

Towards a Comprehensive U.S. Agenda for UN Reform

An Examination of Recommendations proposed by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan
and supported by the Bush Administration

Background

As the United Nations celebrates its 60th anniversary, there is widespread consensus in the international community that the institution needs to be reformed. Secretary Condoleezza Rice recently said in an interview, "There's no doubt that this is an organization that needs updating and reforming in order to be effective. And we are a founding member of the United Nations. We shouldn't abandon it. We should make it a stronger instrument." And for the first time in recent history, member states agree that UN reform is possible; as Assistant Secretary of State Kim Holmes said in an April speech, "the tipping point for change may well be upon us."

On March 21, 2005, Secretary General Kofi Annan released a report entitled "In larger freedom," in which he proposes groundbreaking recommendations as part of a comprehensive strategy to reform the United Nations. The report sets the starting point for the UN summit in New York in September. The summit is an historic opportunity for President Bush to engage the international community in a new dialogue about what security means in the 21st century, how to deal with global issues such as poverty and disease and how the UN can play an effective role in an era of global interdependence.

Annan named the report "In larger freedom" to "stress the enduring relevance of the Charter of the United Nations and to emphasize that its purposes must be advanced in the lives of individual men and women." His recommendations are classified into four categories:

- **Freedom from want:** to lift people from extreme poverty and eradicate deadly diseases;
- **Freedom from fear:** to ensure lives are not ripped apart by violence and war;
- **Freedom to live in dignity:** to promote democracy, rule of law, human rights and;
- **Strengthening the United Nations:** to make the UN an effective institution for the 21st century

This paper will explore the recommendations laid out in Annan's report that are supported by the Bush Administration such as: preventing terrorism, creating a Peacebuilding Commission, establishing a UN Democracy Fund, replacing the Commission on Human Rights with a smaller Human Rights Council, fighting poverty, development aid and debt relief. It will then make the case on the need for President Bush to promote a comprehensive U.S. agenda for UN reform at the September 2005 world leaders summit.

Freedom from want

In 2000, the international community agreed to confront global poverty, hunger, disease and other development and laid out key pragmatic targets for 2015, known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In his report, the Secretary General emphasized that “humanity will not enjoy development without security, or security without development.”

- Kofi Annan’s report acknowledges that “developing countries should recommit themselves to taking primary responsibility for their own development by strengthening governance, combating corruption and putting in place the policies and investments to drive private-sector led growth and maximize domestic resources to fund national development strategies.¹” This resonates with the Bush Administration’s Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) – a program designed to provide aid to countries that display a strong commitment to democracy, economic freedom and rule of law. In an April meeting, Larry Greenwood, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, stated that it is “important to focus on successes so we can learn from them: China, Mozambique, Vietnam, Senegal, Ghana, Botswana...what’s the common factor of these countries? Not just ODA. Government actions- regulatory environment, good governance, sound economic policies.”
- Another goal is debt relief, and according to Secretary John W. Snow at an April meeting of the G-7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, the United States supports 100 percent reduction of debt for Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC).
- The United States also supports Kofi Annan’s call to “establish a worldwide warning system for all natural hazards, building on existing national and regional capacity.²” In January, Ambassador Howard Baker, who led the U.S. delegation to the UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction said, “The United States feels that never again should lives be lost because a global tsunami warning system doesn't exist, and thus wishes to announce today a commitment to do whatever it takes, in partnership with others, to expand and enhance the existing Pacific Ocean tsunami warning system into a global system including the Indian Ocean, the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea to protect coasts and coastal areas from tsunami threats.”

Freedom from fear

- In his report, the Secretary General pushes Member States to agree on a clear definition of terrorism as any intentional attack on civilians and noncombatants by non state actors for political purposes. This would be a major step for the UN, defying the notion of some member states that “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.” The Secretary General has also recognized the right of states to act preemptively against imminent threats and has established guidelines for states to consider before waging an attack. Assistant Secretary Kim Holmes said the Bush Administration welcomes the Secretary General’s acknowledgement “that states need not wait until an attack happens to use force in self-defense.”
- Secretary Holmes also highlighted that the U.S, played a prominent role in creating the Counter-Terrorism Committee at the UN through the Security Council. The Counter-Terrorism Committee has since become the UN’s leading body to promote collective action against international terrorism.

