



Is the UN Ready for a Second Trump Presidency?

UNITED NATIONS, Aug 29 2024 (IPS) - The Communist Manifesto of a bygone era, authored by [Karl Marx](#) and [Friedrich Engels](#), begins with an implicit warning: “A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of Communism.”

And today another specter is haunting— this time at the UN — the specter of a second Trump presidency.

When Trump first took office back in January 2017, he either de-funded, withdrew from, or denigrated several UN agencies and affiliated institutions, including the World Health Organization, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the UN Human Rights Council, among others.

In the unlikely event of a second Trump presidency, should the UN prepare for another political nightmare?

According to a report on Cable News Network (CNN) last October, Trump was quoted as saying that if elected again to the White House, he would [reinstate and expand a travel ban](#) on people from predominantly Muslim countries, suspend refugee resettlements and aggressively deport those whom he characterized as having “jihadist sympathies.”

He cited the Hamas attacks on Israel as the reason for his hard-line immigration policies. Trump also said he would ban travel from Gaza, Syria, Somalia, Yemen, Libya “or anywhere else that threatens our security.”

When Trump first walked onto the podium at the General Assembly hall, he looked at the hundreds of foreign delegates from 192 countries, and reportedly asked: “How the hell did you guys get into this country?”, according to a joke in circulation in the UN’s watering hole, the delegate’s lounge.

There was also a widespread rumor of a new slogan promoting tourism during Trump’s presidency: “Visit us on a one-way ticket – and we will deport you free”.

Meanwhile, at a 2017 White House meeting, Trump apparently said all Haitians “have AIDS”; that Nigerians should “go back to their huts in Africa”; and questioned why US should welcome people from “shithole countries” in Africa, according a report in the New York Times.

And he also displayed his ignorance by asking whether UK was a nuclear power – and whether Nepal (which he pronounced as Nipple) and Bhutan (pronounced Button) were part of India?

Asked about a possible second Trump presidency, Kul Gautam, a former UN Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of the UN children’s agency UNICEF told IPS: “Yes, there will be considerable potential danger and a great deal of unpredictability to the UN system in the unlikely event of a 2nd Trump Presidency”.

However, he pointed out, the extent of the danger will depend on what happens in the US Congress. If Trump wins and the US House of Representatives and the Senate are also captured by the Republicans, the UN could face a mortal risk.

And also, recall that earlier this year the House Republicans zeroed out funding for the UN regular budget and more than a dozen UN entities, including UNICEF and WHO.

So, the worst-case scenario for the UN would be Trump in the White House and Republican majority in both chambers of the US Congress.

But if one or both Houses of Congress are held by the Democratic Party, Trump alone cannot cause irreparable harm to the UN. Still, US defunding of certain UN agencies will cause great harm to those entities and the important services they provide, said Gautam, author of “*My Journey from the Hills of Nepal to the Halls of the United Nations*” ([kulgautam.org](#)).

Stephen Zunes, Professor of Politics and Director of International Studies at the University of San Francisco, who has written extensively on the politics of the United Nations, told IPS: “Yes, this would indeed be disastrous and UN funding for these agencies and affiliated institutions would indeed be cut”.

It should be noted, however, that Biden has already eliminated U.S. funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) and has threatened to eliminate funding to any organization that has Palestine as a full member. Though Harris has generally been less hostile to international legal norms than Biden, I have seen no indication that Harris would reverse these policies, said Zunes.

“Given Trump’s disrespect for domestic laws and institutions, it’s not surprising he would have a similar contempt for international laws and institutions,” he declared.

Samir Sanbar, a former UN Assistant Secretary-General and head of the former Department of Public Information (DPI), told IPS besides welcoming senior UN officials at Trump Tower, across from UN Headquarters, the former US President also enjoyed being seated at the main table at the luncheon for heads of state at opening of the General assembly session.

Under a Trump presidency, he said, there is however a serious risk of blocking payments for certain U.N. Agencies and Funds, particularly UNRWA, which offers assistance to Palestinian refugees and advocates their right of return. Also, WHO and possibly UNICEF would face cuts particularly for their assistance in Gaza.

“And I read somewhere that Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner would prefer to clear Gaza from its two million human beings in order to turn it into a tourist resort,” said Sanbar.

Commenting on the on-again, off-again US threat to cut funds to the UN, Gautam said a blessing in disguise of drastic US defunding of the UN would be for the organization to seriously explore a more robust alternative long-term funding mechanism of the UN and reduce its heavy dependence on US funding.

To avoid the perpetual threat and blackmail of the US and occasionally some other member states defunding the UN, “I am all for resurrecting, reconsidering and reformulating a very creative proposal presented by former Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme way back in 1985.

Palme proposed that no country should be asked or allowed to contribute more than 10 percent to the UN’s budget.”

That would have meant a significant **reduction** in the US share of the UN budget from 25 % to 10 %; and a modest increase in contribution by most other countries.

“I am FOR the Palme proposal to reduce the UN’s over-dependence on a handful of large donors, and correspondingly decrease the undue influence of those countries in the appointment of high-level UN jobs, and other decision-making processes”.

“Today, many UN activities benefit from voluntary contribution of governments, as well as the private sector, and philanthropic foundations. I believe we must seriously explore more such innovative possibilities, including income from the Global Commons and the Tobin Tax, to liberate the UN from the perpetual threats of arbitrary cuts and defunding by major donors.”

And it is worth recalling that in the larger scheme of international finance, in a world economy of \$103 trillion and global military budgets of \$2.4 trillion per year, the UN’s regular annual budget is less than \$4 billion, and the totality of the UN system’s budget for humanitarian assistance, development cooperation, peace-keeping operations, technical assistance and other essential normative functions, amounts to less than \$50 billion per year.

“This is a modest amount to respond to the huge challenges that the UN is asked and expected to help tackle. To put it in perspective, the total UN system-wide spending annually is far less than one month’s US spending on defense, and less than the US military aid to Israel or Ukraine alone.”

With similar investment, bilateral aid and national budgets of much bigger proportions could hardly achieve results comparable to what the UN and international financial institutions achieve, declared Gautam.