



July 9, 2021

Featuring Rich Goldberg and Morgan Viña

Hosted by FDD Founder and President Clifford D. May

**MAY:** The UN and other international organizations were designed to give structure to what we like to call the international community, establishing and expressing what we like to call international laws and international norms. Over recent years however, authoritarian regimes have been increasingly dominating these entities and utilizing them for their own decidedly illiberal ends. FDD scholars have just published *A Better Blueprint For International Organizations*, a monograph with a foreword by former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley and contributions from a dozen FDD scholars. They make clear what went wrong and what can and should be done to fix this broken, indeed increasingly corrupt international system. Richard Goldberg Senior Advisor to FDD is the monograph's editor. He's with us today, as is Morgan Viña who served as Chief of Staff and Senior Policy Advisor to Ambassador Haley and is now an Adjunct Fellow at FDD. I'm Cliff and I'm pleased that you're joining us too, here on *Foreign Podicy*.

Rich, remind us how and why the UN and its satellite organizations, how they were envisioned and how they got founded. Most of the listeners, most of them were not alive when that happened. I think it's part of the ether, but I don't think people really know the history.

**GOLDBERG:** Well, when we take a look back and we go all the way back to League of Nations post-World War I. There's an idea of President Wilson's, other foreign leaders that we could bring foreign powers together, the world power, so to speak, and have a community of adults, responsible stakeholders who would look out for international peace and security, that could be the ultimate decision makers on big decisions that the world has to come to that had failed in the past and usually resorted to violence, conflict. war, et cetera, hunger, humanitarian strife, et cetera. We flash forward. Obviously, the League of Nations was another failure. We had World War II and so, arising out of the ashes of a second war we had a vision of a better version of the League of Nations, the United Nations, and a lot of the doctrines, conventions, organizations that had existed going back to the 19th century forward were sort of incorporated into this larger UN United Nations system.

The idea was we now have a Security Council, a core permanent member structure along with others that get elected to make the big decisions about international peace and security to ensure that there isn't another World War and also a larger body, the General Assembly, The Community of Nations to come together to speak about issues of the day, to bring issues to light, and to cast an eye on injustices throughout the world. We had the Convention on the Declaration of Human Rights, which came in 1948 to again say we just came out of the Holocaust during the Second World War. We're not going to ever allow that to happen again. The General Assembly could be a place for that to be discussed and ultimately the Security Council as well.

Then you had all the different satellite agencies that you referred to. Some of them that predate the UN, some that were born out of 1945 and beyond discussions. Some that serve functional purposes. Some that are setting standards for technology as technology evolves, some that are humanitarian in nature serving certain types of humanitarian functional needs throughout the world. Some are advisory in nature and some are supposed to be there to be our guard posts to prevent disaster as the world evolves into a chaotic and dangerous place.

The World Health Organization for potential health and pandemic issues that could emerge. We think of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the watchdog for nuclear weapons and nuclear capable technologies. The OPCW, the Organization for the Prohibition Of Chemical Weapons to enforce the Convention on Chemical Weapons to ensure that we don't have chemical warfare the way we saw in past World Wars and beyond in a localized nature and then we have other mechanisms that are newer, that we thought would be good ideas, at least some did in the world, like the Human Rights Council, that perhaps there could be this commission or council that came next to try to stop human rights abuses and call out dictators.



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What we've seen over time, when we look through the various agencies and mechanisms and bodies that have been established is the good intentions that came decades ago from the United States and our allies have been hijacked, undermined, really with pernicious intent maligned by our adversaries and we think about the worst authoritarian leaders in the world, and they view this as a stage where they can undermine U.S. interest. They can advance their own interest. They can whitewash their misdeeds and things as simple as a Human Rights Council that on its face sounds so obvious that we should have, become so abused, so corrupted that it actually is a forum for dictators and authoritarians to whitewash their own sins and to cast stones upon the world democracies, the United States, Israel, and others.

So, what we did was we took a look at all these organizations. We boiled down to about a dozen that we thought were able to typify many others. Functional organizations, some of these standard-making organizations, some of the specialized agencies of the UN, also one peacekeeping organization. Peacekeeping, a major arm we could talk about. We said, "Okay, we need a real strategy for the 21st century. We have been lacking that through administrations." Towards the end of the Trump administration, we definitely saw finally the emergence and recognition of China being a malign actor that is corrupting so many organizations and advancing it. Obviously, we went through decades of The Cold War, where we knew we were in political warfare with the Soviet Union and many of these agencies and bodies, but we were able to lead an international order, the democracies of the world in that Cold War to stand up to the Soviets and Soviet satellites to push back wherever they tried to corrupt.

