

## Who Leads the United Nations?

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Let me start by thanking the American Enterprise Institute for hosting this panel today.

The title is an interesting starting point for a discussion. I would think the answer differs depending on who you ask. My answer would be that no one “leads” the United Nations.

Certainly, the Secretary-General does not lead the organization. Not even Kofi Annan – described as a “secular pope” and “conscience of the world” by his admirers – was able to force the organization in a direction it was unwilling to go. Ban Ki-Moon is unlikely to be more successful than Annan.

Not even a permanent member of the Security Council, clearly the most powerful individual nations in the UN, can force the organization to adopt its agenda.

Based on my observations, the UN has 192 leaders – the member states – which means that it has no leader. Any organization of 192 generals and no privates is going to experience gridlock, but the UN exacerbates the problem by ignoring differences among nations.

This is most clearly illustrated by the fact that each member state has one vote in the General Assembly, despite vast differences in military power, population, geographical size, economic strength, and financial contributions to the organization. Under the parameters established by the Charter, U.N. member states are granted equal standing and privileges in the organization regardless of these real world disparities.

The UN operates under the theory that each UN member state abides by the founding principles of the organization and shares an equal desire to confront and overcome problems facing the world. This theory is evidently false.

The organization includes many members who do not respect the fundamental rights of their people. Disparate levels of development, geographic size and location, power and other characteristics ensure that members will disagree over the priority and urgency of various issues.

On matters that they care about, each member state seeks to “lead” the UN to adopt its position. On matters of substance, some member states inevitably oppose this effort. The chaos of conflicting priorities and demands does not, as with markets, transform into a spontaneous order leading to “a more efficient allocation of societal resources than any design could achieve” to borrow a phrase from Hayek. The result is often sly maneuvering and low-level conflict that undermines bold initiatives and virtually assures a lowest-common denominator outcome.

Leadership in this context requires coalitions of member states to move an agenda – the group with the most votes dominates and, by default, “leads” the organization.

This brings us to the groups mentioned in the announcement for this event. The most powerful and influential coalitions in the United Nations are the Group of 77, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Let me briefly describe each group:

- **[Slide]** The **Organization of the Islamic Conference** was established in 1969 to “strengthen solidarity and cooperation among Islamic States in the political, economic, cultural, scientific and social fields.” The OIC is also strongly focused on Israel and includes in its charter a pledge to “support of the struggle of the people of Palestine, to help them regain their rights and liberate their land.”
- **[Slide]** The **Non-Aligned Movement** was founded in 1961 to ensure “the national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of non-aligned countries” in their “struggle against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, Zionism, and all forms of foreign aggression, occupation, domination, interference or hegemony as well as against great power and bloc politics.” Ostensibly, the NAM sought to distance members from the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In reality, most NAM members were sympathetic, if not aligned, with the Soviet Union. The end of the Cold War brought an end to the original stated purpose of the NAM. In recent years, it has become most notable as a vehicle to disparage American policies led by Iran, North Korea, Sudan, Venezuela and current chairman Cuba.
- **[Slide]** The **Group of 77** was established in 1964 by 77 developing countries. The G-77 seeks to coordinate, articulate and promote the economic interests of developing countries by leveraging their “joint negotiating capacity on all major international economic issues within the United Nations system.” The G-77 offers resolutions and decisions in the General Assembly and its Committees and various UN bodies and specialized agencies. It also produces joint declarations and statements on UN reform.

I have shown you the maps, but let me now illustrate the membership in terms of the General Assembly. Under General Assembly rules, most decisions are made by simple majority. Decisions on important matters, such as admitting new members or approving the budget require approval by a two-thirds majority. Looking at the numbers it is very easy to see how these groups can use the leverage of their numbers to push or block various resolutions and reforms.

- **[Slide]** The G-77 now has 130 members and represents over 67 percent of the General Assembly.
- **[Slide]** The NAM has 118 members and represents about 61 percent of the General Assembly.
- **[Slide]** The OIC has 57 members and represents over 29 percent of the General Assembly.

If they vote as a bloc, the membership of the G-77 and the NAM alone are sufficient to pass resolutions in the General Assembly.

The OIC lacks the numbers of the G-77 and the NAM, although because most of its members are also members of these groups, the OIC can use those groups to advance its agenda. However, the OIC also asserts its agenda through its strong position in the African and Asian regional groups. There is a strong tendency in the UN for regions to vote together as a bloc. Members of the OIC represent a majority of the African regional group and just under half of the Asian group. The OIC uses its strong position in these groups to encourage them to support its agenda and also to get them to support regional candidates for various positions on UN bodies.

**[Slide]** I have described the OIC, the NAM, and the G-77 as distinct entities, but they in fact overlap in terms of membership as illustrated in the slide. Unsurprisingly, the groups also share

agendas. For instance, all three groups are hostile to Israel, oppose unilateral economic sanctions, demand increased economic transfers from developed countries, and resist critical UN reforms to increase accountability, oversight, and efficiency.

Let me provide a couple of examples of how these groups drive their agendas in the UN.

