

The 10 worst U.N. Security Council resolutions ever

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As the world's attention turns to whether yet another U.N. Security Council sanctions resolution will convince Iran to stop enriching uranium, *Turtle Bay* thought it would be useful to look at previous resolutions that have strained to meet expectations. Here's a list of 10 of the most ill-conceived, pointless, or just plain bad resolutions that have been adopted by the 15-nation security club. Some of these resolutions are perfectly fine, but contain flaws that have come back to haunt their authors. Others are good for some countries, but disastrous for others. And still others have simply outlived their expiration dates. In any case, they all highlight the fallibility of what dignitaries here like to call "this august body."

The Somalia Swan Song Resolution: 1863

Four days before **Barack Obama** was inaugurated as president of the United States, **George W. Bush's** administration pressed through a Security Council resolution calling for the establishment of

a U.N. peacekeeping mission in Somalia, which was on the verge of losing its Ethiopian occupiers and being overrun by Islamist militants. The move had been strenuously opposed by the U.N. secretariat, which argued that there was no peace to keep in Somalia and no countries willing to send troops.

"Some view U.N. Security Council resolution 1863 as simply an empty gesture -- a call for a U.N. peace enforcement operation in Somalia by an outgoing Bush administration which knew the force would never be deployed," said **Kenneth Menkhaus**, a scholar at Davidson College. "But others argue this resolution was actively harmful. It handed the jihadist group al-Shabab a perfect mobilization tool against the U.S. and the U.N. precisely at the moment when an Ethiopian troop withdrawal from Somalia and a change of government in Somalia had put the Shabab on the defensive. The resolution only served to stir up a hornet's nest in Somalia."

Susan Rice, the new U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, was also cool to the idea. "I am skeptical, too, about the wisdom of a United Nations peacekeeping force in Somalia at this time," Rice said at her confirmation hearing.

The Condi & Sergei Do-Nothing Iran Resolution: 1835

Relations between the United States and Russia deteriorated dramatically after the United States sided with Georgia in its conflict with Russian troops over the breakaway republics Abkhazia and Ossetia. In the midst of the standoff, the International Atomic Energy Agency issued a report concluding that Iran had not complied with U.N. demands to cease its enrichment of uranium and that it could not verify whether Iran's nuclear program was peaceful. Such reports typically serve as a trigger for sanctions. Moscow made it clear it was not prepared to support a U.S. push for imposing new measures against Iran. But in an effort to demonstrate that relations between the two powers were not irreparable, then Secretary of State **Condoleezza Rice** and Russian Foreign Minister **Sergei Lavrov** agreed **to put forward a resolution** reiterating each country's support for existing U.N. agreements on Iran's nuclear program, but including no new measures.

The "We Command You to Stop Killing Your People ... Please" Resolution: 1706

In August, 2006, the U.N. Security Council passed this little-remembered resolution authorizing the deployment of a U.N. peacekeeping mission in Darfur, Sudan, to use "all necessary means" to

protect Darfuri civilians. But the resolution, which was championed by the Bush administration, required the consent of the Sudanese government to be implemented.

"Well, I think there's a chicken and egg situation here," then-U.S. ambassador **John Bolton** said after the vote. "I think once the resolution is passed, the consent may be forthcoming more rapidly than people think."

Sudan never gave it, and the U.N. was not prepared to fight its way into Darfur. It would be nearly another year before the council finally reached agreement with Sudan on a force that it would accept. On July 31, 2007, the Security Council passed resolution 1769, creating a hybrid United Nations/ African Union peacekeeping force that has been handicapped by a confused command structure and a shortage of advanced military hardware, such as attack helicopters.

"The go-to prescription for any problem is to throw a few peacekeepers at it, no matter how inappropriate or ineffectual," said **John Prendergast**, the cofounder of the **Enough Project**.

"Instead of a diplomatic investment in a political solution, backed by real consequences for continued genocidal crimes, the U.S. supported a few thousand non-integrated African troops to be deployed throughout a vast, hostile Saharan terrain. They predictably had little impact, and the political problems continue to fester unaddressed."

