

Retail Diplomacy

The Edifying Story of UN Dues Reform

Suzanne Nossel

PERHAPS THE most widely heard and trenchant criticism of the Bush Administration's foreign policy before September 11 was that it displayed a wilful and counterproductive unilateralism. Clearly, since the terrorist attacks, that policy has changed: We're all multilateralists now, at least for the time being. Nonetheless, a tension remains: Can an administration whose vision of international leadership is defined by a go-it-alone approach whenever possible really conduct effective multilateral diplomacy? The question is not only whether the administration can keep a motley coalition together long enough to accomplish its military and political goals in the war against terrorism. We need also to ask whether it will, and whether it should, maintain a commitment to multilateralism once the present crisis passes.

The answer is not simple; some mix of unilateral and multilateral methods surely makes sense for the United States.¹ But the problem is clear. Despite (or perhaps because of) its superpower status, the United States has grown increasingly isolated in the United Nations and other international forums. In the past year, America has been reviled for sabotaging

the Kyoto climate negotiations, bullied in the UN Security Council over Iraq and Israel, kicked off the Geneva-based Human Rights Commission for the first time in history, and provoked to walk out of the Durban racism conference in a huff. These setbacks triggered not only dismay but also a reactive impulse in the Congress. As the first plane slammed into tower one of the World Trade Center, the post of U.S. ambassador to the UN had been stripped of its cabinet rank and left vacant for nearly eight months. American arrears to the UN were at an historic high, with \$582 million pledged in January mired in delay.

On the other hand, despite the setbacks noted above, the United States has beaten the odds in several key recent multilateral battles. A year ago the United States kept Sudan, the duly anointed candidate of the African Group, off the UN Security Council. The United States ended Israel's fifty years of technical pariah status at the UN, winning our ally acceptance into a regional group. In late 2000 the Americans convinced the membership to accept Jesse Helms' UN finance formula, cutting its dues while forcing others to pay more.

On all of these issues, successes and failures, more was at stake than what was officially on the table. When the United

Suzanne Nossel was Deputy to the Ambassador for UN Management and Reform at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations (1999–2001).

¹Note, for example, the formulation suggested above by Joseph Nye in "Seven Tests."

States loses in international forums, both its pride and global standing are hurt. When it stands alone, even if it holds the line, it is vulnerable to accusations of high-handedness and double standards. When it succeeds by browbeating others, it feeds resentments. Every which way, it becomes harder to achieve American goals the next time around and, as we have learned this fall, one never knows when the “next time around” may be the time that really counts.

Both champions and critics of multilateral diplomatic forums have a stake in ensuring that as long as the United States is at the table in global forums, it is effective in promoting American interests and poised to marshal global support when it needs to do so. Even critics of the United Nations have to concede that it plays an important role over an array of functions that serve U.S. interests: human rights and refugee protection, international air traffic control and safety, and now perhaps even “nation-building.” Likewise, the UN’s most enthusiastic supporters, both in the United States and globally, would be better off if the United States were more confident of its influence among the UN membership, and thus more willing to put trust in the organization. The tired debate over whether multilateral institutions do America more harm than good must give way to a pragmatic discussion of the recent U.S. track record in the multilateral arena and what can be done to improve it.

The need for improvement should be obvious. After the Human Rights Commission ouster, U.S. policymakers were indignant over the UN’s act of defiance, having assumed that American stature alone guaranteed the seat in perpetuity. But things no longer work that way. While we remain on top militarily and economically, other spheres of influence—including Europe and China—are rising.

Moreover, America’s pre-eminent status can be a mixed blessing. Even as the world pledged to support a U.S.-led fight against terrorism, one could discern an undercurrent of grim satisfaction that the United States had proven less than invincible. Resentment toward U.S. hegemony fuels efforts to use international organizations to rein America in. The United States, in turn, balks at encroachments on its sovereignty, clipping the wings of international organizations by withholding its support. As the events of this fall have demonstrated, however, stifling international organizations is risky, in that there are certain key tasks that only the UN is equipped to undertake.