Now we have the post-Soviet Union Russia of Putin alongside Xi's China that is sort of doing that only in 2.0 version. Not just trying to cause angst to the United States, but advance their own interests, hijack organizations, see how they can use these resources and platforms to advance their own interests and they are succeeding. We have a semblance, I think, of people in Washington coming together to say, "We have a problem here. We need to do something," but there's been little sort of coalescence around this is what we need to do. You have Democrats who say, "We just need to engage. We just need to pay our dues. We just need to sit at the table and things will go well." You have some Republicans who say, "We need to burn it all down and walk away and just cut our fundings and we'll just save the taxpayer some money."

But when they look away, China and Russia are still there. The agencies didn't disappear. We didn't actually burn it down. We just walked away for a while and so, what we tried to do with this monograph is to say, "Okay, let's take an agency by agency look. Let's make real recommendations and see how the administration and Congress could actually push back in some cases, could try to reclaim some of these organizations that have been hijacked and in other cases, have an honest discussion about pulling out, degrading, replacing where we know the system is so broken it can't be fixed."

**MAY:** Morgan, Nikki Haley was very clear and very candid in her memoir, sort of autobiography or whatever. It was a very good book. I read it. I wrote a column about it, but that she didn't know a lot about this world, about international affairs, any of it before she took that job. I'm curious to know how she climbed the learning curve when she got into this very broad, grand cosmopolitan bureaucracy, and also your experience. I actually don't know how much you knew before you began to work for her, before you began to work in the UN system. I mean, was it all very clear? Was it a painful learning experience? Just reflect on both your experience and hers. I'm very curious.

**VIÑA:** Sure. Thanks Cliff. Good question. So, Nikki's book, *With All Due Respect*, is her second and it really chronicles her time up in New York so well and I think she so beautifully and hilariously says at the beginning, when Reince Priebus, Trump's former Chief of Staff, offered her the job of US Ambassador to the United Nations, she says, "I



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don't even know what the United Nations does. All I know is everybody hates it." She went back and she spoke with her husband, talked to her family about the role and she really followed the advice of her parents, which was whatever you do, be great at it and make sure that people remember you for it. After some negotiating, she accepted the job and a few weeks after she did, while she was going through the confirmation process, UNSCR, UN Security Council Resolution 2334 came up in the Council.

For those of you who need a reminder, 2334 was the resolution that condemned Israeli settlements and Ambassador Haley talks in her book about how she had contacted Ambassador at the time, Samantha Power, never got a call back from her and she really decided early on, then and there, that the United States under her tenure was going to stand up for its friends. The United States for that resolution abstained and really sort of turned its back on Israel and Ambassador Haley really sort of drew a line in the sand that said, "We're going to take names. It may not be popular. We may not be the most popular kid in camp here, but we're going to be a leader and we're going to stand up for our friends," and she did that throughout her tenure.

From my experience, now I was working on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee when she was nominated, and I helped with her confirmation. She is quite possibly the only nominee I ever had that actually took copious amounts of notes and asked very probing, detailed questions during my meeting with her. I had never had a nominee do that and she was just so spot on and ready to really take on the job. I really admired that and knew I wanted to work for her.

**MAY:** You were familiar with the UN System at this point because you'd worked in international affairs, foreign relations, but still, it's a very specific bureaucracy, different from the congressional bureaucracy. I mean, there's nothing quite like it really, is there?

**VIÑA:** So, Cliff, you make a really good point in that. Congress runs oversight of U.S. actions at the United Nations. Congress itself doesn't actually negotiate any of these mandates or do any of the negotiating. Congress really is the funding and runs oversight of the State Department and so, as a result it's one thing to actually sort of be asking for reports and making recommendations and making sure that the administration is aware of what the Hill thinks. It's quite another to actually be affecting change at Turtle Bay and so, actually going from Capitol Hill to the US Mission to the UN was quite different because you're an actual practitioner as opposed to one who practices oversight.

**MAY:** Another thing that, tell me if you think I'm wrong, Morgan you start on this, but Rich, I want to hear a little discussion between the two of you. I've heard sort of two views on the UN. So, there are some people who see the UN as largely irrelevant, kind of a debating society, a collection of bureaucracies, and probably not worth a whole lot of intention. It's there. That's fine.

Then there are others who see it, Americans and Europeans as well, as very much any evolving world government, a global maker of international laws with a Secretary General who is or should be something akin to a world president and then there are people in between of these things.

Am I right in that, Morgan? Or do you see public perception, American and foreign through a different lens?