The Pick Your Terrorist Resolution: 1530

In the hours after al Qaeda-inspired militants bombed a Spanish train in June 2004, in Madrid, killing 191 people, Spain's President **José Maria Aznar** mustered universal support in the Security Council for a resolution condemning the armed Basque separatist movement, ETA, for carrying out the attack. The Spanish initiative, taken three days before Spain's presidential election, showed how easy it is to bend the will of the council when a member is confronted with a national tragedy. But the ruse didn't work at home. Aznar was voted out of power, in part because of anger over what was seen as a political ploy to win support. Although no one in the Security Council still considers ETA responsible for the attack, the resolution still remains on the books.

"This is part of the modus operandi: well, we got it wrong, too bad, let's move on," said **Colin Keating**, a former New Zealand ambassador to the U.N. who now runs the **Security Council**

Report. "This is not an organ that sees itself as accountable to anybody, and certainly not to the principle of historical accuracy."

The "Trust Me, He's a Terrorist" Resolutions: 1267 and 1390

Resolution 1267, passed after the bombings of two U.S. embassies in East Africa, imposed a series of travel and financial sanctions on members of the Taliban-controlled government of Afghanistan for refusing to surrender al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden to stand trial for the embassy bombings. After the September 11 attacks, the council expanded the list of targets to al Qaeda and affiliated groups, setting the stage for the United States, Russia, and other countries to propose the inclusion of hundreds of individuals on a **U.N. terror list**.

The measures created a Kafkaesque predicament for those targeted by them. The accused had no legal recourse to challenge their listing, and in order to be removed, they had to convince the state that had placed them on the list in the first place. But some individuals had no way of even establishing which country had placed them on the list, because the procedures allow governments to secretly finger individuals.

Garad Jama, a Somali-born U.S. citizen who lives in Minneapolis, said his life was destroyed by the appearance on U.S. and U.N. terror lists. A year later, in August 2002, Jama was removed from both lists. "My life has been trouble," Jama told me then. "I have never had any connection with any terrorism."

Dick Marty, a Swiss investigator for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, denounced the U.N. blacklisting as a "flagrant injustice" that failed to meet basic human rights standards. He said the council's activities constituted a "dangerous erosion of fundamental rights and freedoms." European governments have been struggling for the past decade to revise the resolution and increase due-process protections.

The Genocide Rescue Brigade That Never Was Resolution: 912

In April 1994, as Rwandan extremists unleashed the largest mass killing operation in modern history, the Security Council reached agreement on Resolution 912, which called for the reduction in the size of an already under-equipped U.N. peacekeeping force. In a compromise, the United States allowed the resolution to include a provision that stated the council's willingness to consider any recommendations by then Secretary-General **Boutros Boutros-Ghali** concerning the size and the

mandate of the mission. Eight days later, Boutros-Ghali appealed to the council to reverse its decision, saying the U.N. mandate was insufficient to confront mass killings. But the United States blocked any decision by the council to expand the mission.

"The international community, together with nations in Africa, must bear its share of responsibility for this tragedy," then U.S. President **Bill Clinton** said in a 1998 tour to Rwanda. "We did not act quickly enough after the killing began. We should not have allowed the refugee camps to become safe havens for the killers. We did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide."

The Bosnian Unsafe Haven Resolution: 819

In 1992, the Bosnian Serb Army ethnically cleansed large swaths of north eastern and central Bosnia, forcing more than 100,000 civilians to flee to enclaves. On April 16, 1993, the U.N. passed Resolution 819, creating a "safe haven" in Srebrenica, but then failed to muster enough forces to protect it. It compounded the problem by setting up other safe havens. The site would later become the site of the worst mass murder in Western Europe since World War II. Even at the time of the resolution's passage, Bosnians had little doubt as to the fecklessness of the gesture. Bosnia's U.N. ambassador to the United Nations, **Mohammed Sacirbey**, immediately denounced it as a cynical and meaningless act.

"The tragedy of Srebrenica will haunt our history forever," then Secretary-General **Kofi Annan** wrote in a 1999 review of the U.N.'s failure to protect the people of Srebrenica. "Through error, misjudgment and inability to recognize the scope of evil confronting us, we failed to do our part to save the people of Srebrenica."