In a world of competing power centers, the United States cannot rely on a strategy of curbing international organizations at its pleasure. Rather, we must learn how to translate our global military and economic clout into effective and specific diplomatic influence. American strength lies ultimately not in the ability to steamroll the world community, but in the power to turn delegations around one by one through persuasion and bilateral leverage. Put another way, we need to focus more on the art of retail diplomacy as a tool for multilateral advocacy.

A noteworthy recent example of successful retail diplomacy was the campaign to negotiate a reduction of America’s UN dues. Like many examples of the art, this effort was not particularly glamorous. But it worked, and it bears many lessons in diplomatic skill and stamina that American statesmen will need to learn in the months and years ahead.

Cutting U.S. Dues: A Case Study

IN DECEMBER 2000, after a 14-month campaign, the United States overcame nearly universal opposition at the UN to win an agreement to lower American dues to the organiza-

tion. The victory fulfilled the terms of the 1999 "Helms-Biden" law, which provided for payment of nearly \$1 billion in U.S. arrears to the UN, but only if the UN membership agreed to lower U.S. dues for the UN's regular and peacekeeping budgets by more than \$170 million annually.

On the face of it, the U.S. position evinced not a little chutzpah. The U.S. stance was the equivalent of having Bill Gates, in response to an IRS enforcement action on back taxes owed, agree to pay up only if the IRS agreed to lower his tax bracket in future years, regardless of what he earned. When the UN membership signed onto the deal, Senators Helms and Biden were as stunned as anyone else, and led a historic standing ovation in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for the triumph in what many saw as an era of waning American influence at the UN.

How did the United States convince 188 other countries to fork over more so that—during the longest period of prosperity in its history—the world's richest country could pay less? For starters, the United States wielded powerful leverage: nearly \$1 billion in back dues that would be paid to the UN if the American demands were met. Beyond that, the charm, boldness and bravado of then-UN Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke gave the advocacy effort unique momentum and profile.

But incentives and personalities, though crucial, were not enough. When Helms-Biden was passed in December 1999, dangling the promise of repayment in exchange for a dues reduction, a Canadian diplomat described the offer as "a lump of coal in the Christmas stocking"—and the Canadians are about the best friends the United States has at the UN. The UN membership was galled by the U.S. attempt to attach strings to payments that it owed under the UN

Charter, seeing the move as a bald-faced violation of international law and a dangerous precedent. What would stop the Japanese from withholding payments to protest their lack of a seat on the Security Council? And the Germans from following suit? Most of the membership had long been on record opposing a U.S. dues reduction as inconsistent with the precept underlying the UN's financial system—that each country be assessed according to its "capacity to pay." This phrase became a mantra repeated in every accent known to humanity, the rallying cry of countries accusing the United States of foisting burdens onto the less fortunate.

By some accounts, this was all so much ritual howling before the inevitable concession to U.S. power and money. According to this view, the membership was bound to surrender because the United States was holding the organization to ransom; unless it gave in, the UN would risk bankruptcy. In forums like the UN, however, the best interests of the institution do not always dictate the course taken. For one thing, there is an obvious point that Americans sometimes forget: decisions are not made by "the UN" but rather by 189 member states, each of which acts in its own self-interest. In this equation, the UN's fiscal needs often carry less weight than delegations' own financial interests, loyalties and vanities. Moreover, the organization had functioned under the weight of U.S. arrears for more than a decade, and there were plenty of governments that believed it would be better off holding firm by rejecting U.S. demands and re-enforcing America's outcast image.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to getting the UN to accept American terms was the zero-sum game of UN financing, where every dollar of reduced U.S. dues meant higher payments for another, usually poorer, country. Although virtually

the entire UN membership privately agreed that, on the basis of their economic growth over the last decade, the Chinese could afford to pay more than their drastically discounted rate, virtually no one was willing to say so to Beijing. Developed and developing countries alike would sooner have left the UN insolvent than ask a poorer country—even a rising economic powerhouse—to pay more to enable a richer one to pay less. The ostensible imperative of giving in to U.S. power did not translate into the political will necessary to meet U.S. demands. So despite its financial leverage, a U.S. victory was hardly foreordained.

