

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on
United Nations Reform
July 21, 2005

The world has just marked the 60th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. In that time, the organization has accomplished much worth celebrating, not least its role in helping to prevent a repeat of the calamitous world conflict that brought about the U.N.'s creation. But unfortunately, the U.N.'s anniversary has been overshadowed by a series of setbacks that have raised questions about its ability to live up to its founders' intentions.

During the Oil-for-Food scandal, billions of dollars that should have been spent on humanitarian needs in Iraq were instead siphoned off by Saddam Hussein's regime through a system of surcharges, bribes and kickbacks. This corruption depended upon members of the U.N. Security Council who were complicit in these activities. It also depended on U.N. officials and contractors who were dishonest, inattentive or willing to make damaging compromises in pursuit of a compassionate mission.

The capabilities possessed by the United Nations depend heavily on maintaining the credibility associated with countries acting together in a well-established forum with well-established rules. Profiteering, mismanagement and bureaucratic stonewalling squander this precious resource. At a time when the United States is appealing for greater international help in Iraq, Afghanistan, and in trouble spots around the world, a diminishment of U.N. credibility reduces U.S. options and increases our own burdens.

The Foreign Relations Committee held the first Congressional hearing on the U.N.'s Oil-for-Food scandal a year ago last April. Since that time, through the efforts of Paul Volcker, Senator Norm Coleman, and many others, we have learned much more about the extent of the corruption and mismanagement involved. Senator Coleman's work as a Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and as the Chairman of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations has provided the Senate with extensive knowledge of what went wrong in the Oil-for-Food Program.

During the last several weeks, Senator Coleman and I have combined efforts to offer the Senate a comprehensive reform bill that we believe would greatly improve the ability of the United Nations to be an effective institution in this century. I would like to thank staff on the Foreign Relations Committee and on the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations who collaborated for many hours as we finalized the Coleman-Lugar U.N. reform bill.

We began with the presumptions that the United Nations needs more focused oversight, better whistleblower protection, greater transparency in its procurement and financial dealings, and better management of its personnel. It also needs to reform two functions vital to international peace and security: peacekeeping and human rights protection. Achieving these and other reforms will require a significant shift in the culture of consensus that often results in gridlock at the U.N. and has thwarted previous attempts at reform.

Our legislation provides President Bush with the flexibility and tools he needs to achieve the objective of a reformed United Nations. Should the President believe that, in spite of his best efforts, the other member states of the U.N. do not share our conviction regarding these reforms, our bill grants him authority to withhold up to 50 percent of our U.N. dues until such time as reform has taken hold.

Other members of Congress, including members of this Committee, also have spent substantial time considering what the United States should do to achieve reform at the United Nations. The House of Representatives has already voted for a bill that would require the President to withhold U.S. contributions to the U.N. by 50 percent, if certain conditions are not met. Some Senators have voiced support for this approach, but I believe that a rigid formula that removes decision making and flexibility from the President is a mistake. The drive for reform at the U.N. is not going to occur in a national security vacuum. We will continue to have national security interests that are affected by U.N. agencies and U.N. deliberations. Without narrowing the President's options, the Coleman-Lugar legislation allows the President to make tactical judgments in the national security interest about how to apply leverage and about what methods to use in pursuing reform.

On the other side of the equation, some Senators may oppose the Coleman-Lugar bill because it does allow the President to cut U.S. contributions to the United Nations by up to 50 percent. Senators may contend that the U.S. contribution should be predictable and off the table in negotiations on reform. But U.N. reform is urgent and is most likely to happen if Presidential initiatives are backed up by a full range of options, including withholding funds.

The diminishment of U.N. credibility from corruption in the Oil-for-Food Program and other scandals related to peacekeeping troops and the Human Rights Commission is harmful to U.S. efforts aimed at coordinating a stronger global response to terrorism, the AIDS crisis, nuclear proliferation, and many other international problems. Congress, motivated in large part by these matters and the unwillingness of the Security Council to address appropriately the genocide taking place in Darfur, commissioned an important study on U.N. reform through the United States Institute of Peace. That study was ably chaired by the distinguished members of our first panel – former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and former Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell. We are pleased to have the benefit of their counsel today. I would strongly encourage my colleagues to read the bipartisan report that resulted from their efforts, entitled: *American Interests and UN Reform*. It puts forward excellent recommendations for change that could help the U.N. to regain public confidence and improve its capability to serve peace and prosperity around the world. Senator Coleman and I relied heavily on these recommendations as we constructed our bill.

In addition to our first panel, we are very fortunate to be joined by Nicholas Burns, the State Department's Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs. Secretary Burns has been a good friend to this Committee, and he speaks to us today as one of Secretary Rice's key advisors on U.N. reform issues.

The U.N.'s ability to organize burden sharing and take over missions best handled by the international community is critical to the long-term success of U.S. foreign policy. Americans cannot afford to approach the United Nations purely out of unilateral frustration. Rather, we have to show resolute leadership that will drive reform toward a constructive outcome that will reinvigorate the United Nations. In this process, we must do more than just negotiate for reform. We must also explain why these reforms are necessary and how they will help the world community. If we can create international momentum, we have a unique opportunity to achieve an objective that has long been sought by both critics and friends of the United Nations.

We thank our witnesses and look forward to hearing their testimony.

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