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How to Fix the U.N.

Here are 3 ways Donald Trump can help the United Nations, rather than defunding it.

By Jared Genser

At his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, on Wednesday, President-elect Donald Trump remarked “When do you see the United Nations solving problems? They don't. They cause problems ... So if it lives up to the potential, it's a great thing. And if it doesn't, it is a waste of time and money.” These comments elaborated on his observations made about the United Nations on Monday, when he was harshly critical of the Security Council's recent resolution condemning Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Trump is spot-on when he spoke about the need for the U.N. to live up to its potential, even if his comments were less than nuanced. The U.N.'s greatest failures are of epic proportion and attract news coverage internationally. The world vividly remembers the genocides in Rwanda and Srebrenica, which took place under the cover of U.N. peacekeepers. The U.N. has refused to be accountable for its role in importing cholera into Haiti, which killed more than 10,000 and sickened hundreds of thousands. It has yet to get a handle on sexual abuse by U.N. peacekeepers, such as reports earlier this year from the Central African Republic where more than 100 girls in just one local area were abused. And the U.N. inquiry into the scandal around the Iraqi oil-for-food program concluded that more than half of the 4,500 companies participating paid kickbacks enabling Saddam Hussein to pocket \$1.8 billion – and he earned another \$10.9 billion through illegal oil smuggling.

In the last five years, the U.N.'s greatest failure has been its inability to bring peace to Syria. The war has reportedly killed more than 470,000 people with some 11 million Syrians on the run, including 6.3 million people displaced internally and 4.8 million who have sought safety in neighboring countries. It has also cost \$255 billion, wiping out Syria's wealth. However, the U.N. is immobilized because the Security Council's permanent members, including the United States and Russia, are deadlocked. As a result, history is more likely to lay blame on U.S.

leadership for not pressing Russia and Iran to bring the conflict to an end.

Yet while there is much to criticize, the U.N. deserves credit for some extraordinary achievements. Smallpox was declared extinct in 1980 because of the World Health Organization's global smallpox eradication program, which dispersed 465 million doses of the vaccine in 27 countries. UNICEF has saved the lives of more than 90 million children in the last 20 years as a result of its efforts to reduce child mortality. In 2015 alone, the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees was protecting 16.1 million refugees. And also in 2015, the U.N. facilitated the adoption of two historic accords: the Paris Agreement to limit climate change, and the U.N.'s Agenda 2030, which created a blueprint for eliminating extreme poverty, reducing inequality and protecting the planet.

It is indisputable that the world is in the midst of a profound transformation. The U.N. plays a critical role in facilitating global solutions to problems that cross all international borders. And in this context, the role of the U.S. is indispensable. The U.S. contributes some \$3 billion or 22 percent of the U.N. regular budget and easily another \$4 to 5 billion in so-called voluntary contributions to specialized U.N. agencies. Therefore, Trump is right to express concern about resource management and structural failures of the U.N.

After the Security Council vote on Israel earlier this week, there have been calls on Capitol Hill to cut off U.N. support until that resolution is repealed, including from Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., chair of the appropriations subcommittee that oversees the State Department and foreign aid budget. In his outgoing remarks, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon admitted that the U.N. has a “disproportionate volume of resolutions, reports and conferences criticizing Israel ... [and] this reality has hampered the ability of the U.N. to fulfill its role effectively.” But cutting off aid entirely is a self-defeating proposition, especially when Trump has suggested he wants to scale back U.S. military engagement globally. U.S. interests are best served when the U.N. is able to address problems that would have otherwise fallen to the U.S.

Trump has said the U.N. must to live up to its potential. Here's a roadmap for some of the most important things he could do after being inaugurated.

First, Trump should urge the development of a new generation of U.N. stabilization missions with more robust rules of engagement and enhanced equipment and combat logistics. Trump has said he wants to eliminate the Islamic State group and other global terrorist threats, but he has equally called for pulling back U.S. troops deployed abroad. Even though there are more than 100,000 U.N. peacekeepers deployed in 16 operations with an almost \$8 billion annual budget, historically peacekeepers have operated in a defensive posture. As such, they have been incapable of responding to the asymmetric threats posed by terrorist groups. In addition, Trump should support U.N. efforts to revitalize the pool of high-level envoys as mediators and

peacemakers to bolster U.N. capacity in preventative diplomacy.

Second, Trump should increase the annual budget for the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights by 50 percent on a sustainable basis. Although the U.N. Charter says that promoting and protecting human rights is one of the three core purposes of the organization, the office's annual budget is less than 3 percent of the regular U.N. budget and all together is only \$225 million. In comparison, and as noted by the relentless and extremely effective current High Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad, the population of Switzerland spends some \$900 million a year on chocolate.

These new resources should be invested in the office's field operations globally, which monitor, report on and address egregious human-rights abuses across 54 country and thematic mandates. While those experts get little attention globally, in most cases their work is exceptional and has a real and dramatic impact on human lives. In my own experience, I have taken more than 40 cases of political prisoners to the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. The decisions of this body have been invaluable to securing the release of many of my clients, including Myanmar's Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

And finally, Trump should demand management reform across the U.N., which, as a businessman he claims he is well-equipped to do. He should insist that the Office of Internal Oversight Services be revamped so that it is independent from the secretary-general, it must be led by a person of impeccable global reputation, and have all resources required to be effective. There must be an annual, unified and transparent presentation of the U.N. budget. All senior U.N. officials should be required to make financial disclosures public – right now this is a voluntary choice. And all U.N. agencies should be required to develop and be held to account for achieving meaningful performance indicators. While some agencies are better than others, indicators are far too frequently pathetic. For example, to measure the success of the U.N. in advancing the role of women in peacemaking and peacebuilding, one indicator is the number of times the word “women” appears in Security Council resolutions.

Just as the U.S. is about to see a major shift in direction with the inauguration of Trump, the U.N. has also recently just undergone a historic transition. Earlier this month, Antonio Guterres was sworn in for a five-year term as the new secretary-general of the United Nations. He is both a former prime minister of Portugal and a veteran U.N. insider, having served as its high commissioner for refugees for a decade. The direction of the U.N. will be impacted dramatically by the relationship these two men will form.

The U.N. is a sclerotic institution in desperate need of a dramatic reform to ensure it is fit for purpose in the 21st century. Trump is right to demand that the U.N. to live up to its potential or otherwise be a waste of time or money.

But rather than stepping back from, defunding or withdrawing from the U.N., Trump must use his skills as a negotiator and the leverage of the outsized U.S. financial support to demand and secure the reforms that have eluded past presidents for decades. Advancing vital U.S. interests requires nothing less.

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