

Preserving America's Leadership in a World of Law†

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of many momentous events—the death of Franklin Roosevelt, the liberation of the Nazi death camps, VE-Day, Victory in Asia Day (as the politically correct call it) and, most importantly, the birth of the United Nations. Although we now take it for granted, 1945 also marked the commencement of this country's first peacetime commitment to world leadership. A bipartisan commitment forged by President Truman, Secretaries Marshall and Acheson, and Senators Connally and Vandenburg. An enduring commitment that led the world through the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Empire, through the replacement of colonialization with more than 100 new states, through the creation of global political and economic networks, and through a marked increase in the number of open societies and open markets around the world.

However noble or necessary our assumption of this leadership role may have been, with all its costs and risks, it has on balance also been enormously beneficial to America's self-interest—to the protection of our national security, our far-flung economic activities, and our foreign markets and sources of energy and supply. So long as we exercise leadership, the world is more likely to be hospitable to our citizens, our currency, our goods and our values, and less likely to be dotted with hostile weapons, despots, ideologies or systems that would do us harm. Americans have every reason, in this fiftieth anniversary year, for satisfaction with this record of global leadership.

Today, however, that continued leadership role is in doubt. Not because some other nation or system seeks to displace us. Not because we suddenly lack the

*Mr. Sorensen is a member of the firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, New York City. He was Special Counsel to the President of the United States from 1961 to 1964; a member of the Executive Committee, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights under Law, 1966-76; and a member of the President's Advisory Committee for Trade Negotiations, 1978-1980. He is currently a director of the Council on Foreign Relations.

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capacity to lead. On the contrary, it makes a substantial difference that we are still the world's only military superpower—provided that military strength is both relevant to today's type of conflict and applied when necessary. It makes a substantial difference that we are still the world's richest country, provided we use our economic strength to help develop and open markets elsewhere, and do not start a round of market closings by closing our own. It makes a substantial difference that we still enjoy, because of our long, proud record of help and humanitarianism toward others, the world's respect for our moral authority—provided that authority is not dissipated by our export of violence-laced movies and music, by overbearing or underhanded American businessmen or tourists or intelligence agents abroad, or by rollbacks in the racial and immigration policies that have made us a shining example to all.

Nor, when I say our global leadership is threatened, am I talking about foreign criticism. Popularity is not a prerequisite of leadership. Any decisive leader makes unpopular decisions, and our foreign policy will still enjoy respect for its consistency and reliability, provided that foreign policy is neither captive to domestic ethnic, ideological or economic interest groups nor subject to drastic alteration after each election.

No, our leadership role is in doubt today, not because our strength or record is lacking, not because we are threatened from without, but because our continuing acceptance of that role is being challenged from within. Do we, as a people, still have the will to be involved, to take on the risks and costs and burdens of leadership? That is the question.

We cannot be a leader if we have no followers; and we cannot have followers unless we consider their views and interests as well as our own, unless we help tackle their problems as well as our own. We cannot be the team captain unless we are a team player. We cannot win the game unless we enter it. We cannot be like the poor but pious man who, week after week, prayed to the Lord that he might win the Lottery, but never won, promised the Lord he would tithe generously from his winnings but never won, intensified the tone and length of his prayers but never won, until finally the Lord, in a clap of thunder, sent him a message: "For God's sake, buy a ticket!"

I.

Washington today is filled with elected officials who are unwilling to pay for a ticket—not in a global lottery but a global system of law and order. Surely we did not spend trillions of dollars since 1941 making the world safe for democracy and diversity only to shrink from it now. And yet, in the name of economizing, that is precisely what some members of Congress are trying to do. Cut back on our dues and contributions to the United Nations, where we are still the world's leading deadbeat. Cut off the loans and guarantees we promised to Mexico to prevent turmoil on our border. Block debt relief for Jordan now that it has finally

signed a peace pact with Israel. Halt the funds promised to Russia to help dismantle its nuclear weapons and resettle the troops pulled back from Eastern Europe. Cut economic and military assistance to foreign countries, particularly in Africa, now that we no longer need them for the Cold War. Cut funds and personnel for our embassies, consulates and libraries around the world that literally represent the first line of defense for our national interest.

This is not merely budget cutting—this represents a policy of cut and run. To assert that this retreat from the world is fiscally required is ludicrous. The entire international affairs budget of the United States Government—everything—represents less than 1.5 percent of total federal spending. Abolish all international activities *in toto*—all foreign aid, all participation in the U.N., NATO, the OAS, UNICEF, the Peace Corps, everything—and we will have saved less than 1.5 percent of the budget! It sounds like a joke. But it is not; for in the last decade, the Congress has already cut this country's international affairs budget, in real dollars, by nearly 50 percent.

