CHAPTER ONE

The Price of Uncertainty and Division

like proud parents, Americans took great pride in the birth of the United Nations in 1945. Seen as the product of American leadership and vision, the UN's principles and procedures were said to reflect the nation's values and traditions. The United Nations was to be a cornerstone of the more peaceful world order sought so earnestly by the American people following the most destructive war in history. Yet half a century later relations between the world body and its most important member state are in a shambles, dominated by finger-pointing, recriminations, and mutual mistrust. The same, and worse, could be said of congressional-executive relations in the formulation of U.S. policies toward the UN. Unless steps to mend these deep rifts are taken soon, one of the first acts of the new millennium could well be the revocation of the U.S. vote in the General Assembly. Unless an unforeseen payment is made, by January 2000 the United States will be more than two years behind in its payments to the world body and subject to the article 19 penalty of loss of vote.

Although only a symptom of the underlying political malaise, financial issues serve as a barometer of the degree of American engagement. At the UN's founding, the United States shouldered almost half of the financial burden with hardly a complaint. In 1999 Congress balks at paying a quarter of the UN budget and refuses to settle U.S. arrears until the other member

states agree to lower its assessment and to accept a long list of unilateral demands. With $1.6 billion in arrears, the United States in 1999 owes about twice as much to the UN as all 184 other member states combined.[1] Spurred by a warning from the General Accounting Office, an arm of Congress, that the United States could lose its vote in the General Assembly by January 1999 for being two years in arrears, a divided Congress in late 1998 came up with just enough dues money to postpone the day of reckoning for another year.[2] Indignant, the other member states then added fuel to the fire by voting to keep the United States off of the General Assembly's chief budget oversight committee, on which it had customarily served as the body's top contributor,[3] and by threatening to break the informal no-growth rule in the 2000–2001 budget.[4]

As the world organization verges on bankruptcy and partisan bickering divides America, this volume seeks to take a serious and sober look at the roots of American ambivalence toward the UN and its predecessor, the League of Nations. It asks: what has happened to turn U.S.-UN relations on their head? What led to such a dramatic reversal, as America turned from being the greatest champion to the loudest detractor of the UN and other international organizations? Why have Americans again and again been the first to create international institutions and then the first to forsake them? Why, eight decades after the historic Senate debate over the League of Nations, are the core issues—regarding America's place in the world and the effects on its national sovereignty of participation in international bodies—still unresolved and as divisive in 1999 as they were in 1919? What is it about the American political culture that has permitted ever closer economic, social, technological, and political ties with the rest of the world even as the opposition to institutionalizing these relationships has hardened? Are there any prospects for healing these feuds and for forging a bipartisan consensus on policies and strategies for the twenty-first century? Or are we headed for another century of doubt, uncertainty, and inconsistency?

In seeking answers to these queries, this volume considers ambivalence to be a phenomenon that operates on two levels: on the personal level it is reflected in the attitudes of individual citizens; while on the collective level it is expressed in inconsistent, hot and cold, national policies toward international organizations. Because these two levels of doubt tend to feed off each other, the analysis addresses them as parts of a single phenomenon. It seeks to trace the roots of the growing doubts that appear to have sapped the enthusiasm of many individual supporters of the UN, and before them of the League. It also seeks to shed light on the persistent divisions within the

American body politic that have resulted in U.S. national policies that have seemed to others to reflect uncertain and at times self-defeating tactics and strategies. The United States has had, and continues to have, more than its share of both hard-core supporters and hard-core opponents of international organization. In between have been large numbers of people lacking either strong views or much information about the procedures and activities of these bodies. So America is both divided and ambivalent.

Given the predominantly negative tenor of much of the recent commentary in this country regarding the United Nations, it is easy to forget that over the course of this century, as well as during the nineteenth century, America has produced some of the world's most vigorous enthusiasts for international cooperation and most creative architects of international institutions.[5] At the close of the First World War, President Woodrow Wilson was the prime advocate of the League of Nations,and a generation later during the final stages of the Second World War, presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S Truman were the prime movers behind the creation of the United Nations. Yet the U.S. Congress, with Republican majorities, rejected participation in the League and in recent years has brought the UN to the brink of insolvency. These seemingly intractable contradictions in American perspectives have resulted in an almost perpetual crisis in U.S. relations with the very bodies it has worked to establish. To borrow Yogi Berra's trenchant phrase, with each new round of recriminations, one gets a weary sense of déjà vu all over again. In recent years, the chronically thin ice on which the U.S.-UN relationship rests has worn thinner and thinner, as it approaches the point where it will simply give way altogether.

