

# Imprimis

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## America and the United Nations

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Journalist



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*The following is abridged from a speech delivered on December 5, 2005, at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., at Hillsdale College's sixth annual Churchill Dinner.*

At one level, the United Nations is merely the latest variant on the Congress of Vienna held almost two centuries ago—a venue where the great powers sit down to resolve the problems of the world to their mutual satisfaction. Unfortunately, unlike Lord Castlereagh, Prince Metternich and Talleyrand, none of whom would be asked to audition for a "We Are The World" charity fundraising single, the UN has become the repository of all the West's sappiest illusions of one-worldism.

Let me give an example. Nearly three years ago, the space shuttle Columbia crashed, and Katie Couric on NBC's *Today* show saluted the fallen heroes as follows: "They were an airborne United Nations—men, women, an African-American, an Indian woman, an Israeli...." By contrast, there's a famous terror-supporting Islamist imam in Britain, Abu Hamza, who, when the shuttle crashed, claimed it was God's punishment "because it carried Americans, an Israeli and a Hindu, a trinity of evil against Islam." Say what you like about the old Islamofascist nutcake, but he was at least paying attention to the particulars of the situation, not just peddling, as Katie Couric did, vapid "multi-culti" bromides.

Why couldn't Katie have said the Columbia was an airborne America? After all, the "Indian woman," Kalpana Chawla, was the American Dream writ large upon the stars: she emigrated to the U.S. in the 1980s and became an astronaut within a decade. What an incredible country. But somehow it wasn't enough to see in the crew's multiple ethnicities a stirring testament to the possibilities of her own land; instead, Katie upgraded them into an emblem of what seemed to her a far nobler ideal—the UN.

In the days before Miss Couric's observation—this was in 2003, just before the Iraq war—there had been two notable news items about the United Nations: (1) The newly elected chair of the UN Human Rights Commission was Colonel Gaddafi's Libya; and (2) it was announced that in



May, the presidency of the UN Conference on Disarmament would pass to Saddam Hussein's Iraq. But as Katie demonstrated, no matter what the UN actually is, the very initials evoke in her and many others some vague blurry memory of a long-ago UNESCO benefit with Danny Kaye or Audrey Hepburn surrounded by smiling children of many lands. There were many woozy Western leftists who felt—and still feel—that the theoretical idealism of Communism excused all its terrible failures in practice. The UN gets a similar pass, but from a far larger number of people. How else to explain all the polls in Europe, Australia, Canada and even America that show large numbers of people will only support war if it's approved by the UN?

## The Real UN

In fact, however, the UN is a shamefully squalid organization whose corruption is almost impossible to exaggerate. If you think—as the media and the left do in this country—that Iraq is a God-awful mess (which it's not), then try being the Balkans or Sudan or even Cyprus or anywhere where the problem's been left to the United Nations. If you don't want to bulk up your pension by skimming the Oil-for-Food program, no need to worry. Whatever your bag, the UN can find somewhere that suits—in West Africa, it's Sex-for-Food, with aid workers demanding sexual services from locals as young as four; in Cambodia, it's drug dealing; in Kenya, it's the refugee extortion racket; in the Balkans, sex slaves. On a UN peace mission, everyone gets his piece.

Didier Bourguet, a UN staffer in Congo and the Central African Republic, enjoyed the pleasures of 12-year-old girls, and as a result is now on trial in France. His lawyer has said he was part of a UN pedophile network operating from Africa to southeast Asia. But has anyone read anything about that? The merest glimpse of a U.S. servicewoman leading an Abu Ghraib inmate around with girly knickers on his head was enough to prompt calls for Donald Rumsfeld's resignation, and for Ted Kennedy to charge that Saddam's torture chambers were now open “under new management.” But systemic UN child sex in at least 50 percent of their missions? The transnational morality set can barely stifle their yawns. If you're going to sexually assault prepubescent girls, make sure you're wearing a blue helmet.

