

2007

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Recommended Citation

Pubantz. 2007. "The US-UN Relationship and the Promotion of Democratic Nation-Building." *Societies Without Borders* 2 (1): 93-116.
Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/swb/vol2/iss1/7>

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Societies Without Borders 2 (2007) 93–116
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The US–UN Relationship and the Promotion of Democratic Nation-Building

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Received 18 April 2006; accepted 17 May 2006

Abstract

Since 1990, both the United Nations and the United States have promoted democratic nation-building in conflict areas. However, despite the common goal of creating stable democracies, the two entities have often worked at cross purposes. Following the 1993 debacle in Somalia, the United States largely deserted UN nation-building efforts and moved toward unilateral democracy promotion. Over the next decade US efforts were directed at establishing Lockean procedural democracies, defined largely in terms of civil and political institutions. In UN parlance, however, democracy has taken on a holistic meaning that provides for the inclusion of social, economic, and cultural factors. This definitional dissonance, coupled with American conservative hostility toward UN democratic nation-building, undermines the effectiveness of UN efforts. US unilateral democracy promotion has proven largely ineffective as well. Democratization would be far better served by US support for on-going UN nation-building.

Las relaciones US–UN y la promoción de la democracia

Desde 1990, Naciones Unidas y Estados Unidos han promovido la democracia en zonas conflictivas. Sin embargo, a pesar del propósito común de crear democracias estables, las dos entidades han trabajado de manera distinta. Desde el debacle de 1993 en Somalia, los Estados Unidos abandonaron los esfuerzos colectivos y actuaron unilateralmente. En la década siguiente sus esfuerzos se dirigieron a establecer democracias procesales, al estilo Locke, definidas principalmente en términos de instituciones civiles y políticas. En la terminología de las Naciones Unidas, sin embargo, la democracia se entiende en sentido global, incluyendo factores sociales, económicos y culturales. Esta disonancia, junto a la hostilidad americana hacia las Naciones Unidas, aminora la efectividad de sus esfuerzos. La promoción unilateral de la democracia ha sido además ineficaz. La democratización sería mejor servida si los Estados Unidos apoyaran la acción de las Naciones Unidas.

Le rapport des Etats-Unis et l'ONU et la promotion bâtiment de nation

Depuis 1990, les Nations Unies et les Etats-Unis favorisent le bâtiment de nation démocratique dans des régions de conflit. Cependant, en dépit du but commun de créer des démocraties stables, les deux entités se sont souvent contrariés dans leurs buts et méthodes. Après le débâcle en Somalie en 1993, les Etats-Unis ont largement abandonné des efforts de bâtiment de nation de l'ONU et se sont déplacés vers la promotion unilatérale de démocratie. Pendant le décennie suivant, les efforts ont été dirigés à établir des démocraties procédurales dans le cadre de Locke, définies en termes d'institutions civiles et politiques. En même temps, dans le langage de l'ONU, la démocratie a pris une signification holistique qui prévoit l'inclusion des facteurs sociaux, économiques, et culturels. Ce dissonance définitionnel, couplé à l'hostilité conservatrice américaine vers le bâtiment de nation démocratique de l'ONU, mine l'efficacité des efforts de l'ONU. En grande partie, la promotion unilatérale de démocratie des Etats-Unis a prouvé aussi bien inefficace. La démocratisation serait mieux servie par le soutien des Etats-Unis du bâtiment de nation en cours de l'ONU

Keywords

United Nations, democracy, nation-building, global governance

Introduction

“So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.”

– US President George W. Bush, *Second Inaugural Address*, 20 January 2005.

“(The goal of the United Nations is) to strengthen the capacity of all our countries to implement the principles and practices of democracy and human rights, including minority rights.”

– UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, *Road Map Towards the Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration*, 6 September 2001.

For nearly two decades the United Nations has pursued “nation-building” as an integral part of its peacekeeping missions. Revising earlier conceptions of peacekeeping, recent UN interventions have had among their goals reordering domestic societies, addressing internal human rights violations, and introducing democratic practices, often in opposition to the wishes of indigenous governments. These “second-generation” peacekeeping operations reflect a post-Cold War preoccupation with a new philosophical orientation in UN purposes, and a realization that international peace and security depends more heavily now than in the past on the maintenance of viable, stable, and popularly supported governments. Cold War UN neutrality between socialist and capitalist prescriptions for good government has given way to full acceptance of western theories of the democratic state.

Simultaneously the United States, the UN's most important member, has made democracy promotion a central tenet of its activist foreign policy. From Ronald Reagan's confrontation with the communist world to George H.W. Bush's "New World Order," Bill Clinton's policy of democratic enlargement, and George W. Bush's promotion of democracy in the Middle East and elsewhere, the US government has given high priority to democratic governance. Furthermore, the focus of this American effort has been precisely in those regions of the world faced with failed states, internal conflicts, and traditional authoritarian rule – paralleling the geography of UN peacekeeping.

Given the symmetry of UN peacekeeping goals and American foreign policy, it would seem reasonable that broad US support for the United Nations would be forthcoming. Yet, the last twenty years have witnessed deep tensions in the US–UN relationship that have weakened both actors' ability to promote democratization. This anomalous circumstance has produced diminished American involvement in UN nation-building missions, calls for dramatic reform in the United Nations itself, and a unilateral tendency in American democratization initiatives, most recently in Iraq. Furthermore, in the promotion of democratic nation-building the United Nations increasingly has acted not as an intergovernmental organization that is a composite of its member states but rather as a separate actor, often challenging US democratization efforts. This contentious circumstance raises important questions about the potential for international democracy promotion by either international organizations or major democratic states, about the perceived value of the United Nations to American foreign policy in the 21st century, and about the evolving character of the post-Cold War United Nations.