Persistent strains of idealism and cynicism, multilateralism and unilateralism, internationalism and isolationism have long coexisted across the spectrum of American thinking. The resulting ambivalence,the product of fundamentally contrary political impulses, is as alive and as destructive in 1999 as it was in 1919 when President Wilson and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge clashed over the soul and shape of America's place in the world. Their struggle has yet to be resolved either intellectually or politically, leaving Washington unable to abandon world organization or to give it full support. Again, a president and a chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee have asserted contrasting views not only of America's global interests and obligations, but also of the relative roles of the executive and legislative branches in translating these impulses into the nation's foreign policy. Again, the president appears unlikely to prevail. The latest round—in which President Bill Clinton vetoed the bill to pay a portion of the UN arrears

because of unrelated abortion language attached by Congress—served chiefly to perpetuate the congressional-executive stalemate, producing no winners either in Washington or at the UN.[6]

If this see-saw pattern is so well established, why then should it be of such urgent concern? What are the costs of ambivalence to U.S. national interests? First, in an era in which problem solving in field after field demands closer cooperation among sovereign nations, the effects of America's split personality are reaching far beyond the United Nations and its finances. Among the recent victims of American ambivalence has been the potential for consistency, vision, and leadership in U.S. policymaking. In those rare cases when strategies are actually formulated in Washington, the resources to carry them out are frequently lacking, for the refusal to pay UN dues has been mirrored in cutbacks in the funding of U.S. foreign relations across the board, including for peacekeeping, foreign aid, and the International Monetary Fund.

Over the long haul U.S. ambivalence has led to less tangible but more consequential casualties. These include the integrity of international law, the viability of the global financial system, the credibility of American commitments to international undertakings, and relationships with key allies, whose often self-righteous reactions have contributed to a downward spiral of recriminations and mistrust. In the process, the quest to make the UN a more efficient and effective instrument for achieving important interests that the United States shares with others has been undermined and could be jeopardized altogether. The United Nations, a flawed but unprecedented experiment in international cooperation, has been left in limbo, neither strengthened nor abandoned. Instead, it drifts like an over-aged adolescent, yet to achieve its potential, clueless about what the future holds. None of this serves U.S. national interests, for in the end the nation will have fewer viable tools with which to conduct foreign affairs and a lessened sense of national will and purpose in a world in which both opportunities and dangers are growing. A weakened UN means fewer options for U.S. foreign policy.

It would be far too simplistic to conclude that American idealism created the UN and that American skepticism is killing it, for many hands have played a part in both. But the hot and cold pattern is worrisome, especially in a nation of such power and dynamism that its leadership is a prerequisite for most successful multilateral undertakings. The costs have been high not only for America's reputation, but more generally for the prospects of organizing effective multilateral coalitions when needed to respond to crises that

the United States cannot or will not handle unilaterally. A vicious cycle is at work here. American skepticism about the viability of international institutions undermines their performance, reinforcing the doubts even as they become self-fulfilling.

Paradoxically, the mutual crisis of confidence between the United States and the rest of the UN community is deepening at a point when the values and perspectives of the United States and those of other member states seem in some important respects to be converging as the scope of their mutual interests expands.[7] A once-in-a-generation opportunity to reinforce the mechanisms, reassert the values, and broaden the base for international cooperation could well be lost on the shoals of domestic as well as intergovernmental bickering. Such an outcome would be a major opportunity cost. To a worrisome extent, in the halls of both the UN and Congress, a mean and narrow contrariness appears to have replaced the high aspirations and community spirit that led to the creation of the world body.

