

THE FUTURE OF THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED NATIONS

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The guiding principles of the United Nations (UN) existed long before the actual creation and ratification of the UN Charter and Organization in 1945. An international institution the size and magnitude of the UN had never successfully endured international pressures, but the necessity and overwhelming desire of the superpowers after the devastation of World War II solidified the common aspiration for such an establishment. The United Nations embodied a renewed outlook on peace, security and human rights for all the worlds' citizens. Each and every president since Franklin Delano Roosevelt reassured the nation of the United States' (U.S.) commitment to the UN and its goals for international peace and the spread of democracy. After President Woodrow Wilson changed the way the American people justified their foreign policy, an outlet like the United Nations was the only means available on such a global scale to implement the moral fabric of universal human rights that had become inherent in American foreign policy. Despite a significant global recession and the outbreak of riots and protests across the Middle East presently, the need for a peacekeeping institution has never been more evident. The potential reasons for United States withdrawal from the United Nations are futile and ineffectual when the global dynamic so heavily depends on the cooperation and understanding of all nations in the realm of the United Nations. While criticisms of the legitimacy, efficiency, and necessity of the United Nations remain connected to the function of such an organization, it is in the United States best interest to remain politically, economically, socially and militarily tied to the conditions of the United Nations because of the UN's continual promotion of American ideals like universal

human rights and democracy, its focus of containing current threats to global instability like Iran, North Korea and international terrorist organizations, as well as its underlying fabric which supports the superpower status and influence of the United States.

### **American Foreign Policy and the Influence of Universal Human Rights**

American foreign policy is driven by the fundamental understanding of all Americans that every human has undeniable rights. This moral fabric has blurred the distinction of national self determination and interests as the sole factors for establishing foreign policy while contributing to a more integrated and diverse look at national security in the form of international stability and development. While American foreign policy may have originated in the strict principles of Realpolitik which outlined the use of power to preserve a state's interests, Realpolitik's influence evaporated when President Woodrow Wilson injected morale into the formation of foreign policy.<sup>1</sup> President Wilson outlined an extraordinary doctrine for American security which stated, "the security of America was inseparable from the security of *all* the rest of mankind,"<sup>2</sup> and proclaimed, "the universal applicability of (America's) values, and in time, America's commitment to spreading them."<sup>3</sup> Wilson established a hard line when it came to justifying international intervention with the moral beliefs of the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Andrew Sukys, "Rethinking the Moral Agenda within American Foreign Policy: Lessons from Niebuhr, Huntington, and the Japanese Experience," *Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table* (Spring 2008): 1, <http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IACDocument&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A197721369&source=gale&userGroupName=iwp&version=1.0&contentSet=IAC-Documents&retrieveFormat=PDF>.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 47.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

It was Wilson's devotion to drive the U.S. out of isolation and stop the unyielding cycle of balance of power politics that had preceded his administration which compelled him to outline the League of Nations. Wilson was convinced that, "all nations in the world had an equal interest in peace and would therefore unite to punish those who had disturbed it."<sup>4</sup> While Wilson failed to convince the American people of the necessity of the League of Nations, "every president since Wilson has advanced variations of Wilson's theme."<sup>5</sup> This struggle between good and evil in foreign policy has outlasted every administration since Wilson, and despite the struggle to reconcile the preservation of vital national interests with the moral distinctions of universal human rights, "the postwar world became largely America's creation...as a beacon to follow, and a hope to attain."<sup>6</sup>

The genocide and destruction of World War II prompted the return of the United States and the international community to create an international peacekeeping organization like that of the failed League of Nations so as to prevent any comparable war in the future. After President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "restored hope at home, destiny imposed on him the obligation of defending democracy around the world."<sup>7</sup> President Roosevelt's policy was, "a heady mixture of traditional American exceptionalism, Wilsonian idealism, and Roosevelt's own canny insight into the American psyche."<sup>8</sup> It was on October 24, 1945 that the original 51 member countries including the United States ratified the United Nations Charter outlining the four main