The UN's Promotion of Democracy

Beginning in the late 1980s, the United Nations sought to introduce democratic practices – most particularly regular elections, human rights protection, good governance practices, and popular participation – in post-conflict areas. First during the secretary-generalship of Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, and then under his two successors Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan, UN peacekeeping moved beyond merely separating combatants to rebuilding domestic governments and internal civil societies. In June 1992, Boutros-Ghali spelled out this ambitious program of UN-sponsored democratic nation-building in his report *An Agenda for Peace*. Boutros-Ghali urged the United Nations to identify "at risk" states and to act early in order to avoid

the collapse of state sovereignty and internal order, particularly in Asia and Africa.¹ Paramount for Boutros-Ghali was the democratization of states that had long suffered under authoritarian governments.

The first UN democratization initiatives in post-conflict settings were in Namibia (1989) and Cambodia (1992). In Namibia the United Nations took full administrative control of the former South African mandate region, ultimately presiding over elections and the transfer of power to an independent government. With the strong support of the United States and the other permanent members of the UN Security Council, the Council established the United Nations Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG) to guide the independence process. UNTAG educated and registered voters, and oversaw the 1989 elections for a constituent assembly. UNTAG declared the elections – in which 96% of eligible Namibians voted and the South West African Peoples' Organization (SWAPO) won a majority – to be free and fair. On March 21, 1990, Namibia achieved full independence and UNTAG left the country. The UN operation's success served as a model for succeeding missions in Central America – El Salvador and Guatemala² – and Asia, particularly in Cambodia.

Cambodia had been in political and military turmoil since the end of the Vietnam War. However, Cold War considerations gave the United Nations little room to maneuver in proposing or enforcing an internal settlement. Only with the end of US–Soviet confrontation and increased international cooperation in the early 1990s could the UN play a critical role in facilitating Cambodian democratic stability. By August 1990, the permanent members of the Security Council reached agreement on a framework for a political settlement. After a series of meetings to negotiate the details, the Security Council authorized the dispatch of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). UNTAC took on an unprecedented set of responsibilities to institutionalize the reconciliation of the parties. It managed daily administration of Cambodian foreign and defense policy, provided domestic government services, and stationed more than 20,000 UN personnel in the country. UNTAC administered the first round of Cambodian elections in May 1993. The United States provided extensive electoral assistance through the semi-public National Democratic and International Republican Institutes. These organizations trained Cambodian parties on

¹) Boutros-Ghali 1992.

²) For coverage of these two countries, see Moore and Pubantz 2002, pp. 104, 131.

campaign management and party organizational issues.³ UNTAC in turn drafted the election law and trained 50,000 election officials.

A power-sharing government came to office that lasted until prime minister Hun Sen carried out a coup in 1997. The refocusing of the world community on other crises and America's growing distaste for nation-building operations by 1997 allowed early democratization efforts to falter. The United Nations under Kofi Annan's leadership initiated intricate internal negotiations and in July 1998, again with international monitors present, another controversial election was held, won by Hun Sen. The United Nations also provided technical assistance for municipal and parliamentary elections in 2002–2003. But continuing human rights violations early in the century, and Cambodia's unwillingness to address the human rights horrors of the Pol Pot regime postponed democracy's achievement. By 2006 the United Nations and the Cambodian government had only reached agreement in principle to establish a war crimes tribunal to hold responsible those accountable for the 1.5 million Cambodians who were executed or who died from starvation and disease during the rule of the Khmer Rouge.

The Namibian experience, coupled with early progress on Cambodia and the successful 1991 American-led UN liberation of Kuwait, produced a euphoric belief in the promise of the UN's capability to insure international peace and security and to rebuild states along democratic lines. In each of these cases the United States lent its full support for UN action. In Cambodia particularly Washington was willing to delegate responsibility to the United Nations⁴ and to provide sufficient financial support. There was a growing "institutionalization" of the United Nations in American foreign policy during George H.W. Bush's presidency. In the Gulf War, the president had demonstrated the viability of the United Nations. In its aftermath, UN procedures and structures increasingly seemed to be appropriate venues for decision-making, even if that meant some limitation on unilateral action, or if it meant that outside actors such as the secretary-general would set the agenda for international attention and action.

Boutros-Ghali's *Agenda for Peace* was not dramatically different from an emerging "Bush Doctrine" in US foreign policy. Enshrined as "the new world order," the doctrine envisioned a liberal and internationalist America willing to lead a multilateral coalition of great powers through UN auspices to end

³) Dobbins et al. 2004, p. 85.

⁴) Inoguchi 2000, p. 284.

aggression in the third world, solve disputes by peaceful negotiation, and intervene to ameliorate humanitarian disasters. In 1988, the year George Bush won the presidency, there were fewer than 10,000 UN peacekeepers on duty in world hot spots, costing the United Nations \$364 million annually.⁵ By June 1992 the number of peacekeepers had risen to 44,000, and it would approach 80,000 shortly after president Clinton's inauguration. The total cost would also rise dramatically to \$4 billion a year. The new world order was being policed by UN-authorized peacekeeping forces largely initiated by US efforts in the service of humanitarian and democratic nation-building purposes around the world.