And at least the Pentagon put a stop to Abu Ghraib. As a British UN official in the Congo told my newspaper in London: “The crux of the

problem is that if the UN gets bolshie”—that's Britspeak for complaining aggressively—“with these governments then they stop providing the UN with troops and staff.” That's the system in a nutshell: when a British bigwig is with British forces, he'll enforce British standards; when a British official is holed up with an impeccably “multilateral” force of Uruguayans, Tunisians, etc., he's more circumspect. When in Rome, do as the Visigoths do. In Congo, the UN had to forbid all contact between its predatory forces and the natives. The rest of the world should be so lucky.

The child sex racket is only the most extreme example of what's wrong with the UN approach to the world. Developed peoples value resilience: when disaster strikes, you bounce back. A hurricane flattens Florida, you patch things up and reopen. As the New Colonial Class, the UN doesn't look at it like that: when disaster strikes, it just proves that you and your countrymen are children who need to be taken under the transnational wing. The folks who have been under the UN wing the longest—indeed, the only ones with their own permanent UN agency and semi-centenarian “refugee camps”—are the most comprehensively wrecked people on the face of the earth: the Palestinians. UN territories like Kosovo are the global equivalent of inner-city housing projects with the blue helmets as local enforcers for the absentee slum landlord. By contrast, a couple of years after imperialist warmonger Bush showed up, Afghanistan and Iraq have elections, presidents and prime ministers.

Let's just take one of the scandals that go widely unreported in the American media—the UN Oil-for-Food program. Among the targets of the corruption investigation was Kofi Annan's son Kojo—who had a \$30,000-a-year job but managed to find a spare quarter-million dollars sitting around to invest in a Swiss football club. The investigators then broadened their sights to include Kofi's brother Kobina Annan, the Ghanaian Ambassador to Morocco, who has ties to a businessman behind several of the entities involved in the scandal—one Michael Wilson, the son of the former Ghanaian Ambassador to Switzerland and a childhood friend of young Kojo. Mr. Wilson is currently being investigated for bribery involving a \$50 million contract to renovate the Geneva offices of the UN World Intellectual Property Organization.

The actual head of the Oil-for-Food racket, Kofi sidekick Benon Sevan, has resigned, having hitherto insisted that a mysterious six-figure sum in his bank account was a gift from his elderly

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aunt, a lady of modest means who lived in a two-room flat in Cyprus. Paul Volcker's investigators had planned to confirm with auntie her nephew's version of events, but unfortunately she fell down an elevator shaft and died. It now seems likely that the windfall had less to do with Mr. Sevan's late aunt than with his soliciting of oil allocations for a company run by a cousin of Kofi Annan's predecessor, Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

Despite current investigations into his brother, his son, his son's best friend, his predecessor's cousin, his former chief of staff, his procurement officer and the executive director of the UN's biggest ever program, the Secretary-General insists he remains committed to staying on and tackling the important work of "reforming" the UN. Unfortunately, his Executive Coordinator for United Nations Reform has also had to resign.

You'd think that by now, respect for the UN would be plummeting faster than Benon Sevan's auntie down that lift shaft. After all, these aren't peripheral figures or minor departments. They reach right into the heart of UN policy on two of the critical issues of the day—Iraq and North Korea. Most of the Ghanaian diplomatic corps and their progeny seem to have directorships at companies with UN contracts and/or Saddamite oil options.

What's important to understand is that Mr. Annan's ramshackle UN of humanitarian money-launderers, peacekeeper-rapists and a Human Rights Commission that looks like a lifetime-achievement awards ceremony for the world's torturers is not a momentary aberration. Nor can it be corrected by bureaucratic reforms designed to ensure that the failed Budget Oversight Committee will henceforth be policed by a Budget Oversight Committee Oversight Committee. The Oil-for-Food fiasco *is* the UN—the predictable spawn of its utopian fantasies and fetid realities. If Saddam grasped this more clearly than, say, Katie Couric or John Kerry, well, that's why he is—was—an A-list dictator and they're not.

