

GREAT DECISIONS

GDTV SHOW #1 UN Reform: Pipe Dream of Possibility?

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>> Begleiter: It has been said the U.N. has no vested interest in the status quo. Still, most agree the world body has become stuck on critical issues related to security, development, human rights, and its own internal organization. How can the 60-year-old United Nations retool itself to better meet the global challenges of the 21st century? U.N. reform: pipe dream or possibility? Coming up next on Great Decisions 2006.

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>> Begleiter: Created after World War II to bolster collective security, promote human rights, and foster development, the United Nations has arguably done as much or more than any individual government to alleviate suffering around the world due to war, poverty, disease, and natural disaster. Its six principal organs are charged with combating the most pressing global challenges of the day, an inherently altruistic mission dependent on the political, military, and financial support of its 191 member states. The organization's idealistic goals, however, have long made it an easy target for critics. The U.N. was built--and its bureaucracy organized--under the Cold War rules of a bipolar political world. Today, with the Cold War a distant memory, a number of high-profile scandals and deep-seated organizational failures have expanded the chorus of U.N. critics. Supporters and detractors alike now agree the world body must implement change or risk the same fate as its predecessor, the League of Nations: irrelevance and eventual decay. That looming ultimatum, underscored by a U.S. administration frequently at odds with the U.N., has led Secretary-General Kofi Annan to call for the most sweeping reforms of the world body since its inception in 1945. But after much advanced billing, many proposed reforms fell flat at last year's World Summit, where history's largest gathering of world leaders failed to agree on key issues related to fighting poverty, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, and human rights abuses worldwide. Despite years of discussion, diplomats also failed to deal with expansion of the decision-making security

council as well as administrative reforms in the wake of the poorly managed Oil for Food Program in Iraq. Some American legislators are again threatening to withhold dues if the U.N. fails to get off the dime and implement significant reform. The U.S. currently provides \$2.4 billion a year, roughly 1/4 of the U.N.'s operating budget. Can the threat of irrelevance reverse 60 years of bureaucratic inertia? Does the secretary-general have the authority to implement much-needed change? And with security council vetoes still in the hands of post-World War II powers, is there a deficit of democracy at the U.N. that needs to be addressed? Joining us to discuss the state of reform at the United Nations are Sir Emyr Jones Parry, the United Kingdom's ambassador to the U.N., and Edward Luck, director of the Center on International Organization at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. Welcome to you both.

>> Thank you.

>> Begleiter: So if the U.N. structure was built at the end of World War II and designed and honed, fine-tuned during decades of cold war, why should the structure remain the same today as it was during a very different climate in the world? Ambassador?

>> It's a very fair question, but I think the reality is that the charter establishing the U.N., what it stands for, has stood the test of time remarkably well. I think we've just concluded that the charter itself doesn't require amendment. What does need change--and badly does need change--is the structure of the U.N. And what I mean by that: the secretariat, the way it functions. Because it was planned for another age. What we now need to do is do what governments, what companies all do, the process of modernization, to actually have a secretariat ready, prepared, and talented-- equipped--for today's challenges. The second thing we need to do is make sure that we have the right mix of policies so that we are coping with today and tomorrow's challenges and not with yesterday's. So that means we need to be able to cope with terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, poverty. The hard issues which actually confront mankind, we need to do better at them. And the other thing, I think, which needs substantial improvement is the way the U.N. delivers. It's the case at the moment if you go around West Africa that most countries would say they're well served by the U.N. But one can't help feeling that the U.N. could do even better. We could have less duplication. We could have a more immediate response to disaster, that, effectively, the U.N.-- on behalf of all of us-- could have a better shot at coping with the global challenges we confront.

>> Begleiter: Ed Luck, what needs to change, if anything?

