



# *laetus in praesens*

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1 March 2025 | Draft

## **Transforming the United Nations from New York Entrapment**

### **Navigating uncharted waters in quest of relevance in a shifting world**

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## **Introduction**

There is a long history of proposals to [reform the United Nations](#). These predate the new foreign policies of the USA as instigated by Donald Trump, together with the dramatic commitment to efficiency embodied in the role of Elon Musk. As of the time of writing, these have seemingly had relatively little implication for the UN system. It is however the case that Trump immediately instigated the withdrawal of the US as a primary contributor to the World Health Organization. This followed from his earlier announcement in 2018 of withdrawal of the USA from the Universal Postal Union. Following his presidential inauguration, Donald Trump formally nominated [Elise Stefanik as US ambassador to the United Nations](#) -- an appointment reflective of controversial policies in anticipation of their further development.

Laws passed in the USA after Palestine applied for UNESCO and WHO membership in April 1989 meant that the USA could not contribute financially to any UN organization that accepted Palestine as a full member. As

a result, the USA withdrew its funding, which had accounted for about 22% of UNESCO's already restricted budget. 2023 saw Russia excluded from the UNESCO executive committee for the first time. The United States stated its intent to rejoin UNESCO in 2023, 5 years after leaving, and to pay its \$600 million in back dues -- and was duly readmitted by the UNESCO General Conference in 2023.

In 2018, citing a "failure to mobilize adequate and appropriate burden sharing," the [Trump administration](#) stopped funding UNRWA, calling its fundamental business model and fiscal practices "simply unsustainable". However, the [Biden administration](#) restarted funding in April 2021. On 28 October 2024, the Israeli Knesset passed legislation that ordered UNRWA to cease "any activity" in territories claimed by Israel within 90 days. The Israeli government, for its part, declared that it will terminate all collaboration, communication and contact with UNRWA beginning on January 30, 2025.

In a rapidly evolving foreign policy context, there are other indications (Walden Bello, [The IMF and World Bank Await Elon Musk](#), *CounterPunch*, 26 February 2025). The UN Human Rights Council has offered another instance, as argued by Amnesty International ([U.S. Withdrawal from UN Human Rights Council Is Performative Disregard for Human Rights](#), 5 February 2025). Prior to Trump's inauguration and policy reversals, Russian delegations to the UN HQ were variously challenged and delayed ([The Russian Foreign Ministry hopes that the Trump administration will normalize the issuance of visas](#), *Pravda*, 2025). This is seemingly consistent with public opinion in the USA (Inken von Borzyskowski, [Public support for withdrawal from international organizations: experimental evidence from the US](#), *The Review of International Organizations*, 19, 2024, 4)

A potentially ominous Executive Order has now been signed by Trump ([Withdrawing the United States from and ending funding to certain United Nations organizations and reviewing United States support to all international organizations](#), 4 February 2025). This has been followed by an initiative to withdraw the USA from membership of the UN ([Republicans introduce bill on full US withdrawal from the UN: what will happen next](#), *Oboz*, 21 February 2025; [Bill on full withdrawal from UN introduced in US Congress](#), *Pravda*, 21 February 2025; [Lee introduces Defund Act to Pull USA from UN](#), 20 February 2025). Such an initiative could be understood as a punitive response to the isolation of the US by an overwhelming majority of Member States in adopting UN General Assembly resolutions demanding that Israel "brings to an end without delay its unlawful presence" in the Occupied Palestinian Territory ([September 2024](#)) and subsequently demanding a Gaza cease fire and hostage release ([December 2024](#)).

Intriguingly, despite such pressures, the US might choose to avoid complete withdrawal in order to continue to derive public relations benefit through use of its veto power. Otherwise, in its absence, the majority of other countries could be free to vote against the perceived interests of the USA.