Why was there an Oil-for-Food program in the first place? Because back in the 90s, having thrown a big old multilateral Gulf War and gotten to the gates of Baghdad, the grand UN coalition then decided against toppling Saddam. So, having shirked the responsibilities that come with having a real policy, America and its allies were in the market for a pseudo-policy. And where does an advanced Western democracy go when it wants a pseudo-policy? Why, the UN! Saddam correctly calculated that the great powers were over-invested in Oil-for-Food as a figleaf for their lack of will, and reasoned that in such an environment their figleaf

would also serve as a discreet veil for all kinds of other activities. He didn't game the system; he simply understood far better than Clinton and Bush Sr., John Major and Tony Blair how it worked.

## Failures of Transnationalism

Transnationalism is the mechanism by which the world's most enlightened progressives provide cover for its darkest forces. It's a largely unconscious alliance, but not an illogical one. Western proponents of Kyoto and some of the other loopy NGO-beloved eco-doom-mongering concepts up for debate in Montreal at the moment have at least this much in common with psychotic Third World thugocracies: they find it hard to win free elections, they regard transnational bodies as useful for conferring a respect unearned at the ballot box, and they are unduly troubled by the lack of accountability in global institutions.

Those of us who believe that big government is by definition remote government—and that therefore the UN's pretensions to world government make it potentially the worst of all—should, in theory, argue for withdrawal from the organization. Outside of a few college towns and coastal enclaves, I don't believe there would be any political downside for candidates campaigning on a platform of pulling out of the UN entirely, and I'd encourage Republicans to do so if only as a way of unnerving those lazy pols like John Kerry who are prone to mindless transnationalist boosterism. But as a matter of practical politics, I can't see the U.S. leaving the UN anytime soon.

Can the U.S. force the UN to reform itself? Look at it this way: With hindsight, the UN was most effective when it was least effective—that's to say, the four decades between Korea and the Gulf War, when the Cold War's mutually-assured vetoes at least accurately represented the global stand-off. Now, however, we're in a unipolar world. As a result, the UN is no longer a permanent talking-shop for the world's powers but an alternative power in and of itself—a sort of ersatz superpower intended to counter the real one. Consider the 85 yes-or-no votes America made in the General Assembly in 2003: Arab League members voted against the U.S. position 88.7% of the time; ASEAN members voted against the U.S. position 84.5% of the time; Islamic Conference members voted against the U.S. position 84.1% of the time; African members voted against the U.S. position 83.8% of the time; Non-Aligned Movement

members voted against the U.S. position 82.7% of the time; and European Union members voted against the U.S. position 54.5% of the time.

You can take the view of the European elites that this is proof of America's isolation and that the U.S. now needs to issue a "Declaration of Interdependence" with the world. Or you can be like the proud mom in Irving Berlin's WWI marching song: "They Were All Out Of Step But Jim." But what these figures really demonstrate is that the logic of the post-Cold War UN is to be institutionally anti-American. The U.S. could seize on Kofi Annan's present embarrassment and lean hard on him to reform this and reorganize that and reinvent the other and, if it employs its full diplomatic muscle, it might get those anti-U.S. votes down to... a tad over 80%. And along the way it would find that it had "reformed" a corrupt, dysfunctional, sclerotic anti-American club into a lean, mean, functioning, effective anti-American club. Which is, if they're honest, what most reformers mean by "reform."

In the old days, ramshackle dictatorships were proxies for heavyweight patrons, but not any more. These days, psychotic dictators represent only themselves. Yet somehow, in the post-Cold War talking shops, the loony tunes' prestige has been enhanced: the UN, as Canadian writer George Jonas puts it, enables "dysfunctional dictatorships to punch above their weight." Away from Kofi and Co., the world is moving more or less in the right direction: entire regions that were once wall-to-wall tyrannies are now filled with flawed but broadly functioning democracies—e.g., Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America. The UN has been irrelevant to this transformation. Its structures resist reform and the principal beneficiaries are the thug states.

