MAY: With the defeat of the Axis powers in 1945, the United States emerged as the strongest nation on earth, but rather than emulate hegemons of the past, American leaders envisioned a new and different world order. Their goal was to organize an international community, establish universal human rights and a growing body of international law. This required new institutions, in particular, the United Nations. Three quarters of a century later, you have to be willfully blind not to see that the UN and many other international organizations have become bloated and corrupt bureaucracies, increasingly serving the interest of despots. To discuss what’s gone wrong and what might be done to prevent the UN and other international organizations from drifting further into the clutches of authoritarians, we’re joined by Rich Goldberg, a Senior Advisor at FDD. Among his many government positions, Rich served as the Director for Countering Iranian Weapons of Mass Destruction at the National Security Council, and as Deputy Chief of Staff and Foreign Policy Advisor to former Senator Mark Kirk, both while Mark Kirk was in the Senate and before that in the House. Rich is an officer in the U.S. Navy Reserve.

Also, with us is Orde Kittrie, he too is a Senior Fellow at FDD, as well as a professor of law. He's a leading expert on non-proliferation law and policy and an expert on international law, particularly as it relates to the Middle East. On Lawfare, well, Orde wrote the book, its title, Lawfare: Law as a Weapon of War. Orde has served for over a decade in various legal and policy positions at the U.S. State Department. Among them, he was lead negotiator at the UN for the Treaty on the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism and participated in drafting several UN Security Council Resolutions. And we’re delighted to have Emma Reilly, who has worked in the field of human rights for almost 20 years. She joined the UN Human Rights Office in 2012. A year later, she blew the whistle on an exceptional and dangerous policy, UN bureaucrats giving to the Chinese government the names of dissidents, including U.S. citizens who planned to testify before UN Human Rights bodies. The response, well they’re trying to fire her. I’m Cliff May. It’s nice to have you with us here too on Foreign Podicy.

- Foreign Podicy Intro -

MAY: All right, Rich, look, I offered just four sentences on the evolution or maybe the devolution of the UN and other international organizations. Maybe just elaborate a bit on what the UN’s founders attempted and what’s actually occurred, as you’ve seen it.

GOLDBERG: Yeah, I mean, listen, we just celebrated the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, and we think of this ideistically. This body created out of World War II, the failure of the League of Nations to prevent a World War after World War I. And the idea that we could have the world powers sit together with the community of nations to defend human rights, to ensure that genocides, a Holocaust could never happen again, to ensure world war would not happen again. To prevent conflict, maintain what they call “international peace and security.” And over time, this creates massive bureaucracies, international organizations, hundreds of international organizations.

And while this was created out of U.S. leadership, as you grow and grow into bureaucracy and add members and bring into that club of the international community, members who don't view the world as you do, authoritarian dictatorships. Those with an agenda to move the United States out of the way of leading this world community, you have to ask yourself, do these institutions continue to function in a way that serves the interests of United States, our allies, the way we want the world to look, the way we wanted the world to look in 1945?

And in some cases, things are going very well. With this much money flowing through, billions of dollars, there’s going to be waste, fraud and abuse. With large bureaucracies, you’re going to have problems. But some of these large welfare humanitarian agencies that serve underserved communities throughout the world with food and medicine and
education, few others will be able to do that, except some of these agencies. But then you have other institutions that are meant to be guiding, moral leadership posts for the international community, whether it’s on human rights. And you also have technological and standard making bodies throughout the UN system to guide, as we move into the 21st century of technology and innovation.

And you also have other sorts of organizations that may exist in the arms control arena, or other types of areas, where U.S. adversaries, aren’t going to see the world as we see it. And as you keep writing checks and you keep growing these institutions at some point, if you take your eye off the ball, our adversaries, Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, Syria, you go down the litany of the list, they’re going to start trying ways to take advantage. And they’ve been doing that now for several years. And in organization we’ll talk about, we’re starting to see the problems emerge.

