

PANEL I: UNITED STATES ATTITUDES ON THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS REGARDING THE MAINTENANCE AND THE RESTORATION OF PEACE

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I have been asked to talk about the attitude of the United States towards the role of the United Nations with regard to maintaining and restoring peace. I thought I would approach this assignment by discussing four questions.

First, what *is* the U.S. attitude towards U.N. peacekeeping? This is obviously a complex and difficult question. Certainly, one must distinguish between official U.S. governmental attitudes, those of the various media, and those of the public more generally; between Democratic and Republican administrations; and often between those held by the Executive and by the Congress. Moreover, it will obviously often be difficult to identify a single, coherent point of view on the part of either officials, the media, or the public; more likely, there will be a considerable spectrum of opinion among different agencies and groups. Finally, both official and public attitudes will, of course, change over time and among issues. Indeed, as often pointed out, our American history and psyche has seemed to manifest a tension between a strain of moralism and idealism, pushing us towards involvement in international organization efforts, and a contrasting strain of realism and pragmatism, skeptical of world order values. Our foreign policy has often seemed to oscillate between these two perspectives.

As regards official U.S. policy, what *can* be said is virtually a truism—that the U.S. government has generally supported the U.N. when and to the extent that the administration in office felt that the organization was serving our purposes and promoting our national interest. Conversely, it has been less supportive of the U.N. and more inclined to pursue unilateral or more selective policies when it believed that such was not the case. After all, this is what we would want and expect our government to do.

Thus, it is not surprising that our official policy towards the U.N. has “flip-flopped” to some extent over the last fifty years. Certainly, the U.S. strongly supported the U.N. in the early days of the organization. We had

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played a central role in creating the organization, we and our friends largely dominated it at that time, and during that period we sought, often successfully, to use the U.N. as an important tool to achieve our Cold War and other foreign policy goals. Our use of the U.N. in the Korean conflict was perhaps the most notable example.

However, as many newly-independent third-world nations entered the U.N. in the 1960s and 1970s and the U.S. and western position in the organization consequently became less dominant, U.S. interest and support waned. This was perhaps most dramatically evident following the U.N. General Assembly's adoption in 1975 of its notorious "Zionism equals racism" resolution, and more generally during the Reagan administration, when there was an apparent deliberate effort to distance our foreign policy from the U.N.

But again, following the collapse of Soviet communism and the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s and 1990s, our government once more saw the U.N. with its newly energized Security Council as a useful tool for furthering our national foreign policy interests, and we turned to it frequently—perhaps most dramatically in the Persian Gulf and the Haiti crises. We all still remember President Bush's clarion call at that time for a "new international order!"

Most recently, in the wake of disappointing experiences with U.N. peacekeeping and peacemaking in Somalia and Bosnia, and a seeming increase in conservative sentiment among the U.S. public, the administration appears once again to be less inclined to rely on U.N. rather than unilateral or allied initiatives to implement its foreign policy.

In the wake of the recent November 1994 Republican victory, the debate over U.S. policy towards the U.N. will certainly continue. For both the Republican "Contract with America" and important legislation presently pending in Congress—the National Security Revitalization Act—would seriously limit U.S. participation in or contributions to U.N. peacekeeping. For example, under the proposed legislation, the administration would have to deduct from our annual dues any extra costs the Pentagon has incurred with regard to the U.S. involvement in peacekeeping missions—deductions which would greatly deplete U.S. contributions to the U.N. in this respect. Moreover, the proposed act would restrict the circumstances under which U.S. troops could serve under U.N. command, and would create a special bipartisan commission to study national security strategies. The thrust of current Republican policy is clearly against any substantial U.S. government reliance on or support of the U.N. and U.N. peacekeeping as a way of achieving our foreign policy objectives.

Turning to broader U.S. public, as opposed to official, attitudes towards the U.N., these also appear to be shifting, uncertain, and not easy to define. Certainly, the Republican Congress, and for the most part the media, seem to assume that the American public is broadly skeptical of and opposed to U.S. participation in international organizations and activities, and, more particularly, is opposed to our reliance on or participation in U.N. peacekeeping. However, it is not clear that this "conventional wisdom" accurately portrays the real public sentiment on these issues. For example, an interesting article on public attitudes towards the U.N., appearing in the recent March/April 1995 issue of the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, suggests that, in contrast with conventional assumptions, public opinion surveys indicate that about one-half of the general public supports the idea of U.N. peacekeeping and U.S. participation in it, while only 10 percent are clearly opposed. The article also reports that there is a 40-45 percent swing vote on these issues, which results in a 60-80 percent majority of those surveyed indicating that they would favor U.N. peacekeeping and U.S. support for it when the peacekeeping efforts relate to protection against major human rights violations, are intended to replace dictators with democratic governments, or where both sides in a conflict have asked for U.N. peacekeeping help. However, public support tends to fall off where the situations involved are more risky or ambiguous, such as that currently occurring in Bosnia. This survey suggests that the American public may be less anti-U.N. and anti-peacekeeping than politicians or the media have assumed!