## What Actually Works?

What should replace the UN? Some people talk about a "caucus of the democracies." But I'd like to propose a more radical suggestion: nothing. In the war on terror, America's most important relationships have been not transnational but bilateral: Australia's John Howard didn't dispatch troops to Iraq because the Aussies and the Yanks belong to the same international talking shop; Tony Blair's reliability on war and terror isn't because of the European Union but in spite of it. These relationships are meaningful precisely because they're not the product of formal transnational bureaucracies.

When the tsunami hit last year, hundreds of thousands of people died within minutes. The Australians and Americans arrived within hours. The UN was unable to get to Banda Aceh for weeks. Instead, the humanitarian fat cats were back in New York and Geneva holding press conferences warning about post-tsunami health consequences—dysentery, cholera, BSE from water-logged cattle, etc.—that, its spokesmen assured us, would kill as many people as the original disaster. But this never happened, any more than did their predictions of disaster for Iraq: "The head of the World Food Program has warned that Iraq could spiral into a massive humanitarian disaster." Or for Afghanistan: "The UN Children's Fund has estimated that as many as 100,000 Afghan children could die of cold, disease and hunger."

It's one thing to invent humanitarian disasters to disparage Bush's unilateralist war-mongering; but in the wake of the tsunami, the UN was reduced to inventing a humanitarian disaster in order to distract attention from the existing humanitarian disaster it wasn't doing anything about.

In fact, the whole idea of multilateral organizations feels a bit last millennium. With hindsight, institutions like the UN seem like a hangover from the Congress of Vienna age when contact between nations was limited to the potentates' emissaries. That's why transnationalism so appeals both to Euro-statists and to dictators—the great men of the world meeting together to decide things for everyone else. But, in the era of the Internet, five-cents-per-minute international phone rates, bank cards issued in Finland that you can use in an ATM in Brazil or Fiji, and blue collar families taking cheap vacations in the Maldives and Bali, the bloated UN bureaucracy seems at best irrelevant and at worst an obstruction to the progress of international relations. I'm all in favor of the Universal Postal Union and the Berne Copyright Convention, but they work precisely because dysfunctional dictators weren't involved. The non-nutcake jurisdictions came together, and others were required to be in compliance before they could join. That's why they work and endure. Transnational institutions should reflect points of agreement: Americans don't mind the Toronto Blue Jays playing in the same baseball league—and even winning it occasionally—because they're all agreed on the rules of baseball. A joint North American Public Health Commission, on the other hand, would be a bureaucratic boondoggle seeking to reconcile two incompatible health systems. Imagine then what

happens when you put America, Denmark, Libya and Syria on a human rights committee, and then try and explain why the verdict of such a committee should be given any weight when the U.S. is weighing its vital national interest.

It's a good basic axiom that if you take a quart of ice cream and a quart of dog mess and mix 'em together, the result will taste more like dog mess than ice cream. That's the problem with the UN. If you make the free nations and the thug states members of the same club, the danger isn't that they'll meet each other half-way but that the free world winds up going three-quarters or seven-eighths of the way. Indeed, the UN has met the thug states so much more than half way that they now largely share the dictators' view of their peoples—as either helpless children who need every decision made for them, or a bunch of dupes whose national wealth can be rerouted to a Swiss bank account.

Perhaps that malign combination of empty European gesture-politics and Third World larceny would be relatively harmless, at least in the geopolitical sense, if these were quieter times. But they're not. This is an age in which America and its real allies—a bigger number than you'd think—need to be free to act without being a latter-day Gulliver ensnared by Lilliputian UN resolutions from head to toe. After all, consider the alternative to American action. As you may have noticed, the good people of Darfur in Sudan have been fortunate enough not to attract the attention of the arrogant cowboy unilateralist Bush and have instead fallen under the care of the UN multilateral compassion set. So, after months of expressing deep, grave concern over whether the graves were deep enough, Kofi Annan managed to persuade the UN to set up a committee to look into what's going on in Darfur. Eventually, they reported back that it's not genocide.