So, I think, look. I mean in my perspective, the United States doesn't really have much to prove at the United Nations, to be quite frank. Since the UN's founding, the international community has really looked to the United States, frankly as sort of the standard bearer for freedom, peace, and prosperity. It really hasn't sort of defined international



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norms, right? And so, the United States really already sort of precedes itself as the world leader and most member states look to the United States as that world leader. Now, I think we can sort of talk about sort of those shifting dynamics as we see a resurgent China in the mix and I'm sure we'll get to that in a bit, but when it really comes down to it, the UN doesn't really do a lot for the United States, but we also have a lot to lose if we do nothing at the UN. If we stand by and stay silent, then other powers will come in and fill that gap, i.e., Russia and China, but apart from having that permanent seat on the UN Security Council—

with veto power, the United States is almost like every other country in the General Assembly. We all have one vote. So often when the GA votes, it's the United States and Israel on one side. Even our allies and partners that we stick with and other international organizations, like NATO, are on the other side of us, on the other side of our vote, especially when it comes to issues such as defending Israel. So when it really comes down to it, I think you do see a split between the United States on one side and then everyone else on the other. I think it's also important to mention though, that the United States pays more into the UN system, both voluntary and assess contributions more than any other member state. So we have a lot of leverage in that, but at the same time, when you really think about it, it's not very reliable business model for the UN system to really rely on one mega donor. So I think that leaves a lot of opportunity for exploration and reform as well.

**MAY:** Originally, as the mega donor, you would think we would have some demands on the organization and on its members, many of whom also get support from the U.S. and not others, and yet—and I'm not entirely sure why it is that our European allies and NATO members don't vote with us on a consistent basis. I don't think it takes that much courage for Germany or France or the UK to do that, or Denmark or the Netherlands for that matter. The smaller countries also, they're going to come to us asking a lot of things, and yet they feel very free, have for years and years, to say, "No, we're going to vote against the U.S. I don't think we're going to pay much of a price for it. What the heck?"

By the way, they're right in this, that the U.S. hasn't made them pay much of a price, partly because there's been a view, I think until Nikki Haley was at the UN, that, "Oh, it doesn't matter. Boys will be boys. We don't expect a lot." It's okay. It's okay. Sorry, we don't expect a lot from the UN, and we could still—what we say are international norms, those are international norms, even if the truth is the expressions of the General Assembly, which are meant to be the sense of the international community, are absolutely in contradiction with everything we believe and stand for. Go ahead, Rich. Talk about that a little.

**GOLDBERG:** I think you're touching on probably one of the most complex dynamics that exists. That is the reason we have so many problems in the international organization space and why we have disagreement in Washington over how to handle it, where you could be the mega donor, the number one donor, and have a very strong school of thinking in Washington, which is we can't exercise that influence, we can't bully people, we can't be pushing people around, we can't condition this aid. We have to act as if we are one of all other voices, that we're no more important than the smallest donor at the table. The views of the People's Republic of China need to be taken into account as much as our views as well. We need to work diplomatically to build consensus, consensus which means we might not get everything according to our values and priorities, but we'll get the best thing we possibly could by working together, et cetera.

Now, obviously the opposite approach of just picking up sticks and leaving sometimes leaves a vacuum as well, which you don't want to see, because if the Europeans still have a certain mindset and China and Russia are still at the table, and there's still enough resources and infrastructure to do damage to U.S. interests, you don't want to just have walked away and not have replaced, peeled away, continued to degrade, et cetera. So, there is a balance here, but the complexity that I want to touch on and really open up is this; you go back to sort of your IR theory 101, and



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you probably remember your professor talking about theories of universalism as a concept of international relations. there is a certain core idea, set of values that crosses boundaries of states, that there are certain things that keep us all together as humans and that, as we think about our foreign policy and our foreign interests, that those core values--today, you may come close to calling it globalist, I think some would call it.

That needs to be the governing structure of the world, that really supersedes your own sovereign ideas, sovereign rules, sovereign goals, if that in some way is conflicting with the global good. It's a utilitarian type mentality, communitarianism, universalism all wrapped into one. So the social dynamics, the social politics of Europe, therefore, get projected into this universal concept at the UN of how we need to use international organizations to solve all social problems, even if that's not what the original intent of these organizations were. And therefore, we're going to project our domestic, political views into that dynamic. There will be times when we will agree with our European allies, and we'll be able to be on the same page. There are times when we'll disagree, especially depending on which political party in Washington's in power.

We think about issues that are very controversial in the United States, where we've seen a whiplash go back and forth between the Obama administration to the Trump administration to Biden. The Europeans are seeing it as, "Why do you keep going in and out of certain conventions? Why do you keep coming." Well, we have disagreements politically at home over how to solve some of these issues and the best way to go about them. That's where this tension between sovereignty in international organizations comes into play, which was a thread that you saw Secretary Pompeo and Ambassador Haley and others really pull on. The question though is, there was at some point at the founding of the UN a commitment to a concept of universalism on certain core human rights, on certain core values, that if we could hold the international community to account on those, we could prevent another Holocaust, we could prevent genocide.

We could say, "This is something that actually does cross borders, and we're going to hold all nations to account." When you look at something like human rights, that might make sense. When you look at genocide, that might make sense. When you start looking at all social issues and how to solve them, you start losing the true priorities, the true values that do bind all of us together. Therefore, you enter an international arena where you say, "We want to hand over all rulemaking for every problem in the world to this global body and treat everybody's vote equally," you start losing your own sovereignty and you start diluting what is a true democratic value? Now authoritarians are able to weigh in on what these values should be, what these rules should be. Now there's really no semblance left of what you thought you were promoting 76 years ago.