>> Well, first of all, I think we should recognize that the U.N. has proven to be very adaptable. It really is quite a resilient institution. If one of the founders were to come back now 60 years later, sure, the basic structure or the basic institutional relationships would be quite familiar, because the founders didn't want it to change a lot, so they set it very much in stone in terms of the permanent members and the veto, et cetera. But at the other hand, if they look at the range of the things that the organization does, where it spends its money, what it puts its emphasis on, they probably would barely recognize it. For example, peacekeeping wasn't in the charter. That's now the biggest business of the

organization. Human rights was mentioned but not nearly in the operational kinds of ways that the organization has it now, the emphasis on development. In many ways, this is really quite a different organization. I very much agree that it's got to keep looking at the new priorities, but even since the attacks of 9/11/01, the U.N. has done much more on counterterrorism than one ever could have imagined. It's doing work on overseeing elections, preparing elections. That's nowhere in the charter. The U.N. is trying to prepare countries for democracy. Democracy isn't even mentioned in the charter, so I think the organization is changing. I very much agree with the kinds of priorities that the ambassador pointed out, particularly in terms of the management culture or probably the lack of management culture inside of the organization. And there has to be real transparency, real accountability. We should expect more from the organization. And we have a new secretary-general coming up in a year or so. You know, perhaps he or she will bring some new ideas. And there will be further change in the organization. But we shouldn't think that it's just ossified as one organization that hasn't changed in any way. It has changed a lot, just as the world has changed.

>> Begleiter: Perhaps because of the problem Ed was just mentioning, there just aren't enough people in the right places to do it. Should the U.N. be equipped in some way differently so that it can actually do something without having to wait for the governments that make up its membership to make a decision?

>> Well, I think there are a lot of questions in what you said there.

>> Begleiter: Yes, there are.

>> Let me disaggregate them a little bit. In terms of, say, humanitarian relief, coping with man-made disasters or naturally occurring disasters, yes, there's a need for the U.N. to have a greater capacity to act rapidly, decisively, with the resources, and do the job. I don't dispute that at all. And we're trying to address that. But that's part of this question of how can you better do the things you are doing. But if you looked at--you mentioned--health. The W.H.O., for example, the World Health Organization, has put in place substantial improvements in the last 30 years: the eradication of smallpox, the fact that we were close to eradication of polio: diseases which, 50 years ago, actually killed lots of people. That effort, taking place day in, day out, what is attempted within the millennium development goals to cope with disease, I think, that's got nothing to do with the decision making. That has to do, essentially, with bringing assets to bear on the problem. And day in and day out, the truth is, the U.N. does really rather well. My problem about the delivery is, if you take, for example, peace building, if you go to Liberia and see what is the interaction of—

>> Begleiter: Excuse me. You used "peace building," not peacekeeping.

>> I'm saying peace building. That is coping with a situation--you've come out of conflict. You've put peacekeepers on the ground. What you're trying to do is build up the institutions of rule of law, government, coping with economic development, actually trying to ensure the security of people. How do we do that in a way that we've looked

after child soldiers, the problems of women, actually paying police, whole myriad of issues? Are we joined up enough there to deliver the whole intervention of the global community? And my answer is, we're not. We must do much better. Why should we do better? Well, the answer is, it's partly that if you get countries to a point where they're economically sustainable, it's in our interest economically. But more importantly, I think, there's a moral issue; there's a security issue. We can not afford to have another Afghanistan come. So the prospect of states which might otherwise fail is one that we should be very vigilant against today for all sorts of reasons. So making sure that the U.N. can do better is part of it. Is the problem too much democracy? I'm not sure it's too much democracy so much as a lack of organization, the right structures, and political will by governments. And, of course, if you look back at the areas where the U.N. didn't succeed in the last 15 years, they are, on the whole, not faults of the U.N. itself, but they are where the nations of the U.N. failed to come together to tackle and resolve difficulties.

>> Begleiter: Isn't that always going to be the problem with the U.N., though? No matter what kind of reforms are instituted, it's the member nations that have the power, the money, the equipment, the supplies, the personnel to make things happen.