My second question is, if one assumes that the U.S. government and public are in fact anti-U.N. and anti-U.N. peacekeeping—or at least generally skeptical in this respect—what might explain or account for these attitudes? Let me suggest some factors that may be involved. Certainly, the U.S. and the American public have a long tradition and strong ethos of isolationism, self-reliance, and wariness of "foreign entanglements." Some officials and people may perceive U.S. support of the U.N. and peacekeeping as a form of humanitarian aid that we simply can no longer afford—the kind of foreign aid critics have attacked as "doing little good" for people who in any case do not appreciate it! Others may believe that the U.S. only needed the U.N. to help us win the Cold War; since that is now over, we should go back to "tending our own house" and dealing with our own domestic problems. Many people have a legitimate concern for the bureaucracy, inefficiency, waste, and hypocrisy that can be found in any large organization, particularly a large international organization such as the U.N. Others think it unwise to entrust American interests to an organization such as the U.N. in which

foreign governments, in some cases unsympathetic to the U.S., play a significant and possibly malevolent role. Obviously, the U.N.'s recent, much-criticized performance and experience with peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia and Somalia has not helped; no one wants to see dead U.S. soldiers dragged through the streets of Mogadishu again! It is certainly important, as many people have suggested, that U.N. peacekeeping has no real constituency in the U.S. political process; few interest groups have a real stake in what the U.N. does in terms of money, jobs, influence, or prestige. Finally and perhaps most significantly, officials and the American public generally have little real understanding of the U.N. and its potential contribution to U.S. interests by our officials and the American public.

My third question is, again assuming that there is a negative U.S. official and public attitude towards the U.N. and U.N. peacekeeping, does such an attitude make sense? In my opinion, it does not. First, U.S. support of the U.N. and its peacekeeping efforts can often significantly advance our "narrow" specific national interests. From a very practical and selfish national interest standpoint, it is the case that, in an increasingly complex and dangerous post-Cold War world, we may often be able to accomplish our national security goals more cheaply, safely, and efficiently through U.N. peacekeeping than we could unilaterally. For example, in situations such as that recently occurring in Haiti, U.N. peacekeeping may offer the U.S. a far better, safer, and more internationally acceptable alternative than acting alone. Moreover, in practical terms, U.S. participation thus far in U.N. peacekeeping efforts has really been quite small; we are presently involved in only six of the seventeen current U.N. peacekeeping operations, and Americans make up only one percent of some 80,000 U.N. peacekeepers presently deployed.

Our support for the U.N. is not only crucial to attaining many of our short-term objectives; it is also crucial to our broader long-term national goals of helping to achieve a better and more peaceful world—one in which we and our children can hope to live decent, peaceful, and responsible lives. Finally, we must recognize that, if the U.S. wishes to maintain its position as a world leader, we simply cannot ignore the U.N. and its peacekeeping efforts. Many other countries—including most of our friends abroad—believe in and rely on the U.N. They also know that the U.N. cannot be effective without U.S. support. If we fail to give this support, we risk losing the confidence and support of our allies and other nations for U.S. global leadership more generally.

My final question is, if support for the U.N. and U.N. peacekeeping is, in

fact, in our practical national interest, how can we persuade officials and the public that this is the case? Let me again suggest several things we might do. First, we have to ensure that Congress and the public are better informed regarding the U.N. and what it does—that they understand the hard-headed, “selfish,” “dollars-and-cents” arguments, as well as the broader “better-world” arguments, for our support of U.N. activities. And they need to be better informed as to the relatively limited costs of such support, as compared to our other government expenses. For example, the U.S. total annual expenses for support of the U.N. are less than the cost of several B-2 bombers! Indeed, in terms of our Gross National Product, we contribute proportionally much less than most other nations. Interestingly, a recent *New York Times* article indicated that the American public vastly overestimated the amounts given by the U.S. in foreign aid; many of those surveyed thought that we spent twenty percent of our national budget on foreign aid, while the actual figure was only one-half of one percent. Moreover, when asked how much foreign aid we should give as a percentage of our national budget, those surveyed said that about five percent was appropriate—much more than we actually contribute! Finally, it goes without saying that the U.S. government should insist that the U.N. become more effective and efficient. And we should certainly insist and ensure that any peacekeeping operations we participate in or support in fact make sense and are well-planned, well-organized and well-run.

Who should lead these efforts to better inform the public? Certainly, our elected and appointed public officials have a responsibility in this regard. Obviously there are reasonable arguments *pro* and *con* our reliance on international institutions such as the U.N., which deserve real public debate. But when some individuals play politics with these questions by simply using international organizations as a scapegoat, they do our country a disservice; the public is entitled to hear the *real* facts and policy issues involved—not phony arguments.

Obviously, secondary schools and colleges and universities also have a responsibility to educate the public so that it can understand what the U.N. really is and does, as well as the substantial U.S. stake in the survival and effectiveness of the organization. No young person should reach full participation in our democracy without an opportunity to understand and vote intelligently on questions related to America’s role and place in the world. Finally, the media has a major responsibility to inform the public, not only as to the issues, problems, and costs involved in U.S. support for the U.N., but also as to its possible benefits, payoffs, and savings. U.N. peacekeeping successes as well as failures deserve to be in the news. Thank you.

