008, March 31, 2009, at <http://www.state.gov/p/io/rls/rpt/c29990.htm> (February 24, 2010).

Chart 1 • B 2395 heritage.org

consensus votes grew steadily, peaking at a voting coincidence of over 50 percent in 1995. Since then, however, voting coincidence with the U.S. on non-consensus General Assembly resolutions has fallen, dropping to 25.6 percent in 2008. Overall, voting coincidence with the U.S. in the U.N. General Assembly on non-consensus votes has averaged 31 percent over the past 25 years.<sup>4</sup> (See Chart 1.)

This divergence between the U.S. and the broader U.N. membership over contentious issues is not surprising given that a majority of the U.N.'s member states are neither politically free<sup>5</sup> nor economically free.<sup>6</sup> The U.N. practice of “one nation, one vote” allows the many members with repressive economic

and political systems and the worst human rights records to “vote together to block not only sensible ideas of economic development, but also proposals for U.N. reform that would loosen their hold on U.N. decision making in areas of budget and economic development.”<sup>7</sup> Worse, repressive governments exert pressure through regional voting blocs and other political groupings such as the Group of 77, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the Non-Aligned Movement to dissuade countries that would otherwise be more receptive to U.S. policy positions from voting with the U.S.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike U.N. Security Council resolutions, which all U.N. member states are theoretically obligated to

- Ibid.* The all-time low was 15.4 percent in 1988. See U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Organization Affairs, *Voting Practices in the United Nations*, 2007, April 22, 2008, p. 2, at <http://www.state.gov/p/io/rls/rpt/c25867.htm> (March 26, 2010). The State Department began tracking this information in 1983.
- Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2010: Erosion of Freedom Intensifies*, at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=505> (March 22, 2010).
- Terry Miller and Kim R. Holmes, *2010 Index of Economic Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation and Dow Jones & Company, Inc., 2010), at <http://www.heritage.org/index> (March 22, 2010).
- Kim R. Holmes, “Promoting Economic Freedom at the United Nations,” Heritage Foundation *Lecture No. 823*, February 24, 2004, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Lecture/Promoting-Economic-Freedom-at-the-United-Nations>.
- Brett D. Schaefer, “Who Leads the United Nations?” Heritage Foundation *Lecture No. 1054*, December 4, 2007, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2007/12/Who-Leads-the-United-Nations>.

obey, General Assembly votes are non-binding. However, they do influence public perceptions in many countries and are often characterized as expressing the “will of the international community.” Regrettably, many proposals in recent General Assembly sessions, if adopted and enforced, would damage the global economy and U.S. interests. This situation requires the U.S. to pay close attention to General Assembly votes and U.S. diplomats and negotiators to spend much time and effort to prevent such initiatives from gaining international legitimacy through U.N. resolutions.<sup>9</sup>

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***Most major recipients of U.S. foreign assistance vote against the U.S. more often than they vote with the U.S.***

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A potential lever for increasing support for U.S. policies is U.S. foreign assistance. However, analysis of U.S. economic and military assistance over the past eight years shows that there is no significant relationship between U.S. foreign aid and recipient countries’ support for U.S. policy positions in the General Assembly.<sup>10</sup> This is unsurprising because, historically, America has made little effort to use foreign aid to gain support for U.S. priorities in the U.N. As a result, most major recipients of U.S. foreign assistance vote against the U.S. more often than they vote with the U.S.<sup>11</sup>

Over the past nine sessions of the U.N. General Assembly (2000 through 2008), about 95 percent of U.S. foreign aid recipients voted against the U.S. in a majority of the non-consensus votes, and over 72 percent voted against the U.S. in a majority of the non-consensus votes deemed “important” by the U.S. Department of State.<sup>12</sup>

Of the 30 largest recipients of U.S. foreign aid that have voted during the past eight sessions, 29 countries voted against the U.S. in a majority of the non-consensus votes, and 25 voted against the U.S. in a majority of the important non-consensus votes. (See Chart 2.)

The U.S. provides assistance for a variety of purposes. Some of this assistance can reasonably be linked to support for U.S. policy priorities in the U.N., and some of it cannot.

**Humanitarian Assistance.** The lack of a relationship between humanitarian assistance and support for U.S. positions is understandable. Humanitarian assistance is often provided to address sudden major natural disasters, tragedies, or ongoing suffering. Such assistance is given for moral and humanitarian reasons, not to advance other foreign policy objectives.

**Military Assistance.** Military assistance can similarly be excused for not being closely associated with support for American priorities in the United Nations. Support for U.S. interests is clearly at the forefront of providing military assistance, which is used overwhelmingly to provide equipment and training to U.S. allies or other nations deemed vital to America’s security interests.

