

# Courier

PROVOKING THOUGHT AND ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE ABOUT THE WORLD



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## United Nations: Image vs. Reality







Cover Photo. Sean Penn and Catherine Keener on location for *The Interpreter*. Above. *The Interpreter* stars Nicole Kidman and Penn in the UN General Assembly Hall.

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**“It sheds better light on the UN than all these thousands of articles about the Oil-for-Food scandal.”**

—Edward Luck  
US-UN relations expert, Columbia University

### Diplomacy Matters

## The United Nations on the Big Screen

*Pollack brings Hollywood attention to the international organization*

Rarely do the interests of the Stanley Foundation closely match those of Hollywood, but they did this spring with the release of *The Interpreter*, a film that had grossed more than \$70 million in the United States as of early June. Here, Chicago-based freelance writer **Locke Peterseim** explores how foreign policy issues play at the box office.

When Universal Studios and director Sydney Pollack released the political thriller *The Interpreter* this spring, they had a nice publicity hook in their pocket. The movie, which already had plenty of box-office bait with stars Nicole Kidman and Sean Penn, was the first feature filmed on location inside the United Nations' New York City headquarters. Numerous

filmmakers had tried to shoot inside the United Nations in the past, including Alfred Hitchcock, who wanted to film the early parts of *North by Northwest* there. All were denied access.

So why did the United Nations change that policy for *The Interpreter*? The obvious answer is that the UN realized (1) it has a pretty serious image problem in the United States and (2) pop



culture media such as film thrillers can, to a small degree, shape public attitudes. Just ask winemakers how much Pinot Noir they've moved since *Sideways* hit theaters. Or ask the US Navy how much recruiting numbers went up after *Top Gun* came out.

### Bringing the United Nations to Life

*The Interpreter* is set in New York and tells the story of Sylvia (Kidman), a UN interpreter who originally hails from a fictional southern African nation. Her home country is currently under the rule of an increasingly embattled dictator, and one evening Sylvia overhears someone discussing a plot to assassinate the dictator when he gives a speech to the UN General Assembly later that month. The US Secret Service is called in to investigate, led by Agent Keller, played by Penn. Shadowy figures abound, plots are set in motion, and intrigue mounts.

In the midst of all the usual movie-thriller trappings, the United Nations is more than just a unique backdrop in *The Interpreter*, and Sylvia's job is more than just a convenient device to get the plot moving. As Sylvia's past connection to the dictator is explored, her story calls the mission and ideals of the

United Nations to the film's center stage, turning it into a political thriller that puts as much of its energy into the politics as it does the thrills.

### Guns Versus Diplomacy

At one point we are told that Sylvia, with her choice of diplomacy over guns, "is the UN." The fact that she's also Nicole Kidman doesn't hurt the organization's image either. As a character, Sylvia turns out to be a bit more morally complicated than the lady-in-peril theater posters would seem to suggest. It appears she has arrived at her UN-centric ideals by way of the very "guns in the streets" that she says the United Nations is an alternative to. Penn's secret service agent, meanwhile, stands in for the United States: the cynical, tough cowboy who provides the muscle when more than talk is needed.

So the United Nations becomes the site of an assassination attempt and its willowy personification harbors a violent past. How does all this *help* the United Nations' image in the United States?

### Addressing the "Foreign Body" Myths

American anti-UN sentiments run the gamut—from New Yorkers' annoyance with double-parking diplomats to homegrown militias warning against a UN military invasion by way of the soft Canadian border. Somewhere in the vast middle ground of talk radio and Fox News you'll hear the right-wing talking points that the United States should never have to answer to an international (i.e., "foreign") body, especially one riddled with corruption that coddles and provides a podium for dictators and terrorists. In fact, the very premise of *The Interpreter* centers on just such a dictator coming to New York to use such a platform.

Ultimately, however, *The Interpreter* presents the United

Nations and its diplomatic ideals—its quest to be a forum for peaceful conflict resolution—in a positive light, as mouthed by the movie-star lips of Ms. Kidman and grudgingly embraced by the hardened shell of Mr. Penn's character.

### Logical Solutions Through Multilateralism

Most of all, the film's plot shows the United Nations as an important institution. That the assassination attempt is set to occur in the General Assembly Hall signals that, at least in the film's world, the United Nations is the most symbolically important place to carry out such a piece of violent political theater. Also in the film, a bombing in Brooklyn carried out by terrorists with ties to the fictional African nation reinforces the harsh lesson many real-life UN supporters felt was lost after 9/11: that violence and conflict on one side of the world can have bloody repercussions on the other, underlining the need for international cooperation, not unilateralism.

In the end, *The Interpreter* presents the United Nations as the logical solution to the world's problems. If the heart of post-Iraq American criticism of the United Nations is that the organization is irrelevant and ineffectual, *The Interpreter* shows a United Nations that not only leads the way but gets the job done. At least here on the big screen, the United Nations matters.