For the most wealthy and least taxed nation in the industrialized world now to reduce further its international affairs budget in order to finance further tax cuts, tax cuts which in turn only assure the continuing starvation of American diplomacy, was rightly labeled earlier this month, by a distinguished international affairs columnist, as a “feckless course . . . undermining . . . international confidence” in our ability to lead, encouraging “other powers to take on the leadership role America has played” and making it impossible for any “American President of either party . . . [to] be a strong leader abroad.”

If these measures become law, we will not be saving scarce resources; we will be squandering precious assets. Some may call that responsible frugality, putting America first. I call it irresponsible isolationism that will hurt America most.

II.

Fortunately, full-scale isolationism in the traditional sense—withdraw to Fortress America, avoid foreign entanglements, ignore troubles across the sea—can never return in today's missile shrunken world of interdependent economies where no nation “is an island, entire of itself; we are all a part of the main.” Thoughtful Americans have been through too much to shut their eyes to international tensions and terrorism, to nuclear proliferation, and to continuing threats to our friends, our fellow democracies and our hopes for international law and order. Without allies, the oceans can no longer protect us, nor can any “Star Wars” system shield us. We rely as never before on foreign markets and sources of supply, on international codes of law and conduct. And however wearying they may be, we cannot shed the responsibilities imposed upon us as the world's strongest and richest nation. We would be less safe, less prosperous and less honorable if we tried to do so.

But if all-out Isolationism is merely a distant threat, Unilateralism is a clear and present danger. They are cousins, with a difference. Faced with an international challenge or opportunity, Isolationism counts the coins in his purse and says: "Don't do it at all." But Unilateralism, like Frank Sinatra, says: "Let's do it my way—or not at all." Today Unilateralism is in the saddle in Washington.

Example: The House of Representatives (after a whole one hour debate!) decided to draw a new dividing line in Europe by determining now which Central and East European nations should be instant additions to NATO. This decision was taken without regard to the political, economic or military readiness of those nations to accept the obligations of NATO membership (an alliance of like-minded countries that acts largely by consensus), without regard to the impact on the other, excluded Central and East European nations, without regard to the support this would generate for Russia's resurgent and repugnant nationalist movement under Zhirinovskiy, and without regard to the enormous risks this move would impose upon the United States—which would be obligated to defend these new members by both nuclear and conventional means. It is hard to imagine a more provocative decision being taken with less consultation and consideration for the consequences. But we want to do it our way.

Example: A drive is on in Congress to have the United States unilaterally override and undermine the already precarious Middle East negotiations by, first, blocking all further U.S. funds for and contacts with the Palestinian Authority on grounds that the politically beleaguered, divided and disorganized PLO has not yet met all its obligations under the Oslo Accords; and, second, by picking this delicate moment to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Heavy-handed, presumptuous, short-sighted? Yes, but we'll do it our way.

Example: While both the U.N. and NATO seek to pressure all combatants in the former Yugoslavia to lay down their arms, certain U.S. political leaders are demanding that our government unilaterally lift what's left of the arms embargo on Bosnia, regardless of the views of our allies whose peacekeeping forces would be in jeopardy and regardless of our commitments to NATO and the U.N. Once again, no doubt, we'll do it our way—but when we want sanctions continued on Iraqi oil or Libyan airlines, why under those circumstances do we think France or Russia or Turkey will join in doing it our way?

Less newsworthy, but no less disturbing to the advocates of international law in this room, is this country's persistent recalcitrance to join fully with the rest of the world in approving and implementing international treaties. The Senate, for example, is still dragging its feet on consenting to the ratification of the revised U.N. Law of the Sea Treaty, even after it was altered last year at our insistence regarding deep sea mining regulation. That treaty is absolutely essential to, among others, the U.S. Navy and its ability to project our power and presence quickly when distant conflicts threaten.

Because of Senate opposition (originally fueled, believe it or not, by a Lyndon

Larouche associate who said the treaty would undermine our property rights and sovereignty for the U.N.'s sake), we are the only major developed nation that has not ratified the International Biodiversity Convention designed to help prevent the extinction of flora and fauna around the world. Of course, we still want U.S. pharmaceutical, cosmetics and biotech companies to be able to import medicinal plants and herbs from less developed countries without sharing the technological fruits. One hundred twenty other countries have ratified—but we want to do it our way.

Even after ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and complaining loudly about noncompliance by others, this country cannot bring itself to accept that treaty's prohibition against the execution of sixteen- and seventeen-year-old offenders. No doubt that specific reservation is consistent with the law in some of our states and with public opinion in most of our states. But if we lag behind most of the other constitutional democracies in determining what conduct is unacceptable in a humane society, how many of them will endorse our human rights questions on China, Cuba or Iran?