America’s military concerns often involve unstable areas of the world and require cooperation with governments that are less than ideal partners. The choice is often between supporting U.S. interests in the U.N. or supporting U.S. interests around the world. In an ideal world, recipients of military assistance would bolster U.S. interests in both arenas, but securing support in just one of the two is acceptable. If U.S. interests are not advanced in either realm, assistance should be reallocated.

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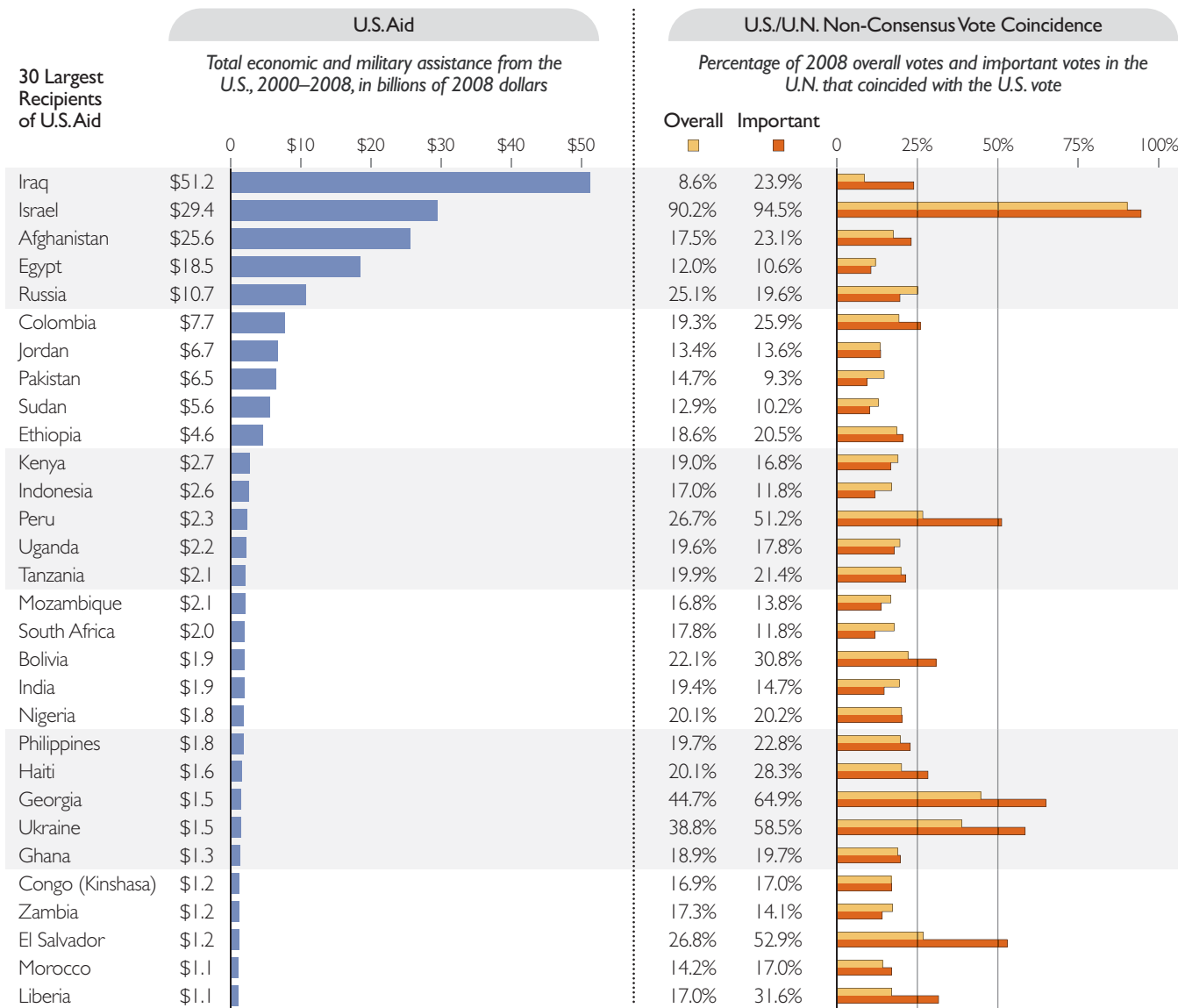
9. Holmes, “Promoting Economic Freedom at the United Nations.”

10. Statistical analysis by The Heritage Foundation revealed no statistically significant relationship between U.S. foreign assistance and recipient countries’ voting coincidence with the U.S. in the U.N. General Assembly. Specifically, for 2000–2008, the analysis demonstrated a negative, albeit statistically insignificant, relationship between U.S. foreign aid and non-consensus overall votes (correlation coefficient of  $-0.01$ ) and between U.S. aid and non-consensus important votes (correlation coefficient of  $-0.02$ ).

