



# World Chronicle

UNITED NATIONS

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## **“The UN Security Council – from the Cold War to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”**

Since the end of the Cold War, the United Nations Security Council has profoundly affected international relations, taking action on a wide range of conflicts around the world.

How effective is the United Nations Security Council – as an institution – in maintaining international peace and security? What are the power dynamics between its five permanent members (P-5) and the ten elected members (E-10) of the Council? How does the emergence of a single superpower – the United States – affect its functioning? What are its challenges for the future?

These are just some of the questions explored in this edition of World Chronicle with David Malone, President of the International Peace Academy, and Kishore Mahbubani, Singapore’s Ambassador to the United Nations, who respectively edited and contributed to a recently published book on the subject: “The UN Security Council – from the Cold War to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”.

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**ANNOUNCER:** From the United Nations in New York, an unedited interview programme on global issues. This is **World Chronicle**. And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

**JENKINS:** Hello, I'm Tony Jenkins and this is **World Chronicle**.

How effective is the United Nations Security Council, as an institution, in maintaining "international peace and security"? How has it evolved since the end of the Cold War? What are its challenges for the future? These are just some of the questions explored in this new book: "The UN Security Council: From the Cold War to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century". We're pleased to have the editor of this book as our guest in the studio. He is David Malone, President of the International Peace Academy. Also joining us is a contributor to this volume and an "inside expert" on the workings of the Security Council, Kishore Mahbubani, Singapore's Ambassador to the United Nations.

Gentlemen, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

**MALONE:** Thank you.

**MAHBUBANI:** Thank you.

**JENKINS:** David Malone, the great presence throughout this book – if you would like, the elephant in the corner – of course is the United States and right there on page one of the book you write, "In the post-Cold War world the key issue for the Council is whether it can engage the United States, modulate its exercise of power and restrain its impulses". Is that what the Security Council is all about these days, restraining the United States?

**MALONE:** Well, it's one of the things that the Security Council is about. When the United States acts without its allies, as it has in Iraq, the cost for the United States are very significant. So Americans also have a very strong interest in seeing the United States engage with the world community at the UN. It's a mistake by the way to believe that the UN dominates the UN Security Council. I didn't use those terms.

**JENKINS:** You mean the US dominates?

**MALONE:** The US dominates the UN Security Council because as we saw in Iraq, actually the United States was frustrated when it wasn't joined by the majority of its partners on the Security Council and when it had to bypass the Security Council in order to attack Saddam Hussein. So the belief that the UN is nothing more than the tool of the United States is demonstrably wrong.

**JENKINS:** Kishore Mahbubani, you were on the Security Council for two years, would you describe what David has just been describing as a success for the Security Council or a failure? In other words, the inability to come to a consensus on the whole issue of Iraq was seen by many people as a failure. In fact, some people used it as an excuse to sound the

death knell to the United Nations. Others said no, this was a tremendous success. This proved that the United Nations – in other words, the family of nations – were not prepared to be bullied by the United States. They stood up to the United States and in effect the Council worked as it was supposed to be.

**MAHBUBANI:** And the debate will continue for a decade or more at least because I think both sides hold on to their views very strongly. You can argue on the one hand that the Security Council did its job in the sense that the United States came forth and said, “Please support this resolution” and the Security Council said, “No, we see no basis for it”. And, therefore, in that sense you can argue that the Security Council did its job. But on the other hand there’s also the other political reality that if you ever have a head-on collision within the UN on one side and the United States on the other side, there can be no doubt that in such a collision it’s not the United States that is going to be damaged, it is the United Nations as an institution that’s going to be damaged.

**JENKINS:** Was it damaged this March? Last March?

**MAHBUBANI:** I think some damage was done but basically if you look at what happened in the aftermath of the war in Iraq and how quickly everything came back to the UN Security Council and how quickly a resolution was passed, as you know, to effectively legitimize the new situation in Iraq, that actually demonstrated once again the centrality of the United Nations. But the essential point...

**JENKINS:** Well, you proved that the United States can’t live without the United Nations.

**MAHBUBANI:** I think it proves that the world we live in is a difficult and messy one and those who look for simple black and white answers are going to have lots of problems because clearly the United Nations cannot be used as an instrument to constrain or contain the United States of America. It’s too big a power. But at the same time, the United States of America with all its power still cannot do whatever it wants to do in the world without the support of the UN. So it is actually a relationship, which I’ve said at one time, where both are indispensable to each other.