¹ Kofi Annan’s report “In larger freedom,” page 55, 5 (a) (i)

² Kofi Annan’s report “In larger freedom,” page 57, 5 (m)

Secretary General Annan has emphasized that the United Nations can play a prominent role in combating terrorism. He outlined his strategy by highlighting "five Ds"³:

- Dissuade disaffected groups from choosing terrorism
 - Deny terrorists necessary means
 - Deter states from supporting terrorists
 - Develop state capacity to prevent terrorism
 - Defend human rights in the struggle against terrorism
- In addition, Secretary Holmes stated that the Bush Administration had also pressed for the adoption of a Security Council Resolution "which requires states to criminalize the proliferation of WMD to states and non-state actors." On April 13, 2005, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted the Nuclear Terrorism Convention. The treaty obliges governments to punish those who illegally possess atomic devices or radioactive materials. The treaty is the 13th anti-terrorism convention introduced to the General Assembly and the first completed since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. The Convention is a key recommendation in the Secretary-General's recent report; Kofi Annan said the measure will serve as an important step toward multilateral efforts to combat terrorism, by preventing terrorists' access to "the most lethal weapons known to humanity."
 - Another key proposal is to establish a Peacebuilding Commission and a Peacebuilding Support Office in the Secretariat. In the report, Kofi Annan stated that the UN's "record of success in mediating and implementing peace agreements is sadly blemished by some devastating failures ... and noting a "gaping hole" in the UN's institutional machinery to "effectively addresses the challenge of helping countries with the transition from war to lasting peace." Currently, half the countries that emerge from conflict revert back to conflict within five years. Therefore, he proposes a permanent office that would identify states on the verge of collapse, provide assistance to prevent such collapses, and sustain the efforts of the international community in post-conflict peacebuilding. In an April speech Secretary Holmes said that the United States supports "the concept of a peacebuilding commission. Helping societies rebuild quickly after a conflict ends – and before the interest of the world wanes – is the best way to shore up peace, secure freedom and prevent relapses." Failed and failing states provide breeding grounds for terrorism and international crime; thus, preventing destabilizing events is in the interests of the U.S.

Freedom to live in dignity

- In his report, Kofi Annan acknowledged the importance of promoting democracy and is urging the international community to "welcome the creation of a Democracy Fund at the United Nations to provide funding and technical assistance to countries seeking to establish or strengthen their democracy."⁴ The fund was proposed by President Bush at the UN General Assembly and Secretary Holmes stated the Secretary General's support is "an important breakthrough." The Bush Administration has concluded its negotiations with the Secretariat and is discussing terms for establishing such a fund and identifying potential donors. Once the Fund is active, the board of donors and democracies can fund NGOs and other entities to assist transitional democracies.
- The Secretary General also highlights the importance of strengthening the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights because the office "remains woefully ill-equipped to respond to the broad range of human rights challenges facing the international community. Member States' proclaimed commitment to human rights must be matched by resources to strengthen the Office's ability to discharge its vital

³ Kofi Annan's report "In larger freedom," page 58 6 (e)

⁴ Kofi Annan's report "In larger freedom," page 59, 7 (d)

mandate.⁵ In a recent testimony before the House International Relations Committee, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations, Mark Lagon, agreed, saying “the potential role of the Office of the High Commissioner in monitoring and preventing human rights abuses on the ground – and in carrying out proper early warning – is no less important than technical assistance...another important area in which the High Commissioner could use additional resources is in the area of training, standardization and professionalization of the so-called “special rapporteurs.”

Strengthening the United Nations

- The United States has also been one of the most vocal critics of the Commission on Human Rights and Secretary-General Kofi Annan recently declared that the United Nations Commission on Human Rights “suffers from declining credibility and professionalism, and is in need of major reform.” It is no secret that the current commission is dysfunctional and has been a way for many countries such as Liberia and Sudan to cover up human rights abuses in their countries rather than advance better practices. His proposal would “replace the Commission on Human Rights with a smaller standing Human Rights Council, as a principal organ of the United Nations or subsidiary body of the General Assembly.⁶” Membership in the new Council would be limited only to states with a credible human rights record, who would be elected by a two-thirds vote of the UN General Assembly. The Council would also be a standing body, meaning that it would be able to meet year-round, rather than just six weeks a year.

