At the United Nations, where countries and interest groups meet to decide economic, social and political issues, the United States wields enormous influence. As a permanent member of the Security Council, it has a veto over UN decisions, and with the world’s largest economy, it is expected to pay a proportionate share of the UN budget. Whether or not the U.S. cooperates and compromises with other nations largely determines whether the United Nations can succeed in its mission of promoting global equality, development, and peace.

The U.S. may be the richest nation on the planet but it’s also the stingiest. With its meager allocation of 0.1% of its gross national product in official development assistance, the U.S. falls woefully short of contributions by other industrialized nations and way below the 0.7% target agreed to in the UN.
How has the U.S. used its influence? It has tried to establish a double standard for international rules, seeking condemnation of its enemies, but endeavoring to exempt itself and its allies from any UN scrutiny. It portrays itself as a world leader in human rights and environmental issues, yet has failed to sign or ratify many of the major treaties or “conventions” addressing these concerns. When new conventions are under negotiation, the U.S. is among the most confrontational countries, waging a continual diplomatic war for exemption from international standards.

U.S. unilateralism in foreign policy dates back many decades, but the George W. Bush administration has taken it to new extremes. Here is a look at the U.S. stance on a few of the more than 500 existing UN multinational treaties.

**WOMEN**

**Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women:** CEDAW is an international bill of rights for women. The U.S., Afghanistan and Sao Tome/Principe are the only three countries that have signed but not ratified this convention. Opened 18 December 1979; in force since 3 September 1981; signed by the U.S. 17 July 1980.1


**Convention on the Political Rights of Women:** Opened 20 December 1952; in force since 7 July 1954; ratified by the U.S. 8 April 1976.  


**Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for**

**Marriage and Registration of Marriages:** Opened 7 November 1962; in force since 9 December 1964; signed by the U.S. 10 December 1962, but not ratified.  


**Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others:** A June 2002 U.S. State Department report on trafficking criticized several U.S. allies for doing too little to combat it, but the U.S. has not signed this treaty. Approved: 2 December 1949; in force since 25 July 1951.  


**ENVIRONMENT**

**Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants:** Only after strong pressure from environmental groups did the U.S. sign this treaty to reduce and/or eliminate releases of chemicals harmful to human and the environment, like industrial products and by-products. Opened 23 May 2001–22 May 2002; not yet in force; signed by the U.S. 23 May 2001, but not ratified.  

• http://www.chem.unep.ch/sc/documents/convtext/convtext_en.pdf or www.chem.unep.ch/so/


• http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/kpeng.pdf

**Convention on Biological Diversity:** Opened 5 June 1992; in force since 29 December 1993; signed by the U.S. 4 June 1993, but not ratified.  


**Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes:** Opened 17 March 1992; in force since 6 October 1996; not signed by the U.S.

• http://www.unece.org/env/water/text/water

**Statutes of the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology:** Opened 4 April 1984; in force since 3 February 1994; not signed by the U.S.

• http://www.icgeb.trieste.it/GENERAL/Statutes_ICGEB.pdf

**The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea:** Opened 10 December 1982; in force since 16 November 1994; not signed by the U.S.


**DISARMAMENT**

**Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty:** This treaty bans all forms of nuclear weapons testing, but it will not go into force until ratified by all 44 countries with nuclear weapons or facilities. As of summer 2002, 165 nations had signed the treaty and 93 had ratified it, including 31 of the 44 key nations. Opened 24 September 1996; not yet in force; signed by the U.S. 24 September 1996, but not ratified.

• http://www.unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/kpeng.pdf

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**When Bush Comes To Shove**

In July 2002, the administration, acting against its own State Department recommendations, declared it would withhold its contribution of $34 million to the United Nations Population Fund, which supports family planning and maternal health programs in more than 140 countries. The organization, which has a proven track record of reducing maternal and child mortality rates, estimates that the loss of U.S. funding will translate into two million more unwanted pregnancies, 4,700 more maternal deaths, and 77,000 more deaths among children under five. One of the Bush administration’s first acts on taking office was to eliminate U.S. aid to foreign organizations that in any way support the right to abortion. This law would have been unconstitutional if it had been applied to U.S. organizations. The administration also works to scrap use of the established term “reproductive health” from all upcoming international texts.

• http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/journals/2613700.html
**Convention on the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines and on their destruction:** Also known as the Ottawa Treaty, this convention is a crucial tool of the international movement against landmines. One hundred and twenty-five states are party to this Convention by ratification, accession or approval. The U.S. opposes it, which may be deemed to be as the Ottawa Treaty, this convention is a crucial tool of the international movement against landmines. One hundred and twenty-five states are party to this Convention by ratification, accession or approval. The U.S. opposes it, and Iraq (those countries labeled as an “axis of evil” by President Bush), among others. Opened 3 December 1997; in force since 1 March 1999; not signed by the U.S.

- [http://www.unog.ch/frames/disarm/dis/treat/ottawa.htm](http://www.unog.ch/frames/disarm/dis/treat/ottawa.htm)

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**Invalidate nuclear, biotech arms agreements**

In December 2001 the U.S. withdrew from the 1972 Antiballistic Missile Treaty with Russia—the first time in the nuclear era that the U.S. has renounced a major arms treaty—prompting Russia to withdraw from the Start II disarmament agreement of 1993.