With the growing acceptance of a single template for good governance – the western Lockean model of representative government – the UN General Assembly in April 1992 created the Electoral Assistance Division in the UN secretariat.⁶ In addition to democratic initiatives in peacekeeping operations, the division reviewed country requests for electoral assistance, developed operational strategies in cooperation with other UN agencies to hold national and municipal elections, provided substantive advice and guidance on electoral matters to member states, and worked with civil society actors to create a vibrant democratic process. It also worked closely with regional international organizations and non-governmental organizations, including American entities such as the Carter Center to promote democratic election procedures. UN democracy initiatives included the protection of opposition factions, the political mobilization of marginalized groups, and the restoration or creation of judicial institutions in order to assure the rule of law and the defense of individual liberties. By June 2004, 101 nations had requested UN electoral assistance, and the United Nations had provided support in 91 cases, including troubled places such as Mozambique, Palestine, Bosnia, and Angola.

In addition to the Electoral Assistance Division, a companion office was created in the UN Development Programme (UNDP): the Management, Development and Governance Division. By 2000 one third of the UNDP budget went toward democracy promotion.⁷ In 2001 alone the UN Development Programme spent \$800 million in 145 countries on democratic governance projects. Among these were funds for national elections in Sierra

⁵) Staff Report, US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations 1993, p. viii.

⁶) A/RES/46/137, 17 December 1991.

⁷) Burnell 2000, pp. 51–52.

Leone, enhanced public participation in Nigeria, and a judicial commission in Afghanistan to restore its justice system.⁸ Additionally, UN resolutions, statements of secretaries-general, and world conferences all reinforced democratic nation-building as a primary task of the United Nations. The General Assembly passed a series of “election resolutions”⁹ and “democracy resolutions”¹⁰ between 1988 and 1998.

With these resolutions, however, a broadening understanding of democracy emerged in UN deliberations. GA Resolution 31 in November of 1998 defined the UN democratization effort in troubled states in comprehensive terms, calling for “building a political culture through human rights observance, mobilization of civil society, electoral assistance, free and independent media, enhancing the rule of law, and improving accountability, transparency, and the quality of public sector management and democratic structures of government.”¹¹ In the summer of 1993 the United Nations convened the World Conference on Human Rights, also known as the Vienna Conference, which highlighted the links among development, democracy and the promotion of human rights.

The 1996 election of Kofi Annan as the UN’s seventh secretary-general brought to the office an advocate of the Kantian thesis that democracies do not wage war with each other. He also held a more comprehensive view of democratic society than contemplated by the representational model of European and American discourse. He promoted the concept of “personal sovereignty,” which the secretary-general argued required intercession in non-democratic states that did not protect the rights of their citizens. Defending the new era of nation-building, he made the case that “surely no legal principle – not even [state] sovereignty – can ever shield crimes against humanity.” There is a “moral duty” for the United Nations to intervene on behalf of the individual.¹² At the time of the Millennium Summit in 2000 Kofi Annan acknowledged that the United Nations is a forum for coordinating the interests and behavior of states, but he asserted it is something more

⁸) Brown 2003, pp. 143–144.

⁹) A/RES/43/157, 8 December 1988; A/RES/44/146, 15 December 1989; A/RES/52/129, 12 December 1997.

¹⁰) A/RES/50/133, 20 December 1995; A/RES/51/31, 6 December 1996; A/RES/52/18, 21 November 1997.

¹¹) A/RES/53/31, 23 November 1998.

¹²) Annan 2000, p. 48.

than this. “Even though the United Nations is an organization of states,” he said, “the Charter is written in the name of ‘We the peoples.’ It reaffirms the dignity and worth of the human person, respect for human rights and the equal rights of men and women, and a commitment to social progress... in freedom from want and fear alike.”¹³

The Millennium Summit proved a watershed in the UN’s redefinition of democracy promotion. The Summit’s declaration endorsed a combination of development, human rights, and democratization targets. Member governments proclaimed “We shall spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect... all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms,... to strengthen the capacity of all our countries to implement the principles and practices of democracy and respect for human rights, including minority rights... [and] to work collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens in all our countries.”

The late Sergio Vieira de Mello, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, described the UN effort to create “holistic democracy” to the Commission on Human Rights in April 2003, eight months before his death in the bombing of the UN’s Baghdad headquarters. He defined democracy as “normatively grounded,”¹⁴ and inclusive of both procedural and substantive rights. Democracy in UN parlance is encapsulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and the International Covenants on Political and Civil Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), and thus encompasses “formal institutions and informal processes, majorities and minorities, males and females, governments and civil society, the political and economic, the national and international... the interdependence of human rights and the rights they defend... the principle and right of self-determination... as well as the rights to an adequate standard of living and to education.”¹⁵ Thus, the UN conception of democracy goes well beyond the usual western definition to include social and economic obligations on the part of the state to its citizens.

¹³) Annan 2000, p. 7.

¹⁴) Report of the high Commissioner for Human Rights, E/CN/.4/2003/59, 27 January 2003, paragraph 3.

¹⁵) Report of the high Commissioner for Human Rights, E/CN/.4/2003/59, 27 January 2003, paragraph 3.