*"The Interpreter was an outstanding thriller. Being able to film in the UN added to its authenticity, power, and suspense."*

—Richard Williamson, former US ambassador to the United Nations

*"Mostly, this movie is a thriller. But in the movie, Kidman's character makes a strong case for laying down weapons and instead talking to resolve problems. That's what the UN can do best. It works when its member nations let it work."*

—Jeffrey Martin, Executive Vice President, The Stanley Foundation

## courier

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## Preparing for the September Summit

# Kofi Annan on Threats and Change

*"We all need to cooperate"*

*On March 30, 2005, Keith Porter, Stanley Foundation director of communication and outreach, and program officer Kristin McHugh interviewed United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan about his newly released report, In Larger Freedom. The interview was conducted in the secretary-general's conference room at UN Headquarters in New York.*

**"You cannot have development without security..."**

**Porter:** What does *collective security* mean to you?

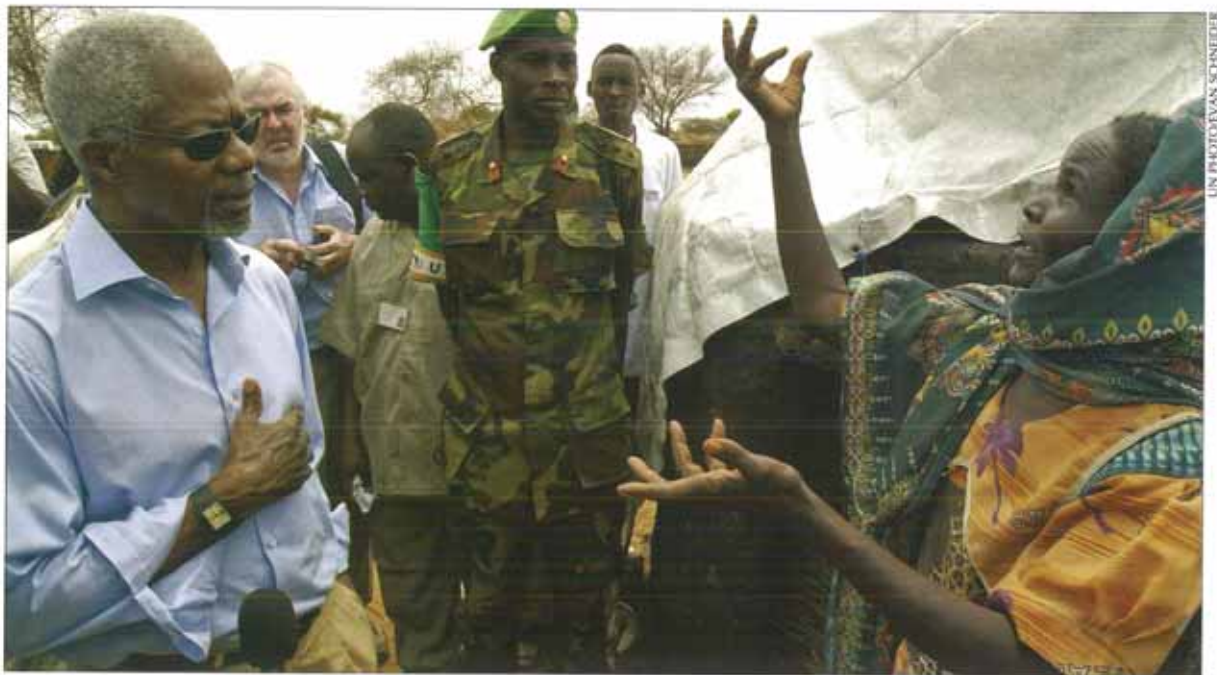
**Annan:** I think the best way to explain it is how we—as an international community or countries working together—protect ourselves. Because today, now more than ever, we are facing threats and dangers that cannot be handled alone by any one country. We need to work together to be able to deal with them. Several exam-

ples are issues of terrorism. Governments have to cooperate to ensure that they are denied the opportunities, to ensure that they are denied support, to ensure that they are not given refuge by anybody. You have other examples. Recently the tsunami in Asia, it became very apparent that the governments in the region, if they had come together and established an early warning system as we have in the Pacific, it would have really helped everybody. Now they are coming together with UNESCO and the UN system, working with them to establish a tsunami system.

**Porter:** We were just in northern Uganda earlier this year to see the civil war, to visit the victims of this war. But when we're sitting here in New York or our homes in Iowa, how do we explain to Americans

why civil conflict in Africa should be a concern of theirs?

**Annan:** Now, I'm really happy that you went to northern Uganda. It's one of the forgotten crises. People are suffering, the war goes on, many people are killed or kidnapped, particularly children, but it's not on anybody's radar. But you are right, I often tell my African leaders, my African friends, that when a crisis begins in a country next to you, don't behave as if it's only that country's problem, because it will not stay in that country for long. It soon destabilizes the neighborhood, the neighboring countries, and causes problem[s] for the citizens of the countries concerned but also the neighboring countries. And we've seen what happens when countries are allowed to fail. Failed states, if we abandon them



**Responding to Injustice.** Annan visited Darfur, Sudan, in May and talked with people living in displacement camps. The secretary-general hopes the September heads-of-state summit will lead to an agreement making it easier to respond to human rights violations like the ongoing genocide in Darfur.

and ignore them, can create problems for us. A good example was Afghanistan. Nobody paid attention or supported [it], and it became a haven for terrorists, who trained more terrorists and, of course, we all know what happened here in this country on September 11. And these are the reasons we need to care about failed and failing states.

**Porter:** You mention civil conflict, failed states, terrorism. There is a connection between all of these things.

**Annan:** Absolutely. The report I've put before the member states makes it quite clear that there is a link between development and security. You cannot have development without security and you cannot have security without development, and all this should be embedded on the respect for human rights and the rule of law. So it all hangs together. And we all need to cooperate to make it happen.

