
8-1-1997

World Government and Black Helicopters: Psychological Factors Affecting Support for the United Nations

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Recommended Citation

Editor, IBPP (1997) "World Government and Black Helicopters: Psychological Factors Affecting Support for the United Nations," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.
Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol3/iss1/5>

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Title: World Government and Black Helicopters: Psychological Factors Affecting Support for the United Nations

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Volume: 3

Issue: 1

Date: 1997-08-01

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Globalization, International, Leadership, Organization, Policy

Abstract. This article describes some psychological factors--too often ignored in debates and policy development--affecting support for the United Nations.

Largely due to domestic politics in the United States (US) leading up to the 1996 Presidential elections, Kofi Annan found himself as the new United Nations (UN) Secretary General. During and after the US Government's (USG) political demonization of his predecessor, Boutros Boutros Ghali, an image of Mr. Annan as public saint--a brilliant UN career bureaucrat, hungry for change, unusually sensitive to the needs of the world, the Third World's best--was constructed in a diplomatic and mass media campaign orchestrated by the USG. The USG also was quite clear in its expectations for Mr. Annan. The hell of Mr. Ghali--Paradise Lost--was to be reworked into a blissful heaven of Annan--Paradise Regained. (The heavy-handedness and irony of the USG--the UN's premier financial deadbeat that is shocked, shocked at the corrupt, duplicative, duplicitous, and Machiavellian machinations of others--ridding the UN of one leader while forcing another upon it has not been lost upon many UN members, observers, and--anathema to US critics of the UN--world citizens.

Unfortunately, all this has placed Mr. Annan in a problematic situation. For starters, Mr. Ghali wasn't that bad--he certainly was not a Satan of international affairs. And Mr. Annan--any human being--is not that good, regardless of his many impressive characteristics. The expected standards of success for (1) changing something that is not what it is purported to be and (2) being someone who is not what one is--and in fact who cannot be--are stacked towards an outcome of failure as perceived by the standards' own creators. Mr. Annan may want to forgive the fathers--the creators--for they know not what they do, but the result may be the same; a figurative Crucifixion.

In addition, Mr. Annan is charged with leading an organization that has a public purpose of contributing to peace, humanitarian support, development issues, health, and so on. However, the UN's de facto purposes have often seemed to be power and hardball politics as usual, including the awarding of sinecures, the making of gratuitous political points, and the narcissistic gratification featuring Nero fiddling while Rome burns. To attempt to actualize administrative restructuring, more efficient coordination among assets and functions, and downsizing and budget reduction would seem to require a sea change in the deeply rooted and even primitive motivations of UN members. Readers familiar with the motivational theories of Abraham Maslow should resonate with the dilemma of attempting to seek the satisfaction of higher order needs while lower order ones not only cry out for sustenance but may be insatiable.

Moreover, as pointed out by Thant Myint-U (see below), the UN serves as a convenient whipping boy to blame for the failures of its members, e.g., in the area of peacekeeping. In fact, one might surmise that members engage in old-fashioned projection with the UN, unconsciously identifying undesired elements in their own makeup, removing these elements from themselves, placing them within the object of the UN, and then relating to this object as if it possessed these elements in some ontological sense--which it may, if perception is indeed reality. In fact, if Mr. Annan could ever be successful in his agenda of

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change, projection might be as relentless but with a change in object occurring most frequently among its members, thereby increasing the likelihood of international conflict.

There also are those politicians and diplomats whom Mr. Annan just cannot please. Because of their beliefs in the evils of world government, their own bloated senses of sovereignty, and conscious and unconscious resentments, Mr. Annan may too often be charged with ideal and, therefore, unreasonable demands--those that make perfection the evil of the good--without the assets to implement them, or demands which have little to do with various collective goods or any good except the destruction of the UN.

But even more important than budget balance sheets, administrative flow-charts, reworked functions and missions, and even the putative gains and losses that the UN may afford specific individuals, agencies, countries, and alliances, there are many unconscious psychological phenomena beyond the defense mechanisms that demand the attention of the Secretary General. The UN seems to serve as a psychological receptacle for hopes and dreams, fears and terrors--as a mirror of ourselves. And like the Evil Queen from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, sometimes we don't like to see the truth and take whatever action is necessary to destroy it. Good luck, Mr. Annan, and be careful with those black helicopters. Besides, the recently announced Hammarskjold medals to be created for some who have died or will have died on international UN missions, there may be a need for the Ghali medals for those who have suffered the slings and arrows of outrageous UN fortune. Kofi Annan may be the first recipient. (See Bion, W.R. (1959.) *Experiences in groups and other papers*. NY: Basic Books; Crossette, B. (July 28, 1997.) U.N. planning medal to honor those killed in its service. *The New York Times*, p. A5; *Reforming the United Nations: New initiatives and past efforts*. The Hague: Kluwer Law International; Thant, M-U. (July 24, 1997.) *The U.N.'s mission impossible*. *The New York Times*. (<http://www.nytimes.com>); Thornburgh, D. (1993.) *Reform and restructuring at the United Nations: A progress report*. Hanover, NH: Nelson Rockefeller Center for the Social Sciences at Dartmouth College.) (Keywords: Foreign Policy, Globalization, International, Leadership, Organization, Policy.)