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 51.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 370.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 397.

goals of preventing another world war, preserving the belief in fundamental human rights and equal rights between men and women, establishing conditions congruent with justice and respect of international treaties and commitments, and promoting social justice and a higher standard of living worldwide.<sup>9</sup> The goals of the UN were to be enforced by practicing tolerance, uniting strength to maintain international peace and security, ensuring that armed force shall not be used unless deemed necessary through and by the guidelines of the UN, and using international machinery to promote the economic and social advancement of all people. The UN Charter, “spells out American aspirations among nations,”<sup>10</sup> and solidified U.S. strategy as, “no nation can build a safer, better world alone.”<sup>11</sup> The United Nations simply spelled out the terms of international peace and security in regards to American exceptionalism. Global peace and security were not separate from the unique idea that all people had irrefutable rights. A new world order characterized by fundamental U.S. ideals shaped the future of international relations in an unprecedented international organization. The relationship between the U.S. and the UN continues to stem from common beliefs and goals for future international affairs.

### **The United Nations Criticisms and Functions**

Since the creation of the United Nations, the debate concerning possible U.S. withdrawal from the international organization still lingers. The focus of such criticism is

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<sup>9</sup> United Nations, "UN Charter," United Nations: We the People, A Stronger UN for a Better World, last modified 2011, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/preamble.shtml>.

<sup>10</sup> Lincoln P. Bloomfield, *The United Nations and U.S. Foreign Policy: A New Look at the National Interest* (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1960), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Sashi Tharoor, "Why America Still Needs the United Nations," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 5 (2003): 67, <http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A106770585&source=gale&userGroupName=iwp&version=1.0>.

tangled in the legitimacy, efficiency and ultimately the necessity of the UN to conduct international peacekeeping missions and promote human rights. While the arguments presented paint a picture for mandatory reform, the critiques of the UN do not warrant any U.S. withdrawal as the mission of the UN and its goals allow for far more political, economic, social and military advantages and opportunities than the U.S. can get on its own.

The financial burden of the UN is the most debated issue when the economic surety of a country is in question. The recent recession globally and domestically has had immense consequences on the budget especially in regards to the foreign affairs of the nation. While many citizens recognize the need for international communication and cooperation, the diplomatic advantages of being a member of the UN for the U.S. are not often recognized publicly. Being the single richest member of the UN, the United States has to shoulder the majority of the UN budget. While all member states are required to pay a portion of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), 25 percent of all peace keeping missions and 22 percent of the overall UN annual budget is composed of U.S. dollars.<sup>12</sup> This number may seem excessive on paper, but in context, this portion of the UN budget makes up only 1/10 of one percent of the overall U.S. budget.<sup>13</sup> The mere amount contributed to the UN does not even factor in the subsequent benefits the U.S. receives from not having to pay for unilateral missions.

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<sup>12</sup> Howard LaFranchi, "UN chief asks Congress to protect funding. Republicans less than thrilled," *Christian Science Monitor* (Washington, D.C.), April 7, 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Foreign-Policy/2011/0407/UN-chief-asks-Congress-to-protect-funding.-Republicans-less-than-thrilled>.

<sup>13</sup> Ted Piccone, "Reforming the United Nations: Lessons Learned" (Address, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Washington, D.C. , March 3, 2011), The Brookings Institute, [http://www.brookings.edu/testimony/2011/0303\\_human\\_rights\\_piccone.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/testimony/2011/0303_human_rights_piccone.aspx).

The UN remains the only global body responsible for maintaining international peace and security.<sup>14</sup> While unilateral missions might maximize efficiency, multilateral approaches through the UN contribute to an international consensus and shared burden of financing. The UN is more cost effective than a unilateral mission because it has always operated on a limited budget and knows the financial constraints on such operations better. UN peacekeeping budgets operate on less revenue than the annual budgets of the New York City police and fire departments.<sup>15</sup> Despite the minimal budget, the UN has had numerous successes in peacekeeping missions. Disillusion in success should not blind people to the limitations of the international organization. The costs of the UN missions, “fall below the costs of running even a modest military establishment.”<sup>16</sup> While the US may be able to undertake a military intervention on its own financially, the international respect garners legitimacy on a global scale.