>> It's not so much the problem. It's real life. That's how it is. The U.N. is a collection of governments, and the question is, how do you galvanize governments so that collectively they do what they ought to do? I think in the Fall Summit, there were signs that governments were prepared to address that. For example, in this concept of the responsibility to protect, governments actually said, "Okay, the primary responsibility for the welfare of the citizens is their own government." If, on the other hand, government is not able or not willing to protect its citizens, we--the international community--accept that we have a responsibility to intervene to protect. Now, that's a big step from where we were, say, 15 years ago.

>> Begleiter: Ed, is there anything that you would suggest in terms of improving the delivery of services by the U.N., including, perhaps, even the delivery of military services when necessary?

>> I think two things. One, the U.N. is a system, but it's not a very systematic system. There's a scattering of agencies doing all sorts of different things, a highly decentralized kind of a system. Very little power at the center. The security council itself doesn't command the agencies. It doesn't command money. That's handled by the general assembly. So the question of who makes the decision and who can make that decision stick is a very difficult one for the organization. You know, we've been talking about coherence, coordination, integration, the term "joined up" for as long as I can remember. I've been around the U.N. 35 years, and this has always been a problem for the organization, because people were worried that somehow the political center of the organization would somehow taint the professional, functional agencies, and therefore you needed some distance. So that, I think, is a very big problem. The other problem is that whatever the security council says, and even though it can take action under chapter seven that's mandatory on member states, they really don't.

>> Begleiter: Chapter seven is the one invoking use of force.

>> Exactly, exactly, which is historically unique. There had been nothing like that in the past, and, obviously, the League of Nations had nothing like that. Very, very special in terms of international law. But I must say, over the-- over the years, many member states seem to think they can still sort of pick and choose. So turning the words of the security council into the deeds of the member states is often a very imprecise operation at best. I mean, certainly, since the end of the Cold War, the council's much more active, obviously getting into things like responsibility to protect. I think it's a major advance, but we should recognize that historically we're still moving slowly in this direction. And member states find a lot of reasons not to respond to the council. And that's often very worrisome, because the council's credibility doesn't depend just on who sits around the table. It depends very much on whether member states and other actors, including armed groups and terrorists and others, pay attention to what the council says.

>> Begleiter: Well, both of you have talked about the security council. Let's talk about it for a minute. That was set up also at the end of World War II. It represents the post-World War II powers. Those powers are in very different political and military and economic situations today than they were, you know, in 1945, 1949. Does it make sense to have five nations with veto power who represented power in 1949 acting that way in 2005? Shouldn't there be a change in who has the veto on the security council? Ambassador?

>> Well, I'd say there's no need for change, but I would, wouldn't I? Quite self-evidently.

>> Begleiter: You've got a veto.

>> We've got a veto, but again, let me stress: The United Kingdom hasn't used the veto or threatened to use the veto for 15 years or more. And in reality, we didn't use it very much when we had it. So when—

>> Begleiter: So I take it you'd be willing to give it up now.

>> I think there's a problem about amending the charter: once you get into that, you open Pandora's box. And the question is where. Certainly, the British government wants to expand the security council. We believe today's security council ought to be bigger. That follows the size of the membership as a whole, now 191. That proportionately means the security council should be at least 25. It's also the case that the African continent, in our view, deserves two permanent members. And—

>> Begleiter: With vetoes?

>> Well, let me come back to the question of vetoes.

>> Begleiter: All right.

>> Looking at Japan, India, Germany, Brazil, we think, again, they have strong cases to be there as permanent members. The claim about the veto is, you know, on the one hand, would it be better if there weren't a veto at all? Which a number of people would argue. The difficulty is, I don't think you're going to get approval for a charter member to take away the veto. What I do think most of the members feel is that if you enlarge the security council and if you take, for example, six more permanent members and give each the veto, if you ended up with a council of, say, 25, of whom 11 had the veto, you are, I think, logically making it less likely that you'll come to a decision. And the view of the members would be, "Well, it may be an anachronism that the veto exists, but let's not perpetuate the anachronism by giving it to others." Now, I would simply say I defend the UK position on the council, not because of the situation in 1945 or whatever. I defend it on the basis of the performance of the United Kingdom in the United Nations and on the security council, where day in, day out, with, I think, a very talented team, we do justice to our role on the security council.

