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United Nations  
New York  
20 April 2005

**Soft Power: The United Nations at Sixty**

Prepared for the Academic Council  
on the United Nations System  
Meeting in Ottawa, 16-18 June 2005

Some years ago, having loosened my bonds to UNICEF, with the naïve arrogance of an amateur I gave a talk in Ottawa on major challenges facing humanity. Besides the usual list I ventured to add: paranoia and xenophobia. In the discussion that followed, a distinguished old diplomat asked: what can we do about that? In effect, he was saying that traditional diplomacy has glossed over the emotional or psychological determinants of human behavior. Give us facts, not feelings.

Of course, when I spoke of xenophobia and paranoia, I was talking about problems. And in a simple listing of global problems -- I have called them challenges -- feelings like xenophobia and paranoia are presented as some sort of autonomous entities, out of context. You might call them negative feelings, related to fear and hatred. But feelings are everywhere, in how we think and what we do. Feelings are energy, the fuel for action. In my simplistic way, I was suggesting that a cold-blooded look at international affairs is missing something of radical importance.

Humanity is cursed by the capacity to surmount feelings. This capacity makes us conscious. We can think, we can look outside ourselves. To some degree, we can use our feelings, not simply let go. We call this rational behaviour. When we know that we have been wrong, we come up with phony excuses, we misuse our minds, we rationalize. This leads on to our sense of responsibility. Whatever its origins, it is a fact, it is in us. Not only can we think, we also feel -- yes, feel -- responsible. Some people call this complex of feeling and thinking spiritual, a participation in some universal life. This is the stuff of life, personal, national and international.

I am not suggesting that the UN is a spiritual construct. It came out of bloody war. It was an act of Realpolitik. But even the most rigorous Darwinian survival rests on keeping life alive. The UN is on the side of life.

Not spiritual, I say, but why life? It is our feeling responsible that opens that door, the door to hope and to faith. Faith is our reaching out to the ideal, the good house we must build.

The UN was born in hope, the hope for a new and peaceable world order in the wake of that great hemorrhage, World War II. But now, in this year 2005, how much of that hope has survived? I tried to address that question at the very beginning of my book, The Diplomacy of Hope. Here is some of what I wrote in my introduction:

Iraq and terrorists have shown that the UN cannot work. The UN Millennium celebrations, ushering in the twenty-first century, were a sham. After all the talk, it is power that decides. The UN has failed. What we need is the anatomy of failure, not the anatomy of hope.

Writing that paragraph was my attempt to take the enemy into my citadel. Can faith and hope stand up to the realities of a brutal world? The first edition of my book came out on September 10, 2001, just a jump ahead of the terrorists. I had to do some heavy thinking. Doing my book all over again made me test my hopes about the UN, about the future. In this new version, I end by saying: The future is inevitable after it happens. That is my declaration of faith, the faith that we can shape our own destiny.

That faith is by no means shared by everyone. Another mythical view of our destiny is that we go around in cycles every ten thousand years or so, just repeating ourselves in some fashion. A contemporary take on that is the suicide myth of the so-called Christian cult, those crazy people who want us to blow ourselves up so they can go on living happily ever after. The hydrogen bomb is the highway to heaven. The UN stands in their way. The UN is the work of the devil.\*

This is not so far off from the delusional worlds of political fanatics who have led whole nations into disaster. In their mad worlds, deluded leaders, out of touch with reality, have brought death to millions; and in our time, my time, we have seen this in Europe, in Russia and in China. On a smaller scale, we can see it everywhere. Especially where people are living in real misery, delusional visionaries can trigger vast tragedies. I wish that were the whole story. Well-fed people can go crazy too. The UN was created in a moment of sanity, to get us out of that nut house, to stem that flow of blood.

The UN is us, isn't it, in this kindergarten of nation states, pretending to be independent of each other in the playground of the world. We have managed to write some rules on how to play, but there is no big policeman to make sure that we follow the rules. There are bullies and midgets. People – nations- are hurting. After sixty years, what is there to celebrate?

How did we manage to get to this place and time? Anthropologists now tell us that we humans have been on this planet 195,000 years, give or take 5,000. (I like that give or take.) That dating comes from old skull bones. And the astrophysicists tell us that we have only 6 billion years until our sun burns out. Where do we go from here? We'd better hurry!