That power alone will not always win the day does not mean that America should avoid taking strong stands. In internal discussions, U.S. policymakers often propose that instead of taking aggressive public stances, the United States should recruit other countries to front American views and thereby prevent a backlash against a “made in the USA” position. “Can’t we get the Philippines to propose the dues cut?” some queried. While the intuition to recruit others to the U.S. cause is sound, America is far too prominent to slink out the back door while others do its bidding. When an important U.S. goal is at stake, relying on the Philippines or Estonia to front for us is risky. There is no guarantee that our ally will make an effective case and, besides, U.S. silence rarely fools anyone in the midst of a contentious debate. When important U.S. interests are at issue, then, the question is not whether to take a stand, but rather how—tactically—to win the fight without scorching the landscape. Success requires careful attention to the power dynamics at play in multilateral settings, the means and methods of persuasion, and the targeted use of U.S. bilateral power and influence. In short, success requires attention to detail.

Details, Details

THE UNITED States rarely wins arguments inside a multilateral meeting room. The impulse that leads rowdy back-benchers to rise up against heavy-handed prime ministers makes membership-wide meetings rallying points for resisting the powers that be. No country wants to be publicly seen to buckle under U.S. pressure. During the dues battle, formal meetings at the UN were bruising for the United States, with country after country taking the floor to demand that America pay its back dues “on time, in full, and without conditions.” Even toward the end, as details of a compromise took shape in private meetings, the public rhetoric remained feverish. Open meetings make good theater, but deals are cut in back rooms. For this reason, too, it was clear that by the time the U.S. delegation was winging its way to the Durban racism conference, the time to rally others to our cause had already passed.

That the United States cannot saunter into a public meeting and expect others to fall into step behind it does not mean that official forums can be ignored. Moves to circumvent ordinary channels risk being labeled as power plays. Likewise, reciting U.S. proposals with a pompous “take it or leave it” tone may seem like fair game for a superpower, but it only undercuts our cause. By doing its homework and making convincing arguments in open meetings, the United States can gain some favor by showing that it knows it cannot rule by fiat and is willing to engage in give-and-take. In its public speeches during the dues debate, the U.S. delegation sought to disarm critics by conceding that the arrears were regrettable, and by pleading for help in solving a problem that was admittedly—in significant part, at least—an American creation. Success in these settings was

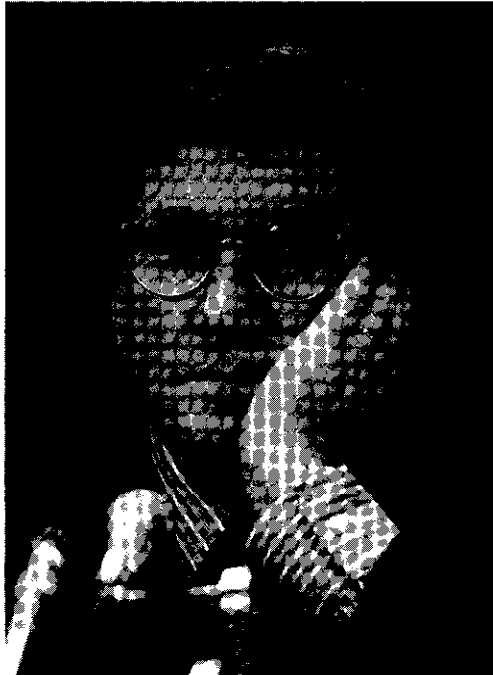
measured in terms of diplomatic damage limitation.

But for every one diplomat in the U.S. seat, playing by the rules, ten others should be working the corridors, explaining the details of the American position one-on-one to foreign ambassadors. Instead of wholesale oratory, the cornerstone of multilateral advocacy efforts is retail persuasion tailored to influence individual constituencies.

Before starting the country-by-country approach, the United States must figure out how to frame its case in a way that others can freely adopt. Winning support hinges on making a coherent, persuasive argument that gives countries a way out from under their reluctance to accede to U.S. power. On the UN dues issue, everyone understood that if American demands were not met, Jesse Helms might never agree to pay a dime of U.S. arrears. But no country wanted to simply give in to an American *diktat* co-authored by the UN's number one public enemy. Even the Israeli delegation needed to present its foreign ministry with a face-saving justification for supporting the U.S. position. The same impulse was at play when our closest allies asked to see U.S. evidence against Osama bin Laden before committing to the anti-terrorist effort. Even those who *want and intend* to side with us prefer to do it on their own terms.