The technicalities of such withdrawal, especially as a Permanent Member of the Security Council, are nevertheless under consideration, as with their implications (Eleanor Stratton, [Can the U.S. Legally Exit the United Nations?](#) *US Constitution.net*, 20 February 2025; Kalyani Yeola, [The U.S. Withdrawal from International Organisations: What it means for Global Order?](#) *Modern Diplomacy*, 10 February 2025; Inken von Borzyskowski, et al, [When do member state withdrawals lead to the death of international organizations?](#) *European Journal of International Relations*, 30, 2024, 3; [Global Governance After U.S. Withdrawal](#), *Council on Foreign Relations*, 19 April 2018).

In this context careful (but rapid consideration) is merited with respect to the relocation of the UN HQ from New York -- as previously clarified (Alfred de Zayas, [Relocating UN Headquarters out of the United States](#), *CounterPunch*, 28 April 2023). The latter noted:

Gradually one hears voices posing the question whether UN headquarters should remain in New York, or perhaps, whether the time has come to consider other possible venues. Most UN offices are still in New York, including DESA, OCT, UNDEF, UNDT, UNODA, UNICEF, and, of course, the UN Security Council, General Assembly, and the Secretary General himself.... More and more one becomes aware that many countries resent the manner in which the United States Government

performs its obligations as host of the Organization. In 2020 the General Assembly Sixth Committee had to deal with complaints against the US for non-compliance with the Headquarters Agreement ([Tackling Host Country Report, Sixth Committee Speakers Highlight Abuses of Headquarters Agreement, Urge Secretary-General to Invoke Arbitration](#), UN Press Release, 23 October 2020)

The summary from 2023 concludes:

In order to reflect the growing importance of the developing world, there are many countries that could conceivably host the United Nations headquarters. One could think of Mexico, and the cities of Puebla and Guadalajara, which have advanced infrastructure. Surely Brazil -- either Rio de Janeiro or Sao Paulo. South Africa would be a credible candidate, and the cities of Cape Town or Durban would be worthy venues. India, the most populous country in the world, would benefit from UN presence -- Delhi and Bangalore have much international experience.

Such possibilities aside, "moving the UN" merits exploration as a metaphor, much as "[turbocharging](#)" was used by the Secretary-General with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals on the occasion of the [UN Summit of the Future](#) (2024). There is a profound irony to the fact of the UN headquarters being located in a country with an unprecedented [national debt of over \\$35 trillion](#) -- a country which could also be readily held to be morally and ethically bankrupt, despite the fundamental role of religion there (and in the election of its current president). The strategic detachment of the US from the principles on which the UN was founded -- and the explicit focus on self-interest -- are especially suggestive of the need of the UN to "move on" -- however that is to be understood.

The following exploration is a development of arguments made previously ([Symbolic Relocation of United Nations HQ to Jerusalem Vicinity](#), 2017; [Build the Wall -- Move the UN HQ?](#) 2017; [Merits of Moving the UN HQ to Baghdad](#), 2003). The focus here is on the controversial, but symbolic, question of an appropriate location in the current global context.

The presentation continues the experiment with AI in the form of [ChatGPT 4o](#) and [DeepSeek](#). Their responses have been framed as grayed areas. **Given the length of the document to which the exchanges gave rise, the form of presentation has itself been treated as an experiment** -- in anticipation of the future implication of AI into research documents. Only the "questions" to AI are rendered immediately visible -- with the response by AI hidden unless specifically requested by the reader (a facility not operational in PDF variants of the page, in contrast with the [original](#)).

Reservations and commentary on the process of interaction with AI to that end have been discussed separately ([Methodological comment on experimental use of AI](#), 2024). Editing responses has focused only on formatting, leaving the distractions of any excessive "algorithmic flattery" for the reader to navigate (as in many social situations where analogous "artificial" conventions are common). Whilst the presentation of responses of two or more AIs could be readily considered unnecessary, it offers a comparative perspective highlighting the strengths and limitations of each in eliciting insight from the range of resources to which each has access.

Readers are of course free to amend the questions asked, or to frame other related questions -- whether with the same AIs, with others, or with those that become available in the future. In endeavouring to elicit insight from the world's resources via AI, the process calls for critical comment in contrast with more traditional methods for doing so.