>> Begleiter: Ed, you're maybe more free to say what needs to be said if you feel this way, but the ambassador couldn't possibly sit there and say, "I'll give up the veto." Should France and Britain continue to hold U.N. security council vetoes, and Russia, for that matter? If the Ambassador's point is right-- don't expand the number of vetoes-- whose veto should be given up, and to whom should it be given?

>> Well, this is one of these issues that where you stand depends very much on where you sit. As an American, I do not favor a council of 25 or 26 that they're talking about now. Whether you have more permanent members, whether you have vetoes or not, it just won't work very well. I don't know of a single intergovernmental body in the U.N. system that's become stronger and more effective as it's become bigger. The rule around the U.N. is, you enlarge bodies until they no longer work. And if you do that to the security council, then the U.N. is in very serious trouble. If anything, I'd like to see a smaller security council, not a larger one. Now, whether these five permanent members should be there forever, should they have the veto? Obviously, it's an anomaly, but it's very difficult to change, because, among other things, they have a veto over giving up the veto in terms of the amendment process in the charter. So they're not going to do it. If I could pick the countries that had a veto, I'd be quite happy, obviously, to have the UK, a good ally, very similar views to the U.S. France, some days yes; other days, maybe no. Obviously, China is often problematic. Russia is, in many ways, a state of the past. So, you know, one might mix it up differently. But the claim of these new G4: Brazil, India, Germany, and Japan. I don't think their claim is all that good, quite frankly. Three of the four of them have declining GDP, a gross national product, compared to the amount in the world. Three of the four therefore also have declining contributions to the U.N. in terms of their assessment scale. The only one of the four that's going up is India. They all have major problems in their region. They don't represent the other countries in their region. They nominated themselves. Now, someday, it might make sense to have a security council where regions were somehow represented or the members of the council--be they permanent or nonpermanent--felt an obligation to reach out to other countries in the region or elsewhere and try to collect their views somehow and see that they're

represented. That would make some sense, but it's not democratic to say that countries nominate themselves and claim to represent the world. That's not democracy, and that's not representation.

>> Begleiter: Just a few moments ago, you were saying, though, that there are many countries in the world or "some countries," I think you said, who don't respect the security council because they're not represented on it, or they feel they're underrepresented.

>> I didn't say it was why they didn't respect it.

>> Begleiter: Well, you said they don't respect it because of the way it's structured. Would it make a difference if that were changed?

>> Well, I think that some of the countries that want change in the council want it to be less active, less interventionist, and certainly less dominated by the United States. I mean, I think there is an underlying problem here that we haven't addressed; that's the power relationship among states in the world outside of the security council, outside of the general assembly, outside of the U.N. altogether. Because when the decision-making bodies within the U.N. no longer reflect the realities of power and capacity outside, then you have you real problems.

>> Begleiter: Isn't that the case now?

>> Well, that's one argument for changing the council's composition. But on the other hand, I think many of these countries feel that since the end of the Cold War, the council's been too active. It's had too much unanimity, and it's too much in terms of the intervention in some countries' affairs. For example, India and Brazil are two countries that very much oppose the idea of the responsibility to protect, and therefore why should they be permanent members? And why, in particular, should they have a veto if they're going to oppose the very doctrine that the ambassador has just said is very important, the secretary-general says is very important? And if they oppose that whole direction, what's the point of having them? So, you know, I think what we have are candidates to be members of the security council. What we don't have are platforms. They're not telling us what decisions in the council would they change, what decisions would be different in the future. How would the council be a more effective security body? Because everyone talks about equity and democracy and representation, and therefore let's change who sits around the table. They don't talk about what kind of security council do they want at the end of the day, and why is that going to be better for everyone's security?

>> Begleiter: Let me ask you this. You both talked about delivery. We've now talked about decision making. Should the U.N. have a military capability that it could use on its own, without having to sort of beg for peacekeepers or intervention forces in one way or another? Or is that something that's simply a non-starter?