**JENKINS:** There’s a sort of an undercurrent I pick up, David, throughout this book of wishful thinking, I suppose, of hoping that the United States itself might change. I mean, you talk a great deal about reform of the United Nations but it’s clear that you feel that the United States needs to rethink the way it goes about its foreign policy. At the same time, as a very pragmatic assessment, that the United States will use the United Nations to serve its own ends. Is that the quandary you’re left in?

**MALONE:** Well, I think the United States is at a very unique moment of its history, after 9/11 in particular, with an administration that is strongly ideological as well. We've seen the administration adopt a number of doctrinal shifts towards a pre-emptive attack, for example, arguing very heavily in favour of the use of the military instrument internationally to confront threats that may or may not respond all that well to the military. We now see the United States over-stretched militarily. It's deployed seriously only in Afghanistan and Iraq and we see today the United States behaving much more multilaterally towards Iran and North Korea. So my sense is that the extreme moment in US foreign policy has passed, that the value of working with partners is newly-recognized again in Washington and that whether President Bush is re-elected or whether there is a Kerry administration, American foreign policy in the years ahead is likely to be more consensually designed with partners and carried forward more prudently than perhaps has been the case in the past couple of years.

**JENKINS:** So there is an element of wishful thinking here? No, I jest. I mean you make clear in this book just how strongly the United States imposes its will. Ambassador Mahubani, at one point you talk about how you suggested changing the rules in the Security Council because the rules by which the Security Council governs itself, despite the fact that the institution is nearly 60 years old, are still provisional. And when you suggested doing something to actually make them permanent the reaction you got from one of the permanent five members of the Security Council was, "What business do these tourists have trying to tell us how we should run our Council?" As if you're almost there as guests! Is there a real role for the elected ten members of the Security Council?

**MAHUBANI:** Well, if you take the 15 members of the Security Council, or even the five, move them across from the UN building where they stand, put them in the UN Plaza Hotel and ask them, "Go make your decisions, go change the world" nobody would listen to them. The only reason why the Security Council is effective is because it is seen in the eyes of the world to have legitimacy and if legitimacy comes from the UN Charter its legitimacy comes from the fact that 191 member states of the UN accept the UN Charter and accept the decisions of the UN Security Council. So there is a symbiotic relationship between the UN Security Council and the other members and this is what I tried to suggest in my essay on the relationship between the permanent members and the elected members. For the permanent members to act as though they could do everything on their own without winning over the UN community would, in the long run, lead to disaster for the UN Security Council. Indeed, it's in the interest of the permanent members to protect the legitimacy and the standing and the prestige of the UN Security Council which frankly, as I say in some points, faces the danger of what I called double de-legitimization. De-legitimization on the one hand, frankly, in the United

States of America and on the other hand if you look at parts of the Islamic world there's a very high degree of disillusionment with the UN Security Council. So the UN Security Council, even though it is the single most effective member of the UN family, has got to work harder to improve its credibility and standing in the world.

**JENKINS:** Well, you were one of the elected ten. You point out a number of problems that you have. One of them I thought was curious was that there is no institutional memory for the elected ten. You arrive almost as sort of newborn babes having to learn the rules of the game as you go along. How do you tackle that? What could be done to change that? Would it be a good idea for example to create a section within the Secretariat whose purpose was just to serve the elected ten so that they can become an institutional memory?

**MAHBUBANI:** Oh, I think there can be many, many solutions and by the way many of the elected members, like Canada for example, or Brazil, have served in the Council many times and so they have some degree of institutional knowledge or so. But I do think that you have to change the corporate culture of the UN Security Council—

**JENKINS:** The corporate culture?

**MAHBUBANI:** Corporate culture where you begin to give a greater role to the elected members because the bigger the role that they play the bigger the ownership that they take of the Security Council, the more it strengthens the legitimacy of the UN Security Council. And this is where sometimes I think that the permanent members are doing themselves a disfavor by not making the Council a more democratic institution.