**MAY:** You know, just a quick point is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, interesting. Universal. Not even international, universal. On Mars and Venus, this is how they think too. The idea that all these nations have signed off on it and therefore believe it is nice and comforting, but they don't. I mean, we know they don't all subscribe to these rights or guaranteed these rights or even aspire to. Freedom House is saying that over the last 15 years, there are fewer free nations and fewer freedoms than ever. It's a nice aspiration that we had, that Eleanor Roosevelt had, that others had, but I don't think it's come to fruition. But to be more specific, Morgan, there are a number of bad actors at the UN. China is not the only bad actor, but China is, I would say--when I say China, I mean, China's rulers, the Communist Party of China, Beijing. I don't mean most of the billion Chinese people, by any means, but they have been the most effective, determined, and strategic of bad actors.

In other words, they seem to have recognized, in a way that I'm not sure the U.S. did, that these international organizations and the UN organization itself could be useful to them, to their national interests and to their ambitions.



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Some of them hegemonic regionally, and I think long-term beyond that. And all they had to do was turn these organizations their way. They could do that in various ways, not through necessarily persuasion, but through bullying, probably through bribing, whatever way they can. It took a long time for people to wake up. I'll just make one other point, and then I want to hear your thoughts. That is at least in part, because there was, I think on a bipartisan basis, a longstanding belief that if we bring China into this international system, they would see that it's useful to them and their stakeholders. Yeah, it's American-led, but that's okay. And yeah, it's liberal, but they're moderating as they get richer. Yeah, it's rules-based, but the rules apply to everyone, so this is good.

They looked at that and they said, "Yeah, that's a fun idea, but we have better ideas and we're going to utilize this organization to diminish American power and influence and expand our own and we'll see if you notice." There are a number of examples we might want to mention. One is the World Trade Organization, bringing them in, helping enrich them, letting them have the status of a developing nation in the World Trade Organization, when they no longer were really a developing nation, letting them cheat and not holding them to account, letting them steal intellectual property by the hundreds of billions of dollars from us and we'd scold them and ask them to stop, but it hasn't happened. So I've opened up a number of boxes for you, Morgan. Pick your box.

**VIÑA:** We may not be able to put the genie back in the bottle, Cliff. No, I think that was very aptly put, and I mean bottom line, China's seeking to remake the world order in its own image. It's an authoritarian image, but it's its image. I think behind closed doors at the UN, China will tell you that look, the United States was a major influence in the shaping of the United Nations. You had your chance. Now we are on the rise, we have our domestic policy agenda, and you know what? Our foreign policy agenda affects everything at home, so we are going to project strength abroad. It's doing that through the international community, through multilateral organizations. China's doing that at a number of levels. You can see the influence of the Belt and Road Initiative within the UN. The Under-Secretary-General for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is Chinese and has had significant success in spreading BRI propaganda throughout the organization and getting UN funds and programs to adopt many of the principles of BRI, as well as funding.

**MAY:** I was just going to say very quickly, the Belt and Road Initiative, in case people don't know, this is an internationalist venture on China's part. They say it's going to help with development. I think critics of it, I'd be among them, would say, no, it's really about Chinese neocolonialism in Africa and a lot of other places where they're getting port facilities, where they're getting natural resources, where there is no evidence that they are really helping these countries around the world that they would say, "we're connecting with." You can correct me or add to that, but I want to make sure people know what BRI is when they listen.

**VIÑA:** Sure, sure. So as it seeks to expand its domestic agenda through its foreign policy, I think what we're also seeing is that not only are we seeing this through a policy push, but also through elections, UN elections. We see China really has made a push to the head of these specialized agencies. ICAO, the International Civil Aviation Organization, which includes—we have a chapter in the monograph as well as on the International Telecommunications Union. I know I'm missing a third and a fourth, but China has really made a strong push to lead these organizations. Thankfully under the Trump administration, when China pursued the head of WIPO, the World Intellectual Property Organization, we were able to defeat that campaign.

**MAY:** Let me just emphasize here, when we're talking about the World Intellectual Property Organization, we're talking about the recognized leading thief in all of history of intellectual property. That's what the People's Republic of



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China is, leading thief of intellectual property, saying, "Yes, we'd like to be the head of the World Intellectual Property Organization." I mean, that's totally putting the fox in charge of the rabbits.