The United States set out early on to formulate the strongest possible argument

for dues reform on its merits. Recognizing that talk of a U.S. dues cut prompted knee-jerk opposition, the U.S. delegation quickly retooled, dropping talk of a rate reduction in favor of a push for broad reform of the UN's entire financing system. Although the U.S. government did not



Ambassador Richard Holbrooke

care terribly about true "reform" of the UN's dues structure, U.S. diplomats made this goal their rallying cry, recognizing that—unlike a stand-alone U.S. dues reduction—it was an agenda to which other governments could subscribe. Statistics were used to show that some countries were paying too little to the UN and others too much, and that the interests of fairness demanded reform. Ambassador Holbrooke presented unwitting foreign ministers

with a laminated card listing every country's payment in order to drive home the point that the system, frozen in 1972, granted steep discounts to some of the richest countries in the world—including Singapore, Brunei and the United Arab Emirates—and simply demanded overhaul.

At the UN, history counts for a lot; delegations often cite chapter and verse of past resolutions to support their points. Digging up quotations, speeches and proposals from days gone by enabled the U.S. delegation to frame an argument that let other delegations back away from their opposition gracefully. We reminded delegates of the dramatic days of 1946, when Senator Arthur Vandenburg—the

Jesse Helms of his day when it came to UN dues—argued at the very first UN budget debate that the organization must cap the rate of its largest contributor, so that no country, not even the United States, could command excessive influence over decision-making.

Ambassador Holbrooke's arguments, laid out in charts and graphs, were pored over at countless meetings between the U.S. delegation and its counterparts. A diagram of a scale tilting precariously to one side was distributed in the capital cities of all UN member states to illustrate the imbalance in the organization's peace-keeping finance scheme. Over time, U.S. rhetoric on putting the UN on a "solid financial footing" by creating a "flatter, more equitable scale" echoed throughout the membership, finding its way into the speeches and statements of delegations from around the world. Eventually, Nigeria, Pakistan, Algeria and other unlikely allies could be seen button-holding regional colleagues in far corners of UN conference rooms, making the case that the finance system needed fixing. When delegates did meet *en masse*, having these countries repeat the merit-based arguments was infinitely more effective in turning around the remaining skeptics than U.S. pleas and threats.

Although everyone knew the United States was out to get its own rate cut and was making the UN an offer it could scarcely refuse, the reframing of the campaign into one for "reform" defused much antagonism. In the final weeks of the debate, when the momentum for change was unstoppable, the United States calmly but firmly reminded its fellow members that unless the final package met the American demands, even a reformed system would leave the UN in continuing financial crisis. At the tail end, the majority of members had accepted U.S. logic but requested extra time to absorb the proposed rate increases. With

the help of Ted Turner, whose donation promised to delay the impact of rate increases for most countries, the American delegation quickly agreed. This small concession helped achieve U.S. goals with a minimum of resentment. This flexibility allowed the United States to come away with almost everything it originally wanted, as well as a reformed system that allowed many other participants in the debate to claim victory.

Untangling Entangling Alliances

MULTILATERAL politics are often dominated by alliances that complicate the task of persuading individual delegations to take the U.S. side. Recognizing the rationale and role of these coalitions and attacking them one by one is essential to building support. Most countries in the United Nations are small or poor or both. Casting lots with like-minded delegations gives weak nations a power base. Although the Cold War bipolarity that generated the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has long since collapsed, by acting under the 120-plus-member NAM umbrella, the developing world has a controlling bloc within the UN General Assembly. Smaller but still significant blocs include the European Union and its associate members, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Rio Group, the Southern African Development Community and others. While these coalitions do not operate in all UN decision-making arenas, their influence is felt ever more widely.