**JENKINS:** We'll get in to that a little bit more in a moment, but first this is **World Chronicle** and we're talking with Ambassadors Kishore Mahbubani and David Malone about the workings of the UN Security Council. Let's look at this video:

## VIDEO ROLL-IN

**NARRATOR:** War and conflict... Hope for a better life... They are the tragedies and triumphs of an era. And for nearly 60 years, the United Nations has been there. At the centre of its commitment – the UN Security Council, with a mission to advance peace and order around the world. This chamber has witnessed some of the most dramatic confrontations of our age.

**NAT SOT:** “We cannot have peace in the Island...”

**NARRATOR:** Decisions made here have reflected the times, and shaped millions of lives.

**NAT POP:** “The loss of life in the Holy Land must be brought to an immediate end...”

**NARRATOR:** Images of the Council are seen globally, its resolutions making headline news... yet few really know how it works from the inside...how it has changed...and the challenges it faces for the future.

**VIDEO OUT**

**JENKINS:** Ambassador Mahbubani, you say in the book that you see the role of the United Nations, and specifically of the Security Council, as continuing to grow in the future. What makes you think that?

**MAHBUBANI:** Oh, I think if you look around the world and you see the number of problems that are rising, it's a sunrise industry in many parts of the world. And if you look at the agenda of the UN Security Council – when I was here in the 1980s as an ambassador from 1984 to 1989, the Security Council. if it was lucky. met once a month or once in two months. Today, it meets several times a day and often over weekends. If you look at the budget, the money that is being controlled by the UN Security Council, it keeps growing.

**JENKINS:** All of the issues to do with globalization. We see diseases spreading around the world, commerce, et cetera but going back to what you were saying earlier about the problems of legitimacy, is there not a conflict there?

**MAHBUBANI:** Oh I think the UN Security Council will be challenged in the years and decades to come.

**JENKINS:** Who's going to do the challenging?

**MAHBUBANI:** The fact that there'll be more and more problems appearing at its doorstep – and as an institution I suspect it may have to re-invent itself, become much more operational, become ready to respond more quickly and more effectively to situations that blow up because if it's seen not to be succeeding...

**JENKINS:** But David, is the Security Council the only place where we can deal with all of these issues? I somehow suspect that if Kofi Annan was sitting at this table with us he might say that the focus was in the wrong place. He often complains that the sort of sexy issues of security are only 10 percent of what the UN is all about, that it's really about development and humanitarian concerns and that in effect your 700-page book is focusing on the wrong place. Is he right?

**MALONE:** I would have died of boredom writing a 700-page book on the General Assembly or, indeed, on the other fora at the UN which are occasionally discussed. The reality is that the Security Council is the only decision-making forum at the UN that matters critically in international relations for the reasons that Kishore was outlining. It's the only one that has legitimacy in the eyes of the world.

**JENKINS:** But why can't the General Assembly do something to gain more legitimacy? In fact, there is a procedure whereby the General Assembly can override the Security Council or at least step in where the Security Council fails to act, which is the "uniting for peace" format.

**MALONE:** The "uniting for peace" format hasn't been used for many years and the reason for that is that the permanent five members don't want it used. The permanent five members want to keep as much of the action in the Security Council as they can and they have been very successful at that. If the rest of the member states in the General Assembly have failed to make themselves relevant it's hardly appropriate to criticize the Security Council for being relevant. The General Assembly will be able to compete with the Security Council when it starts mattering. In the meanwhile it doesn't.

**JENKINS:** I guess that takes guts. There was an ambassador who, at the height of the whole debate on whether or not to go to war with Iraq, said that the role of the United States had become a bit like a boxer standing in the middle of a ring with all of the nations of the world pushed against the ropes and the United States was barking stay in your corner, stay in your corner or I'll thump you. And this was an ambassador who was on the Security Council. But there was actually nothing really to stop these countries from coming forward and saying we won't let ourselves be bullied by you. I guess what you're saying is that the General Assembly has robbed itself of legitimacy?