That's great news, isn't it? Because if it had been genocide, that would have been very, very serious. As yet another Kofi Annan-appointed UN committee boldly declared a year ago: "Genocide anywhere is a threat to the security of all and should never be tolerated." So thank goodness what's going on in Sudan isn't genocide. Instead, it's just 100,000 corpses who all happen to be from the same ethnic group—which means the UN can go on tolerating it until everyone's dead, and none of the multilateral compassion types have to worry their pretty heads about it.

That's the transnational establishment's alternative to Bush and his "coalition of the willing": appoint a committee that agrees on the

urgent need to do nothing at all. Thus, last year the UN Human Rights Commission announced the working group that will decide which complaints will be heard at its annual meeting in Geneva this spring: the five-nation panel that will select which human-rights violations will be up for discussion comprises the Netherlands, Hungary, Cuba, Saudi Arabia and Zimbabwe. I wouldn't bet on them finding room on their crowded agenda for the question of human rights in Cuba, Saudi Arabia and Zimbabwe.

One of the mystifying aspects of UN worship is the assumption that this embryo world government is a "progressive" concept. It's not. Most of us in our business and family and consumer relationships are plugged into global networks far better for the long-term health of the planet than using American money to set up Eurowimp talking shops manned by African thugs—which is what the UN Human Rights Commission boils down to.

## Judging by Results

Go back to that tsunami. While the UN and its agencies were on television badgering and hectoring the West for its stinginess, the actual relief efforts were being made by a couple of diverted U.S. naval groups and the Royal Australian Navy. The Scandinavians can't fly in relief supplies, because they don't have any C-130s. All they can do is wait for the UN to swing by and pick up their check. And it says something for the post-modern decadence of the age that that gives you supposed moral superiority.

There's a moment in the latest Batman movie in which Bruce Wayne has just bumped into his childhood sweetheart, Rachel Dawes, in the lobby of some Gotham City hotel. Unfortunately he's sopping wet, having been cavorting in the ornamental fountain with a couple of hot pieces of arm candy. Rachel is a crusading district attorney and Bruce can see she's a bit disappointed to discover her old pal is now Paris Hilton in drag. So he attempts to assure her that deep down he still cares about all the worthy stuff. Rachel swats this aside. It's not what you feel inside that counts, she says. "It's what you do that defines you."

Bruce wanes, visibly, under her withering riposte. I wouldn't claim this film has anything as coherent as a philosophy, but its director thought enough of that line to reprise it late in the action. "It's what you do that defines you," Batman whispers to Rachel before diving off a rooftop to go whump the bad guys. "Bruce...?" she says, faintly.

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A couple of days after seeing this film I read that the Oxfam international aid organization had paid the better part of a million bucks to Sri Lankan customs officials for the privilege of having 25 four-wheel-drive vehicles allowed into the country to get aid out to remote villages on washed-out roads hit by the tsunami. The Indian-made Mahindras stood idle on the dock in Colombo for a month as Oxfam's representatives were buried under a tsunami of paperwork. Fourteen Unicef ambulances sent to Indonesia spent two months sitting on the dock of the bay wasting time, as the late Otis Redding so shrewdly anticipated.

The tsunami may have been unprecedented, but what followed was business as usual—the sloth and corruption of government, the feebleness of the brand-name NGOs, the compassion-exhibitionism of the transnational jet set. If we

lived in a world where “it’s what you do that defines you,” we’d be heaping praise on the U.S. and Australian militaries, who in the immediate hours after the tsunami dispatched their forces to save lives, distribute food and restore water, power and communications.

According to my favorite foreign minister these days, Australia’s Alexander Downer, “Iraq was a clear example about how outcomes are more important than blind faith in the principles of non-intervention, sovereignty and multilateralism.... Increasingly multilateralism is a synonym for an ineffective and unfocused policy involving internationalism of the lowest common denominator. Multilateral institutions need to become more results-oriented.”

Which is pretty much the Batman thesis: It’s what we do that defines us. And we’ll do more without the UN.



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