**VIÑA:** Exactly. That is exactly what I was going to say. So bottom line, China's making inroads through the personnel as well. I think the United States has a huge, huge opportunity there and we can get into that later. So we're seeing China take part in other elements of UN leadership, particularly in international peacekeeping, through both in-kind contributions, as well as peacekeepers, boots on the grounds themselves. Brad Bowman and I have a really good piece in *The Dispatch* that sort of outlines China's peacekeeping influence in Africa that I encourage listeners to check out. But in addition to that, that's sort of at the optical level. That's what the international community sees China doing. What they don't necessarily see China do is actually change the language of UN Security Council mandates. They negotiate budgeting provisions within the UN's Fifth Committee, which is the budgeting committee of the General Assembly.

They're really able to utilize some of these very sort of inside baseball mechanisms to actually degrade human rights and all of these peace and security principles that the United States and others adhere to. I think a really good example of this is most recently, the UN peacekeeping operation in Abyei, a disputed region between South Sudan and Sudan, human rights, the concept of human rights was actually watered down in the latest resolution back in May. So, I think it's really important excuse me, it was in April. So I think it's important for people to realize that China's having influence at the most base level that is completely unseen by the casual observer. That it's really important for member states, more specifically for the United States, to play a major role in shaping how these resolutions are crafted, because ultimately that's how these resolutions are crafted because ultimately that's how standards are set with the international community.

**MAY:** One of the agencies that's on people's minds a lot, and should be, is the World Health Organization. The U.S. funded it I think at 10 times the levels that China funded it, yet the head of it is Dr. Tedros, who's an Ethiopian. I think it was very clear that he was their guy, that they had him and probably still do, in their pocket very much. The organization, I think it's pretty obvious performed very badly throughout this pandemic that came out of China and was very protective of the Chinese. I think that that meant loss of many more lives than was necessary and much more economic devastation.

Now Rich, think about it, I had dinner with someone the other night, a well-known writer. I won't mention her name. She said, "What a blunder it was for Trump to leave the WHO." And I said, "I'm not sure because what would you suggest is the preferable alternative?" Certainly it's not what President Biden has done, which is to say, "Okay, we're coming back in. We're restoring the funding. We'll keep writing the checks and we'll not demand any reforms whatsoever. We will hope that through our re-participation, our engagement, everything will come out okay." So even if you agree Trump made a mistake in withdrawing, nothing we've done corrects it.

Not only do I want to get your thoughts on that, Rich, but maybe your thoughts on what is, or what would be, if not the best policy, the least bad policy to an organization that is under Chinese influence, that has performed incompetently and perhaps corruptly, and is not trustworthy at going forward on anything that has to do with the People's Republic of China.

**GOLDBERG:** Well in that situation, having talked to a lot of people who were involved last year, the truth is that the move the Trump administration made prompted a pretty strong multilateral discussion of reform for the WHO. The minute the U.S. resumed funding without getting a single reform, that leverage disappeared. So our money, our



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influence, our leadership is leverage. We don't want to be a bully. We're not trying to go into the school yard and push people around and say, "It's our way or the highway," but at the same time, we have to have principles and values and standards of oversight, standards of performance. We are an investor in an organization. You don't give your money to a non-profit and say, "Do whatever you want. I don't know what will happen, but hit me up for more next year. Just hope it goes well." Total corruption goes on, undue influence from bad actors, failure of primary core missions. And you say, "Great. How much would you like next year?" That's crazy.

To think that just showing up at the board meeting and patting everyone on the back and saying, "Tough year. How do we do better next year? Here's the check." Anybody who thinks that that's how you get reform or changes in any organization, I think is really out to lunch. At the same time, we have to be aware in advance of these elections, that these candidates work with our allies. Elections in the UN organizations like these matter. Tedros had a reputation. He was already rumored to be under the influence of China going back to his Health Ministry posts in Ethiopia. We look forward now. There's going to be a reelection, it looks like, for Tedros to continue on after a global pandemic, after covering up the origins of COVID-19, after the Assad regime of Syria gets an election post after using chemical weapons against people to the executive council of the WHO. After in two annual meetings during a global pandemic, the organization pauses to condemn the state of Israel, as if that's what the WHO should be doing in the middle of COVID-19.

So, on every count, you have a very broken organization here that failed in its core mission, that continues to fail in its core mission, but it is something with great potential and it can play a very important role. If we walk away from it completely and don't continue to try to steer reform using the leverage we have with our allies, then very bad actors can use it with very bad outcomes.

