

The UN is a Plastic Owl

by **A.J. Caschetta** (April 2016)

Urban dwellers know the [plastic owl](#). In an effort to scare pigeons from roofs, ledges and window sills, they strap and screw them in place hoping that the appearance of a predator might yield the same results as the real thing. In the suburbs, plastic owls are conscripted to watch over backyard gardens warding off four-legged pests. But birds are smart. Once they learn that a predator look-alike poses no real danger, they resume their perches in bold and fearless defiance where they defecate on city buildings with impunity. Mammals too know that an owl that never moves is not an owl, so across America they eat vegetables in the shadows of fake predators.

The last two decades of diplomatic fiascos at the United Nations (especially concerning Iran) have made it clear that the UN is now little more than a plastic owl – able to muster only the appearance of a wise lookout, alert and ever vigilant. Meanwhile rogue nations and dictators, like birds and rodents, have learned that the UN, like a plastic owl, poses no real danger. Consequently, they defy it with impunity.



The grand experiment that was the United Nations started out with great promise. The partition of the former British mandate Palestine presented a significant step forward in the kind of global cooperation that eluded the League of Nations.

The onset of the Cold War led to decades of relative inaction with the US and USSR exercising veto power at the Security Council, the seat of “hard power” at the UN. In the “soft power” category, as long as some nations were willing to spend money on international aid, the UN’s supporters could still credibly call it a success.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, things changed, and the 1990s mark a sharp transition at the UN. As [Dore Gold](#) puts it: “The UN of the 1990s lost its ability to make clear moral distinctions because its membership had changed radically over the years. Most of the UN’s original members had been inspired by

the democratic leadership of Roosevelt and Churchill against the Axis powers. Yet by 1993, only a minority of members, a mere 75 out of 184, were free democracies.”

The decade that began with Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, the last truly successful UN ventures, was marred by a slow reaction to growing problems in the Somalia relief effort and by the [failure to do anything](#) other than observe as hundreds of thousands died in the Rwanda genocide. Later, the UN would find itself under attack for allowing a [sex-slave operation](#) to flourish under its auspices during the flood of UN-administered relief efforts in the wake of the genocide the UN refused to call a genocide. That scandal [continues](#) to this day.

By mid-decade, with Saddam Hussein defying the terms of the surrender agreement he signed, the UN's Oil For Food program was implemented, cementing the image of its failure and corruption. Amid calls for real reform, the UN managed only one as the [Commission on Human Rights](#) became the [Human Rights Council](#). It was a superficial name change only. In the years since the “reform,” nations such as [China](#), [Ethiopia and Pakistan](#) have served [leadership roles](#) at the HRC. Cuba, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela are [current members](#). The HRC actually gives a human rights [award](#) named for Moammar Khadafy.

In 2002, the UN expanded with the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Even *The New York Times* has [acknowledged](#) the weakness of this new branch of the International Court of Justice. Shortly after its creation, the ICC was presented with a test case in the massive slaughter taking place in the Darfur region of Sudan. It took some time, but in 2005 and then again in 2009 the [ICC charged](#) Omar al Bashir with war crimes. But Bashir recognizes a plastic owl when he sees one, so he laughed it off and [continues to live](#) in prosperity.

In the last decade, international sanctions against Iran and North Korea have offered the UN a chance to recapture some of its former relevance, but in each case it has failed. Both nations continue to violate the IAEA Non-Proliferation Treaty with very few consequences.

The UN has done virtually nothing as Kim Jong Un tests his new and improved Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles that he [boasts](#) can reach Manhattan. But there is suddenly a great deal of discussion and enthusiasm about new UN

sanctions against North Korea. Unfortunately they all hinge on China, which is the main supplier of food, energy and protection to the Kim regime. Adam Szubin, the Treasury Department's acting undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, [believes](#) that China has begun a serious UN-based approach to North Korea – this in spite of the fact that China could easily tame its diminutive neighbor without UN help or approval. Instead it appears that China has discovered a new way to use the plastic owl for diplomatic cover, allowing it to pretend to rein in North Korea while actually doing very little.

