

The United States and the United Nations: Some Revolting European Thoughts



INTRODUCTION

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES (US) AND A GENERAL, UNIVERSAL INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION HAS ALWAYS BEEN A DIFFICULT ONE SINCE THE DAYS OF PRESIDENT WILSON'S FOURTEEN POINTS UNTIL TODAY'S UNITED NATIONS (UN). But what should we Europeans' do about the Americans in this context? Are they part of the problem, the solution, or both? Should we follow them, humour them or ignore them? Let us begin by asking several questions, before referring briefly to American participation and withdrawal from the time of the League of Nations (the League) until the present day. We shall turn then to the "tit for tat" policies which are increasingly coming to dominate EU and US relations both in the UN and the wider context — Iraq being a particularly acute case in point. Finally, we shall broach the issue of American claims and conceptions of exceptionalism, unilateralism and multilateralism which engenders some revolting thoughts about what should be done from a European perspective. This is, of course, an agenda which goes far beyond the US, the UN and the EU. It is about future global relations that are taking shape in the crucible of the Iraq

War and its aftermath. It is about how the new powers — the EU, China, Japan, Russia and India — all of which have been reborn since the Second World War and the old hegemonic power — the US — interact to form a new structure. The US-UN relationship is a harbinger of this great new debate which is now upon us.

WHAT DO WE WANT THE UNITED NATIONS FOR?

IT IS OFTEN SAID THAT, IF THE UN DID NOT EXIST, WE WOULD HAVE TO INVENT IT. So what do we, as Europeans, want from the UN? Let us begin by being modest and evaluate the UN, both in its principal organs and specialised agencies and programmes, as a forum organisation and a service organisation. In this way, we play to its strengths, namely that it can act, like in the American phrase, as the "town meeting of the world", at least as far as governments are concerned, with only the Holy See being absent. It has been and remains a service organisation for the pursuit of functional co-operation in which it has had some great successes, starting with the League as the Bruce Report attested (Ghébali 1970). Both of these functions led to another great suc-

cess of the League that has been greatly undervalued, namely ensuring that the idea of a general, universal international organisation with an international secretariat took root. Thereafter such an institution was part of the global political landscape and global political culture — something that was not self-evident when the League was founded.

The Charter itself makes collective security a primary function of the UN. But both the UN and the League before it have not had a glorious past in this domain. Indeed, the two organisations have tended to be tarred, from the very beginning, with the brush of failure. Collective security is based on the notion that the member-states of a system decide freely on the rules of behaviour that will henceforth govern their interactions and on the ways by which those rules may be changed. Moreover, they supplement this with the threat of, and a promise to apply, sanctions of various sorts to bring any deviant who does not follow the rules of behaviour, or the rules of changing that behaviour, back into the fold. This conception remained a pipe dream so long as the Cold War dominated the Security Council. While the UN did act nominally in the name of collective security in the Korean War, this was by accident since in reality it was a war of proxies supported by different permanent members of the Security Council. It was not until the Gulf War of 1990–91 that one could see collective security being properly applied in that a remarkable Coalition forced Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait and to renounce its annexation of that country. Part of our present concern is that, despite this success, the operation has not been repeated notwithstanding circumstances in Kosovo in which such an action was appropriate and, with more wit, diligence and imagination, might have been possible. In the case of Iraq the precepts of collective

security through the UN have been thrust aside by the US in favour of a posse led by an American sheriff. On the whole, the European powers seem inclined to accept the principle of collective security applied through the UN as a desirable guideline even if they do not always follow it, whereas the US seems to consider the UN framework at best as a possible forum, but only as one of many. For one it is a starting point, while for the other it is less so.

In the meantime a lesser form of collective security, in the shape of UN peace-keeping, has provided an element of collective security together with preventative diplomacy, mediation, facilitation and peacemaking although, here again, the record is mixed. Sometimes the UN framework has been utilised in a highly successful way, sometimes abused and sometimes ignored.

It is often forgotten that human rights have a prominent place in the preamble of the UN Charter and that the aspirations set out therein were, and remain, significantly ahead of their time in terms of their application, even among the permanent members of the Security Council. The UN's record in the field of human rights, although often derided, has always been active. In the early days the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drawn up in 1948 and one of the first contentious issues to come before the new organisation was the question of protecting the ethnic Indian community in South Africa. For fifty years the struggle against *apartheid* was a prominent feature of UN activity. Moreover, a survey conducted by Gallup International in the context of the millennium celebrations, and cited in the Secretary-General's Millennium Report (Annan 2000), found that the defence and promotion of human rights featured impressively high in the preferences of over 60,000 respondents

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from over 50 countries. 'We the peoples ...' (UN Charter, Preamble) clearly want the UN system to protect and promote human rights and there is a modicum of consensus about what those human rights are.

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We also look to the UN system as an instrument for linking the global with the local. While the conception may be global, the programmes are likely to be local. Of course, the UN system is not the only, or perhaps not even the main, actor in this framework. Many of the major participants in global civil society are outside of the UN system. But the system is slowly responding to the need to create a situation in which the development of all actors, from the individual to the global community, can take place, that is from individual and group self-actualisation to the management of global problems. Such problems are those that necessarily affect everyone and from which, therefore, there is no escape. In a situation where "unless we hang together we shall surely hang separately" the UN provides an important, indeed perhaps indispensable, forum. Moreover, the UN is not one thing, it is many things, in fact a veritable repertoire of *fora* and frameworks. Over the last forty years the development of global conferences, a sequence of preparatory commissions, the actual conference itself and follow up conferences have provided the UN system with a new holistic structure. This has the added benefit of bringing in civil society, or at least aspects of it, and thereby opening up the system's overall structure.

