

The Fantasy World of the United Nations



UN Security Council Meeting

by Michael Curtis

Send in the Clowns, where are the Clowns? don't bother they're here. Russia has made its entrance again with its usual flair, sure of its lines.

The United Nations, founded in October 1945 with 51 members has become, in a grandiose setting of Turtle Bay, a body of 193 member states supposedly the guarantor of world peace, heralded as the only place where all the world's nations can discuss common problems and find shared solutions that benefit all of humanity. The benefits have been sparse, and the clowns were present with the speeches of Muammar Gaddafi and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the UN General Assembly, and the election of

Iran to the main committee on the status of women. Its understanding appears minimal. The Russian aggression against Ukraine, known to be in preparation and written about for many months, came as a “big shock” to Amina Mohammad, native of Nigeria, deputy secretary-general of the UN. She explained her ignorance and failure of the UN to act concerning the event by the irrelevant platitude that hindsight is 20-20 vision.

The UN has become, as Volodymyr Zelensky on April 5, 2022, directly told the UN Security Council, a venue for “conversation,” not one for action to stop aggression by Russia, a country that “has turned the right of veto into a right to die.” The question can be raised of whether it has become a negative factor in the search for international justice and peace. The partiality of the UN was shown in the past by its disproportionate behavior. The UN General Assembly held a moment of silence to honor North Korean dictator Kim Jong-il. It refused to honor Vaclav Havel, freedom fighter, who dies the day after Kim in 2011. The UN has been more often prominent for its lack of efficiency in preventing conflicts, and in being the venue for expressions of antisemitism and appeasement, than in championing international justice.

The UN General Assembly, UNGA, has condemned Russia twice in non-binding resolutions over its aggression in Ukraine, and Russia has been suspended from membership of the UN Human Rights Council. But it is meaningful that only 93 members of the UNGA voted to condemn Russia. The reality is that a majority of the members of the UN did not vote for condemnation.

This is a spectacular failure, more than the UN’s previous failures, in 1994 in Rwanda, in 2010 in the cholera issue in Haiti, in the Iraqi oil for food program, and the crisis in South Sudan.

The Secretary-General of the UN, Antonio Guterres, of Portugal, is obviously well meaning and emotionally disturbed

by the horrific scenario and images of dead civilians, especially children, in the streets of Bucha that he visited on April 28, 2022. He called the Russian aggression, “an absurdity in the 21st century. The war is evil. There is no way a war can be acceptable in the 21st century.”

They are appropriate words but are they sufficient as commentary on the reality? Guterres at Bucha said, “When we see this horrendous site, it makes me feel how important it is to have a thorough investigation and accountability.” He fully supported appeal to the International Criminal Court and “appealed to the Russian Federation to accept to co-operate with the ICC, International Criminal Court.” Similarly, Michelle Bachelet, of Chile, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, declared she had been horrified by the images of Bucha, but only commented that the “reports emerging from Ukraine raise serious and disturbing questions about possible war crimes as well as grave breaches of international humanitarian law and serious violations of international human rights law.”

The prosecutor of the ICC, Karim Khan, who was chosen in February 2021, said on March 27, 2022, at the UN in New York, that he favored neither Russia nor Ukraine in the search for truth, “the law is above us, and if the law is not above us, there’s nothing below us, except the abyss.” In a statement, more appropriate from Groucho Marx, prosecutor Khan said “there were reasonable grounds” to believe that crimes had been committed in Ukraine., and the focus is on “alleged” crimes committed in Ukraine. The UN is ineffective and helpless, disregarding the admonition by Zelensky to the UN Security Council on April 6, 2022, “You need to act immediately.”

How different are these lukewarm or vacuous remarks from officials in the U.S. or UK. U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken declared the U.S.’s commitment to Ukraine’s

independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity is iron clad. British foreign secretary, Liz Truss, in a speech on April; 27, 2022, at Mansion House, stated the war in Ukraine is “our war, it is everyone’s war because Ukraine victory is strategically imperative for all of us. We will keep going further and faster to push Russia out of the whole of Ukraine.”

It is unlikely that the war criminal Vladimir Putin will be deterred in any way by this advocacy of moral righteousness. The Russian response to Truss is the UK should clear off from Europe and “eat their porridge, and stop stealing fish and chips from Russia.” More depraved is the communique of foreign minister Sergey Lavrov that Zelensky is a Nazi despite being Jewish, and that Hitler had Jewish blood. More defiant is the Russian pronouncement that strategic stability will only be possible after the “special operation” in Ukraine is finished.

However, the free world has recognized that the aggression, “the special operation” against Ukraine is part of the struggle between the West and Russia. The struggle has been more uncertain for a variety of reasons. First there is the Western and indeed global dependence on Russian energy. The EU has paid more than 35 billion euros to Russia since the “special operation” began. Germany is still not willing to ban Russian gas, but may ban Russian oil. Hungary, under Viktor Orban who has opposed economic sanctions on Russia, will not ban both Russian oil and gas.

Secondly, the difficulty for the UN is of understanding the true relationship between Russia and China. At the meeting of Putin and Xi Jinping in Beijing on February 4, 2022, this axis of autocracy stated the two countries were bound by “increasingly close partnership.” The countries called for NATO to abandon its “ideologized Cold War approaches,” and for all to respect the sovereignty, security, and interests of other countries. Though Ukraine was not mentioned in any joint statement, the countries pledged to counter interference

by outside forces in the internal affairs of sovereign countries. For the West the dilemma is of secondary sanctions being imposed on China and retaliation by Beijing.

Nevertheless, even recognizing that China does not openly oppose the Russian aggression, and may even be a strategic rival, China is, with its 1.4 billion population, \$16 trillion economy, large exports, the greater challenge to democratic systems.

Policy agreements by the United Nations are made intractable by the interests of countries. India obtains most of its arms from Russia and may, after clashes with China, need Russia as protector against advances by China in the Himalayas. Pakistan, under the recently ousted prime minister, Imran Khan, a critic of the West, has received aid from Russia, and wants Russian help in securing trade routes into central Asia. Both India and Pakistan abstained in the UN vote to condemn the aggression.

Countries have refused to condemn Russian for various reasons. Muslim-majority countries, have criticized the West, especially the U.S., for hypocrisy and double standards, for invading Iraq in 2003, for prolonging the civil war in Yemen, and for arming the Royal Saudi Air Force which conducts airstrikes in Yemen.

African countries have benefited from supplies of Russian arms, which they do not recognize as a form of neo-colonialism. In contrast, a lasting reminder is the legacy of Western European colonialism. One example is resentment of France which intervened in Mali in 2013 to prevent a takeover by al-Qaeda. Consequentially, French forces in Mali have been replaced by the Russian mercenaries of the Wagner group.

In the Middle East, Syria has supported Russia which has largely been responsible for the survival of President Bashar al-Assad against fighters of ISIS in 2015. Surprisingly,

though supposedly friends of the West, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have not opposed the Russian aggression and have been relatively mild in their criticism. The ruler of UAE, crown prince Mohammed bin Zayed is friendly with Putin. In contrast relationships between Saudi Arabia's crown prince Mohammed bin Salman and President Joe Biden are not warm, partly because the U.S. and other countries accused Salman of having ordered the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

The Russian aggression presented the opportunity for the UN to generate global consensus to deal with aggression. But it has been ineffective. Instead, the aggression has revived arguments for the reform, even the elimination of the UN, starting with the removal of the veto power which has been a tool of Russian diplomacy, and membership of the Security Council.

Zelensky told the UN it was an utter failure. If it couldn't work to end the Russian aggression it should dissolve itself. That would stop the clowns in the UN from laughing.