11. Iraq, as a non-participating U.N. member, did not vote until 2003.

12. By law, the State Department is required to analyze and discuss “important votes,” which are defined as votes on “issues which directly affected United States interests and on which the United States lobbied extensively.” See U.S. Department of State, *Voting Practices in the United Nations*, 2008.

## U.S. Aid Does Not Translate into Votes in the U.N. General Assembly



Sources: U.S. Agency for International Development, *U.S. Overseas Loans & Grants: Obligations and Loan Authorizations, July 1, 1945–September 30, 2008*, at <http://quesdb.usaid.gov/gbk> (March 26, 2010), and U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Organization Affairs, *Voting Practices in the United Nations, 2008*, March 31, 2009, at <http://www.state.gov/plo/rls/rpt/c29990.htm> (February 24, 2010).

Chart 2 • B 2395 [heritage.org](http://heritage.org)

**Development Assistance.** However, there is no reason for the U.S. not to tie development assistance more closely to support for America’s priorities in the U.N. If development assistance contributed demonstrably to higher standards of living in poor nations, it would support other U.S. priorities because wealthier nations are generally more stable,

more democratic, and more likely to become economic partners with America.

Regrettably, development assistance has a disappointing record in catalyzing economic growth. Between 1980 and 2008, the U.S. disbursed nearly \$460 billion (in 2007 constant dollars) in development assistance. Yet in terms of per capita gross



domestic product (GDP), the populations in a majority of these recipient countries are little better off today than they were decades ago. In fact, many are poorer.

Data on GDP per capita are available for 107 countries that received significant levels of U.S. development assistance (defined as cumulative aid over that period totaling at least 1 percent of their 2008 GDP) between 1980 and 2008. These data show that real per capita GDP:<sup>13</sup>

- Declined in 25 of these countries;
- Grew by less than 1 percent annually in 30 countries; and
- Grew by more than 1 percent annually in 52 countries, but only Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Botswana experienced growth close to or exceeding 5 percent.

This failure to elicit economic growth is tragic because strong, reliable, long-term economic growth is critical to development.<sup>14</sup> For instance, to reach lower-middle-income status (per capita income of \$975), low-income countries such as Nepal (per capita income of \$256) or Togo (per capita income of \$251) must achieve real compound growth in per capita GDP of around 6 percent for more than two decades.<sup>15</sup> To reach upper-middle-income status (per capita income of \$3,856), they must experience real compound growth of 6 percent for more than 50 years. Instead, since 1980,

Nepal has experienced real annual compound growth of only 2.2 percent in per capita GDP, while Togo has had a negative growth rate of -1.2 percent.

With so many recipients of development assistance experiencing declining or insignificant economic growth, one must conclude that development assistance from one government to another is ineffective in promoting development. Combined with the demonstrated failure of U.S. assistance to encourage support for U.S. policies in the U.N., this should lead policymakers to reassess America's development assistance to make it more useful both in fostering development and in directly supporting U.S. interests.<sup>16</sup>

The U.S. has attempted to make its foreign assistance programs more coherent and to ensure that U.S. aid supports U.S. policy priorities more directly. The State Department's budget request for fiscal year (FY) 2010 noted:

[D]iplomacy and development are ever more essential to safeguarding the security and prosperity of our people and our nation. While military force is an important part of our national security, so too are our diplomatic and foreign assistance efforts, which are often the central means by which America can promote stability in key countries and regions, confront security challenges, advance economic transformation, respond to humanitarian crises, and encourage better

13. While experts may disagree on the impact of an additional dollar of development assistance on economic growth, advocates of development aid generally assert that rapid development requires significant levels of development assistance and commonly blame insufficient levels of assistance for the lack of growth among recipients. For instance, see U.N. Millennium Project, *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals* (New York: United Nations Development Program, 2005), at <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/MainReportComplete-lowres.pdf> (March 23, 2010). Thus, the analysis in this paper excludes countries that received an insignificant amount of assistance between 1980 and 2008 (cumulative aid over that period totaling less than 1 percent of their 2008 GDP). World Bank, *World Development Indicators Online*, at <http://www.worldbank.org/data> (March 23, 2010; subscription required), and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *International Development Statistics*, at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/50/17/5037721.htm> (February 23, 2010). Due to the lack of earlier data, per capita GDP figures for the earliest available years were used for 29 countries: Angola, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Croatia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Laos, Lebanon, Macedonia, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Mongolia, Montenegro, Palau, Samoa, Serbia, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Uzbekistan, and Yemen.
14. Statistical analysis by The Heritage Foundation revealed no statistically significant relationship between U.S. foreign assistance and recipient countries' growth in real GDP per capita. Specifically, for 1980–2008, the analysis demonstrated a negative, albeit statistically insignificant, relationship between U.S. foreign aid and growth in real GDP per capita (correlation coefficient of -0.1).
15. World Bank, "Country Classifications," at <http://go.worldbank.org/K2CKM78CC0> (February 23, 2010).

