Failures of the UN “Talking Club”

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By Joseph A. Klein

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President-elect Donald Trump tweeted the sad truth about the United Nations on the day after Christmas, saying it was “just a club for people to get together, talk and have a good time.”

Not long after the president-elect’s tweet appeared, the UN propaganda machine churned out a rebuttal, tweeting the following image listing its Pollyannaish version of its major accomplishments.

Other than its valuable work in supporting and coordinating the delivery by aid workers of food, medical and other humanitarian supplies to areas of the world beset by natural disasters or conflict, the United Nations has failed, or has been largely irrelevant, in key areas for which it seeks to take credit. This article will focus on peacekeeping, poverty reduction, protection of human rights, help in alleviating the plight of refugees and migrants, and use of diplomacy to prevent conflict.

For example, the UN boasts about its peacekeeping missions, which it says keep peace on four continents. What the UN narrative leaves out is the cholera its peacekeepers brought to Haiti, killing nearly 10,000 people, for which the UN has very belatedly accepted some responsibility. The narrative also leaves out the continuing sexual abuse and exploitation scandal involving UN peacekeepers in the Central African Republic, which UN senior officials tried initially to cover up.

And it leaves out the utter failure of peacekeepers in South Sudan to protect women from rape, even right outside the UN’s main camp. UN leaders failed to address the underlying systemic problems at the highest managerial levels, revealing that the UN has learned little from its horrible lack of response to the impending genocide in Rwanda in 1994. Instead, a commander from Kenya, whom had only been on the job in South Sudan for only a few months, became the convenient scapegoat and was dismissed.

To make matters worse, on the same day that the UN Security Council adopted, with the Obama administration’s consent, its anti-Israel settlements resolution, it was unable to muster a majority to approve an arms embargo and targeted sanctions against South Sudan. Even though South Sudan, in the words of the outgoing Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, “is on the verge of a genocide,” the Security Council stood by and did nothing while patting itself on the back for going after Israel.

Overall, UN peacekeeping missions have more often than not avoided using force to protect civilians who are under attack, even when they have clear Security Council authorization to do so.

With respect to dealing with the worst refugee and migration crisis since World War II, the UN has helped provide some humanitarian assistance and support for refugee resettlement. However, UN officials have contributed to the problem of large flows of refugees and migrants by criticizing the policies of sovereign nations to protect their own citizens by stemming an overflow to their countries. For example, the UN Secretary General’s Special Representative for International Migration, Peter Sutherland, claimed that caps on refugees enforced by certain countries in Europe are “directly reminiscent of the type of caps that took place under the Reich [against] the Jewish population.”

This outrageous comparison of good faith attempts to control the tide of mass migration from the Middle East, North Africa and Afghanistan to the plight of Jews during the Holocaust is aimed at browbeating European countries into putting their own citizens in danger to serve a globalist agenda. In an interview with UN News Centre, Sutherland said that governments must recognize that “sovereignty is an absolute illusion that has to be put behind us. The days of hiding behind borders and fences are long gone.” He has thereby dismissed the notion of careful vetting of would-be asylum seekers and border controls, and would eliminate the cardinal principle of national sovereignty enshrined in the UN Charter itself.

Moreover, UN officials are deliberately conflating refugees who seek asylum from persecution or the threat of persecution (to the extent they can be reliably separated from the jihadists), and have special protected status under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, with the much larger group of economic migrants who are simply looking for greener pastures. Economic migrants do not have an inherent human right to choose to live anywhere in the world they wish and demand to be taken in. Each country must be free to apply its own laws in considering applications for admittance by such migrants. UN officials should butt out.