There are three other main factors we can look for in the UN system. The first is the conferment, in some raw sense, of legitimacy on norms and behaviour in the international sphere — this ranges from a resolution of the Security Council to the hundreds of standards set by specialised agencies such as the International Labour

Organisation (ILO). Many of these are merely declaratory, although "merely" is the wrong word since they set standards to which we aspire because they reflect a near consensus of values. They provide a target and a goad to attain that target. By accepting them governments place a rod across their own backs. In this process the US appears to have a sense of anxiety, or perhaps even a lack of self-confidence. To Europeans, working with others of a like mind is now becoming second nature after half a century's experience, whereas for Americans, despite their manifest power, ability and *savoir faire*, there is a strange element of inhibition, indeed fear. This sits oddly with the US' penetration of all parts of the globe and of all global enterprises. It raises questions about the extent to which the US can play a role in a multilateral world, as opposed to an American world. Europeans, on the other hand, feel somewhat more comfortable with a multilateral world than an American world, at least in the 21st century.

While the major powers clearly have much to gain from using the UN system as a tool for broaching the global problems they must necessarily face together, as well as for taking advantage of opportunities, the UN system is also a haven for the small, the weak and the diverse. There is not much protection in the "state of nature" for such powers. However, the UN system can help to civilise that nature, to provide a modest means of protection and to act as a moral witness, albeit not always effectively, but nevertheless frequently to some leavening effect.

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AND, IN PARTICULAR, IN THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE UN. However, there is a role to be played of leadership in global governance, but this is a role that can only be successfully aspired to, and implemented, if it meets with the satisfaction of the followers. Chiefs need Indians. In the past the US played this role quite successfully and to much general satisfaction, at least for Western Europeans, but it is now perhaps losing its ability or willingness to generate support or followers.

Global governance is a process in which there are many different actors. It is multidimensional, concerning itself with political, social, economic, cultural and security questions among others. Moreover, it has formal and informal procedures, in both public and private domains, which produce norms, rules and decisions. In other words, it is a decentralised process relating to the management of global civil society which focuses on global issues that necessarily concern everyone. It is thus likely to be complex, diverse and incomplete as it seeks to deal with the interacting, but not integrated, forms of the sources of social power which are, as pointed out elsewhere, ideological, economic, political and military systems (Mann 1986). While the economic basis of social power has been increasingly dominant for the last five hundred years, it is a moot point whether this will continue or whether we are now seeing the resurgence of another basis of social power, namely ideology, be it in the mountains of Afghanistan or the chapels and churches of the Deep South in the US.

The requirement for leadership is simple to state but difficult to achieve. It plays an organising role in setting the global agenda, mobilising debate around that agenda, bringing the debate to a decision and ensuring that the decision is implemented and that the process fuses into a whole that is ennobled by an innov-

ative spirit. From 1947 until 1960 the US played that role for the Western liberal democracies, but not for the world in its entirety. Global leadership is now required for a world in which history has not come to an end, in which regions are a major unit of analysis and for which global problems and globalisation require the co-operation, not the command, of a wide range of actors. Democratic leadership, the only effective form of leadership in the long run, is dependent on consent. While that consent may be difficult to achieve, once achieved it is a solid basis for civilisation. Our problem is that, while we require a modicum of global governance and global leadership, the UN is only one vessel among several to achieve this and the US is offering at best faltering leadership for some of the UN's biggest functions. The US has walked away from collective security, and more particularly the UN, in its attempt to lead the struggle against terrorism despite the massive support and sympathy it received through UN resolutions after the 11 September attacks. The pursuit of human rights is selective in their promotion, in the rights chosen and in those for whom they are promoted. The asymmetries in the US treatment of the Israelis and Palestinians in the promotion and protection of human rights is striking and the Kosovars can have protection, but only provided they do not ask for self-determination. In the field of global problem management, such as the environment or genetically modified foods, the American position does not command general international nor popular respect which is not to suggest that double standards do not exist elsewhere. Perhaps more worryingly, the US is increasingly trying to act without legitimacy and often not to protect the small or the weak or the diverse but, in fact, to chastise them. Moreover, the limited viability of the UN, faced with needs

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for governance, is further prejudiced by wilful acts of the US on questions such as finance. What “we” want, therefore, is the US to act in a multilateral spirit displaying solidarity with others in the pursuit of its own interests. In the past there was an easy assumption that the US saw its interests as being best pursued in a multilateral environment. Such a policy, and the “give and take” it involved, conferred legitimacy on US leadership and reflected and gave succour to shared values. But now legitimacy is strained as values diverge.

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WHAT DOES THE UNITED STATES WANT THE UNITED NATIONS FOR?

IT IS NOT FOR “US” TO SAY WHAT THE US WANTS THE UN FOR, BUT IT IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE FOR OTHERS WHICH GOALS THE US CHOOSES AND HOW IT GOES ABOUT SEEKING TO ACHIEVE THEM. The UN system is a vehicle for leadership. It can also confer legitimacy on policies and practices, although both using the UN system as a vehicle, and seeking legitimacy from it, does involve paying a price. That price includes listening to others, convincing others and, on occasion, conceding to others, but this is a relatively small concession for the legitimacy and leadership potential that the UN can confer.

The Security Council, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are significant institutions for global governance and are, therefore, of importance for the US. But a leader cannot afford to pick and choose to use when convenient, and to discard when inconvenient, if it is to seek the commitment of others as supporters of its leadership. The US has been and is likely to continue to be a net gainer from the many functional organisations of the UN sys-

tem — not only the technical ones² but also from the big four specialised agencies³ — through the inculcation of American values into the work of the organisations, through the provision of experts and as a source of advice and information. It should not be forgotten that the UN system is impregnated with American values since the US was a major influence on its design. Moreover, the US enjoys a position of great structural power in the system. But with such structural power must go responsibility, otherwise the leadership will become isolated. Indeed, as a major, *status quo*, conservative power, the US, like the other major Western powers, should see the UN system as an establishment organisation which buttresses their position. International law and international institutions tend to reflect the power structure and value system of the present and immediate past, which are Western, and therefore it is an act of self-destruction on the part of Western powers to destroy such institutions.