For once, these negative trends cannot be traced to any cataclysmic or unusually foolish event at the UN, nor to a groundswell of public resentment. The precipitating trends—such as the end of the cold war consensus on American foreign policy, the rise of single-issue interest groups,and the sharpening of partisan divisions—took place within the American body politic,not within the world organization. In fact,as detailed in chapter 10, public opinion surveys suggest that growing numbers of Americans are reluctant to act unilaterally, are seeking partners to share the nation's international burdens, and are increasingly conscious of the transnational nature of many of the biggest challenges facing the United States. Appreciation of the links between "domestic" and "international"issues appears to be growing, even as faith in the adequacy of the established network of intergovernmental institutions—with the UN at its center—is wavering. The message of internationalism may well be taking hold, but its flip side is likely to be rising demands and expectations for truly effective implementation and for forms of international organization that not only sound good, but are up to the demanding tasks at hand. In the beginning American idealism was critical to getting the UN off the ground. Over time, the projection of ideals has inevitably given way to evaluations of performance, to assessments of whether the UN is equipped to begin to fulfill the dream. Questions of decisionmaking, management, and finance therefore have come to the fore.

The greatest irony, of course, is that Americans—from presidents to jurists, from educators to environmentalists, and from humanitarians to

arms controllers—have been in the vanguard of the movement to build international norms,laws, and institutions at least since the mid-nineteenth century. By the early years of the twentieth century America had a well-established tradition of support for international adjudication and arbitration and for the convening of the Hague peace conferences to address arms limitations and humanitarian rules of warfare. Beginning with the League to Enforce Peace, a succession of high-profile private organizations have mobilized many of the nation's most prominent Republicans, Democrats, and independents to speak out in support of stronger and more effective global institutions.[8] Fed by the internationalist instincts of many of America's greatest philanthropists,far more extensive scholarship and policy analysis of these matters have been undertaken in the United States than anywhere else, and student interest and enthusiasm remain high. All-American notions of human rights, democratic government, and law and order have repeatedly been projected onto a global screen, gaining broad international acceptance over time.

Yet even while the participation of American private citizens, nongovernmental groups, relief organizations,and scholars in UN conferences, studies, and programs appears to be expanding, official ties face debilitating political and resource constraints. From Eleanor Roosevelt onward, Americans have played leading roles in the codification of international conventions for the protection of human rights, only to have the Senate delay for years—sometimes indefinitely—its consent to ratification. During 1997 and 1998, for example, U.S.-based advocacy groups championed international agreements, on issues such as land mines and a wide-ranging International Criminal Court, that went beyond what even the Clinton administration could accept. The chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, meanwhile, had already declared that in terms of Senate consideration, the court would be "dead on arrival."[9] A similar pattern of dual voices has been followed in such varied fields as arms control, trade, and environmental protection, as American prophets of international order have found more receptive audiences abroad than at home.

American ambivalence,like an artichoke, is a many-layered phenomenon. Uncovering the heart of the matter entails peeling away layer after layer in an effort to understand how they interact and how each contributes to the overall pattern of dissonance. This book is the first to trace the evolution of American attitudes and policies toward the League of Nations and the United Nations. During the course of my research, it became increasingly evident that eight core themes in the domestic debate have been repeated

generation after generation. They remain unresolved, defining an unending political struggle that will undoubtedly be one of the legacies of this century to the next. These themes are addressed in the following order, with the most fundamental and stubborn ones first: (1) the notion of American exceptionalism and the difficulty of reconciling national power with the decisionmaking processes of global bodies; (2) the preservation of national sovereignty in an increasingly interdependent world; (3) negative attitudes toward other countries, races,and social systems;(4) the minority status in which the United States frequently finds itself in international forums; (5) the dilemmas involved in putting military forces at the disposal of global organizations; (6) the extent to which national security interests and international commitments overlap; (7) persistent questions of UN reform and restructuring; and (8) recurrent squabbles over burden sharing and the financing of international organizations. On the surface, at least, much of the current policy debate revolves around the last four themes. These issues, however, would be far more manageable if progress could be made in addressing the more fundamental concerns encompassed in the first four themes relating to America's place and comfort level in global political bodies.Each of these concerns, it should be stressed, is made far more problematic by the peculiarities of the American political system, with its separation of powers,single-issue constituencies,partisan divisions, and domestic preoccupations.

The first of the eight themes is addressed in chapter 2, which speaks of some of those national characteristics that make America different, in its political culture, in terms of its substantive interests, and its preeminent power. The resulting sense of exceptionalism makes it hard to blend the United States smoothly into the ranks of the so-called community of nations and into the rules and procedure of intergovernmental decisionmaking processes. Surely Americans are not the only nationalistic people in the world, yet the nation's history, geography, power, and political culture do work to set it apart. Most Americans believe in international organization, but as a way of propagating American values, not of compromising them in order to get along with the majority. Confident in their nation's principles and bound by the demands of both geopolitics and domestic political forces, time and again U.S. representatives have seemingly relished playing in global forums the part of the lonely voice for national interests and values.