Evolving US Support for Democratic Nation-Building

The United Nations undertook a precedent-setting initiative to implant democracy in Somalia. In December 1992, the Security Council, using its enforcement powers under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, authorized intervention led by the United States. Without the invitation of the domestic government, the Council sent forces not only to provide humanitarian assistance and security, but also to restore political stability, the rule of law, a functioning democracy, and reconciliation among ethnic groups. As a result, in February 2000, the UN facilitated a peace conference in Djibouti that led to the election of a new Somali president and national assembly, and the creation of a Transitional National Government. The Somali model of intervention under Chapter VII was replicated with varying degrees of success over the next twelve years in Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo, East Timor, Afghanistan, and Liberia.

Despite warnings from his advisers that the United States could be caught up in a civil war with little meaning for national interests, president George H.W. Bush responded to a plea from UN secretary-general Boutros-Ghali to assist the existing peacekeeping mission in the country (UNOSOM I) by moving stores of food from Mogadishu to the starving millions in the countryside.¹⁶ By fall 1992, a half million Somalis had died from war, disease and starvation, including nearly one quarter of Somali children in the southern region of the country.¹⁷ The American-led operation was expected to be short-term and quickly turned over to UN administration (UNOSOM II). President Bush expressed his hope that US forces would already be withdrawing from Somalia as president-elect Clinton was inaugurated.

That was not to happen. A self-styled “pragmatic Wilsonian,” Clinton picked up in January 1993 where his predecessor had left off. He encouraged an expansive role for the United Nations, arguing to the American people that multilateralism through the UN held the best opportunity for burden-sharing and global security. In his first address to the General Assembly he said, “I hope the United States will always be willing to do its part” in support of UN peacekeeping operations. However, events in Somalia, coupled with the continuing crisis in the Balkans and a new conservative Republican

¹⁶ For a full discussion of president Bush’s “moralist” motivations for sending troops to Somalia, see Burgess 1997.

¹⁷ For a complete history and analysis of the UN effort in Somalia and the American intervention, see Hirsch and Oakley 1995.

majority winning control of both houses of Congress in 1994 tested, and ultimately undermined that commitment. In the wake of these events the administration was not only more cautious about democratic nation-building, but more demanding of fundamental reform of the United Nations.

Pressured by the UN secretary-general to expand the Somali mission from the relatively limited mandate of providing a secure environment for humanitarian relief to a full-fledged effort at political reconciliation and the creation of democratic government, president Clinton made no immediate effort to extricate US forces. His commitment reflected the new “assertive multilateralism”¹⁸ espoused by UN ambassador Madeleine Albright. While recognizing that the United States could not “respond to every alarm,”¹⁹ and that “there was no magic formula,”²⁰ Clinton and his advisers looked to international cooperation through UN mechanisms, particularly to the UN Security Council’s permanent members, as the initial step in resolving post-Cold War conflict.

The UN multilateral force of 28,000 troops had a contingent of 4,000 US personnel under UN command, including a 1,300 man American Quick Reaction Force. The Security Council directed UNOSOM II to disarm the warlords and begin the nation-building process.²¹ Albright lauded the UN action, hailing it as “an unprecedented enterprise and nothing less than the restoration of an entire country.”²² Her boss, secretary of state Christopher, noted that “for the first time there will be a sturdy American role to help the United Nations rebuild a viable nation-state.”²³

The “enemy” for the United Nations in Somalia quickly became General Mohamed Farah Aideed, one of the primary competitors for power, and “warlord” of the most powerful faction in Mogadishu. Aideed’s forces ambushed and killed two dozen Pakistani peacekeepers on June 5, 1993.

¹⁸ Albright first used the term in testimony before the US House of Representatives Subcommittee on International Security, International Organizations and Human Rights in June, 1993. While continuing to endorse its underlying sentiment, Albright later referred to the term as “without appeal,” and as “the sound bite that bit me.” Albright 2003, p. 176.

¹⁹ Statement Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 13 January 1993, as reprinted in Christopher 1998, p. 27.

²⁰ Statement Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 13 January 1993, as reprinted in Christopher 1998, p. 27.

²¹ S/Res/814, 26 March 1993.

²² See Hyland 1999, p. 56.

²³ Gordon 1993, A7.

Washington immediately sought a UN resolution ordering the arrest of the warlord. Both the United Nations and the United States shifted their missions, in a classic case of “mission creep,” to root out the enemies of UN nation-building in Somalia.²⁴

Events came to a head on October 3, when eighteen US soldiers were trapped in a firefight and killed. Americans were presented on the evening news with pictures of their dead soldiers, one of whom was pulled through the streets of Mogadishu, apparently by gleeful supporters of Aideed. The revulsion with American involvement in Somalia (later captured in the popular film *Black Hawk Down*) was complete. While he would enlarge the US contingent for the time being, he dropped the search for Aideed and withdrew all US forces within six months. As far as the president was concerned, there would be no more Somalias.²⁵ After Somalia, the administration did not use the term “assertive multilateralism” again. Events in Somalia more than anywhere else moved US foreign policy from the cooperative US–UN nation-building course and toward a new concern for the dangers the over-extension of UN activity could present for American national interests.

The first victim of the post-Somalia caution in Washington was the small central African state of Rwanda. In April 1994 Rwandan Hutus launched a well planned massacre of the Tutsi minority. By the time the killing ended in early summer, more than 800,000 had been slaughtered and more than a million were in refugee camps outside Rwanda. When the massacres broke out, the United States proposed that the Security Council *cut back*, not enlarge, the number of peacekeepers in the region out of fear for the peacekeepers’ safety. Under pressure from Washington, the Security Council cut the force to 70 observers.²⁶ The Clinton administration even worried about the provision of logistical support that might drag Americans into unintended involvement. In the end Washington provided meager resources – \$500 million in relief through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees

²⁴) Operating essentially independent of UN control, US forces for practical purposes declared war on Aideed with a surprise helicopter gunship attack on a suspected meeting of Aideed’s lieutenants on July 12. Then, following the deaths of four US peacekeepers in August, Clinton augmented the force and redoubled efforts to capture the warlord. See Delaney 2004, p. 36.