It is, perhaps, for these reasons that American public opinion has for many years demonstrated its support for the UN. Unfortunately, while that support is broad it is not very deep. The UN is relatively low on the hierarchy of priorities so that it can become a whipping post for those in the US who have a different agenda (UNA-USA 1998; Luck 1999).

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

HAVING SPECULATED ON THE COMPLEMENTARY AND CONTRASTING PREDILECTIONS OF HYPOTHETICAL EUROPEANS AND AMERICANS ON THE IDEA AND FUNCTIONS OF THE UN SYSTEM, WHERE DO WE STAND NOW? Over the last two decades the behaviour of the US has increasingly weakened the UN system, and more par-

ticularly its principal organs. The US has played tactical games that constitute a strategic weakening of the UN system. Given the strong structural power the US wields in the system, any weakening of that system is likely to be self-defeating since the system can facilitate US policy and interests in many different fields. Others argue that working in concert within the UN system is almost a *sine qua non* for global leadership if that leadership is to be based on consent rather than coercion. Moreover, the key notion of which the US appears to have lost sight is that self-interest includes an element of community interest. If they do not pay their community dues the weak are excluded from the association, whereas if the strong, such as the US, do not pay their community dues then the collectivity may well collapse. To be sure the strong may survive but not as well as they would with a strong sense of shared community. Everyone therefore has a stake in staving off the collapse of the UN system, whatever the US does.

Moreover global politics are changing. In the last half-century the EU and China (not to mention India, Japan and, latterly, Russia) have been putting their internal affairs in order and are now both readying themselves for leadership roles. In the forthcoming decades these roles are likely to come to the fore. Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger once stingingly remarked that he did not know what Europe's view was since he did not know which telephone number to ring. That situation is likely to change, indeed it has already changed. Kissinger's question is also relevant for the US. Who do we Europeans ring — the White House, the State Department, the Pentagon, the Congress or, on particular issues, major interest organisations or big business? It is extremely difficult to work with the US because it has a decentralised power sys-

tem. Thus, what may be agreed after long and painstaking negotiations can be, and often is, trumped by short-term interests emanating from some part of the domestic political scene. Clearly, the US is the sole, complete superpower and that counts for much. But in each major dimension there are actual or nascent countervailing forces, particularly if we are concerned with long-term, self-sustaining, and therefore necessarily non-coercive outcomes. Thus as actors such as the EU, China, Japan, India and Russia emerge or remerge, the hegemonic position that the US enjoyed after the Second World War no longer pertains, although the mind-set still seems to linger on — hence these revolting thoughts.

US policy, in weakening the UN, deprives others of an asset. Moreover, if the US chooses not to follow the rules, do we owe it anything? If the US in its reaction to terrorism has allowed liberal values to flounder, as Britain did in Northern Ireland, should we then respond to its call?⁴ If the US has no sense of *noblesse oblige vis-à-vis* the UN, or indeed elsewhere, and seems to have gone precipitously from an isolationist position to a position of isolation, what can and should we do about it? Moreover, do we really share values, as Europeans, with the US? The answer in many fundamental ways is "yes", just as we share values with other parts of the world, and perhaps more so, but there is a difference in the balance between notions of meritocracy and those of solidarity. A meritocratic society privileges the best and rewards the individual actor with only a minimal concern for solidarity with society as a whole. Margaret Thatcher, former British Prime Minister, reflected this point of view when she once infamously proclaimed that "there is no such thing as society". Most meritocrats would not go so far and would admit that there needs to be an element of solidarity

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with the poorer, weaker and diverse elements of society. The EU puts greater emphasis on solidarity, while being mindful of the need for meritocracy. Put starkly, unfettered liberalism kills, while an all-pervasive solidarity may suffocate. The US and the EU have different emphases, and this shows in the UN system.

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This puts Europeans in a quandary. What do we do about the Americans and the UN? Do we make universality a defining principle? Do we accept universality with a disruptive US or do we choose to let universality go by calling the bluff of those who advocate a US outside of the UN and a UN outside of the US? In such a situation will the US behave benevolently, as it did in the past, or will it adopt a policy of sabotage towards the near-universal organisation? Is there a third route in which we seek to maintain universality but bypass the US? Should we pay the American financial arrears if once again they follow a policy of financial blackmail? Should we act illegally if the US is so doing? Should we promote the role of the euro as the UN currency hoping thereby to have a windfall for the UN when the euro-to-dollar rate changes? Should we try to put the US in a position of lumping it, leaving it or acting collegially again? These are all open yet also relevant questions.

Of course, there can be no doubt that it is much preferable for we Europeans to go ahead with the US and through the UN. If that is not a practical proposition, can we go ahead by building global governance and exerting leadership by consulting with other major powers, such as Russia, Japan, China and India, and acting within the UN framework wherever this practicable? Is the waiting game coming to an end? At what point do we start to discount the US?

If the EU — and others — give up on the US then this is, of course, a dangerous game. It is like starting divorce proceed-

ings when you do not want to have the final outcome. The EU is already the largest financial contributor to the UN system. There is no reason that, in order to cover any future American arrears, we should not rise to the financial position of the US in the early days of the UN, when it bore approximately half of the total expenditure. If we cannot buy off the US through UN reforms in return for the US paying its lawful dues, because it is likely that they will continue to demand further reforms as each new payment becomes due, then can we buy them out by paying their dues? Can we establish an informal UN Protection Caucus (UN-PC)? This Caucus would examine illegal and abusive acts in the UN context, whether by the US or others, and then advise what to do and how to get around these abusive or illegal acts if it is evident that, otherwise, there is a general consensus. Naturally, this would only apply to illegal or abusive acts and not to genuine opposition. In short, it is a policy of doing what you can without the Americans and having a proactive countervailing set of policies. This is a sad outcome and without doubt a *pis aller*. Let us backtrack and see how we got into this sorry position. What happened in the past when the US either did not join, or in fact withdrew, from international organisations?