The Iraqi Collateral Damage Resolutions: 661 and 687

These resolutions played a central role in the defeat, containment, and ultimate overthrow of **Saddam Hussein**, showing that U.N. resolutions can have extremely sharp teeth. But Resolution 661 of 1990, which imposed a comprehensive economic oil embargo, inflicted such extreme hardship on ordinary Iraqis that it has since been politically impossible to rally support for comprehensive embargos. Today, the council mostly imposes targeted sanctions aimed at a country's ruling elites.

Resolution 687 of 1991, known to U.N. diplomats as the Mother of All Resolutions, set the terms of Hussein's military defeat in the first Gulf War and required he destroy the country's weapons of mass destruction. (A decade later, the U.S. and Britain cited Iraq's alleged violation of this resolution as the legal justification for their overthrow of Saddam Hussein, against the objections of other council members.)

This resolution in many ways started out as an unqualified success, leading to Iraq's destruction of its WMD program within a year -- a fact that only became clear when American forces fruitlessly scoured the country in search of banned weapons after Hussein's overthrow. But it has also become a symbol of the council's abuse of power. The resolution established a monitoring system -- including U.N. weapons experts and sensors, drones, and cameras -- so elaborate and intrusive that it has been described as the world's first "foreign occupation by remote control." The United States and Britain piggybacked on the monitoring system to spy on Hussein's security detail.

Although Hussein's rule has ended and his regime's weapons are long since eliminated, the resolution continues to live on, placing restraints on the new government's ability to function like a normal country. The trade restrictions, which include a ban on chemicals, including pesticides, are "among the constraints that continue to prevent Iraq from regaining its status as a responsible and active member of the international community and, at the same time, deprive it of the benefits of technological progress and scientific research," said Iraq's Foreign Minister **Hoshyar Zebari**.

The "You Say Territories I Say Des Territoires" Resolution: 242

As if the Middle East conflict weren't complicated enough on its own, the Security Council approved Resolution 242 -- which introduced the "land for peace" formula in 1967, right after the Six-Day War - - with an ambiguous translation. In English, the resolution calls for the "withdrawal of Israeli forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict," which Israel interpreted to mean it could give back some, but not all, conquered territories in a final settlement. The French version says that Israeli is obliged to withdraw from "des territoires occupés," which the Arabs interpreted as requiring Israel give up all the land it seized in the 1967 Six-Day War. The meaning of the resolution has never been fully resolved, and has tried the patience of linguists, politicians, diplomats and armed militants. It has also provided material for countless university dissertations, books, and papers with ponderous titles like "A Case Study in Diplomatic Ambiguity," and "A Legal Reappraisal of the Right-Wing

Interpretation of the Withdrawal Phrase with Reference to the Conflict Between Israel and the Palestinians." The ambiguity reflected an inability of the council to agree on language defining the fate of Arab territories. "This situation could lead to real trouble in the future," then Secretary of State **Dean Rusk** would later recall.

The "What's Bad For the Bolsheviks, Is Bad For the Yanks" Resolution: 82

This 1950 resolution authorized the U.S. intervention into the Korean War and provided an early demonstration of the Security Council's extraordinary power. It also spurred the development of a way to circumvent the council entirely. After the Soviet Union realized the folly of its failure to block Resolution 82 (on account of a decision to boycott the council in protest over its refusal to transfer the Chinese seat from Taiwan to Beijing), Moscow committed to vetoing all further resolutions challenging North Korea.

In response, U.S. Secretary of State **Dean Acheson** introduced a new procedure to the General Assembly called the "Uniting for Peace Resolution." Its purpose was to allow a member state to bypass the Security Council and seek approval for action in the General Assembly, including recommendations on the use of force.

But the Uniting For Peace formula would later come back to haunt the United States. The resolution also allows for convening an open-ended emergency special session to address threats to international peace and security ignored by the council. Under the leadership of Arab states seeking a way around the U.S. veto, the 10th emergency session was first convened in 1997 to address the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, and it has never been formally closed.