Show All AI Responses

## Principal criteria constraining relocation

**Question:** There is increasing pressure and justification to relocate the UN HQ from New York to some other location. Could you comment on the range of issues determining any such selection. Beyond Geneva as a fallback option, these clearly include considerations of: political sensitivities, symbolism, logistical viability, local host support, security, internet access, staff residency, travel restrictions, and the like

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## **Challenging attraction of an habitual comfort zone**

**Question:** The simple focus on relocation tends to distract from issues for which the UN HQ invites criticism -- aside from the political arguments for UN reform. New York is a natural attractor for both staff and delegates (and accompanying persons) seeking the benefits of the epitome of a developed country lifestyle -- strongly at variance with the problematic condition of the countries on which UN attention is formally focused. The UN location, as with some of the obvious alternatives, exemplify the sense of a "comfort zone" within which people are only challenged in theory -- but not in practice. How does that consideration reframe the conventional options

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**Question:** Whilst the responses to UN transformation highlight appropriately the more rational dimensions of the possibility (potentially enabled by AI), with a passing indication of their symbolic implications, far less obvious is the value attached to face-to-face encounters currently and the sense of presence subtly communicated. Since the variety of such undeclared factors is typically fundamental to resistance to change, however rationalized, they are clearly of greater relevance to some cultures and behavioural preferences. Could you comment further on how these might be navigated in enabling the changes envisaged.

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## **Improbable resolution of relocation dilemmas?**

**Question:** Is there a case for recognizing that the range of variously incommensurable criteria, for a location on which many could agree, is basically such as to inhibit such agreement or to delay it for years (as with "UN reform"). This could result in a chaotic scenario following withdrawal of UN membership and funding -- and lack of viable alternative facilities. The chaos could be exacerbated by the attitudes of those with an otherwise unquestionable investment in the comfort zone that the current situation represents.

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## **UN HQ as a "shell operation"?**

**Question:** Given the dramatic manner in which Elon Musk is approaching the inefficiencies of the US federal institutions, it is to be assumed these will be adapted to a critique of the UN HQ, its staffing and its meetings. Is there a case for considering how the UN HQ could be transformed into a "shell operation" with transfer of many operations and staff elsewhere

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## **Enabling role of AI in future UN organization**

**Question:** Those responses allude to a "networked" reconfiguration of the UN but make no mention of the role of AI in enabling the envisaged transformation -- and its potentially controversial role (from a UN perspective in the light of the Global Digital Compact) in facilitating future global governance. Is it the case that many of those currently defined as "staff members" could operate remotely from their home countries, with an increasing proportion of meetings conducted via the internet.

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## Future challenge of competing AI platforms

**Question:** Enthusiasm with regard to AI potential readily omits consideration of the complexities deriving from multiple AI proprietary platforms and the competitive geopolitical relations between their proprietors and stakeholders. This is not mitigated by any hypothetical integration between them, enhanced by any AGI developments (*Imagining a Future Union of Artificial Intelligences*, 2024). Could you comment on how that context might be modelled with appropriate safety features consistent with current concerns

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## Artificiality of both AI and human intelligence?

**Question:** Framed as a challenge of competing "artificial intelligences", how is the challenge of AI to global governance fundamentally different from the "artificiality" of human intelligence as articulated by language, culture, belief system, ideology, and discipline. (*How Artificial is Human Intelligence -- and Humanity?* 2023). Is the problem more general

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**Question:** Any clarification of the artificiality of "intelligence", whether human or AI, tends to avoid controversial clarification of the role of relative "ignorance" -- as implied by relative intelligence. The strategic preoccupations of the UN, notably as framed by the Sustainable Development Goals and the mandate of UNESCO, can be understood as addressing the challenges of relative ignorance through their focus on education and learning. Since these are initiatives with effective outcomes primarily in the longer-term, the challenge for any AI-enabled reform of the UN calls for consideration of the complementarity between the management of intelligence and that of ignorance -- whether that of humans or of AI. This is especially evident in a siloed context reinforced by readily deniable institutional biases and their questionable competence with respect to the complexity of polycrises. This deniability tends to ensure that the challenge of ignorance is not factored into strategic decision-making. Could you comment on how a reformed UN might respond to this challenge and its problematic embodiment by the UN itself.

