



A limited UN is best for America

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[Newt Gingrich](#)

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Four years after the December 1941 attack on the United States at Pearl Harbor, world leaders gathered in San Francisco and founded the United Nations, an international organization dedicated to preventing war, defending human rights, and helping the peoples of the world achieve safety, health, prosperity and freedom.

Yet, by any reasonable measure, there exists an unacceptable gap between the ideals of the UN Charter and the institution that exists today.

It is for this reason that four years after the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, world leaders are gathering in New York this week to discuss how the UN

will reform itself so it can live up to its founding ideals. The stakes are high, and not just for Americans. This week's 9/11 anniversary reminds us that we are living in a world with profoundly different threats to the safety of Americans than we were at the founding of the UN.

Today, the civilized world is engaged in a long war against the irreconcilable wing of Islam. Thousands of innocents have been murdered and maimed in terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, London, Madrid, Beslan, Bali, Jerusalem, Baghdad, Istanbul and many other cities. The terrorist Ayman al-Zawahiri is explicit about Al Qaeda's "right to kill four million Americans - two million of them children

children - and to exile twice as many and wound and cripple hundreds of thousands."

The 9/11 anniversary also provides perspective for what must be America's only measuring stick for any program of UN reform - whether it enhances America's safety, and whether it furthers the spread of freedom and liberty across the world. President George W. Bush had it exactly right in his second Inaugural Address when he said that "the best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world."

I was recently co-chairman of a congressional task force on UN reform, along with the former Senate majority leader George Mitchell, because I share the belief that a dramatically reformed UN can be an effective instrument in the pursuit of a safer America and a freer world. But to achieve these needed reforms, America must be united in a common vision for what we expect from the UN.

Through my work on the task force, I have come to the conclusion that American interests call for a fundamentally limited, but honest and effective UN.

The UN must be a fundamentally limited institution because it has no democratic accountability but has at times pretensions of asserting legitimacy akin to that of a democratic nation state. For example, large international meetings sponsored by the UN often aim to create new systems of "law" and new "norms" of

international behavior under the guise of "global governance." These present a direct threat to American sovereignty and our system of constitutional liberty and therefore must be rejected.

The United Nations is neither accountable nor responsible to a democratic electorate, genuine democratic institutions, nor the give and take of national democratic politics.

Our founding fathers separated power among three branches and created a system of checks and balances to hold our government accountable and keep it limited. We need only take note of the intense focus on the confirmation hearings for just one U.S. Supreme Court nominee to appreciate that the UN has no comparable accountability mechanism.

The oil-for-food scandal is a perfect example of why we need a limited UN. Without democratic systems of accountability in place, oil-for-food, a program designed to provide humanitarian relief to Iraqis suffering under Saddam Hussein's rule, was grotesquely transformed into a dictatorship support program. The UN's failure strengthened Saddam's rule, undermined American safety and delayed Iraqi freedom - a result completely at odds with what was intended.

Moreover, the fact that the UN has no democratic preconditions for membership limits America's ability to render the UN's infrastructure and its decisions compatible with American values and interests. The

plain and simple facts are that Sudan is currently serving its second term on the Human Rights Commission, and that Libya, the same nation that accepted responsibility for the murder of 189 Americans in the bombing of Pan Am 103, was elected as chair of the commission in 2003.

America has every interest in limiting, not expanding, the opportunities for such charades.

America also requires an honest UN. Because so much of the UN behavior and culture would be indefensible if described honestly, there is an overwhelming tendency to use platitudes and misleading terms to camouflage the indefensible.

Fortunately, the new American UN ambassador, John Bolton, is unafraid to speak clearly about America's values and interests. He will only be confrontational to those who defend policies that cannot stand the light of day.

For example, four years after the terrorist attacks of 2001, the UN General Assembly still has not reached agreement on something as basic to the war on terror as a comprehensive definition of terrorism. Many member states that support terrorism have tried to derail this process by insisting that actions by individuals or irregular organizations in the context of "wars of national liberation" and the ejection of "occupying forces" should not be considered terrorism.

This is unacceptable, as it would legitimize terrorist attacks anywhere, and specifically against coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as against Israel. Uniformed national military forces are already bound by the laws of war; we must insist on a comprehensive definition of terror that applies to individuals and irregular forces.

Forcing an honest debate in the UN with those countries who would defend terror tactics will expose their corrupt values.

Lastly, a United Nations that is limited in its responsibilities and honest in carrying them out would prove to be a much more effective institution. The United States, which funds 22 percent of the UN's regular budget, has a duty to insist on reformed systems of accountability, transparency and integrity that will enhance its effectiveness.

True UN reform is going to take time and will require an ongoing effort by Congress, the president and a coalition of genuine democracies. I remain hopeful that the UN will adopt all the necessary reform measures without the need for any type of limitation on the appropriation of U.S. taxpayer funds for UN activities. Yet, if reform measures are not implemented in a timely way, I think it is inevitable that limitations would be enforced by the Congress.

Without very substantial reform, there is little reason to believe the UN will be able to realize the goals of its charter in the future. Failure,

while not desirable, can be an option for the UN. It cannot be one for the United States. There must be effective multilateral instruments for saving lives and defending innocent people, and we should be prepared to explore other avenues for effective action if the UN fails to reform itself.

We are in a long war for civilization. It is at once a global military fight and a battle of ideas between those who would defend civilization and those who would destroy it. At

every point in this struggle, a reformed and an effective UN would be a tremendous ally on the side of civilization. A UN that can honestly confront the challenges of this struggle, such as accurately defining terrorism and telling the truth about the Iranian nuclear program, as well as honestly describing and confronting the genocide in Sudan, and other horrific human rights violations worldwide, would contribute enormously to American safety at home and liberty abroad.

Newt Gingrich, former speaker of the House, is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and author of *"Winning the Future: A 21st Century Contract With America."* This article first appeared in *The Boston Globe*