MAY: That’s a good, big picture analysis. Emma, I want you to just get your story on the record here. There’s lots of things we’re going to discuss. But I want people to hear from you. Human rights has been your career. I suspect it’s been your passion. And then you saw the UN human rights organizations violating basic human rights. Putting individuals and their families in mortal danger. Am I exaggerating when I say that?

REILLY: Not at all. Basically, yeah, when I joined the UN in 2012, it had always been something of a dream. I think I agree with a lot of what Rich just said about for some of these agencies. It really is the only place that a lot of abuses are talked about. For example, in China, in Russia, Asian Human Rights Council. And so it’s something of a dream to work with the UN. But very quickly, I discovered that UN bureaucrats were basically operating without any oversight. So, member states has set the rules with these bodies and the member states were very clear that nobody should know which specific individuals are going to be attending meetings of UN Human Rights bodies in advance, clear written rule. And basically my boss decided to break this for China. He explicitly said, “We don’t want to exacerbate China’s mistrust of us.” I tend to be of the opinion that if we’re working in the field of human rights, China to perhaps should mistrust us. But essentially, he started handing China names of individuals who were planning to attend sessions of human rights meetings.

MAY: And they were going to talk about human rights violations they had seen. The Uyghurs, for example, what was happening to them. They were going to testify in front of the UN.

REILLY: Yeah, exactly. They were going to talk about the beginnings of the Uyghur genocide. It’s now ongoing. They were going to talk about the treatment of people in Tibet. They were going to talk about Hong Kong. And how this information was used, was fairly obvious. China sent agents to their family homes. They were forced to call them to say, “Don’t go to that meeting.” In some cases that were horrific stories of phone calls made by one family member recounting that other family members were being tortured in the background. At least one of the people whose names was handed to China, later went back to China and was killed in a concentration camp. These are not minor issues. This is direct complicity of the UN bureaucracy itself in an ongoing genocide. And there has never been an investigation, unfortunately.

MAY: You saw this going on. You thought, “I can’t keep silent about this. I’m here to promote human rights, not see people’s human rights violated,” in the ways you’ve described. “So I’m going to be a whistleblower.” And there are supposedly protections for whistleblowers at the United Nations. You expected, I would think, that people would listen and say, “This is a problem.” And by the way, you expected, the media would be interested in this. And none of the above is what happened.
REILLY: No. When I reported it to each individual, they feigned surprise. The only thing that has actually happened internally in the UN is that they have asked the very man who gave names to China, “Did you do this?” His story of course, keeps changing. So, they just basically at the beginning denied it. I went to member states. The members states asked the UN, “Is this happening?” And the UN said, “No, it’s not.” I provided the written evidence. Of course, at that point the member states know the UN is lying, but there’s actually very little the member states can do in those circumstances. It’s very hard to hold a bureaucracy to account when you have no oversight of that bureaucracy.

And everything that the UN bureaucrats do is very much behind closed doors without a right of oversight of the member states. The UN has refused at any point to investigate it. And in fact, the UN in court – I could only take the UN to an employment tribunal, so that's sort of the main thing that we talk about in court. But the policy itself obviously is a major part of my court case. There the UN says, “Of course we gave the names to China. China asks. Somehow by definition, we consider this a public list, despite it never been published anywhere. Therefore, we have to give the names to China.”

MAY: So, essentially what you’re saying, and you’ve sent me. The UN’s response was to say, “Look, we’ve never done this besides, we’ve stopped doing it. And in any case, it’s okay for us to do it because it all should be public anyhow.” They’ve essentially said three things, all of which are contradictory at the same time, while also again, focusing on you and how bad you were to the system.

REILLY: Exactly. The UN’s main priority has been to stop people talking about this. So the UN has been more than willing to lie about it to member states, to the press. I actually won a court case last week in the Netherlands. I took the Dutch Foreign Minister to court because he repeated what the UN told the Dutch Parliament, and I won. So that's just gives you an idea. They don’t have a leg to stand on as soon as there is a country with rule of law where it’s looked at. But the problem is just the sheer lack of oversight. These bureaucrats effectively operate accountable to nobody. The UN’s legal position, in my case, is incredibly dangerous. They say that it cannot be misconduct if a UN bureaucrat breaks the rules that the member states of the UN have set. So what on earth would misconduct look like, then?