governance, policies, and institutions. Expenditures on diplomacy and development represent an investment which in the long run is less costly in terms of lives and dollars than defense spending that would otherwise be required.<sup>17</sup>

Under the FY 2007–FY 2012 joint strategic plan prepared by the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development, U.S. foreign assistance is guided by seven strategic goals:

- Achieving peace and security,
- Governing justly and democratically,
- Investing in people,
- Promoting economic growth and prosperity,
- Providing humanitarian assistance,
- Promoting international understanding, and
- Strengthening U.S. consular and management capabilities.<sup>18</sup>

These seven strategic goals are important and, if achieved, would likely contribute to U.S. interests and increase support for U.S. policy priorities in the U.N. However, this agenda lacks an explicit statement that U.S. foreign assistance is intended to bolster support for U.S. political priorities. By failing to link economic assistance explicitly to support for

U.S. policies in the U.N., the U.S. is missing a key opportunity to advance its policies.

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If expenditures on development represent an investment, the return should be economic growth and development that is broadly experienced by recipients or support for U.S. interests and policies in places like the U.N. Regrettably, neither is evident. On the contrary, recipient countries too often view U.S. aid as an entitlement unrelated to U.S. foreign policy priorities. This is particularly true in the U.N., where aid recipients seldom face repercussions for failing to support U.S. priorities.

### **Freedom: A Key Indicator of Support**

While U.S. development aid garners little support from recipients in the U.N. General Assembly, a country's level of political and economic freedom is a key indicator of the likelihood that it will vote with the U.S. Specifically, the tendency to side with the U.S. on non-consensus votes increases as political or economic freedom increases, as measured by *Freedom in the World 2010* and the *2010 Index of Economic Freedom*.

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16. With the creation of the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) in 2004, the U.S. government began to explore an innovative and results-oriented approach to development assistance by providing assistance to developing countries that have demonstrated a lasting commitment to good governance, economic freedom, and investing in their people. The results thus far are encouraging, and the program could provide valuable insight into how to improve the disappointing efforts of other U.S. development aid programs. For instance, there are indications that the MCA, through its focus on encouraging policy change, may be more effective than other aid programs. In the relatively short time since it was established, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) has created remarkable policy reform competition, known as “the MCC effect,” among countries that wish to qualify for an MCC “compact agreement” or a “threshold program.” By increasing transparency in compiling and disseminating economic statistics and competing with each other for MCC grants, these countries have been motivated to pursue real policy improvements. The reforms brought about by the MCC effect have encouraged entrepreneurial activities and have created more favorable conditions for economic growth and development. For more information, see Brett D. Schaefer, “Promoting Economic Prosperity Through the Millennium Challenge Account,” *Heritage Foundation Lecture* No. 920, January 13, 2006, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Lecture/Promoting-Economic-Prosperity-Through-the-Millennium-Challenge-Account>, and Brett D. Schaefer and Anthony B. Kim, “President Bush’s Trip to Africa: Solidifying U.S. Partnerships with the Region,” *Heritage Foundation WebMemo* No. 1817, February 15, 2008, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2008/02/President-Bushs-Trip-to-Africa-Solidifying-US-Partnerships-with-the-Region>.
17. U.S. Department of State, *Fiscal Year 2010 Budget Request: International Affairs Function 150, Summary and Highlights*, at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/122513.pdf> (March 23, 2010).
18. U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development, *Strategic Plan, Fiscal Years 2007–2012: Transformational Diplomacy*, revised May 7, 2007, at [http://www.usaid.gov/policy/coordination/stratplan\\_fy07-12.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/policy/coordination/stratplan_fy07-12.pdf) (February 23, 2010).

**Economic Freedom.** Economic freedom includes an individual's basic rights to work, produce, save, and consume without infringement by the state. Greater economic freedom empowers people with more opportunity and not only induces lasting prosperity, but also cultivates respect for human rights.<sup>19</sup> In other words, by reducing barriers to economic activity, economic freedom helps to create a framework in which people can fulfill their dreams of success.