**MAY:** Morgan, similarly Ambassador Haley led the effort to withdraw the U.S. from the UN Human Rights Council, which she called in the forward to this monograph, "A cesspool of human rights violators." She's not mincing any words there. President Biden is seeking now to have the U.S. reelected to this cesspool. Again, no reforms demanded, nothing about American taxpayer dollars which go to it. It's not an easy organization to reform. It is dominated by human rights violators. In fact, it's a great place for a human rights violator to get elected to because it gives them impunity. It's not like there haven't been attempts to reform it. Years ago, there was a UN Human Rights Commission. I remember when people gave up on it and they said, "We're going to change this profoundly. We're going to give it a new name. It's not going to be a commission, it is going to be a council. And boy, is that going to"—

I remember people from the State Department who oversee the—coming to see me at FDD and saying, "We just want to show you, we've done some great negotiating here. We've changed everything here." I remember saying, "Well, I hope you're right." I wasn't as skeptical probably and as cynical then as I am now, but I find as cynical as I get, I can't just keep up with everything. So talk a little bit about the UN Human Rights Council. Is there anything better to do than not be on it and not give it legitimacy? My view is Nikki Haley was right. Getting back to what Rich said, maybe if the U.S. is off there for a while, maybe our allies say, "Well, the Americans have a point. Let's see if we can reform it and make it good enough that the U.S. wants to rejoin and re-engage."

**VIÑA:** Cliff, you bring up a really good point about we want to revisit it. To be quite frank, we really worked with our allies and partners to try to reform it, and there was no buy-in, quite frankly. The UN Human Rights Council was a broken organization when we came in, and it continues to be a broken organization. We tried to fix it. Ambassador Haley really led a strong push for reform to bring accountability to the organization. Frankly, we weren't able to get enough buy-in from some of our closest allies and partners who claimed to be the standard bearers for human



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rights. I think that was a real disappointment for us. As a result, we cut our losses. It was an organization that we were legitimizing with our presence. So, for us, and for Ambassador Haley in particular, she really made the brave move with Secretary Pompeo to announce the U.S. departure from the organization.

I think what we're seeing with the Biden administration coming in now is that there's this knee-jerk reaction to just reverse everything that the Trump administration did. We see this with the WHO, and we're seeing this with the announcement that the United States is going to run for election on the Human Rights Council. Again, the United States loses its leverage when it claims is going to rejoin without getting anything in return. So, to Rich's point, I think that the Biden administration really needs to rethink the conditions for U.S. return, what that will look like, and see if they can't use any of that as leverage.

**MAY:** Before we leave this topic, and maybe there's no answer to this, I don't understand, do you have theories about why our allies, why the British, the French, the Norwegians, why would they not want to take some pains to improve an organization that is so bad? Why would they not say, "You're right. Let's figure out a way to do this"? I mean, they argue and they posture that they care about human rights. They do in their own countries, certainly. Why are they so reluctant to get any skin in the game?

**VIÑA:** One of the patterns that we experienced in New York was that the Europeans often don't like to rock the boat. They often defer to the status quo. We saw this not only when it came to UN Security Council mandates, but also when it came to major reforms. There was often a reluctance to rock the boat, and that the status quo was often the preferred method for operating. So, when we were unable to get commitments and support for genuine reform and accountability, that would frankly level the playing field and ensure that Israel was treated as it should, without bias and without any antisemitic prejudice, that was absent.

**GOLDBERG:** I would add the following. When multilateralism, the term, the concept, the objective, becomes the end state goal, that that is your religion, that is your ideology, as long as we are talking in a multilateral setting, so long as we have an organization that is multilateral, that's great. That's what we need. We need more multilateralism, whatever that means. Then you've completely lost objectivity of what we were supposed to be working on, because if that's the goal and it doesn't matter who's in the club and it doesn't matter what you're working on as long as it's multilateral, then multilateralism has no identifiable redeeming quality for advancing the interests of democracies and freedom.

I would say, going back, Cliff, to one of your last questions and hearing Morgan talk about the Human Rights Council and the contrast between the WHO and Human Rights Council, this is a nuance I think we get into in the monograph. We have to recognize that there are organizations that have governance structures that do lend themselves to U.S. influence if we are going to put our back into it and really use that influence, use all the leverage we can, get our allies together, form a common picture, pushback against authoritarians, and condition our assistance. Say, "We're not going to give money as a group to WHO if states that kill their own people with chemical weapons are going to somehow be elected to the executive club, to the Executive Board. We're not going to allow the WHO to help that government in Syria in any way. We're not going to stand for our money being used to advance systemic antisemitism inside this body." Antisemitism using the working definition that the State Department uses, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

We are going to have basic standards of oversight and performance metrics. If you don't meet them, then something has to change or the money goes away. The WHO is a place where that could happen with U.S. leadership.



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You have other organizations that were conceived and created with a complete inability to achieve reform because of the governance structure. The UN Human Rights Council is one of those organizations. We can't just say, "Oh, we're going to cut our funding. We're going to walk away. Oh, we're going to get our votes in. Oh, let's work together to get a different Director General or a different Secretary General." It doesn't work that way. The elections are secret ballot. The UNGA, we're electing from everybody. There is no Board of Governors like there is in other specialized agencies. There's no oversight of the funds from the U.S. So, there's very little ability for us to move the needle there.