MAY: It kind of makes – if the UN bureaucrat has done it, it must be legal, by definition.

REILLY: Exactly. That is literally what the ethics office found in my case. So, the whistleblower policy that you’re talking about, you go to the ethics office, and the ethics office might say, “Can't send. Because nobody acted to stop this. It cannot have been misconduct.” Something approaching people infallibility of –

MAY: And the last question then we'll come back, they've been trying to get rid of you. There's a problem here and the problem is you and you telling the truth and you talking about what the UN is doing to violate rights and so everything they can do – and despite whistleblower protections that supposedly exist, that's what they want to do is get rid of you.

REILLY: Exactly. So I was actually finally, after seven years in 2020, I was given formal whistleblower protected status, which it turns out is absolutely meaningless. The Secretary General, despite having ordered my protection in 2018 decided, “No, I don’t feel like protecting her.” And that's basically it. And what happened instead is that the woman who has been leading the retaliation against me has placed me under investigation explicitly for the fact that I have told member states about this. So I'm under investigation for that. It's really interesting though, in a sense that the UN doesn't even have the sense to realize that it's shooting itself in the foot, because if the UN could possibly claim I was lying, I would be under investigation for that.
MAY: All right. Well, a couple we’ll come back to this and we’ll have you involved in the conversation as we go forward. Orde, I wanted to talk to you a little bit, at least to start about the International Criminal court also, was meant to play an important role in terms of human rights. It was founded to focus on those regimes in the world that are committing the most heinous crimes and getting away with it. Over the past decades, it hasn’t succeeded in prosecuting and convicting many international criminals. And under the current Chief Prosecutor, it’s the U.S. and Israel that are in the crosshairs. How did that happen?

KITTRIE: Yeah, thanks Cliff. One of the things that intrigues me about Emma’s comments is that we are seeing the same theme in various other international organizations. And want to discuss how that plays out at the ICC. Also, ICAO, the International Civil Aviation Organization. And then I’d be curious to hear from Emma, in terms of oversight, what’s the answer to this? Are there proposals out there that the U.S. for instance, could advocate for, that would increase the oversight? International Criminal Court is the international organization most focused on justice for atrocities. It’s currently led by the former Attorney General of the Gambia. She was Attorney General of the Gambia during a human rights abusing dictatorial regime. Of course, the ICC totally ignores those human rights violations that occurred in the Gambia. The International Criminal Court is incredibly inefficient. $2 billion spent for eight convictions total over 20 years. There’s rampant sexual harassment at the ICC, including a report that was commissioned by all of the ICC members states.

The report said that senior managers at the ICC are felt to have impunity for sexual harassment. Nothing is going to be done to them. That is the perception of those who are harassed. So what does the ICC do? It distracts from all of this by pursuing politicized illegitimate cases against two non-member states, the United States and Israel.

Now we recently saw an election at the ICC. We almost saw elected as prosecutor, the leading outside advocate of those cases. Thankfully, a more responsible candidate, one who will hopefully prove the ICC is management and refocus it on its core mission. And I just want to mention very briefly something similar happening at ICAO. The Chinese Secretary General Fang Lu covered up for months in infiltration of ICAO servers by a hacker group, reportedly sponsored by the Chinese government. The hack described as the worst in ICAO’s history reportedly enabled the hackers to spread malware to ICAO’s partners, leaving the entire aviation industry vulnerable. Despite the ICAO ICT teams disastrously incompetent response to the attack, the ICAO Secretary General intervened to protect them from discipline. Instead, the whistleblower who exposed the coverup was fired. And so, again and again, we’re seeing this across international organizations, and I’d be curious to know from your perch, you’ve probably seen some proposals for what can be done to change this dynamic because it’s clearly not a UNHRC only phenomenon.