III.

The Sinatra Syndrome has reached its most serious and most dangerous level in the current Washington effort to emasculate United Nations peacekeeping. The House has passed a measure (ironically entitled "The National Security Revitalization Act") which would effectively "zero out" our current funding obligation for U.N. peacekeeping, both cut and condition further all future funding for U.S. participation, prohibit the Department of Defense from diverting any of its money to provide logistical or other support for emergency peacekeeping, and, all in all, effectively terminate our forty years of backing this kind of activity.

Forget the ABA's excellent recommendation that U.N. peacekeeping forces be supplemented by specially trained, standby peacemaking and peace enforcement units on call to the Security Council. If this becomes law, thereby violating our treaty obligations, then other countries may well decide to do the same and put U.N. peacekeeping out of business altogether, i.e., pull the blue helmets out of their positions on the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border, the Iraqi-Turkish border, the Israeli-Syrian border and more than a dozen other hot spots, including Cambodia, Rwanda and Haiti.

This bill would also "revitalize" our national security by prohibiting U.S. peacekeepers from serving under foreign commanders, thereby reversing a policy that began with the Revolutionary War and Lafayette. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of U.S. troops have served under foreign commanders, just as millions of foreign troops have served under U.S. commanders. How else can an allied coalition deploy its forces flexibly?

To put this proposal in perspective: A little over 1.57 million men and women wear the U.S. military uniform today; of those, a little over 1.57 million are not involved in U.N. peacekeeping operations. Fewer than 1,000 Americans are

among the 62,000 troops now participating in seventeen United Nations operations around the world. At last count, nineteen other countries had sustained more peacekeeping fatalities than the United States. But American politicians—some of whom still supported the U.S. war in Vietnam after 50,000 U.S. fatalities—turned against the United Nations after the tragic deaths in Somalia of eighteen U.S. servicemen who were under U.S. command on a U.S.-inspired mission.

I am not unaware of the flaws and failings that still beset the United Nations. (Indeed, I hear about them regularly across the dinner table and even the pillow.) But the reform of those flaws and failings will not come about by the U.S. Congress attempting to impose its will unilaterally in blunderbuss fashion, and certainly not by emasculating or eliminating U.N. peacekeeping.

When this country first went into Somalia, we wanted United Nations peacekeepers or peace enforcers to follow us. The same was true of the Persian Gulf and Haiti. In other countries, where our earlier involvement had only prolonged military conflict—such as Nicaragua, El Salvador, Cambodia and Angola—U.N. personnel helped bring hostilities to an end. In the Middle East, Namibia, Mozambique, Indonesia, and elsewhere, U.N. peacekeepers—usually with U.S. logistical, transport and other support—have helped over the years to avert or terminate serious conflicts. But those U.N. operations that lacked the full, timely and sustained support of the United States—such as Bosnia and Rwanda—were virtually doomed to fail; and then we reacted to those failures by condemning the U.N.

What I find particularly discouraging is the eagerness of some American political leaders to make the United Nations a political football. I expect nothing better from the recently publicized Michigan Militia whose commanders say they are arming against a possible U.N. takeover of their sovereign territory. But I did expect more from the distinguished presidential candidate who recently declared that “it is high time we reined in U.N. peacekeeping,” and that “we must stop placing the agenda of the United Nations before the interests of the United States.” He received an enthusiastic response, according to the press, when he deliberately mispronounced the name of Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and vowed that if his presidential campaign is successful, “American policies will be determined by us, not by the United Nations.”

What nonsense! I know no one who feels American policies should be determined by the United Nations, and I know no thoughtful person who thinks they have been. I have mentioned no candidates or political parties by name. There is blame enough to go around. But it is disappointing—indeed, sad—to see U.N. peacekeeping, once a centerpiece of President Bush’s New World Order, become the principal target of what may well be a successful presidential drive.

Have we once again forgotten history? Will the presidential campaign of 1996 resemble the presidential campaign of 1920, when U.S. support for international organization became the major issue, a subject of demagogic debate that sounded the death knell for America’s indispensable participation in the League of Nations?

Only those who recognize the value to America of international law and international organizations can prevent such a setback. Only thoughtful voices raised in communities across this country can reverse this politically inspired trend toward unilateralism. It is not necessary to argue that the U.N. has a flawless record, that it is more wise and far-sighted than the governments that compose it, or that it is subject to none of the same waste and abuse that characterize all public bureaucracies at every level. But it is necessary to remind both leaders and voters that the U.N. and its peacekeeping forces represent a crucial instrument of law and order in today's world and a vital asset for an effective American foreign policy, if, in the words of the Charter, we are "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war."