The equally significant UN failure of late is Iran. The Obama administration's desire to reach a deal at any cost preventing Iran from building nuclear weapons has led to the UN's P5+1 coddling the Mullahs at every step. From the very outset, Iran has dictated the terms, beginning with the [covering](#) of marble bas relief depicting a naked man in the European Headquarters in Geneva. The statue titled *The Creation of Man*, carved by Eric Gill, was donated in 1938 by Great Britain to the League of Nations.

As the Obama administration and the UN pushed through the JCPOA, the worst deal in the history of international diplomacy, skeptics were assured that any Iranian violations would be met with swift "snapback" sanctions. That assurance was echoed by editors at [The New York Times](#) and analysts at the [Brookings Institute](#). Yet when those inevitable violations occurred, the UN acted in good plastic-owl fashion – it did nothing.

The most recent and flagrant violation took place in early March when Iran [tested long range missiles](#), reportedly decorated for the occasion with lettering in both Hebrew and Farsi reading "Israel must be wiped off the face of the earth." It was just another in a long series of Iranian promises to destroy Israel. But this bold hostile act actually elicited a reaction from the UN as its chief sent out his spokesman to [declare](#): "In the current political atmosphere in the Middle East region, and so soon after the positive news of the lifting of sanctions against Iran the secretary general calls...Iran to act with moderation, caution and good sense not to increase tensions through hasty actions." Some plastic owls come with [moving heads](#).

When faced with the fact that Iran's missile tests violate UN Security Council Resolution 2231 which "calls upon" Iran to stop building and testing such weapons, Russia's ambassador to the UN, Vitaly Churkin, [revealed](#) the catch: "A

call is different than a ban so legally you cannot violate a call.” While the Obama administration seems intent on going through [the motions](#) at the UN, it does so only half-heartedly and from a position of weakness. Iran knows it has little to fear.

There are two areas where the UN has actually been effective: condemning Israel and supporting terrorists. In his book [The UN Gang](#) (2005) [Pedro Sanjuan](#) documents in great detail the UN culture of anti-Semitism. Sanjuan was the top US spy in the secretariat, essentially spying on the Soviet spies installed in Turtle Bay by the KGB. After a long career in politics, beginning with the Kennedy administration, Sanjuan wrote that “More than all the other elements in the UN espionage-counter-espionage saga, what bothered me most during my years there was this unrelenting bigotry.”

After the Arab rejection of Resolution 181 and Israel’s War of Independence in 1948, the UN expanded with the advent of the Relief and Works Agency for the Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). What was intended as a short-term relief program for Arab refugees has become an organ for anti-Israel activity. Through the years this bureaucracy has been more devoted to delegitimizing the Jewish state it voted to create in 1947 than to providing aid to the Arabs who rejected a state of their own. In his tenure as Secretary General, Kofi Annan infamously [met](#) with Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, conferring a degree of legitimacy on Hezbollah that even a [stone-throwing](#) Professor Edward Said couldn’t match. More recently Ban Ki Moon has been a great equivocator when it comes to the Hamas and PA-inspired violence. In January he excused the so-called “Knife Intifada” by [observing](#) that “As oppressed peoples have demonstrated throughout the ages, it is human nature to react to occupation, which often serves as a potent incubator of hate and extremism.”

Moon’s obsession with “occupation” led him to alienate the government of Morocco as he allegedly used the term to describe that nation’s control over Western Sahara. Many Moroccans, and at least [one US Congressman](#), are [outraged](#) at Moon’s words and believe he is no longer a reliable arbiter of peace because of his sympathy for the [Polisario Front](#).

The UN did not evolve into a plastic owl through natural selection. It was deliberately mutated into one. As autocrats, oligarchies and tyrants gradually

came to outnumber everyone else, the supranational Leviathan became a dictator's club, at best turning a blind eye to tyranny and at worst nurturing it. This is what happens when security is trusted to a plastic owl.

When the [US House of Representatives](#) and then the [State Department](#) declared that ISIS was engaging in genocide, another door was opened, enabling the UN to redeem itself. After all, preventing genocide is its reason for existing. But on this front, like a plastic owl, the UN remains motionless.

A.J. Caschetta is a senior lecturer at the Rochester Institute of Technology and a Shillman-Ginsburg fellow at the Middle East Forum. He can be reached at ajcgsl@rit.edu.

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