MAY: No, go ahead, Emma if you have some quick thoughts on that, we’ll come back to solutions towards the end, after we kind of lay out some of the organizations and problems that there are. But if you have quick thoughts on it, no, go ahead.

REILLY: Yeah. To be honest, the elements of what a proper receptive UN would look like already exist. There’s something in the UN called the Joint Inspection Unit. And the people employed there report back to countries. So, the U.S. member of this actually did a report a couple of years ago about just how terrible the oversight mechanisms in the UN are. She found in the report that the ethics office was effectively unfit for purpose. What needs to happen is external oversight.

Just the same as you have civilian oversight of the military, you need external oversight of the UN. At the moment, and especially in my own case, the UN, if it loses a case, it rewrites the rules, it fires the judge. And if ever it’s forced to
do an investigation, it gets to handpick two investigators from them within its own staff. That is not oversight. So yeah, give the Joint Inspection Unit teeth. That could happen tomorrow, and so the U.S. is best placed to advocate for that.

**MAY:** Rich, the U.S. has on occasion, or various people in the U.S. government have on occasion said, “All right, at the very least, we need some independent auditing of finances of these organizations.” And the UN has always said, “That's nice that you'd like that, but you can't have it. It's just simply not going to happen. We do our own auditing and we tell you it’s good. So it’s fine.” And just going a little further. The Trump administration pulled out of the World Health Organization, pulled out of the UN Human Rights Council. President Biden has gone back into the World Health Organization, is going to begin again to become the major contributor, about 10 times as much as China contributes and has observer status and is going to go back to the UN Human Rights Council.

**GOLDBERG:** As we're recording this, we just had the Secretary of State appear for the first time since the U.S. withdrew from the Human Rights Council, speaking at the Human Rights Council’s meeting and pledging to lead a reform effort there, whether that's possible without putting some sort of conditionality on U.S. aid. It has not worked in the past, unlikely to work in the future. At the same time, you're talking about the World Health Organization, there you have an organization where the U.S. is a major, major contributor. There is oversight mechanisms.

U.S. is in leadership posts, when we're participating and still, you have a breakdown in how this institution operates. And this is a problem you see in many international organizations and regimes, where parties are supposed to play by certain rules, but when they don't, when they don't cooperate, when they break their commitments, what exactly is the enforcement mechanism to protect the international community? And if you're going to make your foreign policy and your health policy globally dependent on a UN agency that cannot be trusted, that cannot enforce its own commitments. That cannot really be the alarm bell for a pandemic or ever get to the bottom of a pandemic to ensure it doesn’t happen again. What is the value of that organization? What does that mean for us planning going forward? These are the kinds of questions we have to grapple with.

**MAY:** It strikes me Orde, that in a way, the larger issue here is that we, in theory, have something that is called with great affection, the liberal rules-based international order. But as the various institutions that comprise this liberal rules-based international order, get taken over by China, by other authoritarians, by human rights abusers, and turn to their own efforts, you end up with a world order that is distinctly at some point, illiberal and based on rules made in places like Beijing, made in places like Moscow, made in places like Tehran. Made in a way that is going to disadvantage the free nations of what we used to call the free world. We don't use that phrase very much anymore, in favor of the North authoritarian world, at a time when the authoritarians are increasingly not least those in Beijing saying, “Look, representative government democracy. That's last century. It doesn't really work. You don't want it. It's inefficient. Listen to us. We have the way forward.”

And unless we at least recognize this change is going on, we're not going to do anything about it. And too many people I talk to, people who are in diplomatic servers, people who work at the UN. They don't seem to see it. What they say is the UN or the UN system is flawed, what they say is we need more engagement. And I think that's really like putting a Band-Aid on a gangrenous leg, no, Orde?