In some radical ways, we have indeed been hurrying. Science and technology have made a quantum leap in the lifetime of the United Nations. Looking inward, we have a completely new grasp of the structure and behavior of matter and of the genetic make-up of all life. Looking out, we can decipher starshine in immeasurable galactic time. We have put men on the moon and we are talking to Mars. We may even be able to deflect the next big meteorite from crashing into our planet. And here on this planet we can send and receive sounds and images everywhere in the twinkling of an eye. We can make and distribute more things faster than our grandparents could have imagined.

Science and technology are neutral, they have no conscience: they can heal and they can kill. That is not to say that scientists are amoral. Joseph Rotblatt turned against the team that made the atomic bomb; and we now know that, even within that team, most scientists denounced the planned hydrogen bomb as evil. We look to scientists to explore the life-giving promise of genetic research and to find a way to block HIV. But their social and political environment is not neutral. Scientists do what they are permitted, encouraged and paid to do. So it comes back to us, the peoples invoked in the Preamble to the UN Charter: "We the Peoples."

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\* The UN under attack is the Charter UN -- the General Assembly, the Security Council, ECOSOC, and their offspring (the UNDP, UNCTAD on Trade, the Commissions on Rights and Refugees, UNICEF, UNIFEM, the Population Fund, the Environment, Habitat). Beyond all that is "the UN System", the World Bank and IMF, the Specialized Agencies, also many technical organizations to regulate atomic energy in all its forms, to regulate communications, the air, the sea, the mail and so on; not to mention the many treaty bodies for international covenants.

These are the opening words of the UN Charter. In effect, they are an affirmation of faith, the faith of peoples everywhere who abhor war and seek peace. But is this real? Who put those words in the Charter? What is this faith?

My father, a devout Christian pastor, liked to tell the story of a young lad being prepared for confirmation in the church. His priest was taking him through the catechism. When they came to “faith”, the priest asked: Johnny, what is faith? Johnny scratched his head, and said: Well, father, faith is believing what you know is not true. Is this the faith of 191 states that have signed on to the UN Charter?

What is happening at the UN? I will be coming to that, but first I need my perspective – history, anthropology, psychiatry – in order to get beyond just describing and into understanding what is happening. Without understanding, a doctor can treat symptoms but cannot cure.

The entire complex that we call “The United Nations” is built upon the prevention or resolution of violent conflict, at first between nations, and now even within nations. War is bad, and the job of UN Security Council is to stop it.

Security means stability. In origin it was not a “Peace Council” but a Security Council. Security is to be maintained by negotiation and compromise within the frame of law and the Hague Court, with force in the background. The Security Council with its five permanent members, old wartime allies, was at the heart of the UN, empowered to keep the peace for all.

It was not until the Suez crisis in 1956 that the Security Council got into “Peacekeeping” as a prelude to negotiations. As civil wars, conflicts inside nations, broke out after the Cold War, the Security Council got caught up in mediating and eventually in restoring order. This usually meant creating order, nation building. Security thus means peace. And this has meant a wide and deep change for the Security Council. The Council now has to ask not just how, but why? What causes war? What is peace, how do you get and keep peace?

If we think of war as mass murder -- which indeed it is -- then we can see it as the worst of crimes. (Next to it I would rank extreme poverty and the trade in human flesh, the current form of slavery.) In our own western societies, we see that crime goes up with poverty, so it is easy to extrapolate this internationally; and it seems to fit Africa which is the poorest region and has the most wars. Help Africa to climb out of poverty and wars will cease. Maybe. At least the nature of war will change.

Poverty, however defined, cannot be the sole cause of war. It was not poverty that drove Saddam Hussein to lead Iraq into Iran, it was not poverty that drove Russia into Afghanistan, and it was not poverty that drove the USA into Vietnam. Iraq has plenty of oil, why invade Iran? Both Russia and the USA have had great military might. Why attack the weak? There is something irrational here. Paranoia is irrational.

The UN is not a psychiatric clinic for mass psychosis. It is more like a health club for normal neurotics, a place where you can get better by doing good. The UN is built on whatever rationality there is in political life. Creating the UN was an act of faith in the face of bloody history. The UN is a beginning, not an end.

The UN is a giant screen where nations are on display. As clues to understanding that drama, I have used two metaphors from individual life -- child development and psychiatry. These are two quite different approaches. Is the UN assemblage in its infancy, or is it just the latest episode in the perils of psychosis? Although group behavior is not the same as individual behaviour, both of my conflicting metaphors fit, don't they? Old hallucinations appear in young UN.