**Porter:** What is your plan for getting past the events of the first part of this year, and how do you restore confidence both in your leadership and in the institution?

**Annan:** I think we are moving ahead. That's one of the reasons why I set up a very strong and independent committee to investigate the accusations that have been leveled against us and to get to the bottom of this, and asking everyone in the organization to cooperate fully. And I, myself, have cooperated very fully with the Voelker committee. And I was happy that on the main issue of insinuation that I may have interfered with the contracting process, there's not an iota of evidence that I did. And that, I think, is clear and important—that the world out there gets to know that. It did criticize me that we hadn't done enough, a deeper investigation into allegations against a company, but an investigation was done. But

they felt a deeper one should have been conducted and I accept that, in hindsight. But I think we are moving ahead. We're improving our management. We are taking steps to ensure that peacekeepers do not get involved with sexual exploitation. And we have taken very concrete steps to strengthen training of peacekeepers, to make sure the governments cooperate with us, to make sure the governments will allow us to court martial some of these troops in the country where they are serving.

**Porter:** In March, you released a report that called upon the nations of the world to take certain actions. What do you want to happen in world capitals between now and the September 60th anniversary?

**Annan:** I would want them to take a very critical look at my report and discuss it among themselves—and in fact, that process has started. I'm also in touch with some of the leaders around the world, engaging them. And I've been attending summits. And there's some interesting things in that package. There's very clear definition of terrorism that I've put forward. We also have the proposals that will strengthen the Human Rights Commission, and make it smaller and much more effective and be able to assist governments. There's also a proposal to expand the Security Council from 15 members to 24, because the 15-member composition, quite frankly, reflects the geopolitical realities of 1945. We need to bring it in line with today's realities—make it more democratic and more representative, and I believe if we do that, it will gain in greater legitimacy. On the issue of economic development, we encourage each country to come up with a poverty reduction strategy by 2006. From the developed world, we would want to see increased development assistance.

**Porter:** Is there anything specifically that you would like the United States to do between now and September?

**Annan:** I think the United States has a natural leadership in this organization. And their involvement and cooperation on the reform proposals is extremely important. I have spoken to President Bush since my report came out and also Secretary of State Rice, and they have both indicated to me that they will support and work with me on that reform. Obviously, they don't accept everything in the report, but there are lots of good things in the report that we can all embrace. So I'm looking forward to working with them.

**Porter:** It seems that every time something bad happens in the world that no one wants to deal with, they bring it to the United Nations. And it seems like everyday when you get out of bed, you must know that when you get to work, on your desk there will be a new problem that is awful and no one wants to deal with.... What motivates you to get out of bed every morning?

**Annan:** You're absolutely right that sometimes I go to bed wondering what I'm going to wake up to in the morning, and what we'll have to deal with. And invariably, there's always something that we need to deal with, something that affects the UN agenda when you wake up in the morning. We need to put the human being at the center of everything that we do. So if I'm able to help one individual and I feel that what I have done has made life a little better for someone or improved it, it keeps me going. And I hope at the end of the day, they will say, "the UN has done something."

*...and you cannot have security without development."*



## The Superpower Myth

# Keeping America Safe

*Facing terror here and at the source*



*Nancy Soderberg served as a senior foreign policy analyst to President Clinton and is a former US ambassador to the United Nations. She is also author of The Superpower Myth: The Use and Misuse of American Might and a member of the Stanley Foundation's advisory board. Soderberg prepared this article prior to an appearance in Denver.*

Colorado's residents understand the need to keep America safe and secure. With North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and Air Force Space Command both located here, Coloradans have made a strong commitment to protecting this nation. Yet, today, are we as safe as we need to be?

The answer is clearly no. Terrorism is on the rise, with the State Department recently reporting that last year a frightening 651 attacks occurred worldwide. That is over a three-fold increase from the global attacks of 2003 and a 21-year high. There is a real possibility that the next terrorist attack on our soil could include weapons of mass destruction. The technology revolution has made information on how to build

nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons readily available to terrorists. Al Qaeda has been ousted from Kabul but is linking up with other terrorist organizations around the world, providing them know-how and networks. And remember, Osama bin Laden is still out there.

Both NORAD and Space Command are vital components of our security portfolio. And we must also continue to invest in a national missile defense (NMD) system that will work. But these programs are not designed to address the most urgent threat Americans face today: another terrorist attack in the United States and the possibility that it will involve weapons of mass destruction. Yet over the last four years, we have undermined the very nonproliferation tools that can keep Americans safe.

The Bush administration, led by the new nominee to the United Nations John Bolton, has opposed efforts to strengthen the very international conventions aimed at this threat: the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Bush officials are exploring a resumption of nuclear testing and a new type of "bunker buster" nuclear weapon.

### Nuclear Threats

In the former Soviet Union, nearly 20,000 nuclear warheads remain operational and terrifyingly insecure from theft by terrorists. Only 40 percent of the facilities housing nuclear material have received security improvements and only half of these have complete security systems. And now Russia is developing a new type of nuclear

weapon. Yet today, while we invest \$10 billion in national missile defense, the administration is cutting the \$1 billion Nunn-Lugar program designed to secure these weapons from the hands of terrorists. That needs to change.