ABSENCE AND WITHDRAWALS

ON A HISTORICAL NOTE, EVEN THOUGH NEVER A MEMBER OF THE LEAGUE, THE US WAS NEVER ABSENT SINCE AMERICAN IDEAS AND THE VERY EXISTENCE OF THE US WERE, AND HAD TO BE, TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT BY THE LEAGUE AND ITS MEMBERS. Moreover, the US cooperated with some League activities, even in the area of collective security, and its citizens served in the Secretariat.

Unfortunately, there was no consensus among the other major powers in the League. Indeed, some withdrew which was an overwhelmingly inhibiting factor. If, however, we postulate that now there is a consensus among the major powers in key areas of global governance, for example the environment, would it make a difference between the League experience and a possible UN without the US? But there are other changes in the political situation since the US is a member of the UN and therefore it is a question of withdrawal, not of absence. Thus, the history of American withdrawals is grist to our mill.

The principle of universality is important for all aspects of the UN system. It is part of its uniqueness. A number of states have, from time to time, made a threat of withdrawal and some have actually taken that fateful step, like Indonesia did in the last years of the Sukarno regime. Indonesia's place was always held open after its withdrawal in 1965, and the subsequent regime returned to the UN fold the following year.

Small states are, on the whole, unlikely to withdraw from the UN system since it offers a form of protection and support. On the other hand, large states also benefit greatly from the system since it is a source of legitimacy for their activities and a forum for their action as well as a convenient conduit through which to enact their programmes. Nevertheless, the US has threatened to withdraw from some of the UN's specialised agencies and programmes and in various cases carried out that threat usually, but not always, to return.

In the early 1980s the US threatened to withdraw from the ITU and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The change of emphasis in their activities, as well as policies in the institutions meant that the US stayed its hand. Moreover, given the functional importance of one institution and the significance of

atomic questions and nuclear issues associated with the other, US withdrawal might well have led to significant losses for the US. Earlier there had been an American withdrawal from the ILO in 1977, but in 1980 the US returned to an organisation it had first joined in 1934 after a spat which had much to do with the ambitions and privileges accorded to US trade unions. All these were essentially preliminaries for a major case — the withdrawal from UNESCO — announced in 1984 and the later withdrawal from the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). It is the UNESCO case that is important since not only is UNESCO one of the big four UN specialised agencies, it also provides an insight into US policy towards the UN system as a whole. Happily, however, the Bush Administration has now returned to UNESCO which is heartening for the organisation and a welcome counter-intuitive action on the part of the US. But there was, as we can see, much ado before the happy ending as extensive studies of the case reveal (Coate 1988; Karns and Mingst 1990).

If the US were to withdraw from or take a lower profile in some or all of the principal organs of the UN, this would not necessarily imply a similar withdrawal or low profile in the specialised agencies since they have a separate membership, constitution, budget and secretariat. A precedent was set in the case of the ILO and the League.⁵ The question could therefore arise whether such participation *à la carte* would better suit the interests of the US as well as the well-being of the organisation rather than a constant sense of disgruntlement on all sides and a growing atmosphere of tit for tat.

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IT ALL WENT RATHER WELL AT THE BEGINNING FOR THE "BIG THREE" WHO WERE THE SPONSORS OF THE UN SYSTEM. But the halcyon days do not last. By the early 1960s the characteristics of the early years of the UN had changed. A large number of newly-independent countries joined the organisation and the agenda then transformed to reflect their interests, namely development issues. These issues were pursued in a framework that enabled the newly-independent countries to play off the West against the Soviet Union. The Non-Aligned countries came to control the General Assembly, and with it the budget. A dilemma quickly became evident in that the majority had a great need for expanded UN programmes whereas the small minority of major donors considered the demands being made upon them as increasingly unacceptable. To a degree a compromise was reached, especially with the agencies in Geneva, whereby the Geneva Group, led by the US and the United Kingdom and supported by a number of other major donors, agreed with the Directors-General of the agencies about what their budget was likely to be. This suited all concerned to the extent that it provided an element of stability whereby the institutions could plan ahead. But it did not produce adequate resources, only those which the major donors were willing to provide. The UN system was also changed with the emancipation of Western Europe and Japan from American tutelage, both economically and politically, and by the eventual entry of the Chinese People's Republic into the organisation. These factors meant that the UN system was no longer an American world and matters came to a head over the Congo crisis in 1963 and Nikita Khrushchev's demand for a *Troika* (Abi-Saab 1978).

Gradually the UN became "a dangerous place" for the Americans, as Ambassador Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1978) described it. To navigate in such a place the US chose to use a financial rudder, if necessary to steer against the tide. It cannot be denied that there was much wrong with the UN, and that this was generally agreed, nor can it be denied that over the subsequent years, gradually but with increasing effectiveness, there was much that was put right.⁶ Nevertheless, the atmosphere had changed; there was provocation in demands and provocative responses. The 1970s and 1980s were not a happy time for the UN system with the resolutions on racism and Zionism, the far-reaching demands for a New International Economic Order and blind, negative responses from the likes of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. The kernels of truth and concern were buried on stony ground where they could not take root.