This is well documented in the *Index of Economic Freedom*, which examines the 10 key ingredients of economic freedom, including economic openness to the world, transparency, and the rule of law. Each country is graded on each of the 10 freedoms on a scale of 0 to 100, and a country's overall economic freedom score is the average of its 10 scores. Based on its average score, each country's economy is classified as "free," "mostly free," "moderately free," "mostly unfree," or "repressed."<sup>20</sup>

A close look at voting patterns reveals that economically freer countries are more likely to vote with the U.S. than are countries with less economic freedom.

Chart 3 illustrates voting patterns of the 174 countries for which economic freedom and voting data are available during the 63rd session of the General Assembly. The voting exhibited the following patterns:

- Free countries voted with the U.S. in 42.2 percent of the non-consensus votes;
- Mostly free countries, in 38.3 percent of the votes;
- Moderately free countries, in 28.7 percent of the votes;

- Mostly unfree countries, in 19.2 percent of the votes; and
- Economically repressed countries, in 17.6 percent of the votes.

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Important non-consensus votes exhibited a similar pattern:

- Free countries voted with the U.S. in 63.7 percent of the votes;
- Mostly free countries, in 60.4 percent of the votes;
- Moderately free countries, in 38.1 percent of the votes;
- Mostly unfree countries, in 12.8 percent of the votes; and
- Economically repressed countries, in 12.4 percent of the votes.

Chart 3 also shows average voting coincidence on non-consensus votes for the 174 countries by category of economic freedom over the past nine General Assembly sessions. This chart clearly demonstrates a positive relationship between a country's level of economic freedom and its votes with the U.S. in the General Assembly. Economically free and mostly free countries vote with the U.S. more than twice as often as repressed countries vote with the U.S.<sup>21</sup>

**Political Freedom.** A similar relationship exists between voting coincidence with the U.S. and a

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19. See Kim R. Holmes, "Economic Freedom as a Human Right," Heritage Foundation *Lecture* No. 1094, July 24, 2008, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Lecture/Economic-Freedom-as-a-Human-Right>, and Anthony B. Kim, "Economic Freedom Underpins Human Rights and Democratic Governance," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 1861, March 18, 2008, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2008/03/Economic-Freedom-Underpins-Human-Rights-and-Democratic-Governance>.

20. Terry Miller and Anthony B. Kim, "Defining Economic Freedom," in Miller and Holmes, *2010 Index of Economic Freedom*, pp. 57–62.

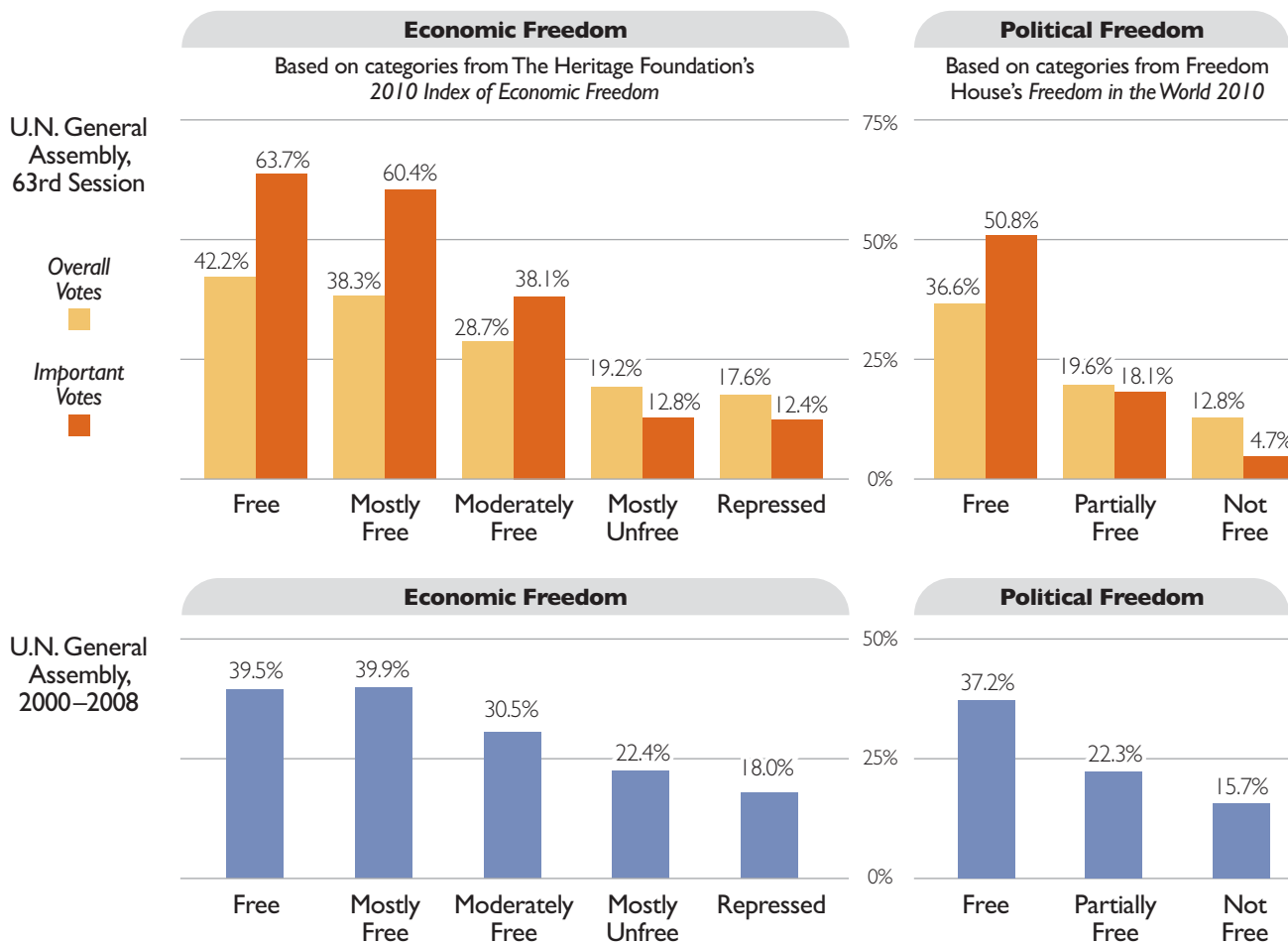
21. Statistical analysis by The Heritage Foundation revealed a statistically significant relationship between a country's economic freedom score in the *Index of Economic Freedom* and its voting coincidence with the U.S. in the U.N. General Assembly. Specifically, for 2000–2008, the analysis demonstrated a positive and strong relationship between a country's level of economic freedom and non-consensus overall votes (correlation coefficient of 0.45) and between a country's level of economic freedom and non-consensus important votes (correlation coefficient of 0.49).