Another urgent threat is the dangerous situation posed by North Korea. Over the last four years, North Korea has restarted its frozen plutonium nuclear weapons program and accelerated a second one based on uranium. North Korea most likely has missiles that could reach Alaska and Hawaii. Pyongyang was caught red-handed cheating on the 1994 deal, yet Washington has refused to put any realistic proposal on the table to resolve the issue. It has turned the negotiations over to China, which has declined to take responsibility for stemming the growing crisis. This crisis simply cannot be ignored any longer.

Much as it wishes the situation were otherwise, the administration will have to negotiate to put this dangerous nuclear genie back in the bottle. Such a deal will involve incentives for North Korea but also a much tougher international inspections regime. The same approach must be adopted in our dealings with Iran, with Bush employing—along with Europe and Russia—a sophisticated mix of carrots and sticks. As distasteful as such deals may be, the alternatives are far more dangerous.

The United States must also redouble its efforts to counterterrorism at its source. That means working to reform the Arab world, home to the September 11 hijackers. President Bush is rightly focusing on two immediate

**The technology revolution has made information on how to build nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons readily available to terrorists.**



**Tradition and Diversity.** *The United States should balance its traditional investments in national missile defense with more diverse systems and programs aimed at preventing another attack on American soil, particularly one using weapons of mass destruction.*

priorities: reform of the radical education system and an end to the hatred and incitement to violence prevalent in much of the government controlled media. The United States must also work to address the crises in the developing world of underdevelopment, environmental degradation, and infectious diseases.

Of the 164 conflicts of the last two decades, most were waged in the developing world and took place

within, not between, states. It is not an accident that Osama bin Laden chose Sudan, a country at war for the last two decades, or Afghanistan, a failed state, as his places of safe haven. The United States must take up the challenge, articulated in the UN secretary-general's recent *In Larger Freedom* report, and provide 0.7 percent of its gross national income to address the vast challenges of the developing world, up from its current .15 percent. In the

post-9/11 world, these are not humanitarian efforts, they are vital to the security of the United States.

### **The US Role**

The United States needs to once again become the world's persuader, not just enforcer. Over the last four years, President Bush has been misled by the myth that, because America is the world's greatest power, we can single-handedly bend the world to our will, primarily through military might. That costly "superpower myth" has made America less, not more, safe. The consequent spike in anti-Americanism around the world has made countries less willing to join us in the fight against terrorism and proliferation.

As President Bush passes the first hundred days of his second term, an important shift appears to be under way from the myth to a more realistic policy that can enhance American security.

The hubris of the last four years is being replaced by talk of a need to rebuild alliances and put past differences behind us. If President Bush turns his new rhetoric into more realistic policies, historic progress in making America safer is possible. Coloradans, as all Americans, should embrace such a shift.

*The United States needs to once again become the world's persuader, not just enforcer.*



## Southeast Asia

# Troubled Waters

*Will the globalization of the Mekong River unite or divide the region?*

**T**he minimum wager at the popular baccarat tables of the Golden Triangle Paradise Resort casino in southern Myanmar is 300 Thai baht, or about \$8.

Downstream a few miles, a young fisherman working the quiet waters of the Mekong River off the rocky shores of Laos expects to sell the three fish netted during his sweltering 12-hour workday for about the same amount.

And like the casino gambler, the fisherman's odds of improving his earnings are not in his favor.

### "It's Not Natural"

For a complex mix of reasons, water levels are fluctuating on the Mekong, Southeast Asia's largest river system that runs some 2,580

miles from its source in Tibet to the Mekong Delta in Vietnam.

Proposed dam projects in China have worried many living in the downstream countries of Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam—where millions of residents depend on clean, predictable flows of the river. Planned hydroelectric dams in China are designed to feed the country's ever-growing energy demands but have also created fears of potential water shortages that could hurt the Mekong's wildlife.

Environmentalists and fishermen living downstream are also troubled by the dynamite blasting of the river's rapids to deepen and widen the Mekong to accommodate larger (and more lucrative) cargo ships. Logging, overfishing, and recent drought during the dry season have only complicated the equation of causes and effects on the river's flow.

"It's not natural," said Pui Buppa, a 77-year-old retired fisherman who lives in a small village along

the Mekong in Thailand's upper Chiang Khong province. "Many kinds of fish have disappeared."

Another retired fisherman who lives nearby fears that the rapids blasting will lead to the extinction of the Mekong giant catfish, the largest scaleless freshwater fish in the world, which can grow up to ten feet long and weigh as much as 650 pounds. As the rapids are demolished, the spawning areas deteriorate and the species' population dwindles.

"The rapids have been here for several centuries. There's no reason to destroy part of the relationship between the spirits and the people," said Sor Jiranat, 78. "Local people will not get any benefit from improvement of the waterway. Only rich people."

### Prosper Thy Neighbor?

The Mekong River Commission (MRC) was formed ten years ago through an agreement by Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam to cooperatively manage the river basin's development. Upstream countries Myanmar and China are not official members of the World Bank-supported inter-governmental organization.

The four MRC countries belong to a larger multilateral organization called the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which focuses on the economic integration of its member countries under a stated "prosper thy neighbor" policy.