**KITTRIE:** Yeah. So it’s clear that the system is not just flawed, but very flawed. And it's also clear that U.S. adversaries are engaging with the system in a much more sophisticated hardball way than the United States is doing. As I mentioned in my book *Lawfare: Law as a Weapon of War*, the Chinese government have adopted Lawfare as a major element of their national strategy.
When it comes to international organizations, the Chinese government has a very, very sophisticated approach to these international organizations. It’s no accident that of the 15 major UN agencies, four of them are led by Chinese nationals, whereas no other country has more than one leading them. And one of the problems, one of the many problems is that the Chinese government gives instructions to its nationals once they head these organizations and these nationals follow it. The UN charter requires that UN officials not seek or receive instructions from their national governments. However, Chinese national officials typically use these organizations, resources, reputations, rulemaking, and standard setting functions to advance PRC objectives, often to the detriment of the organizations’ missions. And it has an impact, not only on the human rights of particular individuals, as in what Emma was describing, but you also end up with an influence on the policy of these organizations. If you look at the UN Human Rights Council, right? During 2019 China’s human rights record was under formal scrutiny, as the UNHRC considered the report of China’s universal periodic review. The PRC engaged in an aggressive, multifaceted campaign of pressure, on both UN and foreign government officials to stifle criticism of its human rights record during the UPR, probably part of this was pressure on people who were going to testify against it. And China basically ended up with dozens of countries signing on to statements applauding China’s “counter-terrorism de-radicalization measures” in Xinjiang, that the statement said led to a “stronger sense of happiness, fulfillment and security.” Some of this is really Orwellian, and I think it’s a result of the fact that China, in particular, is taking a much more systematic – to these institutions than is the U.S.

MAY: Yeah. And Emma, I’m curious to know. Your colleagues at the UN, who probably, like you, have a passion for human rights. When they see Venezuela being voted onto the UN Human Rights Council. When they see a representative from North Korea get up and make a speech, and talk about the terrible human rights violations taking place today in Australia. Are they embarrassed by that? Are they cynical about that? Or do they think it’s just fine because everybody gets to have an opinion, and so does North Korea, so who are we to judge? How do they talk among themselves when you’re sitting, having a cup of coffee with them? or when you were, you’re probably not now.

REILLY: Yeah. Having a cup of coffee with me could be dangerous to your career. The disturbing thing, actually, has been some of those attitudes. When I first started reporting this in 2013, people were shocked. People thought it was disgraceful. People said, if there’s anything to do to support me in speaking out, etc. Now, the reaction isn’t so much that. It’s, “Well, that’s how it works. You knew that when you joined the UN. This is how things are.” I think it’s telling, this practice started in 2006. I discovered it in 2013, because I had just joined the organization, but nobody in those seven years thought to report it. Similarly, nobody else has dared reported since I did. I think there’s a problem. And I agree with what Orde’s saying, but I think it’s not just the Chinese citizens here within the UN, because that rule on taking instructions from national governments, the guy who decided to hand me in to China is French. And it is true that, from internal documents, you see the Chinese government sending CVS of their nationals. They want to have more people in there.

The Human Rights Council, I think, internally, is largely seen as a political talking shop. It’s where the mandates of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights come from, but there isn’t much questioning, to be honest, happening within the office about whether this is as it should be, whether it’s fulfilling what it was supposed to do. Because the idea of the Human Rights Council in 2006, was to replace the commission precisely because the commission had become overrun by authoritarians and was no longer really discussing human rights, but was just scoring political points off one another. The idea of the council was that, that was to stop. And I don’t think it can be viewed as a great success if it’s looked at from the standard of what it was supposed to achieve.

MAY: Yeah. There’s two points here that, one is that people think it’s not so bad, but the UN Human Rights Council at this point, I think is, for a lot of people around the world, it’s subverting the very idea of human rights. How do you
know what human rights means, and what is the definition of it, and where human rights come from? If you're somebody, I don't know, in some third world country trying to understand through the UN, I think you get a view of human rights that is very perverted. Another, you mentioned that it doesn't have to be a Chinese national, the head of the World Health Organization is an Ethiopian but, for reasons I don't necessarily understand, he seems beholden to Beijing, either from incentives or disincentives, he seems to be doing their bidding. That's what he has been doing. And when he lost the U.S., the most important funder, as somebody who's run an organization dependent on funders, you lose your most important funder, you generally submit your resignation and let somebody else try to heal it. Instead, he said, “No, I'll just wait for them to come back. And I don't apologize.”

