

The United Nations is contemptible. Here's how to fix it



by Conrad Black

The discovery by the Israeli Defense forces of comprehensive electrical and communications connections between the United Nations Relief and Works Agency headquarters in Gaza and a large Hamas terrorist barracks and command centre and tunnel complex immediately beneath it illustrated as brazenly as possible the hypocrisy and political corruption of the United Nations Organization. This conforms perfectly to the gradual degradation of the UN from a responsible international organization pursuing universal goals and particularly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and providing a parliamentary forum where all states could be heard, to its

present contemptible status.

In its early days after 1945, the victorious non-communist Allied powers of the Second World War and particularly the United States and its closest allies dominated proceedings. China was then Nationalist China and like France and Britain, it was heavily dependent upon the economic largesse and military deterrent power of the Americans. The only permanent member of the Security Council that had any practical ability to part company with the Americans on important matters was Josef Stalin's Soviet Union. The autonomous members of the emerging Commonwealth of Nations, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand as well as all the Latin American countries, and the smaller western European countries, could be counted upon to vote with the senior western allies in the late war.

In its early stages, the United Nations admirably performed the dual role envisioned for it by its chief founder, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, which was to give a collegial cover for the exercise of America's overwhelming influence in the world while presenting the world to a formerly isolationist America as a less threatening place for the U.S. to become involved generally than America with its sense of exceptionalism and aversion to entangling alliances had traditionally believed. At the end of the Second World War, the United States had half of the war-ravaged world's economic activity and possessed an absolute monopoly of nuclear weapons, as well as, by a wide margin, the largest navy and the largest air force in the world. And its civilian and military leaders, Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Douglas MacArthur, Dwight Eisenhower, and George C. Marshall were immensely respected and had led the Western allies to the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany and imperialist Japan.

As colonial areas were granted independence, it has naturally delighted large numbers of formerly colonial jurisdictions to annoy and perversely irritate former colonial powers and traditionally advanced countries. For approximately 20 years

the traditional influence of the West coupled with the exclusion of the People's Republic of China from UN membership enabled the western powers to maintain a preeminent influence at the United Nations. But for many years the general assembly and practically all of the UN committees have been dominated by countries that are undemocratic, frequently gratuitously violent and corrupt, and make little pretense of sharing western values of individual liberty, democratic government, the free market, and the rule of law, (imperfect as all of the western democracies are as practitioners of what they generally sincerely profess to believe).

Of the 192 members of the United Nations, the usually reliable human rights watchdog, Freedom House in New York considers that only 84 qualify as democratic countries. In the United Nations Human Rights Council, composed of 47 member states, only 14 of them qualify as democracies. Among those countries forming the non-democratic majority of the Council that ultimately decides human rights positions at the United Nations are the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia, Afghanistan, China, Iraq, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Russia. The idea that those countries have a preeminent influence in determining international human rights policy and monitoring compliance with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (of which the principal author was President Roosevelt's wife Eleanor), is a mockery and an outrage.

Judges of the International Court of Justice are selected by United Nations majorities and are therefore determined by representatives of the regimes that do not accept or purport to approve of the rule of law as it has been traditionally defined in civilized countries governed by political institutions that respect individual liberties and the democratic political process. This is true of those judges now judging Israel in its response to the Hamas invasion and terrorist actions conducted against Israel on Oct. 7. It is an

elemental principle of justice that it is only as good as the judges who administer it and in this case and in these circumstances, as the intimate physical integration of the United Nations operations in Gaza with the Hamas subterranean terrorist network indicates, no court whose judges are chosen by the process used at the International Court of Justice is reliable and neither Israel nor any other responsible state should submit in advance to its authority under any circumstances.

Canada, as a founding member of the United Nations and as one of the most important western Allied contributors to victory in the Second World War after only the British and the Americans, and as a country that has never had any imperialist tendency nor waged war other than victoriously and in just causes, is admirably qualified to propose the reform so desperately needed to restore the United Nations as a serious functioning institution worthy of respect. It should become a bicameral chamber, one continuing to be an equal vote for every member, and the other house weighted according to some composite measurement of population and economic strength. The Security Council should be expanded in its permanent membership from five to at least 10 and there should be permanent memberships residing in small regional groups such as a rotating membership between Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Chile, or between Spain, Poland, and Italy, or Canada, Australia, and South Africa.

Objective standards of conduct should be agreed upon again as they were at the founding of the United Nations, and they should be rigorously enforced on the members, suspending the vote of states that have no respect for individual rights and due process. Over the last 20 years there have been 103 resolutions condemning Israel, a functioning democracy with a respected judiciary that has had to endure war disputing its very existence since it was founded as a Jewish state in 1948. In the same time there have been no resolutions criticizing

the People's Republic of China, Saudi Arabia, or Venezuela.

Canada has traditionally paid a great deal of attention to the United Nations and the present government has squandered a lot of money trying unsuccessfully to buy a temporary seat on the Security Council and we have an outstanding ambassador there in Bob Rae. He should be given a mandate to prepare, in consultation with other responsible members, a comprehensive reform of this now thoroughly dysfunctional organization that has become an insult to all civilized countries.

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