So now I come to it: Iraq and Darfur. Out of the nimbus, what do we see? The UN in crisis. What's new? Every year, UN speechwriters have reached for the word. One year it was "watershed". Then came "fork in the road". Last year they gave up, no new word. The annual UN report was admirably sober and matter-of-fact. The facts speak for themselves.

Iraq and Darfur put the UN in the headlines and onto the TV screens -- CNN and Al Gazira. It is better to be attacked than ignored. The UN was attacked for good reasons and bad. The UN was attacked for not supporting the US-led invasion of Iraq, and then attacked for legitimizing the US occupation by facilitating elections and sweetening the transition to some sort of elected government, still in the shadow of the US Army. On Darfur, it was attacked for meddling in the domestic affairs of sovereign Sudan, and fiercely denounced for failing to stop that ravage.

How does this unravel? After Gorbachev's *perestroika*, there was a brief euphoria for the UN, soon blown away by Africa (Somalia, Rwanda), old Yugoslavia (especially Srebrenica), Chechnya, and of course the first UN engagement with Iraq. And, to scupper the UN's new millennium, the 2000 celebration, terrorism struck in our New York front yard and at the mighty US Pentagon.

In the 1990s, everything had been going to the Security Council. Peacekeeping became nation building, with civilian leadership. Human rights, protecting women and children, even the voice of NGO's, all had their place at the UN table. This gave plausibility to the Canadian idea, a gift to the UN, that true security is human security -- the life of the people -- rather than state security. This idea reinforced international law as transcending national law; and led on to another Canadian initiative, validated by an eminent Commission, the idea that national governments are responsible to protect their people. If they can't or won't do that, then the international community, the UN, should have the legal and moral responsibility to take over.

And then the old problem of terrorism -- there were already a dozen treaties on varieties of terrorism -- captured the Security Council. Stunned by 9/11, the US government, the George W. Bush government, within 24 hours took terrorism to the Security Council. The UN was at the heart of things. Or so it seemed.

The world did not collapse when the Trade Towers came down, and the USA is not the universe. But America's military power and economic tentacles loom (can tentacles loom?) wherever you are. Pierre Trudeau said it for Canada: when the elephant twitches, watch out!

Twitching from terror, the impregnable USA went into panic. Any combination of megalomania and paranoia would be explosive, as seen in history. Added to that mix is a vision of divine mission, God's command to export something called freedom, democracy and the free market, into a new holy land. A holy war is launched against terrorists, at home and abroad.

It was with this mind-set that the US government, failing to convert the UN, invaded Iraq. The revealed truth was that Iraq was the heart of darkness, the grand central of terrorism, presumably sustained by Afghanistan. *Ecrasez l'infâme!*

*L'infâme*, however, was not to be found. *L'infâme* had other ideas. With its strange mix of oil riches, macho authority and religious fanaticism, this middle-eastern jihad saw the USA as the great Satan. To bring down the USA and its mercenaries, anything goes, including terrorism.

And so we have two world visions in conflict, two irreconcilable truths. Fortunately, most people are not caught up in this frenzy. But there it is.

Surely this visionary distortion of reality explains not only the US invasion of Iraq but also the US/ Pentagon's claim that it can strike on suspicion anywhere anytime. How else explain the huge increase in the Pentagon budget, playing with nuclear weapons and dreaming of weapons in space?

And yet, this is not the whole story. The United Nations, that real world, is there. While Iraq and terror are a huge distraction, the whole world looks to the UN. Why the UN? Is it only lip service, the mantra that the UN process is the only way to go, that no country can go it alone? While making it work is not easy, it is so obviously true that it gives some dignity even to hypocrisy. The tragic tsunami confirms this. Only the UN could lead the counter-tsunami of aid to victims of that disaster.

Wars and extreme poverty are even worse than the Asian tsunami. Only the UN can lead the great march on the road to the good life. That is why we have goals, ambitious goals for the UN family. These goals are commitments by UN heads of state, specific things to do to make life better for all people, especially for the ubiquitous poor.

Progress toward reaching the 2015 goals is being tracked from year to year. The track record just now has been analyzed in a big study, commissioned by the UN, and led by Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University in New York. Sachs calls his report "a practical plan to achieve the millennium development goals." This is a forward-looking approach. Sachs says that by redoubling investment and with good governance, most goals are within reach. The tragic exception is poverty in Africa -- but as Stephen Lewis keeps reminding us, many countries won't make it unless HIV/AIDS is brought under control.