ASEAN Secretary-General Ong Keng Yong said the six Mekong countries have been "more cooperative than competitive" over the past three or four years. ASEAN

**ASEAN has tried to engage China in discussions on how to cooperate with its neighbors in the region.**





has tried to engage China in discussions on how to cooperate with its neighbors in the region.

"We do this in a very diplomatic way, but the main objective is to let China know that whatever they do upstream affects downstream," Ong said. "The water flow is something the lower countries are not very satisfied with."

While China has made efforts to improve the Mekong's navigation and share technical information on water flows with its downstream neighbors, critics say Beijing's actions have fallen short of its "peaceful neighbor" rhetoric.

### Balancing Interests

Brad Babson, a former adviser to the World Bank who has worked extensively on Mekong River issues, said the challenge is balancing the interests of all countries in the region.

"All countries know what being an upstream and a downstream country is like. Countries cannot get away from the fact that they have to pay attention to other countries," he said.

But diplomacy should be supported by practical development measures. "There's actually a fair amount of tolerance for development. The question is how do you manage the tradeoffs?" Babson said.

Supervising a long line of stevedores hand-loading instant noodles onto a small China-bound cargo ship in Chiang Saen, trader Suwat Sriwarat, 34, says Thailand's fishermen can coexist with the Mekong's modernization.

"There should be a mix between preservation and development," he said.

But environmentalists like Pai Deetes of the Southeast Asia Rivers Network, a group that



**Going With the Flow.** A family of fishermen catches a little shade along the rocky shores of the Mekong River a few miles south of Houayxay, Laos. Upstream dam projects, rapids blasting, overfishing, and recent drought have been blamed for thinning out the river's fish population. "Fish used to jump into the boat," said one retired fisherman. "No longer."

monitors the Mekong and is worried about the effects of upstream dams in China, said locals will lose out if water issues are not considered transboundary in nature.

"Local livelihoods and natural resources must be considered as equal," she said. "Local people don't want compensation in cash or other material. What they want to recover is their river."

Thai Senator Kraisaak Choonhavan worries about his country's food-based culture surviving the ever-changing flows of the Mekong.

"The government is concentrating more and more on the international globalization of business without regards to the community life which Thailand was build upon and the relative security we've had all these years," he said.

### "A Dirty Game"

In Cambodia, the poorest of the Mekong region countries and most dependent on fishing, officials say millions could be affected if development projects are not handled carefully.

"The Chinese are playing a dirty game," said Roland Eng, Cambodia's former ambassador to the United States. "China has the money, but these development projects will affect millions of people. It's a serious conflict. People are selling the crops, their cows, their kids."

ASEAN Secretary-General Ong said stabilized development in the Mekong region—with China's cooperation—could foster better cooperation in the fight against other cross-border problems like the narcotics trade and human trafficking.

"The more we can engage the Mekong River countries together...it will foster a climate of confidence. The potential for cooperation among these six countries is better than ever before."

—Loren Keller

**"Countries cannot get away from the fact that they have to pay attention to other countries."**



## Southeast Asia

# One Policy Does Not Fit All

*US should recognize, engage nonviolent Islamic extremists*

**H**ow can the United States have a more secure relationship with Southeast Asian Muslims? The short answer is that it cannot, if it doesn't begin to alter its policies.

Southeast Asians in general, Muslim or not, have been vocal about their disdain for the Iraq war. But a deeper look at the United States' conflicted relationship with Southeast Asian Muslims reveals that current dissatisfaction stems from widespread misperceptions of the region.

This was the premise of a roundtable discussion held in San Francisco in November 2004. Hosted by the Stanley Foundation, the event brought together a number of scholars and governmental and nongovernmental representatives to explore what US policymakers should know about Islam in Southeast Asia.

### Diversity in Islam

Increasingly, it seems that US policy toward Southeast Asia and the

Muslim world has been hindered by a lack of understanding of the region. Common misperceptions of a single Islamic identity overshadow the diverse character of Muslim politics and society in the region.

Muslim groups are not part of a single culture. While there is the spread of a global Muslim identity throughout Southeast Asia, scholars have identified six cultural zones of Islam—Arab, Persian, Turkish, sub-Saharan, Indian, and Malay—which represent the historical changes and adaptations of Islam and reflect its interaction with other environments and religions.

US policy often categorizes Muslim groups as either "moderate" or "extremist." But Southeast Asians find these classifications to be overly simplistic. The US government should continue to work with moderate Muslim groups in Southeast Asia, but must also recognize that among the extremists there are both violent and nonviolent elements. The United States

needs to capitalize on opportunities to work with the nonviolent groups as well.

Almost immediately after the 9/11 attacks, Southeast Asian leaders such as President Arroyo of the Philippines stressed to American policymakers that fighting terrorism was as much or more a matter of tackling "root causes" as it was fighting insurgents. "Root causes" meant, to these leaders, poverty.

But, as participants at the roundtable agreed, battling poverty to protect against terrorism is too simple an answer. Although analysts agree that poverty makes it easier to recruit young men, widespread disillusionment with government leaders also contributes to the frustrations that drive Muslim youth to insurgent groups. In order to combat terrorism, the United States must recognize that these issues are connected, that they are not just Muslim issues, and that they must be addressed together.

### Aid or Diplomacy?

Following 9/11, US foreign policymakers turned their focus from development aid to public diplomacy campaigns. Pre-9/11 aid to Southeast Asia had made great strides in addressing "root cause" problems that affected Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In contrast, public diplomacy campaigns have been poorly planned and poorly carried out, ultimately provoking a negative reaction from the exact audience the United States was attempting to reach.