The legitimacy of the UN is also under scrutiny through claims that the organization has no power to influence peace or promote human rights. While the presence of the U.S. as the sole superpower financially secures the UN, its membership also mutually legitimizes the international organization and the interventions it chooses to make. Without UN approval of U.S. military action, public opinion on U.S. wars is

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<sup>14</sup> Sashi Tharoor, "Why America Still Needs the United Nations," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 5 (2003): 67, <http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A106770585&source=gale&userGroupName=iwp&version=1.0>.

<sup>15</sup> Sashi Tharoor, "Why America Still Needs the United Nations," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 5 (2003): 67, <http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A106770585&source=gale&userGroupName=iwp&version=1.0>.

<sup>16</sup> Peter R. Baehr and Leon Gordenker, *The United Nations: Reality and Ideal*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 60.

severely impaired. Although the US has the military capability to carry out a mission on its own, the government, 'thought it prudent to garner international recognition that its actions were permissible and worthy of general support.'<sup>17</sup> This was the case with the first Gulf War. President George H. W. Bush was able to pass a UN resolution to go into Iraq to thwart the actions of Saddam Hussein because Kuwaitis' lives were under attack. The international community approved of the mission, but in subsequent years President George W. Bush would not gain the same recognition. When President George W. Bush invaded Iraq in 2003, UN relations were severely strained. In the past, former US administrations had sought UN guidance on many international activities, but the U.S. completely ignored the UN during the invasion in Iraq.<sup>18</sup> This caused extreme backlash to the United States as the UN upholds the idea that, "a world in which states ignore the will of the international community is less safe for all peoples of all nations."<sup>19</sup> Only when the U.S. so overtly violates the purpose and uses of the UN, does the legitimacy of the UN get called into question. Together the UN and the U.S legitimize one another as a valid international organization and a genuine superpower because the US and the UN, "cannot deliver legitimate world order on its own,"<sup>20</sup> in this continually interdependent global community. For the U.S., "acting in the name of international law is always preferable to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>18</sup> Peter R. Baehr and Leon Gordenker, *The United Nations: Reality and Ideal*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan , 2005), 152-153.

<sup>19</sup> Harvey Morris, "Obama: co-operate on global problems," *Financial Times*, September 24, 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Fredrick Soderbaum and Bjorn Hettne, "The UN and regional organizations in global security: competing or complementary logics?" *Global Governance* (2006): page #s, <http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A155926524&source=gale&userGroupName=iwp&version=1.0>.

acting in the name of national security,"<sup>21</sup> because everyone has a stake in international affairs. For the U.S. government, "couching U.S. action in terms of international law universalizes American interests and comforts allies."<sup>22</sup> As long as the UN exists, people will debate the necessity, efficiency and legitimacy of the international organization. The UN cannot do everything, but that should not allow people to dismiss its ability to do anything.<sup>23</sup>

### **U.S. Interests in UN Today**

The international community is at a crossroads today. People all over the Middle East and North Africa are calling for democratic governance. Iran and North Korea are threatening to use nuclear weapons if they manage to get a hold of the technology. China jeopardizes the superpower status of the United States with a fast growing economy and new relationships with historically allied countries of the United States. The U.S. faces far more challenges in today's world than at any other time since World War II. It is the job of the United States government to, "have a strategy that doesn't leave another

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<sup>21</sup> Sashi Tharoor, "Why America Still Needs the United Nations," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 5 (2003): 67, <http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A106770585&source=gale&userGroupName=iwp&version=1.0>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> US Department of State, *The Future of the U.S.- UN Relationship*, ed. US Government Printing Office, page #s, US Department of State, The Future of the U.S.-UN Relationship. <http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T003&prodId=AONE&docId=A15767288&source=gale&userGroupName=iwp&version=1.0>.

generation cynical about American promises.”<sup>24</sup> The UN poses a great outlet for the United States to tackle current and projected problems for its safety, security and ideology in the changing global environment.