>> I'd rather come at the problem differently. There's undoubtedly a need for peacekeepers. At the moment, the U.N. has got something like 80,000 out there doing the job day in, day out.

>> Begleiter: But they're not U.N. They belong to countries.

>> They go under the U.N. flag, and they wear blue berets. Of course, they come from true contributing countries. You're dead right. But what do we need? We need more rapid reaction capability. As I look at the problems, for example, that happened in Rwanda, part of the difficulty in Rwanda was that at the right moment, the U.N. didn't have the level of resources it needed to be robust enough. I think we demonstrated in Sierra Leone how--with a small but very tough force--you could actually bring order and discipline. And after that, peacekeeping became possible. You need to be able to draw down those resources from somewhere. I--what I'd much prefer to see is that a capability is more ready and at short notice-- say ten days' notice to move-- could be deployed for the United Nations. Now, I think the way the European Union is going, that is possible, in that the union is talking in terms of what they call a battle group, which is about 1,600 men ready at ten day's notice to go out and do robust fighting. Having that capability to actually say, "Okay, the United Nations is worried about what's happening in country X. Let's deploy and stop the problem now." That's what we need. But the prospect of setting up what would be, in effect, a U.N. army with all the paraphernalia and the inefficiencies of a multinational military organization--not in the sense that NATO is--but which would have to have due regard to geographic balance, that the command structure would also have to also have similar regard to, I think it would be close to a nightmare. What you see when you look at troop contributors is, it's a relatively small group of countries in a military theater are doing the job under a command and control which is evident, practical, and works and not some bureaucratic thing which, my fear would be, that it would be very difficult to deploy. Let me give you my final argument. It is that NATO today has about 1.5 million troops, notionally, within the countries comprising NATO, and if it, today, could deploy at short notice 9% of those, I would be amazed. What we have to do is make better use of the forces we have, not to start setting up something different.

>> Begleiter: Ed, do you have a final thought, perhaps, on the question of military power for the U.N.?

>> Well, I very much agree with what the ambassador said in the sense that to create an independent U.N. military force would be equivalent to creating a world government, and that, I don't think-- You know, maybe some day, we'll be at that stage. At this point, I certainly, personally, would not favor that. I think, not only are there enormous logistical problems-- for example, airlift, sealift, how do you get them there-- but real problems, for example, if they get into trouble. It's very nice to say we're going to have these little U.N. forces going to go out there and solve the problems, but what if the problems are greater than they anticipated? What if they get into trouble? Who's going to be, you know, the cavalry in reserve? It's going to have to come from one of the major powers. Now, if the major powers or some of the major powers are committed to doing something about a

situation, then you don't need a U.N. force. It would just get in the way. And if the major powers are not committed to backing up any U.N. force, and everyone says, "Oh, well, that's just the U.N. We don't have responsibility," then I think you have a real troublesome, risky situation. So, you know, I don't think we need it if there's a will, and if there's not the will, it's too dangerous to have it. You know, where do you, for example, station them? And let's say you have three crises at once, which is the way they come, instead of just one. Which one do they go to? What kind of redundancy do you have? What kind of intelligence do you have? What kind of air power do you have? And we should remember, in San Francisco 60 years ago, they couldn't deal with this issue. The charter says that the question of command of any U.N. forces will be decided subsequently. 60 years later, we still haven't gotten to subsequently. They also said that countries, under article 43, should provide stand-by forces to be called up by the security council. Countries were to have individual agreements with the security council. Oddly enough, in the end, none of the countries wanted to sign those kinds of agreements. So you know, it's just a-- it's just a bridge we haven't been able to cross, and I don't think we should assume that we're at a point in history where we're willing to see the U.N. have an independent military capability.

>> Begleiter: Edward Luck, director of the Center for International Organization at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, thank you for being with us. And Ambassador Emyr Jones Parry, thank you very much as well. The United Kingdom's ambassador to the United Nations. And thank you as well for joining us on Great Decisions 2006. I'm Ralph Begleiter.

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