At the top of the UN is the UN Security Council. Rich, Orde, you may want to jump on this as well. The difficulty seems to be, the UN Security Council has two members, Russia and China, who are authoritarian. Now, there is the U.S., and the U.S.'s allies. The U.S. and its allies don't necessarily march in lockstep. Just talk a little bit about what the Security Council does, or doesn't do, today and what utility it has, or doesn't have, Rich.

GOLDBERG: Yeah, I'll give you my two cents, and I'd be curious for Orde's as well, after mine, but I feel like we are not looking at the UN Security Council today the way we need to be. I think we need to reframe the strategic framework in which the United States views the utility of the Security Council. And in some ways it's a throwback to the Cold War era of the Security Council. I think we got into a malaise during the peacetime dividends of the post-Cold War era, where we had a China that was coming into the international community, wanting permanent normal trade relations with the U.S., playing nice with the U.S. and international organizations, keeping, at worst, in abstention on Security Council matters. We had a much weaker Russia, after the fall of the Soviet Union, that needed Western support as it was looking to rebuild and grow, with the hopes of a vibrant democracy replacing the Soviet Union.

And so, we were really able to have our way at the Security Council, with resolutions. And perhaps our European allies were the ones who would water things down more than Russia or China, and we would work hard and we would find compromise. And we would try to work, with consensus being the word at the International Organizations Bureau of the State Department, consensus being the goal. “We can reach consensus. We can get something across.” At some point, Russia, and now China, have reframed their strategy at the Security Council. And they look at it as, “Anything coming through the Security Council that's against our interests or our proxies' interests, or our client states' interests, we're just going to veto. And if it doesn't hurt our interests, we'll let it go. But maybe we'll still cause some pain to the United States along the way.” We haven't adopted that view. We're still in this, “Consensus is the goal. Let's water down our proposals. Let's see how we can find the lowest common denominator to avoid a veto in the Security Council.”

I would advocate taking the Russian perspective on this, and now the Chinese perspective, and that is, anything that the Europeans, Russia, China want to do at Security Council, that's adverse to our interests, we just veto. We assume nothing's going to get done at the Council, but we use it as a bully pulpit. We use it as a place to conduct political warfare, where we want to talk about issues. We want to confront our adversaries, let our adversaries respond, but that becomes the value of the Security Council, at least for the time being.

MAY: Yeah, Orde, I want you to pick up on that. But, a particular question I have. People think, a lot of people, I talk, that the Security Council issues a resolution, that's international law. A lot of people think that if the General Assembly issues a resolution, that's international law. Now, that is not the case, is it, although there's reason for people to think so. By the way, just another example of this, Javad Zarif, the Foreign Minister of Tehran, likes to say that because UN endorsed the Iran Deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, that means it is international law, and it was a violation of international law for the U.S. to withdraw from that, and it had no right to do so once the UN had essentially adopted
it. So people are getting a real confused message, around the world, about human rights, about international law, really about just about everything that comes out of the UN. Am I incorrect?

KITTRIE: You’re right, Cliff. It’s interesting to note, the UN Security Council basically achieved almost nothing for its first several decades. There were, I think, economic sanctions resolutions on a total of two countries coming out of the UN Security Council during its first several decades. After the fall of the Soviet Union, all of a sudden the Security Council became much more of a useful tool. There’ve been dozens of legally binding sanctions regimes imposed by the UN Security Council since the end of the Soviet Union. We now seem to have a situation where the UN Security Council is again becoming more back logged, less productive. And it’s a good question, how to restore the UN Security Council to the considerable value that I think it had for a number of decades.

It’s a challenge. The U.S. benefits from its veto power at the UN Security Council. There are a lot of proposals around the world that would take that away, or add additional parties, or whatever, permanent members, additional – So it seems to me, you’ve got to be careful vis-a-vis the UN Security Council.