Yet, as chapter 3 relates, Americans, for all of their power and self-assurance,are also remarkably sensitive to any attempts to impose limits on

individual liberties or on the nation's freedom of action. The United States, as a result, is as jealous of its national sovereignty as any small nation less able to protect its interests and prerogatives. This strain of sovereignty consciousness has tended to compound America's traditional wariness about government at all levels, particularly when it appears distant and unaccountable. If global government looks to some Americans as a panacea, to many others it looms more as a threat to their individuality and to their treasured way of life.

Chapter 4 introduces a third contrary element of the national political culture: the tendency to mistrust the motivations, values,and intentions of others who are thought to have designs on America's affluence and freedom. The Senate debate over the League of Nations, for instance, combined pervasive suspicion of European craftiness with sometimes virulent expressions of racism. Antipathy toward the United Nations was fueled initially by fears of communist influence inside and outside of the organization and in recent decades by caricatures about the nature and legitimacy of developing country governments. For some Americans these prejudices have been reinforced by concerns about immigration and the uneven domestic effects of the globalization of the economy, producing a volatile mix of national and global issues.

Taking this line of analysis a step further, chapter 5 considers the fourth theme—America's frequent minority status—through the lens of a series of cases in which the United States has found itself to be badly outnumbered on important questions within the "United" Nations. Quite prepared to go it alone if necessary, Americans nonetheless have at times questioned the value of the organization when the majority of member states appeared to hold divergent objectives from those of the nation that did so much to give it birth. By focusing on congressional reactions to a series of crises in U.S.-UN relations, the chapter seeks to shed some light both on the growing interplay between domestic and international agendas and on the evolution of the kinds of disputes that have triggered the most negative and sustained reactions on Capitol Hill.One of the worrisome conclusions is that domestic political forces are pushing U.S. policies in one direction, while the dynamics of interdependence and multilateral diplomacy are pushing them in another, sharpening the dissonance within the American body politic on issues of international law and organization.

Chapters 6 and 7 address two sets of themes that define a dilemma that has baffled international institutions throughout this century: how to organize sovereign nation states for the pursuit of common concerns for peace

and security. No other questions have had a greater impact on the motivations for creating, curbing, or abandoning global organization. As chapter 6 explicates, Americans have been persistently divided about what to seek or expect from either the League or the UN in this regard. From Cambodia to Kosovo, should peace or justice be given the higher priority, and can peace be obtained through war? For all of their idealism about the need for collective action to discourage or punish aggression, the American people have tended to want to have their cake and eat it too, to maintain both reliable collective security mechanisms and national freedom of action. UN supporters have too often denigrated the need for a strong national defense, while the advocates of a strong military have too often dismissed the utility of effective forms of international cooperation. As a result, the symbiotic relationship between these goals tends to get lost in the polarized debate about U.S.-UN relations.

Perversely, since the end of the cold war, these sources of ambivalence have been compounded by a pervasive national uncertainty about where American interests lie and what price Americans are willing to pay to secure them. These doubts have been compounded by nagging congressional-executive disputes over their relative war powers. These questions are considered in chapter 7, along with two controversial matters—who should command international forces, and who should pay for them—that were never settled in the establishment of either the League or the UN. These unresolved issues continue to plague U.S.-UN relations today, limiting the world organization's capacity to carry out its primary founding mandate and reducing public confidence in it.

Chapter 8 deals with a source of persistent criticism of international organizations in general and of the UN in particular: their structures and management. Calls for reform, it turns out, are as old as the organizations themselves,and as American as apple pie. Supporters and skeptics,idealists and realists are all quick to agree that the United Nations is in dire need of a major overhaul,that its bureaucratic structures and antiquated personnel system stand in the way of effective performance. The problem, of course,is that, beyond a common perception that the UN does not work well, different constituencies have very different views concerning what should be done about it. There is no common vision or agenda regarding what a reformed UN should look like. Some advocate a stronger, more independent body and others a smaller, less ambitious,and tamer one. As with military matters, this fundamental divide in American thinking tends to get translated into policies and attitudes that appear essentially ambivalent.