## Freer Nations More Likely to Vote With the U.S.

In 2008, on average only 26 percent of all non-consensus votes in the U.N. General Assembly coincided with the United States' votes. However, when the nations are categorized in terms of economic and political freedom, a trend appears—those nations with better freedom scores cast votes that coincide with the U.S. at a higher rate.

Percentage of Votes Coinciding with the U.S.



**Note:** Data include only resolutions adopted by vote in the U.N. General Assembly.

**Sources:** U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Organization Affairs, *Voting Practices in the United Nations, 2008*, March 31, 2009, at <http://www.state.gov/p/rio/irs/rpt/c29990.htm> (February 24, 2010); Terry Miller and Kim R. Holmes, *2010 Index of Economic Freedom* (Washington, D.C.:The Heritage Foundation and Dow Jones & Company, Inc., 2010), at <http://www.heritage.org/index> (March 22, 2010); and Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2010: Erosion of Freedom Intensifies*, at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=505> (March 22, 2010).

Chart 3 • B 2395 heritage.org

country's level of political freedom as measured by Freedom House in its annual *Freedom in the World* study. Using a grading scale from one to seven, Freedom House grades each country on political rights

and civil liberties, based on 10 questions about political rights and 15 questions about civil liberties. The average of the two grades is then used to classify each country as "free," "partly free," or "not free."<sup>22</sup>

22. Freedom House, "Freedom in the World Methodology Summary," in Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2010: Erosion of Freedom Intensifies*, at [http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw10/FIW\\_2010\\_Methodology\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw10/FIW_2010_Methodology_Summary.pdf) (March 23, 2010).

During the 63rd session of the General Assembly, politically free countries voted with the U.S. more often than partly free countries did, and partly free countries were more likely to vote with the U.S. than not free countries were. (See Chart 3.) On all non-consensus votes:

- Politically free countries voted with the U.S. in 36.6 percent of the votes;
- Partly free countries, in 19.6 percent of the votes; and
- Not free countries, in only 12.8 percent of the votes.

As with economically free countries, politically free countries voted with the U.S. even more frequently on important non-consensus votes:

- Politically free countries voted with the U.S. in 50.8 percent of the votes;
- Partly free countries, in 18.1 percent of the votes; and
- Not free countries, in only 4.7 percent of the votes.

Chart 3 also shows that the relationship between political freedom and voting with the U.S. on non-consensus votes over the the past eight General Assembly sessions is consistent with the results from the 63rd session. Politically free countries voted with the U.S. more than twice as often as not free countries voted with the U.S.<sup>23</sup>

Why do these patterns exist? The U.N. is a microcosm of international relations, and countries vote according to their national interests. As nations become politically and economically freer, the policies that they consider to be in their own interests become more

closely aligned with U.S. policies, not because they are U.S. policies, but because they are more likely to be consistent with those countries' own interests.<sup>24</sup>

## What the U.S. Should Do

Of course, expecting every U.N. member to follow America's lead is unrealistic. Even America's strongest allies do not agree with the U.S. on every vote. Yet the U.S. could champion its positions more effectively in the General Assembly. Other countries do this, and the U.S. needs to increase its efforts if it wishes to promote its policy priorities more successfully in the U.N.