Social commitment is essential for all of the goals, and social means political. If our world can even begin to turn from war to peace, this could be an historical drive toward real human security. It is not money that is holding us back. The world has not overdrawn its bank account. Every year we put over \$1 trillion into arms. This UN programme needs just a fraction of that.

Washington's machismo makes everyone uneasy. Has the UN simply been papering over the brutal realities of international life? This sword has hung over the UN and the Secretary General from the beginning. Can the UN survive? The answer is: Yes, but only through reform. This is our recurrent religion, reformation will save us.

Terrorists gave Kofi Annan a platform for his eminent reform Panel. Threats, that was the dagger at the heart. The eminent Panel found a lot of threats, the whole UN in jeopardy. So once again, reform the whole UN, what it does and how it does it. The Panel saw threats extending to all major issues, while at the same time exposing the structural and resource limits of the UN system. The Panel wants the UN to go all out in peace building -- in effect, promoting human security. Everything is built around that: how to prevent war, how to intervene, how to back up human rights with more than shame. Develop a comprehensive strategy against terrorism. Abandon the false security of mass weapons, especially nuclear; and get serious about controlling HIV/AIDS. The Panel had another go at reforming the Security Council, with a couple of pathways out of that quagmire. The Panel also had practical suggestions for harnessing the energies of the General Assembly and for dealing seriously with human rights. The Panel's report ends with a summary of its recommendations. The summary runs to 101 points. I have not tried to summarize the summary, just to touch on highlights.

So here we have two big studies, one on goals and the other on threats. The two teams, panelists, working independently of each other, came to essentially the same basic conclusion: no peace without human security, no peace with desperate poverty.

In June the UN will be sixty, and in September there will be a birthday party. There will be one more ritual Summit, heads of state hob-nobbing and talking. This could be their last party. The host may reject this antibody. Iraq continues in turmoil and Al Qaeda won't go away. Darfur bleeds. Will the UN be celebrating while Rome burns?

The Secretary-General has done his best to bring things to a head -- this is make-or-break time. On 21 March 2005, he laid out a do-able comprehensive plan of action. He squeezed the essence out of the two big historic studies. Referring back to the UN Charter, he calls his plan: In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all. He says development means a serious attack on poverty, with development assistance reaching the UN target (0.7% of gross national income) by 2015. He says security means reforming the Security Council, deciding when force may be used, stressing governments' responsibility to protect their people, creating a Peace Building Commission, implementing a strategy against terrorism, and getting real about disarmament, especially mass weapons. He says human rights must be at the heart of all UN action; and we'll need a new Human Rights Council, elected by a two-thirds vote of the General Assembly, a Council to replace the Human Rights Commission with its cabal actually opposing rights.

That is the message. Decline and fall, or rise and shine?

Without the USA there would be no UN. It was Roosevelt and Churchill who made it happen. How boggling that the great USA looks like the greatest threat to the UN. USA is shorthand for the US government. Poll after poll has shown that the American people support the UN, but Washington goes its own way. Political expediency and pathological illusion scramble the skies. Kofi Annan, once Washington's darling, is now the target of enemies of the UN. At the very least, the USA -- and indeed, all of us -- need the UN as a façade, to sell our ruthless self-interests. How much can you compromise and still stay alive? The Security Council told Kofi Annan to get into the political process in Iraq. Kiss-and-make-up.

But the hounds are still at the heels. There is mismanagement of oil-for-food in Iraq, guilty until proven innocent in a programme created and supervised by the Security Council, the USA in the lead. Who cares that millions of Iraqis survived on this food? Who wants to know that the big hanky-panky took place outside the UN itself? The UN blundered, the UN was untidy, but what about the “Coalition”, the occupying authority, the Pentagon?

And then sex reared its ugly head. Is it news that young men need women? Where did the term “hooker” come from? In the American civil war, General Joseph Hooker kept a band of comfort women for his troops. The UN is hobbled in many ways. UN peacekeepers come from over 30 national armies. The UN has its own rules, a code of conduct for all to follow, but disciplinary action can be taken only by the governments where the troops come from. Rape is not peace building, and it is a good thing that the Congo sex scandal was exposed. The stern message goes out: all must behave by the explicit UN code.

