The New U.S. Primacy Doctrine and The International Democratic System

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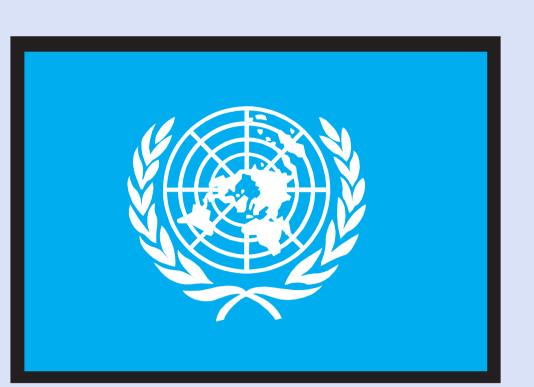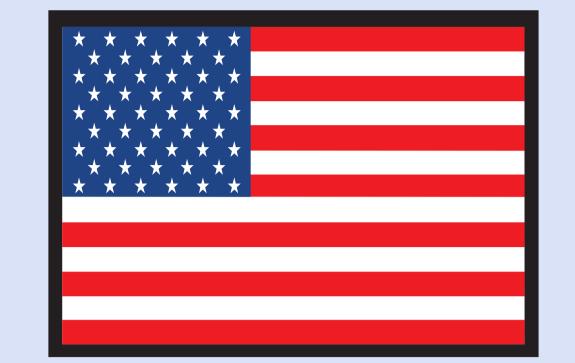**KENT STATE**
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INTRODUCTION

Between September 11, 2001 and March 19, 2003, the diplomatic and peacekeeping relevance of the United Nations and the international community were severely tested. Unfortunately, these parties were unable to avoid the U.S.-led war against Iraq. According to the Bush administration, and other members of the U.S.-led coalition, Saddam Hussein's regime was responsible for harboring known terrorists, and was stockpiling weapons of mass destruction. For the first time in American history, the U.S. officially launched a military strike based on public arguments of preemption, rather than retaliation or humanitarian interests. While this strike contradicted the wishes of the international community, it seems as though the diplomatic process had broken down to the point that war was inevitable. The fact that the war began with a pre-emptive strike against Iraq without U.N. approval, however, raises serious questions about international governance as we enter the twenty-first century.

Holbert, Jerry. "Allies in Wonderland," *Best Editorial Cartoons of the Year, 2004.* Ed. Charles Brooks. Gretna: Pelican Publishing, 2004.

Drawbacks of Working within the U.N. Security Council are Illustrated in U.S. Media

Photo by Sophie Paris, March 7, 2003

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell Argues at the U.N. Security Council for an Invasion of Iraq

BENEFITS OF WORKING WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

While working within the international system can be frustrating, it is essential. If a nation refuses to work within the international system there could be very definite economic and political repercussions. First and foremost, international grievances would lead to sanctions. Economically, strict trade regulations could be enacted. In this era of globalization, hindering trade could easily devastate a nation's economy. Politically speaking, the United Nations is essential for maintaining peace within the current world order. The United Nations system was established as an order which "encourages peace because 'the power capabilities of relevant nations are highly constrained by inter-locking institutions and binding agreements.' "[3] Nations which operate outside that system, or attempt to undermine it, face the risk of political repercussions from other member nations. A current example is the United States' stance towards the International Criminal Court (I.C.C.). The U.S. is concerned that the I.C.C. will violate the national sovereignty of the United States. Before the I.C.C. had even been formed, the U.S. faced an international backlash for its lack of support.[4] On May 3, 2001, the U.S. officially lost a seat on the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. Despite the enormous strength of the U.S. economic and military force, the U.S. cannot work entirely outside of the international community unless it wishes to provoke unnecessary economic and political repercussions.

THE NATURE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Since World War II, the international community has stood for principles of diplomacy and debate, and has emphasized the use of collective resources to help struggling member-nations. International organizations were created to help with economic, social and political needs, and these organizations have been integral parts of the international system for years now. The strongest international organization is the United Nations itself, with the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Health Organization counting as other significant international organizations. These organizations are responsible for averting national and international crises. They function best when a policy enjoys the general consensus of member nations.

THE ISSUE

The United States, under the administration of President George W. Bush, has repeatedly chosen to work outside the structure and authority of the United Nations, finding the system cumbersome to work with. The best examples are found in the Bush administration stance towards international statutes and treaties regarding weapons. Under the auspices of Homeland and National security, the Bush administration has attempted to roll back many such international statutes and treaties, despite protests from the international community. In June 2002, the U.S. formally withdrew from the Anti-ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty, despite significant protest by Russia. Furthermore, the Bush administration has lent little support for the banning of anti-personnel land mines, and has not supported the Biological Weapons Conventions Protocol.

Many of these decisions were made under the auspices of the "Bush Doctrine," which is one of primacy and preemption. The doctrine of Primacy,[1] authored by Paul Wolfowitz, basically states that the best strategy for peace is to maintain the military, economic and political supremacy of the United States. The rationale is that if the U.S. maintains its preeminence, then no other nation will attempt to infringe on the sovereignty of any other nation, for fear of repercussion from the U.S.[2] Furthermore, Wolfowitz's doctrine suggests that the safety of the United States is best ensured by American primacy. Of course, many United Nations member nations are unhappy about this new American mentality and are concerned about the potential development of a 'new world order' along these lines.

The United States seems to have placed the entire world in its 'sphere of influence.' This is demonstrated economically in the encouragement of free trade and capitalist and corporate globalization. Furthermore, it is demonstrated politically in efforts to spread American-style democracy. It would seem that the U.S. is using its new national security doctrine to ensure the ability to police the entire globe. Consequently, the Bush administration has publicly eroded much of the strength of the international system.

DRAWBACKS OF WORKING WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSEM

There are several drawbacks to working within the international constitutional system. First and foremost, national politics can often undermine the greater good. Different sovereign nations often have different national interests; there is difficulty in reaching a unilateral position on many particular issues. Wealthier nations can be obligated to fund programs supported by poorer nations with more votes. Furthermore, the number of interests involved makes it difficult to pass coherent, strong, and effective resolutions. All of these factors also suggest that there is often a great deal of time required to pass resolutions, which can be very dangerous in a time of crisis.

CONCLUSIONS

The United States runs a great risk that policies of primacy and unilateralism will lead to the alienation of allies who may be needed in the future. The U.S. needs to be aware that it is politically and economically dependent on other nations, international organizations and international markets. Along those same lines, if the United States wants to legitimate its global war on terror, the support of the world community is essential, for without international moral and legal authority, the military and economic support which will be necessary in the future will be put into jeopardy.

[1] "Excerpts from Pentagon's Plan: Prevent the Re-emergence of a New Rival," New York Times, March 8, 1992, A14.

[2] The White House, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," September 2002. www.thewhitehouse.gov/nss.html

[3] Stephen Hook, *American Foreign Policy since World War II.* Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2004, 373.

[4] "Bush Administration Ponders Position Towards International Criminal Court". International Enforcement Law Reporter, June 2002, Vol 17.6.