The question then is why do our European allies, why do fellow democracies stick around for such a crazy ride? At that point, I would say, we need to create alternatives. We need to say, "This is broken. This is legitimizing dictators and authoritarians. The governance structure itself, unless overhauled by the GA [General Assembly], is broken and does not allow for any reform." We need a league of democracies, not a league of nations. If we're going to really talk about basic common values that we have as democracies, we're going to have social differences, but there are basic universal human rights that we do agree with, and that we need to actually talk about and try to bring people together on to fulfill that promise of never again. Then let's create that forum separate from authoritarians that try to hijack them.

**MAY:** Morgan, do you have some thoughts on that?

**VIÑA:** Right. I just want to hit on Rich's point about why are European actors so opposed to this? It occurred to me that our European friends were terrified of making the Human Rights Council more accountable and more transparent. Why? Because they did not want to have blowback on them for doing so. When the UN Human Rights Council has elections and those votes are made public, they don't want retaliation by Russia or China against them, or other member states for that matter.

**MAY:** So, they're afraid of Russia and China. They're not afraid of the U.S., you're saying. No, I mean, is that correct? Am I wrong?

**VIÑA:** Well, no. I mean, I think that there is genuine fear by member states in the council that if there is more transparency and there is more accountability, then they will become targets through political retaliation.

**MAY:** I mean, this is a case where elections should not be by secret ballot. We should know, I don't know, how Mexico is voting, who they're voting for, if they're voting for Syria, if they're voting for Burma, if they're voting for human rights violators to be on the Human Rights Council. I think the world should know that. I think we should know that. No?

**VIÑA:** Right, 100%. But I think that goes to Ambassador Haley's point of this being a cesspool of human rights violators. The fact that these political interests are so enmeshed and just ingrained in the fabric of the council that it impedes any hope for reform, demonstrates why the Human Rights Council—

in this case, should be completely reformed, if not scrapped.

**MAY:** Rich, anything you want to add? But also, we're running low on time. You should just briefly talk to us about some of the other international organizations that you've covered in the monograph. We can come back with subsequent broadcasts and do a deeper dive, but maybe just a few words on some of the other ones that people might not know, they're not as famous or infamous as the UN Human Rights Council and the World Health Organization.



# FOREIGN POLICY

## The UN System: What Went Wrong and What Should Be Done

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**GOLDBERG:** Yeah. International Telecommunication Union, Morgan talked about a little bit. This is a very important, very small, obscure standard-making body. When we think of 5G standards, other internet, next generation telecom standards, this is the body that comes together, both governments and the private sector to discuss, currently led by a Chinese national, while Huawei is around the world, trying to sell their equipment and systems, and the U.S. and their allies are warning others don't use those due to significant security risks. They sit at the perch of an organization to set standards in that space and to promote it.

The World Trade Organization, obviously a flashpoint during the Trump administration, continues to be a worry, as we look at how the Chinese are able to, again, as we see across different conventions and rules throughout the international system steal intellectual property, violate trade agreements, trade rules set out by WTO, or operate in spaces where WTO rules don't even apply because they haven't been reworked in many, many years. So, there is a process that needs to be undertaken to WTO for a fundamental reform. How do you resolve disputes? What rules need to be updated to hold China accountable for some of its coercive trade practices?

The International Civil Aviation Organization, ICAO, one of the specialized agencies. This again, I think still for a couple more months is led by a Chinese national. There will be a replacement coming from Latin America to take over the organization, but during the tenure of a Chinese national, a cyber attack occurred from China that exposed a U.S. and other global aerospace companies, including defense contractors, to further cyber attack. This was covered up by the Chinese national in charge of the organization. It's a very important body, when we think about standard-setting in civil aviation around the world.

People have heard of the IAEA, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and they know the issues there with Iran's long-term ambitions for nuclear weapons. Russia continuing to block and tackle, not just for Iran, but for Syria as well at the IAEA. It's a place where the U.S. can and needs to assert its influence and leadership.

The OPCW as well, sometimes in the news, as we've seen chemical weapons attacks in Syria and Russia's own use of chemical weapons and chemical agents against their political opponents. This is an organization, again, where Russia tries to fuel disinformation, just try to fuel discord, and undermine the international norms on the use of chemical weapons.

We've talked about the Human Rights Council already. We've talked about peacekeeping. Morgan touched on that. We need to look at all these peacekeeping agencies. We are spending so much money, not just on the UN as a whole, not just on these small agencies, but the peacekeeping budget that the United States supports is massive as well. We're talking a billion dollars just on the peacekeeping missions or more.

**MAY:** By the way, the peacekeeping missions have been rife with corruption, including all kinds of sexual crimes for years and years and years.

