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UNITED NATIONS REFORM: WHERE'S THE BEEF?

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INTRODUCTION

Under intense pressure from the U.S., the United Nations in 1985 reluctantly agreed to assess its operations and programs to determine how they could be reformed. The goal, ostensibly, was to find ways to restore United Nations effectiveness "when the U.N.'s credibility is sagging in nearly every region of the world."¹ To achieve this, a committee was appointed and, on August 15, 1986, a reform plan was unveiled with considerable fanfare. In the months following, the U.N. General Assembly and Secretariat were supposed to begin translating the reform proposals into reality. Now that this process has been under way for some time, it would be appropriate for Members of Congress, U.S. officials, and the American public to ask about U.N. reform: Where's the beef?

The truth is that, despite the fanfare, there is no beef. Fundamental reform of the U.N. was never even attempted. The U.N. and its reform committee, known formally as The Group of High-Level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations, never focused on U.N. programs. This means that the reform process ignored the basic allocation of resources and the effectiveness and efficiency with which the U.N. bureaucracy in New York spends its nearly one billion dollars each year. (More than \$3 billion are spent by other

1. Leadership at the United Nations, Report of the U.N. Management and Decision Making Panel of the United Nations Association of the USA, December 10, 1986, p. 4.

U.N. agencies.) A fundamental U.N. reform process, moreover, would work from the principles enunciated in the U.N. Charter: keeping the peace, enhancing human rights, promoting economic development. These would be used by genuine reformers as benchmarks for program evaluation. By contrast, the "reform" being pursued at the U.N. is equated with the technical procedures for drawing up, examining, and enacting the U.N.'s biennial budget; and even so narrowly defined, it has scarcely gotten off the ground.

Commenting on the U.N. efforts at budget reform, former U.S. Permanent Representative to the U.N. Jeane J. Kirkpatrick noted that the "new procedures designed to introduce more order and discipline into the U.N. budgeting process" depend on a "restructured Committee for Program and Coordination [which] should operate by consensus but...is not required to do so." She pointed out that this could have some effect only:

If it [the Committee] reaches decisions by consensus, and if the major donors are members, and if their governments insist on fiscal restraint, then the [Committee] will prove the desired instrument for fiscal reform--if the General Assembly chooses to accept its decisions as binding. (Emphasis in the original.)

Consensus decision-making is indeed the key to U.N. budgetary reform. Consensus, of course, means that a policy or budget is adopted only if every committee member approves; in effect, this would give the U.S. a welcome veto over the committee's actions. As Kirkpatrick points out, however, U.N. reform does not require consensus on budget matters.

Thus even on the sole area of attempted U.N. reform, budget matters, the U.N. has taken but one relatively modest step forward. It has avoided, so far, addressing the long-overdue programmatic reform of the U.N. system as a whole.

Congress has been correct in criticizing a wide range of United Nations activities. Congress has been wise in enacting at least a half dozen laws to prod U.N. reform. The most effective action has been the Kassebaum-Solomon Amendment, which cuts the U.S. contribution to the U.N. until fundamental reforms are made. The reforms sought by Congress are not to be cosmetic. So far, however, cosmetics are all that the U.N. reform effort has produced.

IMPETUS FOR U.N. REFORM

The driving force for U.N. reform has been a series of acts by the U.S. Congress, mutually reinforcing, that began in 1979 with the Kemp-Moynihan Amendment barring the use of U.S. contributions for any

U.N. program that would benefit certain terrorist organizations. In 1985, Congress passed the Kassebaum-Solomon Amendment, named after its sponsors, Republican Senator Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas and Republican Representative Gerald Solomon of New York. This major initiative mandated a 20 percent cut in the U.S. assessed contribution to the U.N. unless the General Assembly were to adopt a decision-making procedure on budgetary questions that equated a nation's voting power with its proportionate share of the total assessment. This is known as weighted voting, a procedure used very effectively at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Public and official disenchantment with U.N. failures, waste, and its anti-American bias was fueled also by a steady stream of factual reports issued by the U.S. Mission to the U.N. from 1981 to 1985, during Kirkpatrick's tenure as ambassador. Virtually for the first time since the U.N. was founded in 1945, critical attention began to be focused on what really went on at U.N. Headquarters in New York and on the extent to which the U.N.'s main political bodies--the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Secretariat--were themselves violating the principles of the U.N. Charter. An especially dramatic example: U.N. toleration of Soviet espionage within the Secretariat itself.