However, the determination of Mikhail Gorbachev to use the UN as a means to end the Cold War, which he hoped would then enable him to achieve reform in the Soviet Union, eventually received a positive response from the Western powers. This led to a new working relationship between the permanent members of the Security Council after 1986, leading to a genuine application of the notion of collective security in 1990 and 1991 when Iraq invaded and then annexed Kuwait. These were the sun-lit days when Germany was reunited, Europe was no longer the cockpit of global confrontation and the US President George Bush Senior was looking forward to a "new world order", acceptable to all. But this was not to last since the US and its principal allies in Europe began to drift apart so that open discussion of shared problems began declining and confrontation from entrenched positions began

increasing. The tit for tat that was so depressingly characteristic of the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s is now returning, although this time the chief protagonists are different. The list of issues is long and varied from the International Criminal Court to the environment, land mines, chemical and biological weapons, anti-missile defence, illegal behaviour, Iraq, Israel as well as related issues outside of the UN framework such as Galileo, Echelon and steel. There are as yet no blocs, but it is clear that neither the US nor the EU are willing to hide their differences and that others such as Japan, China, Russia and India are feeling increasingly less inclined to hide their aversions to the US on some key issues as well. Fortunately, there remains a great deal in common, although issues are increasingly coming to a head and not infrequently in the UN system. A touchstone issue is finance.

The UN financial issue has been cogently described in their respective monographs by Luck (1999) and Laurenti (2001). The willingness of the US to use its financial arrears to secure what it considers to be reform of the UN system generated a great deal of anger and irritation. However, it is worth remembering that the use of financial arrears as a political weapon was not an invention of the US. Indeed, both the Soviet Union and France used the financial question, and the possibility of the loss of vote in the General Assembly, as a tool to procure their requirements on issues related to the Congo question in the 1960s. At that time, Arthur Goldberg uttered a warning that what was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander in his famous reservation that,

we must make it crystal clear that if any Member can insist on making an exception to the principle of collective financial responsibility with respect to certain activi-

ties of the Organization, the United States reserves the same option to make exceptions if, in our view, strong and compelling reasons exist for doing so. There can be no double standard among the Members of the Organization (quoted in Luck 1999:236).

Clearly, then as now, the question was not only a legal issue but also, and primarily, a political one. There is, however, a difference between France and the Soviet Union in the early 1960s and the US since the 1970s. Neither France nor the Soviet Union have continued to use the financial weapon, whereas the US has. It has therefore undermined its position because there is no guarantee that, if whatever is contingent upon the US paying its arrears or its assigned quota is accepted, then this will be the last of it. To turn Kissinger's remark on its head, who could we ring up in the US to give us firm long-term assurances that an agreement now will be a final and once-for-all agreement? Who can be sure that such agreements will stick? If we cannot have that certitude why should we bother making the concessions to achieve the agreement? Why should we not give up on the US? Why should we not conceive of the UN in a different way from one in which the US is central?

Nevertheless reforms, and not merely changes, have taken place in the UN system. Even in the second Reagan Administration, US Ambassador to the UN Vernon Walters told Congress that

The reforms respond particularly to the concerns expressed by the United States over the past years ... We must now demonstrate our support for the reform effort and for the United Nations by fulfilling our obligation to pay our assessed contributions, or risk having reform set aside (quoted in Alger et al. 1995:422).

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This was not enough to stop the atmosphere from deteriorating. As the US has attempted to pay the piper only if it plays American tunes, the cumulative reaction has been summarised by Luck (1999:215, 246):

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These unilateral demands ... have not been well received by the other member states, which resent such strong-armed tactics ... Many delegations have come to question the sincerity of the U.S. calls for reform and to wonder — tactfully in public and pointedly in private — whether there are deeper political motivations for American actions ... To the consternation of its severest critics, the U.N. not only has withstood these financial challenges, it has largely retained its popularity with the American public and with other member states. At the same time, the withholdings have made the United States look weak.⁷

These sentiments have led to petty, but hurtful responses. The US lost its “permanent” place on the Human Rights Commission, the Drugs Commission and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. It lost the leadership of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and its failure to get its way on questions such as setting up the International Criminal Court leads to provocative applause. No longer are others afraid to show and vent their feelings.

Perhaps it is time to change the piper and thereby to change the tune. The EU has a great interest in the well-being of the UN system, and our failure to act together in that framework has been lamentably evident on many occasions. Nevertheless, it is a framework within which we increasingly act together, and more than that, act as one. The UN system can become a vehicle, among others,

through which the EU can determine and exercise its global personality and vocation. Not only are the UN specialised agencies vital cogs in the global wheel, they are also *fora* through which global problems can be broached. It is not in our interest to let them wither on the vine. The first thing that the EU can do is to remove the financial threat to the UN, in concert with others. If the US is unwilling or unable to pay its dues then they can be paid by the EU, perhaps acting as an entity. In other words, the EU itself would be an institutional donor. Of course, it would help if the burden were also to be shared by others. Moreover, if the US feels the present system of assessment is unfair, then the system can be changed. While the US might balk at an assessment of 25 percent of the budget, it is perhaps relevant to bear in mind that, collectively, the EU provides 40 percent, and in some aspects a sum considerably higher than this. In the UN’s very first year of operation the US contribution was assessed at 49.86 percent of the budget. There is no reason why the EU should not follow this example if it means that the UN can actually get on with the job for which it was designed, rather than stumble from trying to meet one element of American blackmail after another. Again there is weighted voting in a number of important elements of the UN system, either from a political or financial point of view, for example in the Security Council and the IMF. As weights change so will influence. But we should also remember that the amounts of currency involved are not great in terms of the national budgets of major powers. The return may be great and, even if it is not, the loss would not insuperable — it is but a small risk investment in financial terms. What is more, if the EU is providing 50 percent of the budget then it would be appropriate to base that budget on euros rather than dollars.

The sums are not large in that the regular budget is reputed to be less than that of New York City's Fire Department. Even a major peacekeeping operation such as that in Cambodia only cost USD 3 billion, which is only a small proportion of a national budget for education or health in a major EU country (McDermott 2001).