- **Undermining the Human Rights Council.** After years of disappointment, Secretary-General Kofi Annan characterized the UN Commission on Human Rights as a “shadow on the reputation of the United Nations” and called for it to be replaced. The General Assembly opposed efforts by the U.S. to have the new Human Rights Council apply membership criteria to keep human rights abusers from undermining its agenda as they had with the Commission. Critically, the new Council shifted proportional representation of regions from the Commission to the Council giving Africa and Asia a joint majority. This has dramatically increased the influence of groups like the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the OIC.

In its first year, the Council voted to end scrutiny of human rights practices in Belarus, Cuba, Iran, and Uzbekistan—all of which have long records of human rights abuses. Specifically, in March 2007 the Council discontinued consideration of the human rights situations in Iran and Uzbekistan under the 1503 procedure.<sup>1</sup> Country specific experts focused on Belarus and Cuba were eliminated in June 2007, despite extensive evidence of ongoing violations. Not coincidentally, all four of these countries are members of the NAM.

The OIC held 17 seats on the Council in 2006, more than the one-third (16 seats of 47 total seats) required to call a special session. The Council—led by the OIC—repeatedly singled out Israel for censure despite ignoring far worse human rights situations around the world. Another example is the OIC effort to constrain freedom of expression through the Council came after a Danish newspaper published cartoons of the prophet Mohammed in 2005. The OIC led an effort to persuade the commission and then the council to adopt a resolution against the defamation of Islam.

One of the most frustrating priorities of the G-77 has been to block reform of the UN.

- **Annan’s reform agenda.** In the wake of numerous UN scandals, the U.S. and other major donors worked with former Secretary-General Annan to develop a UN reform agenda. The General Assembly approved a broad reform agenda in 2005 and asked the Secretary-General to submit detailed proposals to implement the reforms. Most of Annan’s reform proposals were, however, blocked by the G-77. To put teeth behind the reform effort, the U.S. led a campaign to cap the UN assessed regular budget at \$950 million, with the remaining budget to be authorized if the reforms are adopted. Compounding the problem, the G-77 led an effort to approve a UN budget beyond the \$950 million cap despite making little progress on UN reform in June 2006, thus removing a major incentive for reform. Most of the reforms have yet to be adopted, including key reforms like reviewing UN mandates, strengthening UN oversight bodies, and reviewing UN practices to increase efficiency and effectiveness.
- **A recent example is Singapore’s effort to eliminate the UN’s Procurement Task Force set up in 2006** in response to rampant problems of fraud and corruption in UN procurement. In its first 18 months, the Task Force identified multiple instances of fraud, corruption, waste

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<sup>1</sup> This involves confidential proceedings to encourage government cooperation.

and mismanagement at the United Nations Headquarters and in peacekeeping missions in cases with an aggregate value in excess of \$610 million.

Despite its success, Singapore is leading an effort by the G-77 to deny funding for the task force, which runs out this year. Singapore is upset over an investigation and allegations made against Assistant Secretary General Andrew Toh who headed the UN Office of Central Support Services, which includes the procurement division. Toh is from Singapore.

Some of you might be wondering why the G-77, the NAM, or the OIC might want to block efforts to improve accountability and transparency, improve oversight, and more efficiently allocate resources within the UN system.

It is peculiar, because these countries are, by and large, among the biggest beneficiaries and focus of UN efforts. You would think they would be advocates for improved UN operations. But they are not. There is one overriding reason for this.

**The free rider problem.** The one-country, one-vote structure of the General Assembly creates a free-rider problem in which countries that pay little to the UN drive financial decisions. Under UN rules, budgetary decisions and related reforms require approval of two-thirds of the General Assembly.

- The combined assessment of the 128 countries with the lowest assessment—two-thirds of the General Assembly—is a paltry 0.919 percent of the regular budget and a minuscule 0.232 percent of the peacekeeping budget.
- The members of the G-77 are assessed a combined 8.8 percent of the regular budget and 5.2 percent of the peacekeeping budget.
- The members of the NAM are assessed a combined 4.9 percent of the regular budget and 1.8 percent of the peacekeeping budget.
- The members of the OIC are assessed a combined 3 percent of the regular budget and 1.2 percent of the peacekeeping budget.
- By contrast, the top eight contributors are assessed 71.1 percent of the regular budget and 77.6 percent of the peacekeeping budget in 2007.
- The U.S. alone is assessed 22 percent of the regular budget and over 26 percent of the peacekeeping budget.

The percentages do not convey the disparities.

Consider that in 2006 the U.S. paid \$439 million to the UN regular budget and over \$1.3 billion to the peacekeeping budget in the fiscal year ending in June 2007.

The 54 countries assessed the lowest rate of 0.001 percent of the regular budget pays less than \$21,000 a year -- \$439 million versus \$21,000.

The 35 countries assessed the lowest rate of 0.0001 percent of the peacekeeping budget paid just over \$5,000 -- \$1.3 billion versus \$5,000.

Nearly all of these countries are in the G-77 and the NAM and as such are able to greatly influence or block efforts to reform the UN to reduce waste, corruption, and inefficiency.

These vast disparities in budgetary responsibilities undermine incentives for most members to ensure that resources are used efficiently and as intended. Why would these nations ruffle feathers? It is easy for them to support the status quo or support an increase in the budget if the cost is inconsequential to them.

I see that I am out of time, so I will end my comments there. I look forward to your questions.