The result was instant recognition that the U.N. could no longer defer the effort to put its house in order. The rhetoric of reform, at least, began to catch up with reality. The solution: create a committee to study the problem and recommend action.

THE EXPERTS GROUP

That reform effort got under way at the end of 1985. In the final action of its 40th session, on December 18, 1985, the U.N. General Assembly established a Group of High-Level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations. This 18-member Experts Group was appointed by Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar with adherence to the traditional U.N. geographic spread. All five permanent members (the U.S., USSR, China, France, and Britain) were represented. The U.S. representative was Jose Sorzano, who had served from 1981 to 1985 as deputy to Ambassador Kirkpatrick and who now is a senior staff member on the National Security Council. From February to August last year, the Experts Group held 67 meetings. Its Report (Supplement No. 49: A/41/49) was delivered on schedule as the 41st U.N. General Assembly convened in mid-September.

Though the Group's title gave the body a very broad charter, the Experts Group confined itself to a relatively narrow focus. Its Report included some sweeping generalizations about the U.N.'s basic organization (calling for follow-on studies by "appropriate" bodies)

and somewhat more specific recommendations about U.N. Secretariat personnel policy. On the key question of the U.N. budget process, however, the Experts Group could not agree on a decision. It put three alternative reform scenarios on the table, ranging from cosmetic-only to something very close to total control of the process by inflexible rule of consensus by the major donor nations.

The Report of the Experts Group is an extraordinary document. Read literally, with all the loopholes of diplomatic understatement closed, it is a damning indictment of U.N. "business as usual." On a single page of the Report, dealing with "Structure of the Secretariat," the descriptive phrases include: "duplication of work," "reduced productivity," "reduced quality of performance," "too top-heavy," "too complex," "too fragmented," "dispersion of responsibility," and "diffuse lines of authority, accountability and communication."

Astonishingly, considering its Third World majority (12 members out of 18) and the fact that criticism of U.N. practices usually is perceived as a slap at Third World "backwardness," the Experts Group draws most of the logical conclusions. Among its general, non-budgetary recommendations are:

- o major consolidation of the Secretariat's nine existing "political" departments and eleven "economic and social" units;
- o no new Secretariat units without the elimination and/or consolidation of existing duplicative units;
- o a 15 percent reduction in the Secretariat's current workforce of nearly 12,000;
- o reduced "perks" and benefits for all Secretariat personnel;
- o a ban on rehiring retired Secretariat officials as "consultants" at full pay;
- o consolidation of the public information function, now dispersed among a dozen competing offices throughout the Secretariat;
- o no new conference facilities--a clear reference to the \$73 million U.N. Center in Addis Ababa, authorized in 1985 over bitter U.S. objections, in the midst of the Ethiopian famine;
- o a 25 percent reduction in the number of Under- and Assistant-Secretaries-General, of which there are now 57 at the U.N.'s New York headquarters alone (this would be comparable to about 500 Under- and Assistant-Secretaries in, for example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which manages to get along with a dozen).

The Experts Group even almost agreed to curtail the Soviet bloc's flagrant abuse of the practice of "secondment," whereby 99.7 percent of Soviet bloc nationals who occupy Secretariat professional slots work on fixed contracts rather than as career international civil servants. For a number of complex reasons, this allows the USSR and Soviet bloc states to "own" the staff positions their nationals hold. At its next-to-last meeting, the Experts Group seemed to reach a consensus to recommend a 50 percent cap on seconded Secretariat professional staff from any member-state. The Soviet representative did not object. Next morning, however, the Soviet delegate apparently realized what he had approved the previous evening. He reversed himself and voted "nyet," preventing the recommendation from being reported as unanimous. "Some members do not agree" was duly noted in the text.