The UN system is in need of protection. Its house still requires a good deal of putting into order but it also needs protection from the bad debts of its largest single funder. An informal UN-PC, in alliance with a Geneva group, now to be chaired by the EU and Japan rather than the US and the United Kingdom, would fulfil this role. Its members would be those of the Security Council, together with members of the G8 which are not on the Security Council, as well as Brazil, Argentina and Mexico from the Americas, Nigeria, South Africa and Egypt from Africa as well as India and Indonesia from Asia. The US would be part of this group free, as it saw fit, to drop in but not to disrupt by blackmail, foot-dragging or pretensions to veto what would otherwise be a consensus. The purpose of the Caucus would be to facilitate the working of the system in its entirety. In some issue areas this is already fitfully the case, for example the environment.

This does not mean an exclusion of the US but rather a taking over of its responsibilities, and especially those that it has manifestly failed to perform, particularly in fulfilling its legal obligations. Moreover, if the US wishes to rejoin the mainstream, which surely is in its interests, then the door is forever open. If the US wants a system of the UN *à la carte*, then this is equally available. The latter is clearly not a desirable outcome for anyone, but neither is the present situation. For the EU such an approach would be a major challenge over which it could flounder or indeed collapse as a political entity,

but the challenge of being a global actor establishing a global identity and a global role is not one from which the EU can flinch. Perhaps the UN could be part of the making of the EU as well as the EU being an element in the reformulation of the UN. Is it overly sanguine to point out that while the process of European integration has seen many setbacks,⁸ nevertheless one step backwards has usually been followed by two steps forwards in the fullness of time. Moreover, in looking to the restructuring of the UN the difficulties in matching aspirations, role, rhetoric, interests and performance are not restricted to the EU, they are also at the centre of American unilateralism, exceptionalism and multilateralism. No one is indispensable, so that America in, America out, or any point in between, whatever the desirabilities, is a relevant question.

ACADEMICS AND POLITICIANS IN THE UNITED STATES

EVERY POLITICIAN HAS HIS ACADEMIC AND EVERY ACADEMIC HAS HIS POLITICIAN IN THE SENSE THAT THERE IS USUALLY A BROAD CONGRUENCE OF VIEWS THAT OVERLAP BETWEEN THE TWO WORLDS OF "TRUTH" AND "POWER". Any choice of politicians and academics, given the wide range of views about the relationship between the US and international organisation in general, and the UN in particular, is bound to be eclectic. Most academics in the US who write about international organisation do so because they have a notion, however inchoate, that international organisation is a good thing despite its weaknesses and errors (except perhaps for some think tanks which are *parti pris*). Politicians who have to deal with the daily inconveniences of multilateral diplomacy in the framework of an

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international organisation, while they may on reflection be mindful of the benefits of the larger picture, nevertheless suffer the slings and arrows of daily misfortune. Public opinion, on the other hand, appears to be broadly supportive of international organisation, but this is not very engaged in the sense that other priorities are far higher.

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In his recent volume, Luck (1999; see also Lyons 1999) indicates a consensus of leading students of the UN that the US has in some way lost control of the decision-making process on international organisations. Let us not forget that the US President has to work in concert with the Congress. The Congress, however, has a domestic-oriented agenda and can often be hijacked by powerful Senators at the head of a single-issue constituency. Luck (1999:7) identifies eight core themes in the domestic debate, which pass from generation to generation, without being resolved, (with the most fundamental and stubborn ones first):

- the notion of American exceptionalism and the difficulty of reconciling national power with the decision-making processes of global bodies.
- The preservation of national sovereignty in an increasingly interdependent world.
- Negative attitudes toward other countries, races, and social systems.
- The minority status in which the US frequently finds itself in international forums.
- The dilemmas involved in putting military forces at the disposal of global organisations.
- The extent to which national security interests and international commitments overlap.
- Persistent questions of UN reform and restructuring.
- Recurrent squabbles over burden sharing and the financing of international organisations.

Luck then comments, rather plaintively, that 'Most Americans believe in international organisations, but as a way of propagating American values, not of compromising them in order to get along with the majority' (*ibid.*).

Two other distinguished scholars in the field, Karns and Mingst (1990:311 *et seq.*), point to long-term advantages that may stay the hand of the US in that 'the absence of institutionalised ways of dealing with problems, of sharing burdens and costs, of creating norms and rules that bind other STATES would become increasingly expensive.' In a sense it could also be un-American since it would 'represent a rejection at the international level of processes at the core of American domestic politics: compromise, promotion of adherence to norms, and rules of law.' Karns and Mingst therefore suggest five strategies 'for more effective multilateral state-craft' which are 'closer co-operation with IGO' secretariats, greater use of transgovernmental networks, "power steering" through special committees, use of *ad hoc* multilateral groups, and enhanced training in multilateral diplomacy.' What these analyses do not take fully on board is the notion that there is no objection in principle to leadership from the US. *C'est le ton qui fait la musique* and the US appear to be tone-deaf. Leonard (1994:245) summed this up well when he stated that,

Leadership is ... much more than placing oneself at the head of a parade or delivering a stirring speech. It requires a sustained, government-wide effort to develop solutions and to nurse those solutions, without arrogance or coercion, through the tortuous process of gaining support for them from the entire international community.

On the other hand, even in its earliest days General Washington urged the US to be wary of Europe and Jefferson warned

of entangling alliances. But for the US to stumble from isolationism to being isolated is a very different matter, not only for the US but for others too. While the US can bring much to the UN system, it can also benefit greatly from it, above all for an element of reality testing since otherwise their self-centredness may lead them, and us, to catastrophe.

Richard Stanley is a denizen of that almost uniquely American world of foundations that encourage research into, and foster discussion about, the work of international organisations. The Stanley Foundation is a major sponsor of discussion groups of “the great and the good”, and Stanley himself frequently makes keynote addresses at such seminars. In 1995 he saw

a major discontinuity in thinking. On one hand, US business and citizenry have never been more involved internationally. On the other hand, there are popular calls for reducing US government involvement outside our borders and shifting our attention almost exclusively to domestic issues (US-UN Relations 1995:8-9).