²⁵) For a description of the shift in sentiment within the White House and State Department, see Shattuck 2003, pp. 22–40.

²⁶) S/Res/912, 21 April 1994.

(UNHCR)²⁷ – and backed a Security Council endorsement of unilateral French action in Rwanda.

The latter decision would prove to be an important precedent for future Russian actions in Georgia, the United States in Haiti, the US and NATO in Kosovo, and Australia in East Timor. The procedure of “subcontracting” – authorizing a state or group of states to act on behalf of the world community in the restoration of peace and stability – became a regular feature of Security Council action following Rwanda. The United States would subsequently evolve the practice into a mechanism by which it would move toward unilateral intervention followed by a request to the Security Council for the equivalent of a post-dated authorization. President Clinton employed the stratagem in Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo, and President George W. Bush used it in Afghanistan and Iraq. The practical logic of subcontracting, however, leads to independent action by a member state that may or may not be in harmony with UN goals and practices. For the United States it allowed the emergence of a separate nation-building and democratization effort in Iraq following the 2003 war.

The crisis of Rwanda proved to be the nadir of Clinton’s UN peacekeeping policy; what then assistant secretary of state John Shattuck later called “a catastrophic disengagement.”²⁸ It reflected the near paranoia about US involvement in conflict situations such as had occurred in Somalia. It cemented Washington’s antipathy toward Boutros-Ghali and his ambitious program of democratic nation-building. It also contributed to the deliberations that started to fashion a more consistent administration approach toward the United Nations, its utility as an instrument for addressing the civil conflicts of the new millennium, and the merits of tying US democratization interests to UN peacekeeping. With the Rwandan episode the United States started down the road of developing an independent peacekeeping strategy that then morphed over two presidencies into unilateral attempts at democratic nation-building following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001.

Just days after the opening horrific events in Rwanda, the administration issued *Presidential Decision Directive 25* (PDD-25), significantly curtailing the American commitment to UN nation-building operations. The president’s statement confirmed that it was no longer US policy “to expand the

²⁷) Kuperman 2001, pp. 56–58.

²⁸) Shattuck 2003, p. 16.

number of UN peace operations, or US involvement in [them].”²⁹ The policy established sixteen criteria that had to be met before the United States would vote for a new peacekeeping operation or directly participate in one. Rwanda was the first case where the president’s new policy had been applied.

Significantly, PDD-25 also demanded financial reform of the United Nations itself. The United States proposed a cut in the US assessment for peacekeeping to 25 percent of the UN budget, and the reform of the UN’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations. PDD-25 had not started out this way. Early deliberations were premised on an active commitment to Boutros-Ghali’s *Agenda for Peace*. Nearly a year before PDD-25’s promulgation, Clinton had signed off on *Presidential Review Directive 13* (PRD-13), a review that leaned toward support for UN command of nation-building operations and an expanded US role in them. In line with the philosophy of the emerging document, the administration placed US troops under UN command for the first time in Macedonia and Somalia.³⁰

Also driving the shift in administration policy was the growing conservative Republican hostility on Capitol Hill toward the UN and toward the White House’s support of UN nation-building missions, and the divergent aims of democratization as understood by the United Nations and the United States. With the 1994 congressional elections looming, Republicans saw in the Somalia fiasco an opportunity to attack administration policy. The minority leader in the House Representatives, Dick Armey of Texas, argued that the nation “had gone too far in the direction of globalism.”³¹ Republicans introduced the National Security Revitalization Act, which required the administration to seek congressional approval for the commitment of forces to UN peacekeeping. In the Senate minority leader Robert Dole introduced the Peace Powers Act that restated the language of the 1945 UN Participation Act requiring congressional approval for providing US military units to the Security Council. Both Houses, moreover, appropriated far less than the president requested for peacekeeping operations.³² The House and Senate were ready for a fight with the administration over any continuing US support for UN nation-building.

²⁹ White House 1994.

³⁰ For a critical review of PRD-13, see Rodman 1994, p. 32. On the matter of US troops in Macedonia and Somalia, see Smith and Preston 1993.

³¹ Hendrickson 1998, p. 243.

³² Browne 2003.

Definitional Dissonance

By the time of Bill Clinton's second inauguration the United States government was well on its way to developing its own democratic nation-building apparatus and *modus operandi* in the service of its classical liberal conception of democracy. The last decade has witnessed an American effort at democracy construction unequalled since the end of World War II, little of it under the auspices of the United Nations, most of it either through multilateral devices outside the UN system or through unilateral action. Faced with strong criticism from conservatives in Congress, president Clinton decided to proceed in Bosnia and Haiti for all practical purposes unilaterally, to cut the number of servicemen under UN command drastically,³³ and to demand a change in leadership at the United Nations when the secretary-general's term ended in 1997.