These US campaigns have worked with varying degrees of success in the region. What US policymakers need to understand above all else, however, is that the complexities of Muslim politics and society in the region cannot be addressed with generic policies and campaigns.

—Jen Maceyko

*Common misperceptions of a single Islamic identity overshadow the diverse character of Muslim politics and society in the region.*



**Toward Understanding.** Protests, like this one in Malaysia, are common in Southeast Asia. The United States should make a concerted effort to understand the nuances of the region.



## Southwest Asia

# Building a Bridge to ASEAN

*Regional organization will thrive with or without US support*

Creating relationships with new and renewed regional organizations—such as the Commonwealth of Independent States, the European Union, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—has come to pose interesting foreign relations dilemmas for the United States since the end of the Cold War.

The US relationship with ASEAN is a particular challenge. The war on terrorism makes Southeast Asia an important region for the United States, but US policy to this point has been based on bilateral relationships—a strategy that many US policymakers consider successful despite its recognizably limited scope.

This policy focus on bilateral relations was the basis for a roundtable discussion held in San Francisco in November 2004, which brought together US and Southeast Asian representatives, scholars, and experts to discuss how the United States and ASEAN could forge a new relationship.

### US Perspective: Limited Success

US analysts tend to judge ASEAN on its achievements, and to date the United States sees very few. Critics of a stronger US relationship with the organization believe it has not played a strong role in settling disputes between its members. Nor has the United States seen members of the group come together to resolve major challenges over the last decade such as the 1997 financial crisis or the current war on terrorism.

There may be some credibility to US skepticism of ASEAN. Both the financial crisis and the war on terrorism have been managed

bilaterally among Southeast Asian states. More recently, discussions within the organization have created divisions between wealthy and poor states. For some Americans, this internal division and lack of cooperation does not inspire confidence in the organization.

### Southeast Asian Perspective: Major Strides

But many Southeast Asians believe the United States holds the organization to an unreasonably high standard. In fact, ASEAN has been successful in providing a forum for Southeast Asian states to debate positions and policies among themselves, a great success considering the sharp political and economic differences in the region.

Other supporters have pointed out that ASEAN has allowed individual governments to take risks they would otherwise avoid. For example, Indonesia agreed to let international peacekeepers into East Timor largely because of ASEAN's support. The organization has also been able to pursue relations with China, Japan, and South Korea with more confidence than if each member were pursuing its own bilateral policies.

### The Need for Cooperation

Regardless of US apprehension over working with ASEAN, it does not seem the organization will become obsolete any time soon. ASEAN is intent on finding a balance in its external relations, with or without the United States. In 2005, China is set to surpass the United States as the region's top trading partner. And



stronger relations with Japan, India, and South Korea are evidence that ASEAN will not be hindered by US indecision.

Undoubtedly, the United States would benefit by building bridges with ASEAN. And while a closer relationship will not be instantaneous, bringing together US and ASEAN representatives to begin discussions on short-term and long-term policy approaches should be a priority in order to develop a more comprehensive US policy toward the regional organization.

—Jen Maceyko

**Finding Common Ground.** Relationships built between ASEAN and larger regional actors—Russia, China, India, and Japan—benefit all those involved.

### Resources

Stanley Foundation policy bulletins *New Glue or New Gloss? Southeast Asian Regionalism and US Policy and Islam in Southeast Asia: What Should US Policymakers Know?* are available at [www.stanleyfoundation.org](http://www.stanleyfoundation.org) or see page 15 to order.

## Public Opinion Versus Politicians' Attitudes

*Strong support for US global engagement*

*This spring the Stanley Foundation, along with Americans for Informed Democracy and the United Nations Foundation, cosponsored a series of town hall-style meetings throughout the Midwest that included discussion on the future of US-UN relations. Featured speakers at two April 19 events in the Twin Cities were Thomas Pickering, former US ambassador to the United Nations, and Charles J. Brown, president and CEO of Citizens for Global Solutions. Brown explores the puzzling disconnect between the American public and its foreign policy leaders. This article was co-authored by Sam Stein, an Edward Rawson Communications Fellow at Citizens for Global Solutions.*

**America's politicians frequently misjudge how closely they share their constituents' vision of the United States' role in the world....**

Famed commentator H. L. Mencken once noted that "nobody ever went broke underestimating the taste of the American public." Today, Mencken would feel vindicated, knowing that the US government is drastically underestimating the public's support for the United Nations and UN reform.

Currently, within and between political parties, an argument persists as to whether the US-UN relationship most appropriately represents a dysfunctional marriage or a failed kinship. Take for example Congress's last session, in which 74 members of the House of Representatives, including Majority Leader Tom Delay (R-TX), voted to cut all of the United States' financial support for the United Nations, while, in contrast, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice urged that "we shouldn't abandon [the UN], we should make it a stronger instrument."

In actuality, these deep divides over the United Nations are highly unreflective of the general consensus held by the American public. Americans don't see US-UN relations as dysfunctional or unsalvageable. Rather, they see the partnership as one of convenience. Poll after poll shows that the majority of Americans not only support the United Nations and its mission but would like to see the international body strengthened so that it can meet the challenges of the 21st century. In fact, in a 2001 Pew poll, 92 percent of the public said that strengthening the United Nations should be an American foreign policy objective.

