

The Disunited Nations

By Sam Vaknin

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Arab nations plan to table a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly condemning the U.S.-British led "invasion" and "occupation" of Iraq and calling for immediate troop withdrawal. A similar effort at the Security Council last week failed, doomed by the veto powers of both alleged aggressors.

This is not likely to endear the organization to the Bush administration whose hawks regard it as a superfluous leftover from the Cold War era. Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas) even introduced legislation to withdraw from the organization altogether. Nile Gardiner, a visiting fellow at the Heritage Foundation, summed up these sentiments in Insight Magazine thus:

"I think the U.N. has been in gradual decline for many years. It failed to act spectacularly in Rwanda and did nothing about Slobodan Milosevic's brutal regime. Iraq is the latest in a long line of failures."

Admittedly, like any bureaucracy, the organization is self-perpetuating, self-serving and self-absorbed. But it - and its raft of specialized offshoots - still give back far more than they receive. In recognition of the U.N.'s crucial role, several liberal Democrats have entered legislation to create a "permanent U.N. security force" and to "voluntarily contribute" to the U.N. Population Fund.

Consider peacekeeping operations. At a total annual cost of c. \$5 billion last year, U.N. peacekeeping missions employ close to 40,000 police and military and another 11,000 civilians from 89 countries. The budget is shoestring and more than half the pledged contributions are still outstanding. The U.N. consumes less than 0.001 percent of the world's gross domestic product. As James Paul, Executive Director of Global Policy Forum, observes:

"All UN staff, including the specialized agencies and funds, are fewer than the civil service of the City of Stockholm or the staff of McDonalds. The core UN budget is one half of one percent of the US military budget and far less than the cost of one B-2 bomber aircraft."

Even the United States Mission to the United Nations, on its Web site, seeks to debunk a few myths. Despite a massive increase in remit and operations, the organization's budget, at \$2.6 billion, has remained constant since 1995. The workforce was cut by 11

percent, to 9000 employees, since 1997:

"The UN has done a great deal to increase efficiency and overall accountability. In 1994, the UN created the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to serve as the inspector general and promote efficient management and reduce waste, fraud and abuse. During the year ended June 30, 2001, OIOS recommended \$58 million in savings and recoveries for the UN and persuaded UN program managers to implement hundreds of recommendations for improving management and internal controls. OIOS investigations also led to successful convictions of UN staff and others for fraud and stealing UN funds."

Yet, bad - and expensive - habits die hard. Budget discipline is lax with no clear order of priorities. The United Nations suffers from an abundance of obsolete relics of past programs, inertly and futilely maintained by beneficiary bureaucrats. Follow-up U.N. conferences - and they tend to proliferate uncontrollably - are still being held in exotic resorts, or shopping-friendly megalopolises. United Nations entities at the country level duplicate efforts and studiously avoid joint programming, common databases and pooling of resources.

The aforementioned OIOS has hitherto identified more than \$200 million in waste and fraud and issued 5000 recommendations to improve efficiency, transparency and accountability. Disgusted by the flagrant squandering of scarce resources, the United States - which covers one fifth of the august establishment's pecuniary needs - accumulated more than \$1.2 billion in arrears by 1999, double the debts of all other members combined.

It has since repaid the bulk of these even as it reduced its share of the United Nations' finances. It now contributes 22 percent of the regular budget, down from 25 percent and 25-27 percent of the costs of the U.N. peacekeeping forces, down from 30-31 percent.

But a row is brewing in the corridors of power with regards to the proposed budget for 2004-5. Ambassador Patrick Kennedy, United States Representative for United Nations Management and Reform, called it "a step backwards". The European Union, predictably, "fully concurred" with it and urged members to increase the budget in line with the U.N.'s enhanced responsibilities.

Kofi Annan, the U.N. General Secretary since 1997, is promoting the nation-building and humanitarian credentials of his reformed outfit for the postwar reconstruction of Iraq. American President George Bush is less than keen and Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain has moderated his pro-multilateralist rhetoric following his meeting with Bush last week.

Even erstwhile keen supporters of the United Nations, such as Japan, a surprising member of the "coalition of the willing", are hesitant. Japan contributes close to one fifth of the international body's regular budget. Yet, disillusioned by its inability to gain permanent membership of the Security Council despite its economic clout, Japan announced, in January, its intention to cut its participation by 5 percent.

The United States seems to wish to consign the organization to the humanitarian

aspects of Iraq's restoration. Last Friday, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) granted \$8 million to the U.N.'s Children's Fund (UNICEF) to pay for sanitation, healthcare and potable water schemes in Iraq as well as for micronutrients, vitamins and medicines for its malnourished and disease-stricken populace.