Addressing the final theme—another question that perennially has been a source of disagreement within the United States as well as between the United States and the other member states—chapter 9 examines issues of finance and burden sharing. Like reform, finance is a matter that has shadowed the world body since its earliest days and that remains an unresolved and controversial question. Over the years, congressional unhappiness with the terms of burden sharing within the organization has manifested itself in one legislative initiative after another to withhold dues payments, resulting in the current financial crisis that threatens both American credibility and the viability of the UN itself. Although the sums of money involved appear modest relative to other areas of U.S. government expenditure, the deep cleavages and layers of mistrust on all sides over financial arrangements are indicative of the underlying political differences that continue to erode the U.S.-UN relationship.

Building on these analyses of the eight key thematic issues, chapter 10 assesses the domestic political forces and trends that have done so much to define and shape U.S. policies toward the United Nations. The chapter opens with a critical appraisal of how the effort to discourage in-depth Senate debate of the UN charter in 1945—out of fear of repeating the League experience—in the end left several pivotal issues unresolved and open to heated debate decades later. It then contrasts the broad surface expressions of support reflected in public polling since the UN's founding with the much more mixed picture that emerges from an examination of trends among various demographic groups,especially the divergent worldviews that have splintered the Republican party. These differences, as expressed on the political level, account for much of the apparent ambivalence in American attitudes and policies toward the world body. Particular attention is given to questions of presidential leadership and UN finance.

In conclusion, chapter 11 draws a number of overall lessons from these thematic chapters, beginning with the caution not to expect miracle cures for such deep and stubborn problems. It calls for adjustments in the policies and attitudes of other member states and the UN secretariat, as well as in those of the United States. A principal recommendation proposes the development of two interactive political compacts—one domestic and one international—to place the U.S.-UN relationship on a new footing. In essence, parallel and mutually reinforcing political reforms within the United States and within the UN community will have to be undertaken if the deeply embedded factors pushing the United States and the world body apart are ever to be overcome.

At this point, a word about methodology would be in order. The scope of the study is largely limited to the League of Nations and the United Nations. As global political organizations, they have sparked more controversy in U.S. political circles than have regional arrangements, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the Organization of American States (OAS), or functional bodies, such as the UN specialized agencies. The Bretton Woods institutions—the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank family—with their weighted voting and widely accepted mandates, have traditionally enjoyed broad political support in Washington. With growing criticism of the IMF's role in the recent international financial crisis and with congressional uneasiness about the power of the World Trade Organization (WTO), however, world economic and financial institutions are increasingly subject to the kinds of funding cuts and political pressures from Capitol Hill that in earlier years were reserved for the UN. Therefore, although this study makes relatively few references to the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions, its conclusions may be increasingly relevant to their future. Nor is international law a focus of this study, yet the implications for the future of the international legal order are also worrisome, because in many cases political support for its universal application and for its institutional base is eroding or under political assault.

The volume's analytical approach is largely thematic rather than chronological both because much of the history has been well documented elsewhere many times and because of the extraordinary, and rather disturbing, degree of continuity in the nature of the arguments on both sides of this core debate. Much of what is being said today on both sides was stated, often with greater eloquence and clarity, in the public discourse leading to the rejection of the League. The persistence of these opposing viewpoints and the lack of concerted efforts to reconcile them (other than during the unusually forward-looking days at the close of the Second World War) have far-ranging, if not reassuring, implications for current and future policies and strategies not only for the United States, but for the rest of the international community as well.

Other than in the discussion of public opinion data, which are of secondary importance to this account, the political and historical assessment presented in this book relies little on quantitative analysis. Also, the author has made little effort to contribute to political science theory, although he hopes that others may find the material presented here to be useful for theory building. The intent, instead, has been to tell the story of America's awkward and hesitant relationships with global political organizations over the course

