

Testimony of David Pressman
Nominee for Alternate Representative for Special Political Affairs at the United Nations
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Thursday, July 17, 2014

Chairman Kaine, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you as the President's nominee to serve as the Alternate Representative for Special Political Affairs at the United Nations. I am grateful to President Obama, Secretary Kerry, and Ambassador Power for this opportunity and for their confidence in me.

I would like briefly to acknowledge members of my family who are spread out across our country from San Diego to New York watching this hearing.

I have dedicated my professional life to public service – at the State Department under two Presidents, as a human rights advocate and attorney, and as an Assistant Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. I served in the Multilateral Affairs Directorate of the National Security Council and, since last Fall, have been Counselor to Ambassador Power at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations.

I have had a chance to work with, around, and for the UN. I have seen both its promise and its success; as well as its failures and its shortcomings. I have looked into the eyes of displaced and desperate people who counted on protection from nearby UN peacekeepers, but who were instead left to fend for themselves. I have also seen, however, the UN accomplish the seemingly impossible: deliver vaccines despite government obstruction to those who would otherwise perish; families evacuated from aerial bombardments that would otherwise have killed them.

From its founding almost seventy years ago, the UN's record has been a mixed one; the organization is far from the panacea that some of its most fervent backers hoped it would become, nor is it the failure its most ardent opponents feared. Its record is truly mixed. It is both indispensable and it is deeply flawed. But it can advance our interests, and as such we must lead it and we must reform it.

As our lives and our world become increasingly interconnected, so too do the threats to our security and liberty. Terrorists, proliferators, aggressors, cyber warriors, criminals, traffickers, and peddlers of repression do not respect borders. In responding to them, our efforts must transcend borders as well. While no country can lead as effectively as we can, it is not America's job to police every problem, to solve every crisis. That burden must be shared; and the United Nations, with strong and assertive American leadership, can help us to protect our interests and promote international peace and security, while more equitably distributing the burden for doing so.

If confirmed, I would be honored to join Ambassador Power in her determined work to make the UN more responsible, effective, and efficient. That means ensuring UN peacekeeping missions

are well-designed, properly-resourced, and responsibly-led. It means ensuring that peacekeepers who are supposed to be out patrolling and protecting civilians are not instead hunkering down on their bases. It means ensuring budget discipline, increasing transparency, and making sure that those who seek to report abuse in the UN system can do so without fear of retribution. It means ensuring that we live up to the spirit of the UN's own Charter by putting an end to the campaign of bigotry and discrimination directed against the State of Israel at the UN. It means ensuring that voices of liberty and freedom are not muffled by the noises of repression and extremism at the UN.

We can and we should make the UN work to advance our interests and our security. Because of U.S. leadership, today, UN-backed and African Union-led peacekeepers are playing important roles in repelling terrorist organizations operating in Somalia, while UN peacekeepers are helping stabilize northern Mali against the threat posed by al-Qaida-affiliated and other extremist groups. Because of U.S. leadership, the UN is on the front lines of preventing regional instability by trying to end conflict and curb suffering in Sudan, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Because of U.S. leadership, the United Nations helped lift Cote d'Ivoire out of the arms of a strongman intent on defying the democratic will of Ivoirians.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, let me just say that I believe we can and should use the United Nations to advance our security, protect our interests, and promote our values; and that by so doing, we can make the world a safer, more just, and more humane place.

It is to those ends that I pledge my best efforts, if confirmed, and it is with gratitude that I thank you and the members of this Committee for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I would be pleased to respond to any questions you might have.