Succumbing to its niche typecasting, the United Nations has launched an unprecedented \$2.2 billion "emergency appeal for immediate humanitarian assistance for the people of Iraq over the next six months, with \$1.3 billion devoted to a massive food aid operation ... to help the displaced, refugees, children, the elderly and other especially vulnerable groups". The donor funds will augment the proceeds of the revamped oil-for-food program, now entirely under the control of the General Secretary.

So, is the United Nations really "just a farce" and its members mostly "petty despots" as Conrad Black, The Canadian media mogul, has it in recent interviews? Or, paradoxically, has this international body been strengthened by its faithful depiction of resistant world opinion in the face of perceived Anglo-Saxon bullying? The global assembly's future largely depends on an incensed and disenchanting United States.

Unable to rely on the kindness of strangers, Annan is reaching out to new constituencies.

At the 1999 World Economic Forum in Davos, he challenged the global business community to enter a "Global Compact" with the U.N. to uphold "human rights, labour standards and environmental practices." The International Chamber of Commerce, representing 7,000 business organizations in 137 countries, picked up the gauntlet and published a joint statement at a July 1999 meeting with United Nations bigwigs.

This uneasy partnership drew severe criticisms from non-governmental organizations the world over. Corpwatch, a California-based NGO, observed acidly that "in the first 18 months of the Global Compact, we have seen a growing but secret membership, heavy influence by the International Chamber of Commerce, and a failure to publish even a single case study of sustainable practices. The Global Compact logo has been used without attribution by DaimlerChrysler, even as Global Compact officials insist that use of the general UN logo is strictly controlled. The Global Compact represents a smuggling of a business agenda into the United Nations. It should not be considered a contribution to or framework for the Johannesburg Summit."

The United Nations - like NATO and other Cold War critters - is an organization in search of a purpose. The demise of the USSR constituted a tectonic shift in international affairs. The U.N.'s inability to accommodate its institutions to the supremacy of the United States, the demography of China, the decline of Britain and France and the economic clout of Germany and Japan are symptoms of denial and delusion that are detrimental to the future of this otherwise benign and useful establishment. The war in Iraq is merely a rude wake-up call. And about time, too.

Sam Vaknin is the author of *Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited* and *After the*

Rain - How the West Lost the East. He is a columnist for Central Europe Review, PopMatters, and eBookWeb , a United Press International (UPI) Senior Business Correspondent, and the editor of mental health and Central East Europe categories in The Open Directory Bellaonline, and Suite101 . Visit Sam's Web site at <http://samvak.tripod.com>

Tsunami Tsupport
By Gary Whittaker

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In the wake of what can be arguably called the world's greatest act of God in the new millenium, we have also been witness to what can be equally argued as the world's greatest act of charity as the United Nations have received over 4 Billion dollars of aid meant for Southeast Asia. With so much money to counter in even greater need, one thing we must learn from this is what to do next time. The tragedy continues to escalate, and what can be more tragic now, with aid so close away, it can't even get to most of the people that need it.

Canada must be commended for it's deployment of the DART team. DART (Disaster Assistance Response Team) is comprised of 43 person medical team, and has a water purification equipment. While they are not equiped to handle major trauma or surgical needs, they can treat secondary ailments relating to unsanitary conditions.

However, the DART team, like most of the assistance sent by the world's nations, cannot even reach to the people since the roads are still blocked. The idea behind the DART team is what is important. There is no reason why other countries work together and create other DART teams, that can both enhance the one Canada has, or focus on other potential problem areas. Measures must be taken that are common for most disasters. Getting a secure location, making a path to reach the affected areas for both containment, and pulling out survivors, treating the wounded, and feeding the people. It has been over 2 weeks since the incident, and still people have no help. Groups impersonating relief organisations seemed to have profited the most, and they have made an unestimated amount of money from unsuspecting samaritans.

What can you do? Simple. If you haven't donated yet, and are afraid of getting scammed, go directly to the relief organisation. Do not give money to people that call you, or that you see in the street. To find a more extensive list, check http://www.google.com/tsunami_relief.html

But that along is not enough. If the United Nations cannot properly manage the assistance, write to your government and have them follow Canada's lead. Get them to work on another DART type team or program. What happened in Southeast Asia can happen to you, either around your home, or while you are on vacation. Do you want to know that people have sent provisions that cannot get to you, but there was something they could do about it?

Gary Whittaker is the editor of T.E.N Magazine, a social commentary webzine with balls! Check out more articles at <http://www.tenwebzine.com>

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