### Summary of U.N./U.S. Voting Coincidence

Percentage of Non-Consensus Votes in the 2008 U.N. General Assembly Coinciding With the U.S. Vote

	Overall Votes	Important Votes
<b>By U.S. Aid Recipient</b>		
30 largest aid recipients	22.2%	26.3%
30 largest aid recipients, excluding Israel	19.8%	23.9%
<b>By Economic Freedom Category (2010 Index of Economic Freedom)</b>		
Free	42.2%	63.7%
Mostly Free	38.3%	60.4%
Moderately Free	28.7%	38.1%
Mostly Unfree	19.2%	12.8%
Repressed	17.6%	12.4%
<b>By Political Freedom Category (Freedom in the World 2010)</b>		
Free	36.6%	50.8%
Partly Free	19.6%	18.1%
Unfree	12.8%	4.7%

**Sources:** U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Organization Affairs, *Voting Practices in the United Nations, 2008*, March 31, 2009, at <http://www.state.gov/p/ilo/rls/rpt/c29990.htm> (February 24, 2010); Terry Miller and Kim R. Holmes, *2010 Index of Economic Freedom* (Washington, D.C.:The Heritage Foundation and Dow Jones & Company, Inc., 2010), at <http://www.heritage.org/index> (March 22, 2010); and Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2010: Erosion of Freedom Intensifies*, at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=505> (March 22, 2010).

Table 1 • B 2395  [heritage.org](http://heritage.org)

23. Statistical analysis by The Heritage Foundation revealed a statistically significant relationship between a country's level of political freedom as determined by Freedom House and its voting coincidence with the U.S. in the U.N. General Assembly. Specifically, for 2000–2008, the analysis demonstrated a positive and strong relationship between a country's level of political freedom and non-consensus overall votes (correlation coefficient of 0.61) and between a country's level of political freedom and non-consensus important votes (correlation coefficient of 0.65).

24. These patterns hold even though voting coincidence with the U.S. on non-consensus decisions has been declining. Freer nations continue to vote with the U.S. more consistently than less free nations do.

General Assembly voting patterns indicate that the U.S. neither effectively rewards countries that support U.S. priorities in the U.N. nor withholds development assistance from countries that consistently oppose U.S. priorities. Table 1 summarizes voting coincidence with the U.S. for the 30 largest recipients of U.S. foreign aid and for economically

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***General Assembly voting patterns indicate that the U.S. neither effectively rewards countries that support U.S. priorities in the U.N. nor withholds development assistance from countries that consistently oppose U.S. priorities.***

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and politically free countries. Clearly, freer countries are more likely than less free countries to support U.S. positions and far more likely than major recipients of U.S. foreign assistance to vote with the U.S.

The Obama Administration and Congress should recognize these realities and take several steps to increase the chances of garnering support for U.S. positions in the General Assembly. Specifically, the U.S. should:

- **Explicitly link disbursement of U.S. development assistance to support for U.S. policy priorities in the U.N.**

The U.S. provides foreign assistance for a number of reasons, ranging from increasing economic growth to addressing humanitarian disasters to strengthening the military capabilities of its friends and allies. In allocating U.S. assistance, these priorities generally override whether the U.S. can rely on the recipient nation to support U.S. positions in the U.N. and other international organizations.

As a result, many countries consider the U.N. and other international organizations to be penalty-free arenas where they can undermine U.S. initiatives and oppose American policy priorities without fear of retaliation or consequence, confident that, no matter how they conduct themselves, they will still receive U.S. assistance. Similarly, congressional earmarks on foreign assistance often remove executive branch discretion over aid disbursements, thereby removing a key means for rewarding nations that support U.S. priorities or penalizing those that oppose them.

If the U.S. is to promote its policy priorities more effectively in the U.N., current aid-allocation practice must change, particularly U.S. development assistance, which has a disappointing record in catalyzing economic growth and development in recipient nations. The U.S. Department of State should inform recipients of U.S. development assistance that their support—or lack of support—for key U.S. priorities in the U.N. and other international organizations will directly affect future levels of U.S. assistance. Congress should assist this process by rescinding earmarks, limitations, and other legislative directives on disbursement of foreign assistance unless they are directly related to U.S. national security.