**MALONE:** Absolutely. And the United States, it's important not to draw a caricature of the United States. On Iraq the United States had many allies there in Iraq and the political coalitions supporting the Americans is bigger yet. And those divisions Kishore was talking about on Iraq – very damaging for the UN – represent real world divisions. The United Nations doesn't evolve in a void. It's actually affected by events elsewhere, in other fora as well, and by reality on the ground. The Americans after all have come back to the United Nations for help in the political management of Iraq. That decision was forced by developments on the ground. So the Security Council and the UN aren't all-important, they are factors in a much broader equation and it's important to see them as such. Would that the General Assembly could be a factor in anything much.

**JENKINS:** When you go through many different examples of where the Security Council has acted -- and it's a catalogue in many ways more of failure than success, whether it's on the military side you catalogue the failure for example in the Balkans, whether it's on sanctions -- you seem to be saying that the United Nations Security Council is essential but at the same time it's not doing a very good job. Is that it?

**MALONE:** I think that's actually a very good description of it and I think it is essential and it isn't doing a very good job. It's had its successes and it's important to remember them. On the ground: Namibia, Mozambique, Cambodia, El Salvador, there are whole bunch of them. Sanctions succeeded sometimes. Look at the Libya case. There is no doubt that UN sanctions helped move Colonel Gaddafi in a direction most of us favour. But the Security Council has a very short attention span. It's pressed very hard by the capitals of the countries involved and on extended programmes of actions such as those required by peace-building in places like Haiti, like Afghanistan, the Security Council tends to drop the ball prematurely and then turns around and blames the rest of the member states and the General Assembly. Not very attractive.

**JENKINS:** Yes. The UN is a very useful scapegoat. I want to ask you about what you think distinguishes the things that worked in the past and what haven't but first – this is **World Chronicle**. Our guests are David Malone of the International Peace Academy and Kishore Mahbubani, Singapore's Ambassador to the United Nations. Our topic: the UN Security Council. Let's look at another video clip:

#### VIDEO ROLL-IN

**NARRATOR:** As the Cold War thawed in the late 1980s, and the East-West superpowers were no longer in conflict, there were signs that the Council *could* provide effective UN enforcement.

**KUWAITI LADY:** "Mr. President, please help my country..."

**NARRATOR:** The use of force after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991 was a watershed moment in Council history. It was the first time since Korea that military action had been authorized.

**DR. DANILO TURK (ASG/DPA):** "That was a remarkable event which showed that a new spirit is prevailing, a new form, a new style, a new content of cooperation was there."

**NARRATOR:** And during the 1990s, a variety of U.N. sanctions – from economic, to travel bans, to arms embargoes – were imposed on at least ten nations and non-government groups. But the post-Cold War world presented new challenges such as shifting political landscapes.

**LEGWAILA JOSEPH LEGWAILA (HEAD, UNMEE):** "In the sense of the countries of Eastern Europe falling apart, in the sense of new countries being created, and being created in a very violent fashion some of them, the civil wars..."



**NARRATOR:** By 1993, the cost of U.N. peacekeeping peaked at 3.6 billion U.S. dollars per year. Yet early successes in Namibia, El Salvador and Mozambique were followed by tragic failures in Rwanda, Somalia, and the former Yugoslavia. It became clear that a new approach was needed. In East Timor, and later Kosovo, the tasks went far beyond that of traditional peacekeeping.

**JEAN-MARIE GUEHENNO [USG/DPKO]:** “I think that the main difference is that the Security Council has found that if you want to have sustainable peace, you cannot address just the military side in a post-conflict situation, and so you do need to have a multi-dimensional operation that addresses civilian as well as military aspects.”

## VIDEO OUT

**JENKINS:** Ambassador Mahbubani, are there things that we can pull out from the Security Council that we know why certain things work and why certain things don't? Are there any distinguishing traits?

**MAHBUBANI:** I think it's very clear that when the interests of the major powers are involved then the Security Council works and when the interests of the major powers are not involved then the Security Council breaks down. And this is the big lesson of Rwanda by the way.

**JENKINS:** I was going to say that's bad news for Africa, isn't it?

**MAHBUBANI:** It is bad news until we can persuade the major powers that the world has shrunk, that we are becoming interdependent, that the problems that you thought belong to a village far, far away in Afghanistan, can now, as Shashi Tharoor always says, lead to the melting of girders in Manhattan. The degree of interdependency has grown so much that now I think more and more the major powers are beginning to realize that it is in their interest to put together a global management system that works.