These are hard times for the UN staff. Job security and efficiency don't always go together. Governments play games to get jobs for the family. There is shuffling at the top, there is over-reaction to unsubstantiated allegations, heads have rolled. A tough *chef de cabinet* comes in. With Kofi Annan under attack, fear and disappointment ripple on down. Most people in the UN really care, but the UN can be a school for cynics.

And so, on to September. The sixtieth birthday party, the Summit, is already in preparation. The President of the continuing General Assembly is setting up four clusters of the 191 states to digest this big meal. They should be telling their captains and kings what has to be done to keep the organization alive.

Recently, in Manhattan, I heard a great talk about the nuclear threat. The speaker, a friend and colleague, is a brilliant physicist. He also knows politics and history. He suggested that the new world empire is repeating the mistakes of past empires that led to their demise. In the discussion that followed, I said no, this time it is different. The nuclear bomb is different. This time the end of empire could be the end of civilization, the end of history.

Is there a way out of this nightmare? We don't know for sure, do we? What we do know is that military power, with nukes its heart, does not make you “secure”; instead, it creates terrifying insecurity. What then can move us along to a more stable world where brains supercede guns? One thing is evident: the gulf between rich and poor, at home and abroad, creates its own time bomb. (Development is freedom, says Amartya Sen.) The internet, which puts us all in universal space and time, erodes introversion. (The world is flat, says Tom Friedman. Are people flat?) International law, hung around human rights, is inching toward enforcement through the Security Council's Tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda, similar Tribunals for Sierra Leone and Cambodia, regional human rights courts for Europe and the Americas, and the International Criminal Court. Carla Delponte, Prosecutor for the Yugoslav Tribunal, sees that court as serving to show the people how they were deceived and misled into tragedy. Some lights are shining.

What about “the peoples”, invoked in the Charter's Preamble? Will “the peoples” save us, or will they follow like lemmings to their death? What we do know is that “civil society”, serious professional NGOs, have enlightened and enlivened governmental calculus at the UN. And in our time, people power has brought down many a ruthless autocracy. The people can make a critical difference. Soft power.

The eminent American scholar and statesman, Joseph Nye, has challenged US reliance on the military in his book The Paradox of American Power. The “soft power” of enlightened statesmanship, of humanitarian responsibility, is spoiled by an obsession with force. The UN is not encumbered with an army. Its strength is in its ideals of common humanity, seeking peace and a better life for all. Compassion and hope are our weapons of mass construction. The future is inevitable after it happens.

## Passion and Power

### Random readings from my Bookshelves

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Armstrong, Karen	<u>The Battle for God</u>
Bass, Gary Jonathan	<u>Stay the Hand of Vengeance</u>
Doyle, Michael W.	<u>Ways of War and Peace</u>
Ehrenreich, Barbara	<u>Blood Rites</u>
Friedman, Thomas L.	<u>The World is Flat</u>
Glad, Betty (ed.)	<u>Psychological Dimensions of War</u>
Geertz, Clifford	<u>The Interpretation of Cultures</u>
Hayner, Priscilla B.	<u>Unspeakable Truths</u>
Hedges, Chris	<u>War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning</u>
Hillman, James	<u>A Terrible Love of War</u>
Howard, Michael	<u>The Causes of War</u>
Howard, Michael	<u>The Invention of Peace</u>
Jolly, Alison	<u>Lucy's Legacy</u>
Neuffer, Elizabeth	<u>The Key to My Neighbor's House</u>
Midgley, Mary	<u>The Ethical Primate</u>
Nye, Joseph S. Jr.	<u>The Paradox of American Power</u>
Olivos, Anne Marie and Paul Steinberg	<u>The Road to Martyrs' Square</u>
Philpott, Daniel	<u>Revolutions in Sovereignty</u>
Rapoport, Anatol	<u>The Origins of Violence</u>
Ridley, Matt	<u>The Origins of Virtue</u>
Robins, Robert S. and Jerrold M. Post	<u>The Psychopolitics of Hatred</u>
Sen, Amartya	<u>Development as Freedom</u>
Tambiah, Stanley J.	<u>Leveling Crowds</u>
Walzer, Michael	<u>Just and Unjust Wars</u>
Wright, Robert	<u>Moral Animal</u>
Volkan, Vamik	<u>Blind Trust</u>
Volkan, Vamik	<u>Blood Lines</u>