He also warned that in the event of a US abdication from UN leadership, others, who would not necessarily be supportive of US interests, might step in and co-opt the organisation. In addition, he noted that in 1995 just over half of the regular budget procurement took place in the US (US-UN Relations 1995:29).

Stanley’s view, however, is that of a liberal and his position is not close to that of many Ambassadors or Ministers such as Daniel Moynihan, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Alan Keyes, John Bolton and others. For example, Ambassador Charles Lichtenstein told the UN Host Committee in 1983 that if they did not like the way they were treated by the US, they could lump it or leave it in that they should ‘seriously consider removing themselves and this organisation from the soil of the United

States’ in which case ‘we will put no impediment in your way and we will be at dockside bidding you a fond farewell as you set off into the sunset’ (quoted in Luck 1999:64). But the “daddy of them all” in putting a strong and sceptical American face to the UN and all its works is Senator Jesse H. Helms. On one occasion, after listing a number of cases in which the US participated in UN operations, Helms (2000-2001:31) continued:

In none of these instances, however, did the US ask for or receive the approval of the UN to “legitimize” its actions. And yet the secretary-general now declares that approval by the UN Security Council is the “sole source of legitimacy on the use of force” in the world. It is a fanciful notion that free peoples need to seek the approval of an international body (a quarter of whose members are totalitarian dictatorships ...) to lend support to nations struggling to break the chains of tyranny ... The UN has no power to grant or decline legitimacy to such actions. They are INHERENTLY legitimate.

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Helms then went on to elaborate on the issue of legitimacy:

The American people will never accept the secretary-general’s claim that the UN is the “sole source of legitimacy on the use of force” in the world. True, the U.S. Senate ratified the UN Charter fifty years ago. Yet in so doing, America did not cede ONE SYLLABLE of its sovereignty to the UN. Under the American system, when international treaties are ratified they simply become domestic U.S. law. As such, they carry no greater or lesser weight than any other domestic U.S. law. Treaty obligations can be superseded by a simple act of Congress ... This is why Americans look with alarm upon the UN’s claim to a monopoly on international moral legitimacy. They see this as a threat to the freedoms of the

American people, a claim of political authority over America and its elected leaders (Helms 2000-2001:32).

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This gives a real flavour of the Republican right's position, a view which cannot but resonate among the current occupants of the White House. Being at the receiving end of policies derived from such a perspective, former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali reflected that diplomacy 'is perceived by an imperial power as a waste of time and prestige and a sign of weakness' (1999:198). Nevertheless, as former US Ambassador Richard Gardner argued, 'if Congress exercises its constitutional right to violate a treaty ... the United States still has a legal obligation to other countries; and our refusal to live up to our commitments can have legal consequences.' Again, 'if America does not live up to its obligations, then any nation would be free to violate any commitment made to us' (quoted in Luck 1999:242-3).

This is perhaps an appropriate context in which to return to the theme of American exceptionalism, unilateralism and multilateralism and what it means for the rest of us.

THE UNITED STATES AS A SPECIAL CASE?

AS MEMBERS OF A SOCIETY, WE ALL REJOICE IN HAVING MUCH IN COMMON WITH OTHERS IN OUR SOCIETY BUT, AT THE SAME TIME, WE RECOGNISE THAT WE ARE DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS. We also rejoice in the differences since both the commonalities and the differences make us what we are: they are the foundation stones of our identity. We also recognise the differences in others and how they cherish those differences, again within a context of commonalities shared univer-

sally. Unfortunately, it is frequently the case that to believe that one is different is also to believe that one is better. Certainly, being different may be better for us, but the US has a tendency to believe not only that their differences are better for them, but that the American way is better for everybody else as well. In other words, they are a special case. This is not just a question of military might or economic power, this is a view that has manifested itself throughout the existence of the US. In short, for many Americans it is a cultural norm. This norm is conceived by some to give rights, and by a smaller number duties as well, for the US. There is a belief that the rest of us should acknowledge this special status, as it constitutes a pinnacle of civilisation. It is this gut feeling which fuels the difficulties between the US and the UN. It rears up even in academic writing, such as that by Luck (1999:292-93):

The first step toward bridging the divide is to recognise that the United States, for all its claims to exceptionalism, is not the problem, or at least not the whole problem. It should be, and often has been, a big part of the solution ... they should realize that when they call out for U.S. leadership, it is inconsistent to then prescribe how this must be defined and expressed tactically, programmatically, and strategically.

Luck seems to think that if the US is to lead then it should have *carte blanche* to do it "its way". How does the claim of exceptionalism sit in our contemporary multilateral world characterised by complex interdependence? Can the US have its cake and eat it? What are the conditions in which leadership can be legitimised and what is the role of the UN therein? Ruggie (1998:109) has had a stab at defining what multilateralism means and comments that,

multilateralism is an institutional form which coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of "generalized" principles of conduct that is, principles which specify appropriate conduct for classes of actions, without regard to the particularistic interests of the parties or the strategic exigencies that may exist in any specific occurrence.

Cronin (2001:112-13), for his part, argues that a hegemonic state is constrained by

its responsibilities and obligations to provide leadership for the system as a whole. Within the context of a hegemonic system, great power also means great responsibility ... Having played a key role in constructing a universal set of institutions and rules that would organize and stabilize international politics, the hegemon is expected to adhere to them even in circumstances that may not be in its self-defined interests.

The same author then relates the theory to President Bush Senior's conception of the new world order and demonstrates the cross fertilisation necessary between American leadership and UN legitimation if success is to be achieved, and argues that the concept of US hegemony

required the active involvement of the UN, since [the US] lacks both the authority and the resources to act without approval or participation from the broader community. All of this not only assumed a degree of consensus among the great powers but also among a substantial portion of the smaller countries. For this, the legitimation of the UN was crucial (Cronin 2001:119).