**JENKINS:** That's essentially the task for smaller nations such as yours, isn't it?

**MAHBUBANI:** Yes. It's the task I think of the UN community. There's one critical word you have not mentioned by the way in this discussions.

**JENKINS:** And what's that?

**MAHBUBANI:** We actually came up with a retreat that David and I were at recently. That word is “accountability” and I mentioned that in my essay. I believe that if we can create some standards of accountability for the UN Security Council that, I think, is going to make the Council a much more effective institution.

**JENKINS:** Well, that touches on an old debate that you also raise in your book which is the idea that the permanent five – when the organization was first founded the permanent

five were given the veto on the understanding that in return they accepted a certain responsibility for collective security.

**MAHBUBANI:** That's right.

**JENKINS:** If that sort of devil's bargain was made then they have failed in their responsibility, haven't they? And how do you make the world accountable?

**MAHBUBANI:** To be fair to the permanent members – by the way, the Security Council would collapse if there were no permanent members. As I say, all the institutional memory is with them and if you have to rely on a new member coming in to respond to a fire every time a new conflict breaks out it's going to be very difficult. And some of the permanent members, to be fair to them – I mentioned for example the United Kingdom and France – have always had ambassadors who are very active, very effective, because they believe that they have a certain sense of responsibility to the institution.

**JENKINS:** But what you're saying in effect is that the reality of the world is that there is a single superpower and people just better get used to it. That's the reality, live with it, no?

**MAHBUBANI:** I think the reality is that the world is becoming much more complicated. You have 250 million people in the United States of America, you have 5.75 billion people outside the United States of America, and we are all coming closer together, closer and closer. And there is no way that the United States on its own, and to be fair to the United States it recognizes it, can manage the world on its own.

**JENKINS:** That's very interesting. It leads me to my next question to you, David, which is that you write in your book that the Security Council has eroded concepts of state sovereignty. You say it's altering the way in which we see the relationship between the state and the citizen. How?

**MALONE:** First of all, by giving much more weight to the humanitarian imperative. The media also have something to do with this. When large numbers of civilians are suffering from the effects of conflict and the media focuses on this, governments tend to turn to the UN to act in order to save lives. And while the UN failed in Rwanda it has addressed a number of these conflicts where humanitarian factors have played a big role. Secondly, human rights play a much greater role in the work of the Council today simply because it's understood that when one cannot resolve civil wars -- and most of the wars the Council deals with today are civil wars with regional participation as long as human rights are being massively violated. Third, the solution to many of these civil war situations is to try to promote democracy and elections as a way to affect a new deal in countries recovering from civil war. Finally, the Council is very concerned about terrorism. None of these issues really favour rigid conceptions of sovereignty

at the state level. That being said, sovereignty continues to matter to each of our countries. It's the sovereignty of other countries that no longer matters very much to us,

**JENKINS:** Is there a certain irony in the fact that we're talking about a body that you describe throughout the book as being essentially undemocratic, as being a major force for trying to promote democracy around the world as a way of dealing with some of these humanitarian and development issues?

**MAHBUBANI:** Well, I think we'd better get used to paradoxes in the world. I think if you look for example at the challenge of nation-building, which is going to become as I say a sunrise industry, and if you heard Jean Marie-Guehenno speaking earlier in your programme in the documentary, he said that what we need now is a comprehensive approach where you don't just focus on the military side but on other dimensions in trying to resolve a country's future.

**JENKINS:** So instead of a peacekeeping force should the United Nations be setting up a sort of a nation- building corps?

**MAHBUBANI:** I think, effectively, if you ever go on a Security Council mission and you actually see what the peacekeepers do on the ground you find that half the time they may be doing military duties. The other half of the time you find they're trying to repair the social fabric, trying to take care of the medical facilities, trying to improve the water supplies. All that is an essential part of trying to rebuild a sense of community among a group of people who have had their lives shattered by conflict.

**JENKINS:** And on that hopeful note we have to leave it. Gentlemen, thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guests have been David Malone, President of the International Peace Academy, and Kishore Mahbubani, Singapore's ambassador to the United Nations.

I'm Tony Jenkins. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

**ANNOUNCER:** Electronic transcripts of this programme may be obtained free of charge by contacting World Chronicle at the address on your screen:

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