In 2001, country delegations met to strengthen the 1972 Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (biological) and Toxin Weapons, and on their Destruction. The U.S. walked out of the meeting and declared that the proposed protocol was dead.


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### My Way or the Highway

In 1984 the U.S. quit UNESCO (the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and ceased contributions to UNESCO’s budget, protesting the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) project that sought to lessen world media dependence on multinational wire agencies. The U.S. charged UNESCO with “curtailment of press freedom”, mismanagement and other faults, despite a 148–1 UN vote in favor of NWICO. UNESCO terminated NWICO in 1989, but the U.S. has still refused to rejoin.


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**HUMAN RIGHTS**

### Convention on the Rights of the Child: The CRC is the most widely and rapidly ratified human rights treaty in history, with 191 participating nations. The only two non-ratifying countries are the U.S. and Somalia, which lacks a functioning government. Opened 20 November 1989; in force since 2 September 1990; signed by the U.S. 16 February 1995, but not ratified.


#### Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict:

- [http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/a_opt2.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/a_opt2.htm)

#### International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights:


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**Civil and Political Rights:**


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**Invalidating nuclear, biotech arms agreements**


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### When Time to Talk, U.S. Prefers To Walk

The U.S. left the UN International Conference on Racism, officially because of heavy criticism aimed at Israel. A conference debate on racism in U.S. society and demands for compensation for slavery may have provided additional reasons for the U.S. decision. Nations rarely walk out of debates, opting instead to enter reservations in keeping with accepted diplomatic norms for recording dissent.

ECONOMY/LABOR

Of the eight core UN conventions relating to work and the International Labour Organization, the U.S. has ratified two. This places the U.S. level with China, Armenia, Burma and Oman, and behind Afghanistan, Qatar, Somalia and Vietnam, which have each signed three.
• http://ilolex.ilo.ch:1567/english/docs/declworld.htm

Among the labor related treaties the U.S. has not ratified:


Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention: Opened 1 July 1949; in force since 18 July 1951


JUSTICE

Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court: The ICC is a permanent court for prosecution of individuals on war crimes, such as genocide and crimes against humanity, that were previously handled by temporary tribunals. The U.S. and most of its allies signed the treaty, but in an unprecedented action, the U.S. declared 6 May 2002 that it no longer considered itself bound by it, claiming the court might try American citizens on ‘frivolous’ charges. Opened 17 July 1998–31 December 2000; in force since 1 July 2002; signed by the U.S. 31 December 2000; “unsigned” by the U.S. 6 May 2002.
• http://www.un.org/law/icc/statute/romefra.htm

What Is A Treaty? The process from draft to international law

Treaty means an agreement, binding under international law, made between two or more political authorities, like governments. The name (convention, protocol, treaty, etc.) has no relation to the strength of the agreement, but only shows the importance the involved parties attribute to it. All multilateral agreements (those between three or more parties) go through certain stages before they come into force:

STEP 1: The draft—usually written by working groups of government delegates to the UN and its sub-organizations.

STEP 2: The presentation to the UN General Assembly, which debates amendments and votes on whether to adopt the treaty text. Adoption formally establishes the form and content of a treaty.

STEP 3: The opening of the treaty for signature by states wishing to become a party to the treaty. Signature shows that the states have begun the process required by their governments for ratification; and agree to refrain from acts contrary to treaty objectives.

STEP 4: Ratification—a country expresses formal intent to be bound by treaty provisions and to bring its national laws into compliance. The ratification process differs in each country but usually gives governments time to seek citizens’ approval for the treaty provisions.

STEP 5: Entering into force—compliance by ratifying governments is induced by international diplomatic pressure and domestic political and legal weight. The United Nations has no enforcement mechanisms, and most treaties are non-self-executing, which means that they cannot override domestic laws. A treaty usually specifies a number of states that must ratify before it goes into effect.

OPTIONAL PROTOCOLS: Some parties to a treaty may wish to take it further than the majority does. They may add an optional protocol for signature and commitment by any state already a party to the original protocol.

OPTIONAL PROTOCOLS:

• http://www.icj-cij.org/icjwww/ibasidocuments/ibasidtext/ibasicdeclarations.htm
• http://www.icj-cij.org/icjwww/lcases/Nus/nus_issummarys/

Just Say NO-Compliance

Since 1945, the International Court of Justice in The Hague has been a forum for settling disputes between states. On 7 October 1985, the U.S. declared it would no longer abide by the court’s decisions and terminated its agreement to the Declaration Recognizing as Compulsory the Jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice, which it had signed on 26 August 1946. This move followed a court finding that the U.S. had infringed on another nation’s sovereignty by mining the ports of Nicaragua. In 1986 the International Court of Justice ruled that the U.S. was in violation of international law in Nicaragua. The U.S. refused to recognize the Court’s jurisdiction. A UN resolution calling for compliance with the ICJ decision was approved by 94 states and opposed by two—the U.S. and Israel.
• http://www.icj-cij.org/icjwww/lcases/Nus/nus_issummarys/
• http://www.icj-cij.org/icjwww/lcases/383e.pdf

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