One thing that I think is an opportunity is, that if you look at concern about what China is doing in the international organization arena, it is bipartisan. It is really across the political spectrum in Washington. I did some writing a couple of months ago, in which I was amused to discover that the criticisms of China’s role in international organizations from Human Rights Watch were, if you took away the names, practically indistinguishable from the criticism you were seeing from the Heritage Foundation. So it seems to me that this is one of, perhaps relatively few, issues in which there’s a strong consensus in Washington. I think there’s an opportunity, therefore, to try and get some immediate legislation in the books, that would push for things such as what Emma and Rich are talking about, that increased oversight. And I certainly hope that that occurs because I think there’s an opportunity here to get some U.S. muscle and some U.S. strategy in place where currently we’re basically having our butts kicked by the Chinese in this because they’re trying harder. They’re paying more attention. I think there’s an opportunity here and I hope it’s seized.

MAY: Yeah, we’re running short on time, but I wanted to at least ask you Rich, you mentioned that there are actually hundreds of international organizations at this point. Probably most of them largely financed by the U.S. I just wonder about others that even if we don’t have a chance to really discuss in depth, people should be aware of the good, the bad, and the ugly. Do you want to just tick off a few that you’ve been looking at?

GOLDBERG: Yeah, no, listen. I think Orde is exactly right. And I think this space of China’s strategy at the UN is one where, listen, we already heard the new UN Ambassador Linda Thomas Greenfield say that countering China at the UN will be her number one priority. And so this can be an area of bipartisan coalescence. There are organizations that we track where the Chinese have either already succeeded in running candidates to lead the organizations or have attempted and will attempt in the future. And it gives you, sort of, the path of what their strategy is. Some of these organizations, you’ve probably never heard of. The International Telecommunications Union. Pretty small, small budgets, but big impact because of its standards its making of influence, especially as we talk about 5G, next generation telecommunications, the internet. And the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, and I think already brought up earlier by Orde of the International Civil Aviation Organization.

There’s also sort of these Internal Secretariat Departments and organizations that the Chinese have taken control of like the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. They’re also the head of a specialized agency called the UN Industrial Development Organization, or UNIDO, which if you go to their website is basically just a daily press release in favor of the Belt and Road Initiative. You add onto the issues we’ve talked about, the Human Rights Council, you do have
a picture here of China’s strategy at the UN. Infiltrate, try to control standards making internationally. Find organizations that support the Belt and Road Initiative, ensure that you’re excluding Taiwan from participation, even in observer status in major international organizations, and find ways to defend yourself from accusations from the international community of wrongdoing, whether it’s undue influence at the WHO, which we’ve seen play out to defend itself from the pandemic, and its complicity there, or trying to whitewash what is as we see a genocide in Xinjiang, and other human rights abuses through the Human Rights Council.

MAY: We talked a little bit about what can be done, audits, independent bodies, not funding organizations that do a bad job. I guess the other thing that I know very briefly Emma, is I think in particular, our European – look, I don’t think the U.S. has been sufficiently concerned with this, not any administration. I mean, I think in the Trump administration, Nikki Haley, when she was Ambassador, she at least spoke about this and made some attempt, but it didn’t – she was going in the right direction, I’d say that. But we haven’t really seen much. Our European allies seem totally unconcerned with this. Australia and New Zealand, for the most part seem to my mind, I could be wrong, unconcerned with this. It would be good, would it not, if the nations of, again, what we used to call the free world, were more concerned about the UN international organizations and again about the world order of what was supposed to be the liberal rules-based international order. I’ll give you just a few moments to ponder that.

REILLY: Yeah. I mean, I agree. I think there is a need to pay more attention to it. I think, just from seeing it in my own case, there is this increasingly naïve belief on the part of some diplomats that when you ask a UN bureaucratic question, the answer that you’re getting is automatically truthful in a way that they do not make that assumption for any member state, but somehow the bureaucracy is perceived as being neutral. It should be neutral, but that perception should be checked. I think there’s also issues around just the level of cronyism internally. I have almost never seen a hiring process in the UN that was fair and based on the merit of the individual. There is a principle called the noble mare principle that is sort of responsible for a lot of the problems.