In the case of Haiti, while the president sought and got a UN Security Council authorization,³⁴ the White House determined the policy and tactics to remove the military junta that had overthrown democratically elected president Jean Bertrand Aristide. Using what secretary of state Warren Christopher characterized as "a coalition of the willing,"³⁵ a term heard regularly in the subsequent Bush administration, the United States returned Aristide to power in October 1994. The Haitian mission "opened the way for the development of a new doctrine of [US] 'humanitarian intervention'"³⁶ that would be used again in Bosnia and Kosovo.

In the wake of Somalia, Rwanda, and Haiti, Clinton shifted his attention from UN-based solutions to the military option available in a refocused NATO. In August 1994 Clinton threatened to lift unilaterally the arms embargo with the Muslim government in Sarajevo if the latest UN peace plan was not accepted by Bosnian Serbs. Following the revolting massacre of Muslim men and boys in the town of Srebrenica in July 1995, NATO launched substantial and decisive air attacks against Serb emplacements. The United Nations was left out of the decision-making.

³³) This trend would continue under the subsequent administration of George W. Bush. By October 2004 there were only 28 US military personnel serving under UN command in a total of five UN operations. Serafino 2004.

³⁴) S/Res/940, 31 July 1994.

³⁵) Christopher 1998, p. 182.

³⁶) Shattuck 2003, p. 287. This is also the assessment to be found in Gordon 1994, p. 134.

Invited by Clinton to Dayton, Ohio, the leaders of Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia hammered out the Dayton Accords,³⁷ an American imposed settlement that assured security in Bosnia. In the Accords, all parties agreed to establish a permanent ceasefire in Bosnia, repatriate refugees, and create a multiethnic democratic state with a tripartite presidency and autonomous ethnic enclaves. The attempt to reestablish peace, stability, and democracy in the Balkans became an American responsibility. The president also came under increasing pressure to capture indicted war criminals and deliver them to the UN war crimes tribunal in The Hague. The United Nations was given a minor role in post-conflict Bosnia. In Kosovo, the UN role would be larger following the 1999 NATO intervention. UNMIK (UN Mission in Kosovo) would oversee day-to-day civil government in the province, but the decision to intervene, security strategy, and the outline of how to proceed with democratization were all decided in Washington.

Democratization is a complex process with which the United States had had little practice by the turn of the century. As a recent RAND study³⁸ found, American efforts to convert authoritarian or failed states to stable democracy requires extensive manpower, significant funds,³⁹ and a bureaucratic architecture for its success. Having not undertaken democracy promotion since the immediate post World War II days, the United States had to start from scratch in the 1990s once it abandoned the UN structures. The lead agencies in Washington for this purpose quickly became the Agency for International Development (USAID), the United States Information Agency (USIA), and the United States Information Service (USIS).⁴⁰ USAID focused on traditional liberal procedural democratic practices: encouraging the rule of law, promoting competitive elections and political processes, developing civil society, and promoting good governance. Spending only \$722 million in 2003,⁴¹ its resources amounted to a mere 9 per cent of total US development assistance, which in turn, when compared to other donor nations, is the lowest share of GNP (0.11% in 2001) of any developed

³⁷) For the complete history of the Dayton Accords, see Holbrooke 1998.

³⁸) Dobbins 2004.

³⁹) This judgment is confirmed in Joyner 2002, pp. 169–170.

⁴⁰) For a full discussion of the role of these agencies in democracy promotion see Hearn and Robinson 2000, pp. 241–262.

⁴¹) Finkel et al. 2006, p. 26.

nation. Democracy aid has also been dispersed over 121 nations since 1990,⁴² diluting its impact in specific and important cases.

External to the federal government, US democracy promotion funds have been funneled through non-governmental organizations, particularly the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI). The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) disperses funds approved by Congress to these organizations as well as to the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) and the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS). Largely headed by former officials in the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations, these NGOs support technical programs in more than 100 countries to promote party development and electoral systems, complementing and sometimes duplicating UN efforts through its Election Assistance Division. Particularly the IRI has been closely associated with conservative Republican efforts to promote American-based democracy programs unconnected to UN projects.

The American definition of democratization at the new millennium still held to narrower criteria than the holistic view put forward by the United Nations. A 2006 study for USAID measured democratization in terms of progress on voting rights, participation, electoral competitiveness, civil liberties, procedural vitality of civil society, decentralized governance, government effectiveness, corruption, and human rights.⁴³ The study, conducted by a team at Vanderbilt University, concluded that US aid on all of these indicators, with the exception of human rights, had a modest positive correlation. In the case of human rights, US assistance had a negative impact.⁴⁴ Not included in US interpretations of democracy promotion was the need to promote group rights, gender equality, or any of the social and economic targets of the Millennium Development Goals.

At the new millennium the US government was promoting both inside the UN system and beyond its structures a new democracy movement, including an effort to create intergovernmental fora for democratic states only. The most important initiative was the Community of Democracies (CoD), which many critics of the United Nations conceptualized as an alternative international organization for promoting US global democratic goals. Strongly encouraged by the US government, in June 2000 more than

⁴²⁾ Finkel et al. 2006, p. 14.

⁴³⁾ Finkel et al. 2006, pp. 95–96.

⁴⁴⁾ Finkel et al. 2006, p. 2.