Unfortunately, political officials and members of the media rarely acknowledge such findings. Often, they flat out disregard them. In a study by the Center of International Security Studies, 67 percent of Congress and 62 percent of the media said that they believed the public, in fact, did not support strengthening the United Nations.

In addition, America's politicians frequently misjudge how closely they share their constituents' vision of the United States' role in the world and its relationship with the international community. According to a 2004 Chicago Council on Foreign Relations study, 78 percent of elected leaders and 66 percent of the public believe the United States should support UN policy even if it may not reflect America's priorities. However, only 16 percent of elected leaders estimated that the public shared this position. Likewise, while 84 percent of elected leaders and 78 percent of the public believe the United States should participate in UN international

peacekeeping operations, only 39 percent of elected leaders said the public shared their view.

### The Mile-Wide Gap

Our elected officials are proving Mencken's axiom; they are underestimating the public they've been appointed to serve. As a result, a mile-wide gap exists between actual public sentiment and what elected officials perceive public opinion to be. These findings are depressingly unfortunate. Currently, there is a small but diminishing window of opportunity for America to reform and forge the relationship it wants with the United Nations.

This opportunity comes in the form of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's recently released report *In Larger Freedom*, which offers what journalist Traci Hukill calls "the most dramatic reforms since [the United Nations'] inception in 1945." Annan's recommendations—both comprehensive in detail and sweeping in vision—are very much structured around America's interests. For example, Annan's report calls for such US-supported proposals as:

- A peacebuilding commission to help countries transition from civil war to functionality.
- A democracy fund to unite and promote nations with shared democratic principles.
- A "worldwide warning system for all natural hazards" to save thousands of lives from future tsunamis.
- The replacement of the Commission on Human Rights with a smaller Human Rights



## The UN: Perceptions vs. Reality

Leaders



**What leaders believe:** Asked whether they thought the United States should support UN policies even if those decisions do not reflect US priorities, 78 percent of foreign policy leaders surveyed agreed.

Leaders overall



**What they think the public believes:** Only 16 percent of those leaders believe a large majority of the public shares this position.

Public



**What the public actually believes:** In reality, 66 percent of the American public believes the United States should support UN policy even if it means that the United States will sometimes have to go along with a policy that is not its first choice.

Source: The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2004

*How is it possible that Congress is so out of step with the preferences of the public and the elite on such a range of foreign policy questions?*

*One possible factor may be that Americans in all types of leadership positions, including Congress and high-level members of the executive branch, misread the attitudes of the general American public. They may not feel that the public supports such positions, so that it is politically risky to pursue them. This may be especially true for new multilateral initiatives.*

—From the CCFR and PIPA report, *The Hall of Mirrors: Perceptions and Misperceptions in the Congressional Foreign Policy Process*, October 1, 2004.

Council, whose members would agree to abide by standards the council oversees.

For many, *In Larger Freedom* is a practical and appealing starting point for any UN reform discussion. Even the caustic, anti-UN Senator Norm Coleman (R-MN) noted that: "It's in America's interest to look at ways to partner with countries that share our values. We need a Democracy Caucus at the UN."

### Citizens' Role

Yet much more is needed to turn Annan's proposals into reality. For

starters, the American public must remind their elected officials that they support a US foreign policy of broad multilateralism, one that includes a more collaborative and productive US-UN relationship. In addition, America's leaders must stop underestimating the public's desire for a stronger, more accountable, reformed United Nations.

Clearly, there exists a large community comprised of the public and policymakers who, despite different political persuasions, often share a vision of UN reform and US global engagement.

Unfortunately, neither the people nor policymakers have made the connection, nor have they recognized the power they could bring to these issues should they join forces. This disconnect must be overcome if the United Nations is to be an effective partner for US foreign policy. Our elected officials must start paying attention to the voters by uniting in support of a reformed United Nations capable of responding to the threats and challenges of the 21st century.

In July 2004, the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) of the University of Maryland surveyed 450 individuals who hold key leadership positions in US foreign policy circles.

Those interviewed included 100 congressional members or their senior staff; 41 administration officials such as assistant secretaries and other senior staff in various offices dealing with foreign policy; 75 university administrators and academics who teach in the area of international relations; 59 journalists who handle international news; 50 religious leaders; 38 senior business executives; 32 labor presidents; 29 presidents of major private foreign policy organizations; and 25 presidents of major special interest groups relevant to foreign policy.

Those interviewed do not necessarily reflect the view of the inner circle of foreign policy decision makers in the White House or the Department of Defense. However, many of the interviewees exercise direct authority over US foreign policy, while others may affect policy indirectly in a variety of ways.

The public sample included 1,195 Americans.

"People Are Debating Everything"

## Arab Media in a Shrinking World

*Television plays an influential role in Middle East politics*

*Professor Ramez Maluf, director of the Beirut Institute for Media Arts at the Lebanese American University, recently spoke at the Iowa City (Iowa) Foreign Relations Council on how the Arab media are shaping developments in Lebanon and the Middle East. His remarks are excerpted here.*

**And everybody, even in the poorest parts of the Arab world, has access to a satellite dish.**

In the last ten years a fantastic explosion of media has happened in our part of the world. The rate at which TV stations were mushrooming this last year was about two new TV stations every month. So we now have something like 200 satellite television stations in addition to the local terrestrial stations.