- **Seek to coordinate voting by politically free governments in the U.N.**

Numerous countries in the U.N. are considered politically free according to Freedom House yet routinely fail to hold repressive governments accountable. Even worse, they frequently permit repressive governments to run roughshod over U.N. bodies and resolutions that are designed to highlight or curb human rights abuse and political repression. Emphasizing the necessity of forming a common partnership for liberty, Heritage Foundation Vice President Kim Holmes points out in *Liberty's Best Hope: American Leadership for the 21st Century* that “the original principles of freedom and democracy

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***“[T]he original principles of freedom and democracy that inspired the founders of the U.N. have been lost in a cynical power game that essentially defines legitimacy and ‘democracy’ as whatever a majority of U.N. members say it is.”***

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that inspired the founders of the U.N. have been lost in a cynical power game that essentially defines legitimacy and ‘democracy’ as whatever a majority of U.N. members say it is.”<sup>25</sup>

A case in point is the disappointing U.N. Human Rights Council (HRC).<sup>26</sup> Although created to replace the discredited U.N. Commission on Human Rights, the HRC has ignored ongoing state-sanctioned human rights abuses in Belarus, Cuba, China, Iran, Zimbabwe, and elsewhere and

instead has spent much of its time obsessing about Israel.<sup>27</sup>

The U.S. and its democratic allies should more clearly denounce actions by regional groups that undermine representative government, the rule of law, or basic human rights. The U.S. has sought to organize these nations by supporting the Community of Democracies, which is designed to promote democracy, in part by coordinating policy positions among democracies on relevant issues at the United Nations, and by supporting the U.N. Democracy Fund.<sup>28</sup> The U.S. needs to continue these efforts and create a more cohesive caucus for political freedom and fundamental human rights among the U.N. membership.

- **Seek support for an economic freedom coalition within the U.N.**

Another strategy for strengthening the American cause at the U.N. is to create an economic freedom caucus to promote free-market principles. Such a coalition would serve U.S. interests by offering alternative voting relationships beyond regional groupings and would promote common principles that both developed and developing countries could champion.

While the U.S. has spoken about the need for economic freedom, its efforts to organize other nations around this concept have not been as successful as those that are focused on democracy have been.<sup>29</sup> The U.S. should seek to emulate its modest successes

in coordinating actions and positions of democratic countries by establishing a Global Economic Freedom Forum<sup>30</sup> in addition to an economic freedom caucus, emphasizing the need for economic freedom in U.N. discussions on development.

## Conclusion

In protecting and advancing American interests, the U.S. should do all that it can to strengthen and broaden support for America's policies in the U.N. The U.S. should focus on changing the dynamics of the U.N. by explicitly linking U.S. assistance to support for U.S. priorities in the U.N., by forging coalitions with nations that share the American principles of political and economic freedom, and by seeking to expand the membership of those coalitions. Increasing the number of economically and politically free countries and forging coalitions with those nations in the U.N. will serve as an indispensable long-term diplomatic tool for advancing American priorities.

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25. Kim R. Holmes, *Liberty's Best Hope: American Leadership for the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2008), p. 53.
26. For more information on the Human Rights Council, see Brett D. Schaefer and Steven Groves, "The U.N. Human Rights Council: No Better for Obama's Engagement," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 2339, November 9, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2009/11/The%20UN%20Human%20Rights%20Council%20No%20Better%20for%20Obamas%20Engagement>.
27. UN Watch, "Anti-Israel Resolutions at the HRC," at <http://www.unwatch.org/site/c.bdKKISNqEmG/b.3820041> (March 23, 2010).
28. U.N. member states contribute to the U.N. General Trust Fund to finance "projects that build and strengthen democratic institutions, promote human rights, and ensure the participation of all groups in democratic processes." U.N. Democracy Fund, "What Is the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF)?" at <http://www.un.org/democracyfund/XWhatIsUNDEF.htm> (March 23, 2010); U.S. Department of State, "The Community of Democracies," at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/c10790.htm> (March 23, 2010); and U.N. Democracy Fund, Web site, at <http://www.un.org/democracyfund> (March 23, 2010).
29. The U.S. Department of State reported in 2006 that "[l]ike-minded nations have succeeded in gaining some support for the principles of economic freedom, though the Economic Freedom Caucus has been hindered by a prolonged and contentious debate in the General Assembly on the respective roles and responsibilities of developed and developing countries." U.S. Department of State, *Performance and Accountability Report, Fiscal Year 2006*, November 2006, p. 153, at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/75840.pdf> (March 23, 2010). For more information on promoting economic freedom at the U.N., see Holmes, "Promoting Economic Freedom at the United Nations."
30. Holmes, *Liberty's Best Hope*, p. 122.