of the twentieth century. To tell this story, the narrative relies heavily on the words of the chief protagonists,particularly members of Congress, who have played a significant role in shaping and leading the national debate. The selection of whom to include has been based on three criteria: official position; representation of a major school of thought on the issue; and how well and concisely the quote captures the core of the argument. By presenting the protagonists in their own words, the book seeks to amplify their voices and clarify their arguments, in an attempt to capture the flavor and emotion, as well as the essence, of the discourse as it has evolved through the course of the century. Few questions of public policy have sparked such passionate, persistent, and polarized debate. To understand the depths of disagreement, one must listen to the words and voices, feel the anger and obstinacy with which they are expressed.Dry assessments of public opinion polls and congressional votes simply cannot begin to tell the whole story. As a result, the narrative includes a large number of quotes, rather than presenting the author's summaries of various points of view. The American political stage, at least until the homogenization encouraged by mass media coverage and concerns about political correctness, was filled with quotable, lively, and sometimes outrageous characters. Their views about international organization,though typically shy on facts, rarely lacked candor. Even today, few subjects produce such pungent rhetoric, particularly in Congress, as the United Nations and the U.S. role in it.

It is not the purpose of this book to weigh the various criticisms of UN procedures and performance, to add further fuel to the domestic debate, or to pronounce judgment about who is right or wrong on each question. There is no lack of partisan voices from both camps. Over the past quarter century this author has been one of these voices; in his view, the degree of antipathy in U.S. political circles toward international law and organization in general and toward the UN in particular has become dysfunctional,skewing policy choices and handicapping the nation's potential for international leadership and for achieving its core interests. It has been the author's experience, however, that much of this debate has revolved around the invocation of symbols and the caricaturing of opposing viewpoints. Frequently emotional, these exchanges have resembled the proverbial dialogue of the deaf, with little effort either to understand the other side or to define some common ground that might provide a more politically sustainable basis for national policymaking.

This book also represents a personal quest for clarity, for a better comprehension of why some prominent and thoughtful Americans—including

those with whom the author has dueled verbally through the years—feel so strongly and stridently that the United Nations and other international organizations are bad for the United States. It is a phenomenon that seems doubly puzzling to the representatives of other countries, many of whom cannot imagine either a world without the UN or a UN without a vigorous American presence. One of the purposes of this book is to respond to the hundreds of queries the author has received over the years from foreign colleagues puzzled by U.S. policies and attitudes toward the global body.

The emphasis, therefore, is on the hard-core skeptics, who have been well represented—some would say overrepresented—in Congress, although undoubtedly the more internationalist and legalistic strain in American thinking has been persistent and politically influential as well. Its views, however, have been more widely represented in the writings of mainstream foreign policy analysts and in executive branch pronouncements, and hence are more widely understood, particularly in other countries. On the whole, the volume gives relatively little attention to the virulently anti-UN views of the more paranoid far-right fringe groups, with their xenophobic, antigovernment, and often racist and anti-Semitic messages. Although occasionally these groups may have a modest amount of influence in some states on some local issues, overall their impact on U.S. foreign policy has been marginal at best. Moreover, it would unfairly malign more mainstream and influential conservative views to pair them with extremist rhetoric, as have some UN supporters. This is not a book about straw men or, save one brief passage, about black helicopters. It seeks to gain a fuller understanding of the perspectives of those Americans who have expressed serious and thoughtful reservations about the United Nations, its affiliates and predecessor. At points, the book takes issue with the logic or factual base of some of the more extreme criticisms of the UN, but its primary purpose is not to defend the institution or to refute its critics.

By examining the evolution of American policies and attitudes toward international organization in some detail, the author hopes to throw some light on the larger question of America's place in a rapidly changing world. Several of the domestic factors discussed here, such as congressional-executive relations, partisanship, attitudes toward government, single interest groups, and the growing role of nonstate actors, are relevant to other areas of foreign policy as well. The actions and statements of U.S. representatives in world forums are bound to affect the way other countries view Washington's likely contributions, style, and attitudes on other levels of interaction and on other issues. Whether or not one considers the substance

of what transpires at the UN and its affiliated bodies to be important, there is no denying that the world body serves as one of the most visible places in which to make a statement or set a tone about national priorities and preferences. America's ambivalence within and toward the organization has left its mark on relations with both friends and potential adversaries, reinforcing the image that the United States is as uncertain about its interests as it is assertive about its values. Other countries follow the ups and downs of U.S.-UN relations with considerable interest and, more often than not, some consternation and wonderment. The world body, after all, is a collection of nation states, not an abstraction, and it is the one place where each country deals both individually and collectively with almost all of the other nations of the world on an enormous variety of issues. It is, despite a number of structural distortions, a relatively good vantage point from which to take stock of how America views its place in the world on the eve of a new, and hopefully less ambivalent, century.