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**Question:** Missing with regard to clarification of the dynamic between intelligence and ignorance (in the light of the UN's engagement with both) is the sense in which vested interests derive benefit from limiting the intelligence of many (even through "dumbing down" programmes) -- and of competing interests -- to the competitive advantage of the few. The matter is further exacerbated by the development of surveillance facilities for the acquisition of intelligence for competitive and security purposes. These processes do little to enhance the governance capacities of the UN, especially when there is dependence on "oversight" facilities to detect potential systemic failures. The particular irony regarding such institutionalized "oversight" is the implied ambiguity of blindspot cultivation. Could you comment on the resulting situation in which engagement with complexity is avoided because the presentation of such matters -- as with AI itself -- is righteously claimed to be too complex for meaningful comprehension.

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## Role of any global AI compact in (self) regulation?

**Question:** The issues highlighted by those responses are a reminder of the UN response to the challenge of [multinational corporations](#) and [corporate social responsibility](#) (CSR). This took the form of the [UN Global Compact](#), whose creation was announced in 1999 at the World Economic Forum -- itself now a focus of major

controversy. The "pact" format has recently been used for the [Global Digital Compact](#) (2024), and previously for the [Global Compact for Migration](#). It is multinational corporations which are now proprietors of AI platforms -- raising the question as to how viable their role would be with respect to such platforms in the light of their record with respect to CSR. Just as multinational corporations are now widely recognized to be completely untrustworthy, could you comment on how any AI platform used by the UN in the future could be assumed to be trustworthy

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## **Challenge of ever-increasing global untrustworthiness**

**Question:** That response suggests that the emerging context for the UN is one of relative untrustworthiness of an unforeseen degree. This frames the question of how collective initiatives might be organized in such a context -- especially when those (including proprietary AIs) who have the power to lie and mislead have no means whatsoever of proving the truth of what they assert. This situation is curiously matched by assumptions relating to the formal signature of any international agreement in a period in which contracts and treaties can be habitually breached -- with no viable constraint on withdrawal from them. Deliberate use of AI technology by organized crime is also to be expected.

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**Question:** Compounding the difficulty clarified by that response is the fact that many of the platforms and their proprietors are based in the USA at a time when the USA is detaching itself from constraining multilateral agreements which do not serve its immediate strategic interests -- irrespective of the questionable sustainability of any new bilateral arrangements. How could the UN make confident use of AI platforms under those circumstances -- a situation further exacerbated by the fact that the logical [root name servers](#) of the internet are controlled by the USA.

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## **Cultivating a principle of reciprocity**

**Question:** In the emerging context, is there a case for cultivating a "principle of reciprocity" -- as partially evident in the emerging pattern of reciprocal tariff barriers between countries. Is it now appropriate for any international organization (governmental or non-governmental) to invite their US members to consider withdrawing their membership, possibly to limit their engagement to an observer role. Those offices located in the US could be relocated. The principle could apply to visa applications for travel. More obviously it could apply to avoidance of scheduling international meetings, exhibitions and sporting events in the USA -- currently of considerable concern ([How Trump's sweeping new policies could change travel](#), BBC, 25 February 2025)

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## **Locating the UN HQ on a cruising ship?**

**Question:** As a potential complement to organizing the UN offices for remote working, there is a case for considering use of a large ship to host selected offices. The current design of large cruise ships encourages reflection on that possibility. Obvious advantages include housing both offices and residences in the same complex, with facilities for dining, entertainment and meetings. Politically and symbolically such a formula would address the legal and other challenges of any particular physical location -- since the ship could travel to multiple locations, possibly on a regular cycle. Such ships also provide for boat and helicopter access to the locations visited. The formula could be extended to all UN Specialized Agencies.

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## Reframing the focus?

**Question:** I have reproduced this exchange in a new post under the title: *Relocating the United Nations HQ from New York / Responding to the death-by-a-thousand cuts instigated by the USA*. Do you have suggestions for a better title, especially since "relocation" avoids the metaphoric sense of "moving on" organizationally

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