We have the higher salaries than any international civil service and the best benefits than any civil service. So, salary of the U.S., benefits of Sweden. It’s a nice cushy gig, and people want to hang onto it once they have it. So it’s very difficult for individuals within the system to speak out, and when we do, there’s no support there. The member states care about what we’re saying, will just believe when they’re told that it stopped or that it never happened. And I think that that’s the problem. There’s a sort of level of credulity when it comes to people who are presenting themselves with a very important title of UN Human Rights Officer. So therefore I have the moral high ground of what I’m saying must be true. That is in my experience when it comes to senior management, simply not the case.

MAY: Orde, any final thoughts or points you wanted to get in that you didn’t have a chance to do? This is your last chance.

REILLY: Just really quickly on I think a really interesting point was made by both Rich and Orde on the funding issue. Part of it is also where the funding goes. The U.S. funds programs that it believes in. So, it gives a lot of money to the Food and Agriculture Organization, for example, to UNHCR funding, refugee camps, et cetera. Of interest, is the fact that China, for example, as one of its donations to the UN every year, it gives $10 million to the Office of the Secretary General to use as it wishes.

MAY: Very interesting. Orde, same question, final points you wanted to get into that I didn’t give you a chance to?
KITTRIE: Yeah. So, I would say that – I mean, thank you, Emma, for what you’ve done. I think her suggestion of imposing a kind of transparency on the UN is a very good one, sort of systematic transparency. But I think that there’s a lot that could be done in the meantime, even really without the cooperation of the UN. A reference was made to the Food and Agriculture Organization. There are allegations that China’s successful campaign to install its candidate a top fee FAO involved a $78 million bribe to Cameroon in exchange for withdrawing its candidate from the race, as well as threatened economic retaliation against smaller and more developing countries if they oppose the Chinese candidate.

China has allegedly also bribed individual foreign officials to gain votes for its candidates. We talked about the ICAO misdeeds of the Chinese Secretary General. It seems to me that there are a lot of stories here that with some further digging could be brought to the world’s attention in a way that they’re not being brought to the attention now. And of course, that could be almost the sort of wedge for getting member states to support the kind of systemic transparency and investigations that Emma is talking about. So Emma, thank you for your efforts to bring UN problems to light. And I think as we’ve discussed, there are others also and the story really needs to be told both to address the particular misdeeds that have occurred, but also to help reform the UN and help it achieve its founding objectives in a better way than it has.

MAY: Rich, I’m going to give you the last words.

GOLDBERG: The last thing I’ll just say is obviously we’ve noted in the past the systemic antisemitism that exists inside the UN system as well. It runs across UN agencies. Obviously, the Human Rights Council has its share sort of obsession with the state of Israel against all other countries, even though Freedom House rates Israel free and China and Russia have seats on the council somehow.

And so, I think that two developments are something that we need to look at of how to with our allies, try to reframe and fix the UN system in that regard. Number one, the Abraham Accords, the opportunity to work with Gulf nations that are normalizing with Israel to bring those Abraham Accords to the UN as well. Can’t just be in the Middle East. Needs to be at Turtle Bay as well. And number two, many countries, including the United States State Department have signed up to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliances’ working definition of antisemitism. We need to get UN agencies to adopt that definition as well and implement it to ensure that this is not a system that allows itself ironically, to be subject to antisemitism after it was built out of the ashes of the Holocaust.

MAY: Well, the hour’s gone. The time has gone fast. We could discuss this for many more hours and should, I’m very pleased that Rich, you and Orde are working on this a lot of FDD and I’m proud to be working on it with you as your colleagues. Emma, I also thank you for the work you’ve done and I’m sympathize for the struggles you’re up against in the international arena, but it’s very, very important. I hope we’ve brought to a realization for people listening just how important all of this is. This is not a side show. This is something very pertinent to the future of the world order. And thank you for listening, it’s always good to be with you here on Foreign Podicy.