100 nations issued the Warsaw Declaration founding the intergovernmental group. As contemplated by the US State Department the CoD could improve UN resolutions and activities in democracy promotion and serve as a “supplementary network”⁴⁵ for democratization. The Community dedicated itself to “the continuous development of democracy domestically and the promotion of democracy regionally and globally,”⁴⁶ but studiously avoided defining the United Nations as a key organ in the democratic movement. In a “Dialogue on Democracy” on 5-6 June 2003 participating states urged the CoD to “use sub-regional organizations (SADC, ECOWAS, CARICOM, MERCOSUR, and others) to promote democratic development, prevent backsliding, and address challenges to democracy,”⁴⁷ and to employ them “as a vehicle to address transnational problems that also threaten democracy, i.e. public health concerns, narco-trafficking, terrorism, etc.”⁴⁸ No mention of the United Nations appeared in the final communiqué.

On 1 November 2004, the CoD convened in New York and established the Democratic Caucus of the United Nations. Avowedly created to promote reform in the United Nations, the caucus emphasized the promotion of democratic principles in UN work. The caucus became an important tool of US policy in its effort to replace the UN Commission on Human Rights with a reformed Council with a membership of only pro-democracy states with strong human rights records. The election in 2000 of a conservative Republican administration that was cool if not hostile toward the United Nations and its nation-building missions only accelerated the separation between the democratization programs of the United Nations and the United States.

The US–UN Relationship

American foreign policy toward UN nation-building has an evolutionary quality to it, moving from the long-felt desire to see an active and effective United Nations right the problems of world affairs to a nearly unilateral

⁴⁵ US Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs Release, September 27, 2004.

⁴⁶ Joint Press Communiqué, Community of Democracies Convening Group’ Ministerial Meeting, New York, September 26, 2003, at the 58th UN General Assembly.

⁴⁷ US State Department Release. “*Dialogue on Democracy: Summation of Best Practices and Key Ideas*,” <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/democ/21692.htm>.

⁴⁸ US State Department Release. “*Dialogue on Democracy: Summation of Best Practices and Key Ideas*,” <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/democ/21692.htm>.

American response. The two year period from the deaths of the marines in the streets of Mogadishu, Somalia, in October 1993 to the resolution in October 1995 of the conflict that had rained mortars on Sarajevo, Bosnia, witnessed the development of a new strategy for addressing the humanitarian crises of the time, and of a new critical approach to the UN. Concomitant with the change in American policy came an American demand for UN reform and a change in the world body's leadership by the Clinton administration. President George W. Bush pushed the divide between the United Nations and the United States even wider.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the president's war on terrorism was an overwhelming unilateral initiative. There was strong multilateral support for Washington's decision to remove the Taliban from power in Afghanistan, curtail Al Qaeda activities there, and seek the democratic reconstruction of the country. But Afghanistan slipped from the front pages of the world's newspapers as the Bush administration announced that nations were "either with us or against us," that there were some unwelcome nations who made up an "axis of evil," and that one of them – Iraq – needed to be struck immediately, preemptively, even unilaterally if the other members of the Security Council refused to accede to US demands for military action.

Despite the challenge of Afghanistan, attention in Washington shifted to Iraq. During much of 2002 and into early 2003, disagreements within the Security Council on the reasonableness of war with Iraq became public. Washington warned of the certain "irrelevancy" of the UN should the Security Council fail to accede to war. In June 2002, Bush asserted a new foreign policy of preemption, coupling fundamental US security concerns with the need for "regime change" in Baghdad. In succeeding months the president further defined US goals in Iraq and in the wider Middle East in terms of bringing about democratic regimes.

In March 2003, the United States with a "coalition of the willing" invaded Iraq, but without an authorizing UN resolution. While the US seemed to "win" the 2003 war in Iraq, postwar challenges proved more intractable than originally thought. Francis Fukuyama has concluded that "this was due in part to the unilateral way in which the administration went into war, which left it mostly bereft of international partners for its effort, and in part to internal bureaucratic struggles that left organization of the reconstruction effort in the hands of the Pentagon."⁴⁹ The Defense Department's first

⁴⁹) Fukuyama 2004.

administrator in Iraq, retired general Jay Garner, rejected his own adviser's admonition that it would "take a little longer to do democratization than three or four months in the summer in Baghdad."⁵⁰ Garner hoped to convene quickly a national conference and forge a unity government, largely drawing on emigré Iraqi politicians to fill key posts.

When Garner's unrealistic efforts proved disappointing, he was replaced by L. Paul Bremer. Bremer was no fan of a UN role in Iraqi democracy-building. Even after the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1483 legitimizing the occupation, Bremer gave only the slightest regard to the resolution's requirement that the Coalition Provisional Authority work "intensively" with the secretary-general's special representative, Sergio Vieira de Mello.⁵¹

By spring 2004, more than 800 Americans had been killed in the country, and over 80 per cent of those deaths had occurred after president Bush announced the end of combat on May 1, 2003 (compared to about 120 American deaths in Afghanistan over a longer period of involvement). The usefulness of unilateral "preemption" and American-dominated democratization efforts outside the sanction of the United Nations were at the least open to debate. In March, American Iraqi policy shifted abruptly,⁵² as officials announced the US intention to transfer sovereignty to an interim Iraqi government – a government selected by secretary-general Annan's special representative Lahkdar Brahimi. Ambassador Brahimi conducted delicate negotiations among the various Iraqi political groupings, the CPA, the leaders of the interim transitional government and produced an agreement on an interim government made up of a president, two vice presidents, a prime minister, and a council of ministers. The United Nations then set up the process that led to January 2005 elections and a subsequent constitutional referendum. None of this, however, brought consolidated democracy to Iraq. Sectarian divisions, insurgency, a narrow definition of democracy by the government in Washington, and continuing American occupation hindered achievement of a democratic Iraq.