The strength of such groups means that an American appeal to a bilateral relationship—for instance, with the United Kingdom or Mexico—may not lure the ally away from an opposing EU or Rio Group position. While many U.S. foreign policymakers have long advocated a common European foreign policy—a

single phone number to call, as Henry Kissinger once famously put it—at the UN, the reality of European coordination is slow and cumbersome decision-making that often culminates in lowest common denominator positions dictated by Germany or France. On UN dues, as long as the French held the EU presidency and were determined to oppose the U.S. plan, private sympathy from Great Britain, Sweden, Portugal and others did little good. In the world of bloc politics, the United States must go beyond gaining the backing of friendly delegations to wrest them out of the grip of opposing group positions.

Unified political and regional groups cannot be attacked frontally. Since a major purpose of these alliances is to enable smaller countries to stand up to the United States, an open effort to divide and conquer these alliances usually just solidifies resistance. Nothing galled the French more than indications that the United States was trying “to divide the EU.” Although the United States must respect group leadership, the key to changing a bloc’s position is addressing the forces behind it. Alliances are generally made up of a large majority of countries that have no stake in the fight and may even privately disagree with the collective position, led by a handful of interested delegations that appeal to group unity to hold the others in thrall. Eroding a solid alliance entails both picking off the disinterested and turning around the core of hardliners.

The United States has yet to fully adapt its multilateral strategies to the reality of alliance politics. Going a big step beyond standard U.S. lobbying tactics, in the dues campaign U.S. diplomats from the UN traveled the world to lobby delegations during key decision-making congresses of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of African Unity. Through these efforts, the United States

was able to influence group positions before they were finalized, a far easier task than attempting to reverse unfavorable positions after the fact. By recognizing that key turning points occur within the alliance structures long in advance of actual UN debates, the United States can get ahead of bloc politics, weighing in with key delegations before they have committed themselves to any particular line.

Because they rarely speak up in multilateral debates, the vast majority of delegations from small countries are often overlooked in advocacy efforts despite the voting power they wield. In the Human Rights Commission vote, for example, Andorra, Benin and Fiji held just as much sway over the final result—arrived at by secret ballot—as did China or Russia. Early on in the drive to lower U.S. dues, important delegations often asked why the United States bothered bringing its case to small delegations. Although the United States and other large countries often rue the “one country, one vote” system, the diffusion of power can be turned into an advantage. Harvesting the low-hanging fruit of small delegations can be relatively easy, and can help isolate more influential players in due course. Because of its size, resources and global presence, the United States is uniquely positioned to rally small delegations that others leave out of their lobbying efforts.

The value of soliciting backbench delegations is several-fold. When the United States first called for a debate on the dues issue, other countries resisted, claiming that the discussions would open up a Pandora’s Box of irreconcilable differences, since no country would willingly pay a penny more under a revised system. By relying on its bilateral relationships to recruit Israel, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Hungary and the Philippines to announce at the outset of the debate that they would “volunteer” to contribute more for UN

peacekeeping, this argument fell away. Later on, when the United States needed proof that the General Assembly as a whole was ready to create an agenda item to discuss financial reform, eliciting dozens of letters of support from across the membership proved critical. At the UN, demonstrating the allegiance of fully half of the organization's 189 members—even if they are virtually all small countries with limited influence—causes opponents to cower.

Where delegations do not have a strong position, winning them over sometimes requires little more than some stroking. When small countries are lobbied personally by the U.S. ambassador to the UN, capitals take notice. During the dues campaign, Ambassador Holbrooke paid countless visits to UN missions across New York City that had never before hosted any senior U.S. official. The Americans got to know each delegation and its issues: Oman was livid about the UN's peacekeeping failures and did not want to invest another dime in them; the Pakistanis would help, but wanted to ensure that their troop contributions to peacekeeping were properly recognized; the Germans could not discuss UN finances without bemoaning their exclusion from the Security Council. Hearing out these countries enabled the United States to see the dues issue from their perspective and craft effective appeals to them as a consequence. As importantly, the hours spent with each and every delegation helped build up the kind of close relationships that are indispensable in a crisis but that cannot be forged on the spot.