In his testimony, Assistant Secretary Lagon emphasized that the “the UN’s human rights mechanisms are broken and must be fixed.” The Commission on Human Rights has a host of well-known structural problems, including inadequate time or resources to address even the most pressing problems. Mr. Lagon added that the Bush Administration “support[s] the Secretary-General’s recommendations....we look forward to engaging with the UN and other Member State officials to work out details of the Council.”

- The Secretary General has also urged Member States to endorse reforms to improve accountability, transparency and efficiency within the Secretariat. In addition, he is seeking to reform the Secretariat by “commissioning a comprehensive review of the Office of Internal Oversight Services with a view to strengthening its independence and authority, as well as its expertise and capacity.⁷” At an April hearing before the House Committee on Appropriations, Assistant Secretary Holmes reiterated this proposal saying “UN reform must improve management and oversight, to ensure greater transparency and accountability.”

A Comprehensive Agenda

“In a world of interconnected threats and challenges, it is in each country's self-interest that all of them are addressed effectively. Hence, the cause of larger freedom can only be advanced by broad, deep and sustained global cooperation among States. Such cooperation is possible if every country's policies take into account not only the needs of its own citizens but also the needs of others. This kind of cooperation not only advances everyone's interests but also recognizes our common humanity.” ~ In larger freedom

Secretary General Annan issued *In Larger Freedom* as a comprehensive agenda to make the UN an effective 21st century institution. In addition to the specific proposals mentioned above, there are many other recommendations supported in part or in principle by the United States in this and other UN reports. But because the U.S. opposes some of the report’s recommendations, the Administration has chosen to treat the report as an *à la carte* menu. Rather than cherry picking specific proposals, the U.S. would be in a

⁵ Kofi Annan’s report “In larger freedom,” page 37, A, 142-144

⁶ Kofi Annan’s report “In larger freedom,” page 61, 8 (e)

⁷ Kofi Annan’s report “In larger freedom,” page 61, 8 (f) (iv and v)

stronger negotiating position if it supports Annan's effort to create a strategic agenda for UN reform, and offer a comprehensive plan on the run up to the September summit.

The U.S. should utilize recommendations from Annan's report that it supports as well as recommendations from other sources including those submitted by the Gingrich-Mitchell USIP taskforce scheduled to be released in June. By acknowledging the utility of a global deal that takes into account "the needs of others" the U.S. will be in a much stronger position to establish an effective 21st century collective security system that advances U.S. objectives and recognizes our common interests.

Resources

Read "In larger freedom" in full at <http://www.un.org/largerfreedom/contents.htm>

For more on UN Reform visit http://www.globalsolutions.org/programs/intl_instit/UN_ref/UN_ref_home.html

Last December, a blue-ribbon UN panel released a report on reforming the UN for the 21st Century, "**A more secure world: Our shared responsibility.**" The report proposed a host of reforms designed to update the UN to face the threats and challenges posed by today's world: poverty, infectious diseases, armed conflicts (both between states and within states), weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and organized international crime rings. To learn more visit http://www.globalsolutions.org/programs/intl_instit/UN_ref/HLP_home.html

In January, the Millennium Project report was released which outlines practical plans for: halving the number of people living in poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; reducing infant mortality rate by two-thirds and maternal mortality by three-quarters; and reversing the spread of HIV /AIDS, malaria and other infectious diseases that kill millions in poor countries annually by 2015. To read the full report, visit http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/index_overview.htm

The U.S. Institute of Peace task force on the United Nations will evaluate how the institution is fulfilling the goals set by the UN Charter, and to offer recommendations on how the United States can play a bigger role, taking into account primarily American interests and responsibilities. The report is due on June 6, 2005. To find out more information, visit <http://www.usip.org/un/about.html>

What We Do

Citizens for Global Solutions envisions a future in which nations work together to abolish war, protect our rights and freedoms, and solve the problems facing humanity that no nation can solve alone. This vision requires effective democratic global institutions that will apply the rule of law while respecting the diversity and autonomy of national and local communities. We work to build political will for our vision in the United States by educating Americans about our global interdependence, communicating global concerns to public officials, and developing proposals to create, reform, and strengthen international institutions such as the United Nations.

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