Since the beginning of 2011, Middle Eastern and North African countries have called for their leaders to step down and for their countries to be ruled by the will of the people. What started in Egypt quickly spread to Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria. While the United States was weary of getting involved in the protests, explicit violations of human rights and the pressure from strong allies forced the U.S. to seek approval from the international community. President Barack Obama spoke to the American people on the importance of Libya when he said, “for generations the U.S. has played a unique role as an anchor of security and an advocate for human freedom. Mindful of the risks and costs of military action, we are naturally reluctant to use military force to solve the world’s many challenges. But when our values and interests are at stake, we have a responsibility to act.”<sup>25</sup> Action from the United States in Libya would not be unilateral. President Obama reinforced this idea by explaining, “we joined with other nations at the United Nations Security Council, (and) we broadened sanctions (and) imposed an arms embargo.”<sup>26</sup> While the U.S. has played a supporting role in the Libyan uprising, President Obama and the administration would not pursue any activity until the UN Security

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<sup>24</sup> George Packer, "Rights and Warnings," *The New Yorker*, May 17, 2010, 35.  
<http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T003&prodId=AONE&docId=A226591258&source=gale&userGroupName=iwp&version=1.0>

<sup>25</sup> Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya" (Address, National Defense University, March 28, 2011), The White House, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/28/remarks-president-address-nation-libya>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Council and other important members in the Arab League and the African Union were in support of such action. Though the revolutions continue across the region, action by the United States was supported because of the measures taken through the UN. President Obama warned that, "When we overuse our military might, or fail to invest in complementary tools, or act without partners, we overstretch our military and Americans bear a great burden."<sup>27</sup> It is with the support of the UN and its ability to impose the moral force of world opinion that allows international action from the United States to be defended. With continuing protests across the Middle East and North Africa, the United States must maintain cordial relationships with these conflict ridden countries through the UN so transitions and future relations will be beneficial for the United States.

China has been another major factor in the decision of the United States to remain tied to the UN. While China remains guarded in their domestic affairs, it has been channeling all its effort, time and money into its economy. While the United States remains the greatest world economy and the most influential country in the world, this may change in short period of time. According to the International Monetary Fund, U.S. demise as an economic powerhouse could come in as little as five years.<sup>28</sup> After that China will be the leading economy in the world. While the United States remains very influential, China has taken the liberty of strengthening its ties to other potentially

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<sup>27</sup> Abe Greenwald, "The Soft-Power Fallacy: Basing American foreign policy on cooperation and conciliation only works when other nations want to cooperate," *Commentary* 130, no. 1 (July-August 2010): 1, <http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IACDocuments&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A230409408&source=gale&srcprod=AONE&userGroupName=iw p&version=1.0>.

<sup>28</sup> Jack Cafferty, "What does it mean that China's economy could surpass U.S.'s in 5 years?" CNN, last modified April 25, 2011, <http://caffertyfile.blogs.cnn.com/2011/04/25/what-does-it-mean-that-chinas-economy-could-surpass-u-s-s-in-5-years/?iref=allsearch>.

dominant economic countries including Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa (BRICS). The BRICS countries have complained about the structure of the UN Security Council for many years, arguing that another member should get a permanent vote. The U.S. still maintains the veto power and ultimately can determine the outcome of this controversial reform. Without a seat and veto power, the U.S. would be powerless to stop the alliance from its international goals. While the U.S. still maintains its own ideologies through promotion within the UN, without an active role and veto power, there is a possibility that the UN could shift its ideological stance if another powerful country were to fill the voided U.S. role. In the wake of the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, it is better for the security and safety of the U.S. to have their own ideologies upheld rather than that of China, who often does not see eye to eye on many domestic and internal issues of countries. Working with China within the UN is the most productive way forward for the United States.<sup>29</sup>