THE U.N. BUDGET PROCESS

With regard to the U.N. budget process, the Experts Group split three ways. Even so, the broad outlines of a quite radical reform were suggested in the Report. Among its major features were:

- o The centerpiece of the budget process would be a Committee on Program and Coordination (CPC) with the appearance at least of increased responsibilities; this 21-member group is elected by the General Assembly for staggered three-year terms (with five members from "the West" and Africa, four each from Asia and Latin America, and three from Eastern Europe).
- o In off-budget years (the U.N. regular budget covers two calendar years) the Secretary-General would present to the CPC a detailed programmatic plan for U.N. activities, along with a projection of needed funding, and would do so in time for thorough "intergovernmental consultations."
- o In budget years, the Secretary-General would recast the agreed program plan into actual budget numbers, again leaving time for thorough review by both the CPC and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (the ACABQ, a 16-member group also elected by the General Assembly for three-year staggered terms, consisting by tradition of genuinely expert "number crunchers" and comparable to the U.S. Joint Economic Committee).
- o A contingency fund would be included in the budget, capped at 2 percent of the projected total, from which all emergency expenditures would have to be funded.
- o All other budget add-ons would require reallocating existing resources.

- o Decision-making in both the CPC and ACABQ "should be" by consensus.
- o Final decisions on programs and budgets would remain, in accordance with the U.N. Charter, with the full 159-member U.N. General Assembly (working through its Fifth or Budget Committee).

That was the rough plan, in outline and lacking consensus, that the Experts Group put on the agenda of the 41st General Assembly last September. It was said, in the corridors and lounges of the United Nations Headquarters in Manhattan, that this was the make-or-break "reform" General Assembly.

WHAT THE 41ST GENERAL ASSEMBLY DID--AND FAILED TO DO

What came out of the General Assembly reform pipeline was barely a trickle. The much-awaited "reform resolution" 41/213, adopted on December 19 without a vote, was long on promise and very short on enforcing teeth. Almost all of the critical components of the budget process remain to be determined. In this resolution:

- o The 15 percent staff cut and the dramatic 25 percent cut in top-level Secretariat posts have been reduced to "targets" only, and even then the Secretary-General should be "flexible" in taking action to avoid "negative impact" on programs and on the "structure" of the Secretariat. Although there have been some reductions in Secretariat personnel, primarily through attrition, full-scale restructuring and reductions have yet to take place.
- o Secondment, and its abuse by the Soviet bloc, survived intact; the Experts Group recommendations on this were to be executed only "to the extent they are agreed upon," thus upholding Soviet veto.
- o The new U.N. Center in famine-stricken Addis Ababa moves full speed ahead; the recommendation to scrap it "should not prejudice" prior decisions by the General Assembly.
- o The contingency fund remains in the budget, but the 2 percent cap has disappeared; add-ons will continue to be at the discretion of the General Assembly and its Third World majority to be funded, apparently, by increased contributions from the U.S. and other big donors.
- o Any sense of attempting to enforce consensus in the budget process has all but disappeared. According to the "reform resolution," the CPC "should [not "must"] continue its existing practice of reaching decisions by consensus," and the key Fifth

(Budget) Committee of the General Assembly, "should continue to make all possible efforts with a view to establishing the broadest possible agreement," meaning that consensus need not be achieved for the U.N. to approve its budget.

The result of the "reform act" of the 41st U.N. General Assembly: U.N. "business as usual."