Ledger Diplomacy

POWER-POINT presentations and personal visits were not enough to sway staunch opponents to the dues reform agenda, however. Some delegations scoffed at

what they deemed efforts to cloak a unilateral U.S. agenda in the guise of UN reforms. In these cases, the United States brought bilateral pressure to bear to persuade hostile delegations to moderate their opposition.

Although at a forum-wide level U.S. power can have a polarizing effect, American influence is a powerful weapon for persuading individual delegations. In *A Dangerous Place*, an account of his experience as U.S. Ambassador to the UN in the mid-1970s, Daniel Patrick Moynihan suggested that the United States use its bilateral ties to advance multilateral priorities. Absent other compelling bilateral goals, Moynihan argued, the U.S. Ambassador to Togo, for example, should make it his or her number one objective to secure that country's backing on key matters in the UN and other forums. By mobilizing support in this way, he suggested, the United States might have headed off the "Zionism Is Racism" resolution that sent U.S.-UN relations into a decades-long downward spiral.

Unfortunately, Moynihan's proposal went nowhere. Multilateral issues remain a sidebar at best to bilateral relationships. Ambassadors have no incentive to push remote and contentious multilateral issues that have little direct bearing on their day-to-day jobs. When the State Department asks that a typical UN issue be raised, embassies tend to simply fax off a background paper to the foreign ministry. When it is brought up at all, the issue is generally raised in isolation, rather than as something central to the give-and-take of the relationship. Even where embassies are willing to push, they rarely have sufficient information to persuade. Though the United States has unparalleled capacity to wage effective campaigns on the global stage via its network of diplomats, this machinery rarely kicks into gear.

On pressing issues, ambassadors need

to be held accountable for delivering the support of their host countries and, in turn, they need to be equipped with the tools and incentives to do so. During the dues debate, the limitations of traditional channels, whereby only the State Department can “instruct” an embassy to raise an issue, became immediately apparent. Instruction cables, required to go through multiple “clearances” by various regional and functional bureaus, were too slow, formal and routine to elicit the necessary advocacy and energy. Instead, once the instructions were given, U.S. diplomats at the UN established direct relationships with their counterparts in various capitals, providing detailed, country-specific information in real time. Traditionally, when UN issues are raised in capitals, they are brought up only once, with the ambassador reporting back via cable whether the host country said “yes” or “no.” On the dues issue, by contrast, since countries’ initial reactions were invariably negative, the first approach needed to be supplemented by a campaign to turn “no” into “yes.” U.S. diplomats at the UN implored their colleagues in embassies to press on in the face of opposition, and to raise the issue repeatedly whenever the country’s relationship with the United States was discussed.

While the United States knows how to mount an aggressive diplomatic campaign when it needs to, the efforts tend to be confined to a handful of countries routinely judged as major players, irrespective of whether these governments are actually calling the shots on a given issue. During the dues campaign, these stepped-up tactics were deployed around the world, with more than fifty embassies actively engaged. In this way, the United States was able to ferret out some unlikely ring-leaders—Oman for the Gulf Cooperation Council, for example—who were ultimately behind unfavorable groups’ positions.

The UN dues campaign illustrates

that the multifaceted relationships between the United States and most other countries make it possible to use both carrots and sticks to elicit cooperation. When a collective incentive such as the salvaging of the U.S.-UN relationship will not sway a country, a more targeted individual inducement may. Most nations count the United States among their most important relationships, a position that confers substantial leverage.

But links between bilateral and multilateral agendas are rare. The State Department strictly separates responsibility for multilateral and bilateral priorities, and the bureaucracy is deeply skittish about *quid pro quos*. The conventional wisdom is that linking unrelated issues complicates bilateral relationships, risking charges of abuse of power. While other countries routinely trade votes on candidates for election to international bodies, U.S. policy forbids it. As a result, on the Human Rights Committee vote we were deserted by some of our closest friends who had committed to trades with other countries in order to advance election campaigns they were waging.