The ultimate reason the United States cannot afford to leave the UN involves Nuclear Proliferation especially in countries like Iran and North Korea as well as international terrorist organizations who continually call for the domination of the United States and one of its strongest allies, Israel. Since the revolution in Iran, its leaders and president have not been shy about its desire to obtain nuclear capabilities. Iran's leaders have also reiterated time and again its dislike of Israel and the need for its removal from the Arab world. While Iran is considered the most influential threat to America and the

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<sup>29</sup> US Department of State, *The Future of the U.S.- UN Relationship*, ed. US Government Printing Office, page #s, US Department of State, The Future of the U.S.-UN Relationship. <http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T003&prodId=AONE&docId=A15767288&source=gale&userGroupName=iwp&version=1.0>.

stability of the Middle East, the U.S. has not gone into the country militarily. Instead the United States has chosen to go through UN. With the help of many UN member states, the U.S. implemented sanctions without which would become obsolete because of alternative forms of trade it could spawn.<sup>30</sup> Recently the sanctions have been more successful. The world has not seen a world war since World War II in large part because of, “the terror over the bomb,”<sup>31</sup> which keeps us in check, but if Iran or North Korea obtain such a device and try to use it against America or Israel, the future might comprise nuclear war. Combating the threats posed by Iran, North Korea, and terrorist organizations are all received far better coming from UN experts rather than US experts.<sup>32</sup> In a world where there is terrorism or threat of this nature, no country is safe from attack. This international dilemma has no other global venue than the UN to deliberate on actions and discuss other avenues for problems. For all the perceived problems of the United Nations, the United States has no interest in withdrawing from the organization completely.

## Conclusion

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<sup>30</sup> US Department of State, *The Future of the U.S.- UN Relationship*, ed. US Government Printing Office, page #s, US Department of State, The Future of the U.S.-UN Relationship. <http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T003&prodId=AONE&docId=A15767288&source=gale&userGroupName=iwp&version=1.0>.

<sup>31</sup> Ernest van den Haag and John P. Conrad, *The U.N.: In or Out?* (New York, NY: Plenum Press, 1987), 4-5.

<sup>32</sup> Sashi Tharoor, "Why America Still Needs the United Nations," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 5 (2003): 67, <http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A106770585&source=gale&userGroupName=iwp&version=1.0>.

Since President Woodrow Wilson shifted the ideological capacity of United States' foreign policy, a moral imperative has driven many international decisions. After the atrocities of World War II, many nations demanded standardized rights for humans and uniform procedures for the conduct of war. While the United Nations continues to maintain its relevancy in terms of conflicts in the Middle East, disaster relief, humanitarian aid and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, a debate persists on whether or not the United States should withdraw from the UN. The consequences of resigning membership in the international organization would be devastating for America. It would damage the view other nations have of the U.S., it would limit the role of the U.S. in global economics and conflict resolution, and it would go against the very ideologies that constitute the basis for governance and life in America. Threats continue to bring down the superpower status of America, and in order to maintain such an influence and dominance in the global environment, the United States has to remain tied to the UN. As Dag Hammarskjold, Second Secretary General of the United Nations, revealed, "the UN was not created to take humanity to heaven, but to save it from hell."<sup>33</sup> The U.S. cannot afford to resign from the UN, and should consider its membership a permanent reminder of the ideas, manners, and principles that forever changed the world during a time when peace was thought to be impossible. Set backs and failures will come along in the future, but that cannot deter the United States from moving forward and ensuring future

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<sup>33</sup> Sashi Tharoor, "Why America Still Needs the United Nations," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 5 (2003): 67, <http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A106770585&source=gale&userGroupName=iwp&version=1.0>.

generations the safety and security long provided from membership in the United Nations.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2007), 278-279.

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