The relationship between hegemony and legitimacy has also been picked up by Lebow and Kelly. The authors took Thucydides as their starting point and argued that

Thucydides' central insight about hegemony is as much psychological as it is material. It requires a concept of legitimacy that makes subordinate status acceptable to member states, their elites and peoples ... For hegemons to survive in the longer term, their leaders must be politically skilful and committed to a conception of metropolitan interests that values preservation of hegemony above short-term gains to be made by exploiting subjects or allies. Hegemony requires the prudent exercise of power (Lebow and Kelly 2001:603).

British Ambassadors to the UN are not normally forthright in their public criticism of the US but Sir John Weston was quoted on two occasions in 1997 to the effect that: 'American exceptionalism cannot mean being the exception to the laws everyone else has to obey' and 'you complain the UN doesn't do the job, but you don't pay the UN the sum you voted to do that job' (quoted in Luck 1999:15, 26). Weston's successor, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, asked Jesse Helms' Committee whether the US is

prepared to invest in a UN that will not realise its full potential without that investment? Like any good investment, it is going to carry some risk. But unless you take that risk, you will never get the higher return that you need in your own interests (quoted in The Future of US-UN Relations 2000).

The US does not seem to be interested in such returns. Perhaps it is indicative that the US is the only country not to caucus on a regular basis in the UN system. In caucus, domestic American political skills would be at a premium. Instead, it has been noted that

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on issue after issue ... the US took the position that it either got its way or it went on its way ... The Clinton administration had said it was "multilateral when we can, unilateral when we must". The Bush administration seemed to be ready to reverse that proposition (Woolacot 2001).

CONCLUSION

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IT IS EVIDENT THERE IS A LONG-STANDING TRADITION OF MULTILATERALISM IN THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE US AND THE UN SYSTEM. However, as the world has changed, and not always to the liking of the US, emphasis has moved over several decades towards an unilateral approach with multilateral support, that is to say that the US has an increasing tendency to decide unilaterally what it wishes to do and seek support from a coalition of the willing where that is necessary, but to proceed on its own if it must. There is, therefore, no real commitment to multilateralism whose basis must be a sense of solidarity of shared values, of shared goals and the confident expectation that the partners will not only work together now but will also be able to work together in most foreseeable circumstances. That is the sort of multilateralism which exists within the EU. Europeans have learned the virtues of multilateralism the hard way. They can see great virtue in doing things in this way, not only on a European scale but also on a wider scale. For the US, the underlying premise is that the American experiment is exceptional and that, in order to protect it, the US must act where necessary in a unilateral manner.

The American experience is less one of solidarity and more one of individualism. Individuals can be bound together in a posse and work together in the pursuit of villains, but they join as individuals and as a reflection of their own individual

interest. Time and again US politicians stress their self-interest and the notion of the US being an exception. The UN can therefore be a bugbear, but one that has its uses in the pursuit of American interests. The conception of a common interest is subsumed under the American interest. To be sure, an element of the common interest forms an integral part of the US national interest, but the succouring of that common interest takes the form, at best, of multilateralism *à la carte*.

In a recent policy paper of the Development and Peace Foundation (Hamm *et al.* 2002), three scenarios were postulated. The first takes as its premise the US as a global super power with a policy of unilateralism in an interdependent world. This premise is likely to lead to confrontation not only with the Third World but also with China and, eventually, the EU. In such a world, the UN would have little role to play except in functional areas, which would themselves become less efficient because of their politicisation. The second scenario is that of an emergent power cartel within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Here, the UN would be an important meeting ground between the rich and poor, since the US would be in close concert with the EU and Japan. There would be a much stronger element of multilateralism and doubtless some confrontation on the North-South divide, unless constructive engagement from both sides of that divide becomes the order of the day. The third scenario, which the German team advocated as their preferred one, was a situation in which there was a conscious attempt to move in the direction of global solidarity in the form of a world domestic policy. In this instance, the UN, as it opens up to global civil society, would be a major vehicle for global governance. The biggest countries of the OECD would then be-

come the partners of the third world. In this case, it would be a very different UN from that which was served up by the Big Three at San Francisco in 1945.

At the present time there is a quickening tendency of the US to move towards the first scenario, which would make the UN largely redundant except in its functional areas. Of course, constructive engagement with the US and participation in its domestic debates are an imperative, but it is difficult to be sanguine about the outcome of that debate. An increasingly bitter confrontation both within the Western world, particularly between the EU and the US, and beyond, is not a desirable outcome. There is, however, a growing tendency in the UN system that if you cannot proceed with the Americans then you should proceed without them, after all due efforts have been made to bring them aboard. The US is increasingly isolating itself, however, the door will remain open. But in the meantime the UN is a forum through which those who wish to work in a multilateral way can do so, perhaps under the watchful eye of a UN-PC in the hope that the relations between the UN and the US will be one of benign neglect rather than of acrimonious confrontation.

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NOTES:

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1 Within the scope of this paper, the generic term "Europeans" applies to citizens and governments of the present member-states of the European Union (EU).

2 Such as the Universal Postal Union (UPU), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

3 United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), and the ILO.

4 See an interesting analysis by Dworkin (2002).

5 When in 1934 the US joined the ILO, President Roosevelt noted that insofar as non-political questions were concerned 'the United States is co-operating more openly in the fuller utilization of the League machinery than ever before' (quoted in Luck, 1999:199).

6 As we have seen above, for example, the Geneva Group helped to manage one difficult problem.

7 Even a number of hard-line opponents of the UN as they saw it, such as Jeane Kirkpatrick, former US Ambassador to the UN, and the Republican Congressman Jesse Helms, recognised that withholding payments had dysfunctional elements (Luck 1999:245).

8 Such as the failure of the European Army and Britain's difficulties in coming to its role in the world.

9 Intergovernmental organisations.

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