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Such U.N. "business as usual" should be unacceptable to the U.S. government, the Congress, and the American people. They have demanded that the U.N. reform itself and the U.N. has refused. The lessons of recent years therefore should continue to guide future U.S. action toward the U.N. The most important lesson: the impetus toward genuine U.N. reform has been driven by 1) a tough-minded approach by the State Department and the U.S. Mission to the U.N. in New York, 2) a specific action agenda to which U.S. representatives to the U.N. firmly adhere, and 3) maximum leverage by the U.S. Congress with its power of the purse. Nothing, apparently, so concentrates the minds of U.N. members and the U.N. bureaucracy as the threat of impending "fiscal crisis".

This pressure must be maintained. The result of this pressure--and the proper functioning of the "consensus" budget process--could be the elimination of some of the most obnoxious of the U.N.'s "perpetual" programs. Example: the Secretariat's anti-colonialism bureaucracy, which spends most of its efforts attacking U.S. "imperialism" in Puerto Rico and Guam. Example: the proliferation of U.N. economic units which continue to advocate the thoroughly discredited Marxist development model throughout the Third World. A key player will be the U.S. representative on the upgraded Committee on Program and Coordination who will have to hold the line for fiscal restraint and fundamental, programmatic reform and against the strong countervailing pressures to "go along" in the interest of harmony within the U.N. "community." To strengthen the U.S. hand in the next negotiating rounds:

1) At a minimum, the Kassebaum-Solomon amendment must remain in force, as must the Sundquist Amendment, named after its author Representative Donald Sundquist, the Tennessee Republican. Congress should ensure that the State Department imposes the congressionally mandated withholdings of U.S. contributions to terrorist organizations, to Law of the Sea administrative machinery, and the Addis Ababa conference center. The Kassebaum-Solomon Amendment reduces the U.S. contribution from 25 percent to 20 percent of the total U.N. regular budget, unless and until the U.N. General Assembly adopts a voting procedure on budget matters weighted to assessed contributions. Congress should now consider enacting a "rolling" or cumulative 20 percent annual reduction in the U.S. contribution, to

step up the pressure. In other words, every year the U.S. contribution would be cut 20 percent from the previous year's base. The Sundquist Amendment mandates an additional \$15-\$20 million annual reduction in the U.S. contribution to the U.N., to offset the U.S. share of salary kickbacks by Soviet bloc U.N. bureaucrats to their governments. This cut should continue as long as the abuse continues.

2) Congress should make all 1987 U.S. contributions to the U.N. regular budget--or a substantial part, such as 50 percent--contingent on the rule of consensus being maintained in the Committee on Program and Coordination and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, in the Fifth Committee, and in the General Assembly plenary. If the U.S. is compelled to vote against program and budget proposals again in 1987, as it has every year since 1980, Congress then should consider whether any additional U.S. assessed contributions to the U.N. serve the U.S. national interest.

3) Congress should require the Secretary of State to report by the end of the year on the success of the U.S. government in significantly reducing the threat to U.S. national security posed by espionage activities under the cover of Soviet bloc Missions to the U.N. and the U.N. Secretariat. Like the required annual report on voting patterns in the U.N. General Assembly mandated by the Kasten Amendment, the substance of this new report should be taken into account when Congress considers future U.S. contributions to the U.N. Because control of espionage using U.N. cover is ultimately the U.N.'s responsibility, Congress should consider offsetting a substantial part of the costs of U.S. counterespionage efforts against the U.S. contribution to the U.N. regular budget.

CONCLUSION

The Experts Group said of its own Report that "it has only begun a reform process." In the same vein, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Vernon Walters and his predecessor Jeane Kirkpatrick assessed the very modest accomplishments of the 41st General Assembly as "only the beginning" of anything approaching lasting reform of the U.N. system. The scenario for that reform remains to be written.

All of them agree that the future of U.N. reform, and the future of the U.N. itself, now is in the hands of the U.N. member-states and the U.N. leadership. If the "by consensus" budget process takes firm hold in 1987, a significant step will have been taken--but only a first step. If the U.S. maintains the pressure that it has mounted in recent years, then that first step may lead to the fundamental programmatic reform that always has been, or ought to have been, the ultimate objective.