Before that, a typical citizen of an Arab country would watch the state television. The news was controlled by the Ministry of Information. People recognized that, but there was no alternative.

In 1991, CNN broadcast the Iraq war live—a breakthrough landmark in the history of television.... It had tremendous impact, not only here but obviously in the Arab world. CNN carried a promotional clip from Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, where he would come on and say, "If I want to know what's happening in Iraq, I watch CNN." And he had 30,000 troops in Iraq. But he wasn't relying on his station to find out, he was relying on CNN.

Soon enough then, the Arabs started having their own stations. In 1992, the first station came online. In 1996, Al Jazeera began. And then there was an explosion.

So the question then becomes, what effect does this have on a

population that up to ten years ago was being told what was real by the Ministry of Information? Now they're watching debates; people are debating everything. Religion. Does God exist? Politics. Democracy. Hezbollah—should it be armed, should it not be armed? All that discussion is taking place.

So are the debates—on Islam, on democracy, on secularism—having any effect? Keep in mind that the Arab world is a poor region. The gross domestic product of all 22

ic, and fun to watch—maybe more so than reading. It's very powerful and has a wide reach. And everybody, even in the poorest parts of the Arab world, has access to a satellite dish. If they don't own one, they can watch it at coffee houses, cafés, and other public places.

I think it does have an effect. The station owned by Rafik Hariri, the prime minister who was assassinated, broadcast his assassination for 24 hours every day of the week



**Accessing the World.** People throughout the Middle East, both wealthy and poor, have access to satellite television and the hundreds of channels it provides. Here, Iraqi men in Baghdad watch as President Bush is interviewed by Al Jazeera television.

Arab countries is \$600 billion, the equivalent of the GDP of Spain. Of course, we're talking about almost 300 million people versus a Spanish population of 40 million. Not all Arab countries are poor, but the vast majority are very poor and the literacy rate is not very encouraging, particularly among women.

So TV, because it's a visual medium, is very intense, dynam-

and they rallied the people. People [an estimated one million of the country's 3.5 million people] demonstrated because they knew television was going to show it. Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad made a statement in the Syrian parliament that these demonstrations were small, that the cameras were actually zooming in.... So the next demonstration, in English, the Lebanese carried big signs saying "ZOOM OUT!"



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US policy needs to be based on a more nuanced understanding of Islam in Southeast Asia. This bulletin recommends ways that US policymakers can be more aware of the complexities of Muslim politics and society in the region when making decisions. 2005 policy bulletin.

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## Essay

# Borders Are Illusory

*The threats we face are interconnected*

*Security in America has taken on a whole new meaning since 9/11. Metal detectors aren't just for airports anymore; some of us pass through them these days just to get into the office. But are*

*we any safer? Is safety even attainable? We know that people, goods, and money move more freely around the world than ever before. But so do diseases, weapons, drugs, and other security threats. Look closely at any one of those threats and you start to see how they're connected to the others—diseases with poverty, poverty with terrorism, terrorism with organized crime, and distant wars with our own security here at home.*

*If the threats are all connected, which do we tackle first? If national borders can't contain them, whose job is it to take them on? And—call it selfish or call it practical—but what does it all mean for us?*

*These questions were addressed in the Stanley Foundation documentary "Security Check: Confronting Today's Global Threats." Available at [www.stanleyfoundation.org](http://www.stanleyfoundation.org). Host David Brancaccio concluded the program with this essay.*

**A** while back I was hanging out with some ranchers in a piece of the Mojave desert in Arizona. They were rough and ready, these ranchers, and the topic around the dinner table one night was security, of sorts. These ranchers were worried about some survivalist-types they'd run into up the road. The survivalists, they said, were dug in with enough camouflage gear, GPS direction finders, and freeze-dried beef

stroganoff to secure themselves against who knows what for a long time. The ranchers didn't like the looks of them. "You got to worry about the right things," one of my rancher friends said. With that, he got up from the table to eliminate what turned out to be a big old snake that he heard rattling at the back door. You don't want to know how.

You do have to worry about the right things. The most pressing worries may be right underfoot, like the snake. But in this interconnected world, security threats to people in faraway places have a way of migrating.

We think of our country's borders as electric fences, surrounded by guard towers and moats. But in reality our borders are more illusory, rather like the parallel white lines ranchers sometimes paint across roads to keep the cattle from roaming too far. To a cow, the trompe l'oeil white lines look like a grate into which they might slip and they avoid them. But more determined animals trudge right over these supposed barriers.

The reports in "Security Check: Confronting Today's Global Threats" present us with an airport international arrivals board no one would want to see:

*Now arriving gate 23D, AIDS or SARS from Asia.*

*Smuggled guns from Colombia at the B gate.*

*Violent insurgency in Uganda fostering terrorism not far behind.*

*Nuclear material inbound from Russia.*

We do instinctively share some of the security concerns of people in far-flung corners of the world. Polls last fall showed American voters making the connection between the terrible Chechen terrorist school takeover in southern Russia late last summer and their choice for US president three months later.

Yet fear itself is not a policy to live by.

What is more useful is the understanding that when more people feel secure where they live, the safer the world becomes for Ugandans, Colombians, Thais, Russians...and Americans.

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