The U.S. government maintains no central ledger in which bilateral relationships are tracked. There is no place to turn to find out what the United States has done for a particular country lately, or what a country may want or fear. We do not keep formal track of which U.S. officials have trusted relationships with which foreign counterparts, of who in the business world might bring influence to bear, or even of what we have learned about how each government makes decisions. An ambassador or State Department desk officer will have part of the picture, but so will officials in Defense, Commerce and other departments and agencies. Likewise, no one tracks what the United States is seeking from others, so that just as one Executive Branch department is trying to curry favor on a top priority, another may

be complaining about something petty. Because they are smaller, and their relations with the United States are of high priority, other countries' right hands are much more likely to know what their left hands are doing when it comes to relations with the United States. While they can play off a range of policy issues to get what they want out of the Americans, the United States is poorly organized to do the same.

During the UN dues negotiations, the U.S. delegation repeatedly learned after the fact of loans, debt forgiveness and other concessions made to countries that actively opposed the reform process. At the end of a long and contentious meeting with the Singaporean delegation, one of their diplomats pulled from his briefcase a press report announcing a U.S.-Singapore free trade agreement. "*This is what matters*", he said, dismissing the importance of the dues issue while steadfastly maintaining his country's refusal to pay more. Without a ledger, Singapore's recalcitrance at the UN had no impact on their favorable treatment at the hands of the U.S. Trade Representative. Had the matters simply been raised together, the free trade cooperation would have provided leverage on the dues issue even without an explicit *quid pro quo*. Allies and enemies alike know that the United States does not keep track of its bilateral relationships in this way, however, and thus rest assured that opposing the United States in multilateral forums will rarely trigger repercussions in the bilateral relationship.

The growing importance of multilateral decision-making demands steps to factor multilateral issues into bilateral relationships. Simply keeping closer track of countries' support in international forums—and making this information available to ambassadors and intermediaries—would signal other countries that their relationships with the United States

cut across multilateral arenas. Before heading off to their posts, ambassadors and political officers stationed in U.S. embassies abroad should visit the UN for a briefing on their new host country's UN record and a strategy session on how to promote better cooperation. While vote-swapping for international elections might bring more grief than gratification, on top priorities involving, for example, UN sanctions, countries should be told that their cooperation will be taken into account by officials with influence over the bilateral relationship.

This does not mean that the United States can or should demand lockstep support in multilateral forums from all aid recipients and trade partners, or disrupt important policy initiatives when involved countries fail to toe America's line on unrelated issues. Multilateral decisions with serious consequences are relatively few, and the scope of our bilateral relationships makes possible nuanced rewards and disincentives that do not compromise American principles or priorities. During the UN dues campaign, U.S. diplomats at the UN made a point of asking other countries whether there was anything that could be done for them bilaterally. While America's UN diplomats could not move mountains, small gestures—usually jostling a small favor loose from another area of the bureaucracy—often went a long way.

The multilateral context itself offers some opportunities for low-cost linkages. During the year of the dues debate, the U.S. delegation used support on that issue as a criterion for deciding which countries to support in contested elections to international bodies. While the United States would not back an inappropriate candidate simply because it backed the dues drive, positions on the dues issue were used to decide among qualified contenders.

This year, while the UN will focus

heavily on terrorism, it will also debate and pass resolutions on other issues—for example, combating AIDS, nuclear and small arms proliferation, and global development. While these will pale in significance for the United States next to the anti-terrorism campaign, they will be of prime importance to certain countries. Our handling of their concerns—our level of engagement, flexibility and willingness to listen—will influence how others treat our priorities.

Another useful measure short of an explicit *quid pro quo* is engaging cabinet secretaries, members of Congress and other U.S. officials to stump for support in key capitals. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee was heavily engaged in the dues campaign, visiting the UN, lobbying Washington embassies, and even writing to ask foreign leaders to agree to pay more. Near the end of the dues debate the U.S. Trade Representative and the Secretaries of the Treasury and Defense were enlisted to call ministers of finance, trade and defense in countries in which they had close ties. Although these officials were generally unfamiliar with the dues issue and were usually speaking to foreign colleagues equally remote from the UN negotiations, mobilizing these important interlocutors underscored the seriousness of the U.S. campaign and created a useful implicit link to other bilateral priorities.

