



Summing up the Summit

By Don Kraus

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Global politics is not for the faint of heart. I spent the last year preparing for the 2005 UN "Summit of all Summits." This week 150 heads-of-state rolled into New York City for the largest meeting of world leaders ever to be held in the history of humanity. I've been caught up in a whirl-wind of radio interviews, strategy meetings, and late night sessions spent dissecting progressive drafts of the "Outcome Document" that national chiefs have come to sign.

The area around the UN building is surrounded by police and security forces. My BBC interview was conducted in a hotel room because only official delegations, UN staff, and press are allowed in the building. I was escorted to my lunch meeting yesterday, held at a restaurant half a block away from the UN, by a nervous plainclothes security agent. But the frustration of dealing with increased security is nothing compared to angst attached to what this "once in a generation" opportunity to build a stronger, more effective UN has and has not accomplished.

The good news is that significant progress has been made on a number of important fronts. For starters, the Outcome Document, which is, in effect, marching orders given to UN diplomats by their bosses, reaffirms the "vital importance of an effective multilateral system, in accordance with international law." It is no small thing for 170+ heads of state, including President Bush, to agree that "we live in a global and interdependent world. No State can stand wholly alone"; or that "many of today's threats recognize no national boundaries" and "that no State can best protect itself by acting entirely alone." Here are a few more points to feel good about:

- Leaders decided to create a new Peacebuilding Commission with a support office and funds to give the UN the ability to keep nations from falling back into conflict once a peace agreement has been achieved.
- After sixty years, the UN will finally have a standing police capacity for UN peacekeeping operations (no small step for the U.S. which has had laws against any kind of standing UN military capacity).
- All UN members accepted a collective international responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, and agreed to take timely and decisive collective action, through the Security Council, when peaceful means prove inadequate and national authorities fail to protect their citizens.
- A strong call was made to conclude a comprehensive convention on terrorism within a year and support for early entry into force of the new Nuclear Terrorism Convention.
- Plans were put in place to make the UN more efficient, effective and accountable including the creation of an independent oversight committee and ethics office.
- Nations agreed to update the UN by reviewing all mandates older than five years, so that obsolete ones can be dropped to make room for new priorities.
- A one-time staff buy-out will ensure that the UN employs the right people based on merit to get the job done.
- Decisive steps were taken to strengthen the UN's human rights machinery including doubling the budget of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

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- Heads of states decided to establish a new UN Human Rights Council during the coming year to replace the discredited Human Rights Commission.
- Democracy was reaffirmed as a universal value and the new U.S. initiated Democracy Fund was welcomed.
- World leaders recommitted to an additional \$50 billion a year to fight poverty by 2010.
- All developing nations agreed to adopt, by 2006, a national plan to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps and achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, thereby cutting extreme poverty in half.
- Leaders agreed to update the UN's charter (always tricky business) by eliminating the outmoded Trusteeship Council which oversaw decolonization and by deleting references to enemy states (which referred to Germany and Japan during WWII).

These important steps forward should not be underrated and I am proud to have played a (very) small role in bringing them about. But this summit could have achieved much more than it did. The United States, along with fellow spoilers Cuba, Venezuela, Egypt and Pakistan bears the primary responsibility for what many consider the underwhelming results of this Summit.

Here's what happened: In early August Ambassador Jean Ping of Gabon, who was serving as the president of the General Assembly, presented the third draft of the Outcome Document that negotiators from 32 nations, including the US, had been working on. This document included important agreements on issues ranging from nonproliferation and disarmament to the structure of the new Human Rights Council.

U.S. Ambassador John Bolton was just reporting to work at the UN after receiving a recess appointment by President Bush (since the Senate would not confirm him). Citizens for Global Solutions campaigned against Ambassador Bolton's nomination because we were concerned that he would derail measures to make the UN stronger and more effective. Unfortunately, our concerns became reality when Bolton proposed over 700 changes to the Outcome Document. Although some of Bolton's edits were constructive, the sheer magnitude of them opened up a flood of changes from other nations that dissolved the delicate consensus that was holding the document together. Many of the United States' (pre-Bolton) priorities were watered down in the ensuing negotiations. This could have been avoided if Ambassador Bolton had remembered the cardinal rule of diplomacy – it is better to remain silent and thought a fool than speak and remove all doubt.

Here's the bad news:

- The most important gap in the final document is that it contains absolutely nothing about disarmament or non-proliferation. Called "a disgrace" by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the gains squandered by Bolton's "negotiations" included agreements that "progress in disarmament and non-proliferation is essential to strengthening international peace and security" and a call to "explore effective measures to prevent and combat the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, ... as well as to ban their transfer to non-State actors." U.S. concerns include non-binding support for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the landmine treaty, and calls for nuclear capable states to eventually reduce their nuclear stockpiles.
- In the Terrorism section, the lack of a clear definition of the most heinous crime of our century could ensure its perpetration by so called 'freedom fighters'. Lost was a clear statement that "any action intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, when the purpose of such an act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population or to compel a Government or an international organization to carry out or to abstain from any act cannot be justified on any grounds and constitutes an act of terrorism." Instead we ended up with a milk-toast condemnation of "terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, committed by whomever, wherever and for whatever purposes, as it constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security."

- The section on Impunity, which committed nations to “end impunity for the most serious crimes of concern to the international community, such as crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes” was completely deleted after the United States refused to allow for any mention of the International Criminal Court in the document. Amb. Bolton would not accept a compromise that calls for cooperation with the ICC “in accordance with our respective legal obligations.” He even was reported to have objected to the Security Council resolution which referred the crimes in Darfur to the Court, despite strong U.S. public support for the referral.
- Although the final Document includes a resolution to create a Human Rights Council, the earlier text stipulated that the Council’s members would be elected by a two-thirds vote of the General Assembly, which would have prevented human rights abusers like Sudan from hijacking the Council. Also lost was the condition that the Council’s members should be evaluated to ensure that they “abide by human rights standard in their respect, protection and promotion of human rights.” Instead the make up and criteria for membership of the Council will be (hopefully) determined by the General Assembly over the next year.
- One of the United States’ primary goals for the summit was the adoption of management reforms to make the UN more effective and transparent. One important measure lost, after the Bolton edits dissolved the consensus that was holding the agreement together, was a commitment “to ensure that the Secretary-General has sufficient authority and flexibility” to hire and fire staff, something any effective boss needs. Another loss was the creation of an “independent oversight advisory committee of experts” to recommend to the General Assembly ways to improve the organization’s oversight coverage.

Ambassador Bolton said that reform “is not a one night stand” but a process. We agree on this point. Overall, I believe that historians will look back on this 2005 Summit as a “glass half full” event. Important measures were agreed upon by heads of state that go a long way toward making the UN an effective and empowered 21st Century institution. But much more could have been accomplished if the United States had kept its eye on the goal and did not allow itself to be sidetracked by low priority ideological driven issues. Secretary Rice said that she would keep Ambassador Bolton on a short leash and she should in the future. Fortunately enough forward motion was made to justify nations staying the course and seeing this round of improvements to fruition. Hopefully Congress will see the wisdom of allowing diplomats the space to do their job without imposing harsh conditions and withholding U.S. dues to the UN. But that’s a topic for another day.