**GOLDBERG:** There are issues like those that need to be addressed. There's issues of Chinese participation and whether or not we're indirectly subsidizing training for the PLA from our contributions, which I think most Americans would be horrified to learn. But also, there's just basic oversight of why was this institution created? What is the mandate of this force? Is it working? Should we keep just forking over money to have it there? The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, a great example. Tony Badran, our colleague at FDD, has written on this for years. The Trump administration tried to make some dents in reform. The French and others have fought for that mandate to continue. again, no return on investment, when we look at the missile flow into Hezbollah, the precision-guided munitions. We



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see Hezbollah stashes, caches of weapons uncovered right next to UN peacekeepers. There are conflicts across the line of disputes that go on right under their nose, with their permission. Again, we need to take a look, not just at UNIFIL, but other peacekeeping forces as well.

Then we also have a handful of organizations that work to undermine peace in the Middle East, that work to foment the systemic antisemitism we see throughout the UN system. There are several Palestinian organizations at the UN that are duplicative in nature exist just to torment the state of Israel. They really serve no purpose at this point, particularly in the wake of the Abraham Accords, as we've seen normalization, peace between Arab states and Israel continued to advance.

Ultimately, one of the greatest institutional barriers to peace between Palestinians and Israelis is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, UNRWA, for so-called Palestinian refugees. It was something set up back in 1950 when there was a refugee population in the aftermath of the Israeli War of Independence. Obviously, Jewish refugees existed in the same numbers at the same time. They were absorbed into Israel. The UN put Arab refugees into refugee camps. Arab states refused to absorb them and to keep them as political pawns. 70 plus years on, this no longer makes any sense as those same Arab countries now normalize with Israel and look to have relations. We see all that UNRWA is now a welfare agency for people to not allow the Palestinians to actually prepare for institution building towards statehood, and instead keep the mythology of some so-called right of return, where millions of people will flood into Israel proper, and at the ballot box, erase the Jewish state overnight. It's something that will never happen, but raise a generation after generation to hate Israel, hate Jews, and to block any hope of lasting peace.

So, we have a lot of organizations here that we have featured. Again, this is not all the organizations, there are hundreds, but they give you a flavor of some of the most important, some of the functions, and some of the kinds of organizations we need to be looking at. Some have very big budgets, big funding streams from the U.S. taxpayer, some not so big, but in each case, we need a plan. We need a strategy. Are we going to be in it? If we're going to be in it, is it working? If it's not working, how are we going to fix it? If we're not going to be in it, why? Are we sure we need to walk away? If we're going to walk away, how are we going to make sure it doesn't continue to exist after we leave, just for China, Russia, and other malign actors to take advantage?

**MAY:** President Biden has said things, starting very early in his administration, that would suggest he does understand there is this competition, that there is this challenge from authoritarian states, not the least, probably most, from the People's Republic of China, but this is obviously not an easy fix. If it were, it would have been done by now. It's going to require, and this is going to be my last subject, it requires a White House. It requires a State Department. It requires Congress to be on the same page and to have what you rightly call, Rich, a strategy. Are we going to cut off funding? Are we going to send our diplomats out and get them to bring our allies on side with us? That should be a diplomatic chore that is doable, easier than getting the Iranian regime on side with us. Are we going to set up an alternative organization? But there's got to be a strategy for these, and this has to be a priority. It hasn't been up to now, and it isn't at this moment, that I can see, in the Biden administration.

Morgan, your last thoughts, and then Rich, any last thoughts you have.

**VIÑA:** The Biden administration has taken a much similar tone to the Obama administration. And unfortunately so far, that is the continuity of, or excuse me, a return to the status quo of what it was under Obama. I think that the United States under President Trump, was often the skunk at the garden party, but it was also seen as a world leader, and it was taken seriously. The Biden administration has taken a very different tone. I think while there is a renewed



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focus on China, there needs to be a stronger push for U.S. interests, and one that isn't afraid to break some china. Right now, we haven't seen that happen. No pun intended, but we need to break some china over this. If that means maintaining many of the policies of the Trump administration, I encouraged the Biden administration to rethink its current trajectory and determine whether or not some of those policies from the Trump administration were actually worth keeping.

**MAY:** Rich, your final concluding remarks.

**GOLDBERG:** There is such a thing, and could and should be such a thing, as an international rules-based order that the U.S. leads, and we should be proud to lead it. Just engaging with authoritarians and other nations is not a strategy. Just showing up to a party, a cocktail hour, conducting some diplomacy, and saying, "Job well done," will not advance U.S. interests.

However, if we very methodically look at our interests, both U.S. sovereign interests and the interests of the international community of democracies, and what that means, and which organizations are advancing those interests and which are not, and we take stock of our levers of influence in each of them. If the administration won't do this, then Congress can do this, and we start an agency-by-agency basis, clawing our way back to influence and leadership, then we will defend U.S. interests, and we will push back on the malign activities of our toughest adversaries.

**MAY:** Very interesting conversation. I've learned a lot. Rich, congratulations on editing this monograph. Morgan, thanks for all your good work, both on this and with Ambassador Haley. To be continued, but for now, thanks for talking to us today and thanks to all of you for joining us here on *Foreign Podicy*.