The UN also seeks to take credit for reducing extreme poverty, “helping to improve the livelihoods of more than 1 billion people.” This was the objective of the UN’s “Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),” which have been succeeded by the “Sustainable Development Goals” 2030 Agenda. The proportion of people living in extreme poverty has fallen, but there are still nearly a billion people living below $1.25 a day, which is considered the threshold for measuring extreme poverty. Moreover, much of the poverty reduction was already underway when the Millennium Development Goals were launched in 2000. According to Sanjay Reddy, economics professor at New York’s New School, poverty reduction “had very little to do with MDG planning and aid money. It had to do with the resumption of growth, perhaps debt forgiveness, and high commodity prices because of China. In Africa, you had some soft authoritarian and market-friendly growth-oriented policies.” Moreover, as Charles Kenny of the Center for Global Development pointed out, “An important part of the progress in poverty reduction we’ve seen is moving hundreds of millions of people from a few cents below $1.25 to [a few cents] above.” Using a $2 a day standard, little outside of China has changed from 1990, the beginning of the MDG measuring period.

One thing is for sure. The UN-led Millennium Development Goals agenda, now superseded by the even more ambitious Sustainable Development Goals agenda, is reflective of the UN’s redistributionist philosophy. Focusing on money alone as the prime solution to the problems besetting poor countries – particularly Africa – overlooks the tribal, racial, religious and ethnic divisions that have spawned killing fields there.  In addition to the direct casualties of war, the violence breaks up the social networks necessary to feed, clothe, shelter and provide health care to the people – right down to the family unit itself.  True human development needs the nutrients of sustainable freedoms to grow and prosper, no matter how much financial help from the developed countries is forthcoming to help eradicate poverty and disease in the poorer regions of the world. Yet the UN focuses on throwing good money after bad, which does not solve complex social and political problems that are deeply rooted in a country’s history, cultural norms and demographics.

Despite its hype, the UN’s contribution to human rights is minimal at best, and at times negative. Its Human Rights Council has some of the world’s worst human rights abusers as members. As a result, dictatorial countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia and Cuba get a slap on the wrist, while the only democracy in the Middle East, Israel, is condemned more than all the other 192 member states of the UN combined. What would you expect when less than half of the UN member states are full-fledged democracies?

Finally, the UN hypes as one of its major contributions that it “uses diplomacy to prevent conflict.” In fact, the UN has not prevented any conflicts to speak of. Despite a noble-sounding UN World Summit in 2005 that talked about the need to create “a culture of prevention,” ten years later the UN itself admitted failure. On June 16th, 2015 the UN’s own High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operation’s report pointed out that the “culture of prevention” had still not materialized and that, “… recommendations and resolutions have largely gone unimplemented.” Moreover, the UN has failed as an institution to end any major conflicts, most notably in Syria where over 400,000 deaths have occurred during the nearly 6 year conflict. Other noted failures of UN diplomacy include Libya, Yemen, the Central African Republic, and Burundi.

UN diplomatic efforts to end decades-old conflicts such as in Cyprus and Western Sahara have gone nowhere. And, as demonstrated by the passage of the anti-Israel settlements Security Council Resolution 2334 on December 23rd, the UN can be used to unfairly prejudge negotiable issues so much in one side’s favor, without changing any real facts on the ground, that it will be harder to negotiate any enduring peace.

In sum, the United Nations has little to crow about. Its record on peacekeeping, human rights, and conflict prevention and resolution has been abysmal. Its bureaucrats have added fuel to the fire of the refugee/migration crisis by condemning reasonable measures to protect each sovereign nation’s citizens from harm. If the UN bureaucracy gets its way, its goal-setting development and climate change agendas would be paid for out of many trillions of dollars of redistributed wealth that the UN bureaucracy would administer. And we haven’t even touched on the UN’s record of corruption, including charges of bribe-taking and influence peddling that have emerged over the last year or so. Apparently little has been learned from the UN’s oil-for-food scandal.

Mr. Trump’s characterization of the United Nations as a “club for people to get together, talk and have a good time” is only partially correct. As he recognized in a subsequent tweet, the UN as it is structured today is actually causing more problems than its purports to solve.