⁵⁰ Reported in Diamond 2005, p. 32.

⁵¹ The UN mission was left poorly defended and to its own agenda. When de Mello and 21 of his colleagues were killed in the August 2003 bombing of the UN's Baghdad headquarters, the secretary-general withdrew the UN presence from Iraq completely. Among other demands, Annan insisted that sovereignty be transferred to the Iraqis before the United Nations injected itself again into the democratization effort.

⁵² Phillips 2005, p. 205.

The Merits of Convergence

The “negotiation” that went on between the United States and the United Nations concerning the role the latter would play in Iraqi democratization was emblematic of the new relationship between an international organization, with an inclusive perception of democracy and its own democracy promotion program, and its most important member. International organizations, made up of sovereign states, are often described as creatures of their memberships, unable to act independently of the will of their members. By the 21st century the United Nations, or at least its secretariat, had emerged as an independent actor. This independence was challenged by an administration in Washington that believed deeply in its own variant of global democratization, unilateral American power, and the dysfunctionality of the United Nations. In 2003 the mix of competing interests produced a standoff that put the United Nations at what Kofi Annan called “a fork in the road,” with the world body limited in what it might do to address the dangers of the time, and the United States seeking tighter budgetary and administrative control over UN nation-building.

While not perfect by any criteria, the UN track record on democratic nation-building has been reasonably good, certainly better than unilateral American efforts in Iraq. Beginning with Namibia in the 1980s, the United Nations has sought to impose a transitional administration on fragmented states, overseeing the entire political process. Simon Chesterman has characterized this procedure as “benevolent autocracy.”⁵³ It is a contradictory process to be sure, for it “imposes” democracy. Yet, most studies demonstrate qualified success. Table 1 uses the criteria established by Freedom House to measure levels of democratization. Comparative evaluations are taken from the Polity IV Project at the University of Maryland. When significant resources and lengthy international commitment are given to UN nation-building missions, such as in Namibia, East Timor, and El Salvador, there seems to be significant progress on consolidating democratic societies. The outcome of American efforts seems more problematic.

In the case of Iraq the American inability to rally international support, and its unwillingness to provide sufficient funds, to put experienced nation-builders in the field, to see democratization as a process inclusive of social and economic goods, and to employ a strategy that does not create a backlash to perceived imperialist ambitions have undermined good US intentions.

⁵³) See Newman and Rich 2004, p. 12.

Table 1 Democratization in states with nation-building operations listed in chronological order by date of UN Security Council authorization

Country	Polity IV (0 low, 10 high)	Freedom House
Congo	0.0	2.9
Namibia	6.0	8.6
El Salvador	3.0	8.6
Cambodia	3.0	2.9
Somalia	–	2.9
Haiti	1.0	2.0
Mozambique	6.0	2.9
Bosnia	–	5.7
Eastern Slavonia	7.0	8.6
Sierra Leone	5.0	5.7
East Timor	6.0	7.1
Kosovo	–	–
Afghanistan	–	2.9
Iraq	0.0	1.4

Source: Dobbins, Jones, Crane, Rathmell, Steele, and Teltschik 2004, p. xxii.

The divergent American path has forced demands for reform of the UN, but the reality may be that the lack of US support for UN efforts⁵⁴ may be the heart of limited effectiveness on both sides.

Beginning with the intervention in Somalia the UN Security Council “subcontracted” a second-generation peacekeeping operation to the United States. This strategy calls upon a member state or regional group of states to lead a UN intervention force. In addition to Somalia, subcontracting has been employed in East Timor, Georgia, Rwanda, Afghanistan, and Sudan. But subcontracting nation-building missions in essence grants broad latitude to the intervening nations to conduct operations as they see fit. It is a short step from acting on behalf of the world community and with its grant of legitimacy to acting unilaterally and without practical accountability. In the case of the United States, which had been developing its own democratization programs during the 1990s, subcontracting evolved in practical terms

⁵⁴) On this point, see Joyner 2002, p. 169.

into wholly constructed US democracy-building efforts subject to little international accountability. Without perceived international authorization, US democracy promotion cannot be expected to succeed in settings such as Iraq.

The divide between Washington and New York over democratization holds a serious threat to the future of the United Nations itself. Beyond the US demands for UN reform and the important challenge to collective security that American unilateral intervention portends, for the first time since 1945 the UN's most important member has taken the first steps toward the construction of an alternative multilateral structure, one more in perceived harmony with the US vision of democratization. The creation of the Community of Democracies and the Democracy Caucus represent the subtle entertainment of the notion that the promotion of global peace through the march of democracy might be better served through a new international organizational alternative to the 60 year old postwar United Nations. This is a challenge not only to the organization but also to the major powers of Europe and Asia that see in the United Nations a counterweight to the extraordinary global power of the United States.

Whether the UN-US relationship can be repaired before serious damage is done to the democratization efforts of both Washington and the United Nations and to the UN as an institution turns in large part on the evolution of presidential policy. The division between the United States and the United Nations is not simply explained by party, ideology, or domestic politics. The divergence began during the Clinton administration and has only widened in the Bush years. However, the difficulty of promoting democracy in Iraq and the subsequent turn to the United Nations for assistance holds hope for further evolution, a closing of the gap. Democracy-building legitimized and largely administered by the United Nations appears to present the best chance for success, especially when it is funded, endorsed, and assisted by the world's most significant powers, most particularly by the United States.

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