Though targeted efforts can erode a solid group stance, there are invariably some delegations that cannot be won over. In the dues negotiation, these included Cuba, Libya and others who opposed initiatives simply because the United States had proposed them. But intractable nations can be isolated by convincing others that their opposition is politically motivated or based solely on narrow, as opposed to enlightened, self-interest. While delegations may be loath to criticize colleagues for ill-founded

positions, the silent majority of moderates is willing to work quietly to prevent spoilers from blocking progress.

From December to September

THE QUEST to lower America's dues and settle the arrears problem recedes in importance now that much weightier problems stand before us. It is worth keeping in mind, however, that without the December 2000 deal the United States would be undertaking its delicate coalition-building from the position of being the UN's biggest debtor, on the verge of losing its General Assembly vote. To get out of this awkward corner, the administration and Congress would have had to voluntarily pay the back dues, notwithstanding the proposed Helms-Biden bargain having been spurned. Likewise the UN membership would have faced a quandary: either refuse the United States in its hour of need, or put aside the dues issue, leaving UN finances in ruin and resentment toward the United States on the rise.

Though that crisis was averted, another very nearly flared. Although the Senate acted in January 2001 to approve payment of the promised arrears on the basis of Ambassador Holbrooke's deal, the House leadership sat on its hands for months, even proposing to attach new conditions to the promised payment. In early September, as the annual opening of the UN General Assembly approached, delegations concluded grimly that, nine months after the deal was reached, President Bush intended to arrive in New York empty-handed. Those who had supported the United States felt sheepish if not betrayed, and our opponents patted themselves on the back for having predicted U.S. faithlessness.

After September 11, the Congress

moved swiftly to discharge payment, and the frustration dissipated, though it did not disappear. Rather than riding off the momentum reached in U.S.-UN relations when the December deal was announced, the administration was faced with a risky standing start, having first to put a new ambassador in the driver's seat and then to accelerate from zero to ninety in mere seconds. In the first few weeks it appeared as though we had pulled it off, but we must avert such situations in the future. Our multilateral behavior should be aimed to ensure that, whatever befalls us, we can approach the UN free of baggage, as a trusted, respected leader able to mobilize support from around the world.

Whether it ever truly existed or not, the era of the United States as unchallenged global agenda-setter is over. In a globalized setting with competing cen-

ters of power, the United States must learn how to maximize its influence by bringing others on board, rather than trying to shove them off to the side as we press ahead. The surest way to dissolve the fragile international coalition we have assembled for the fight against terrorism is to take it for granted. Impatience or arrogance toward the UN will signal the world that the newfound U.S. focus on multilateralism is a passing fancy that will last only as long as the current crisis. Now is the time for a genuine change of course, built on the understanding that to win in the multilateral arena, the United States must rely not on power alone but on hard work—patient persuasion, alliance politics and targeted leverage. A failure to sharpen these tools may mean that an increasingly interdependent world hews less and less to American interests. □

ANNOUNCING THE 2002

PHILLIPS FOUNDATION JOURNALISM FELLOWSHIPS

• WORKING JOURNALISTS ELIGIBLE FOR \$50,000 •

If you are a working print journalist with less than five years of professional experience, a unique opportunity awaits—the chance to apply for a grant to complete a one-year project of your choosing, focusing on journalism supportive of American culture and a free society.

Founded in 1990, the Phillips Foundation is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to advance the cause of objective journalism. The Foundation's fellowship program serves to provide support for journalists who share the Foundation's mission: to advance constitutional principles, a democratic society and a vibrant free enterprise system.

The Phillips Foundation offers \$50,000 full-time and \$25,000 part-time journalism fellowships. Applications are now being accepted for 2002. Applications must be postmarked by March 1, 2002. The winners will be announced at an awards dinner in Washington in the Spring. The fellowships will begin on September 1, 2002. Applicants must be U.S. citizens.

For applications and more information, visit our website or write:

Mr. John Farley

THE PHILLIPS FOUNDATION

7811 Montrose Road, Potomac, Maryland 20854

Telephone (301) 340-2100

E-mail: jfarley@phillips.com

<http://www.thephillipsfoundation.org>

Deadline: March 1, 2002