Misreporting on Trump and the United Nations

January 1, 2017

By [John Hinderaker](http://www.powerlineblog.com/archives/author/john)

Powerline

<http://www.powerlineblog.com/archives/2017/01/misreporting-on-trump-and-the-united-nations.php>

The [Associated Press](http://bigstory.ap.org/article/75fef89b09a54dbd96e49b59681297f0/new-un-chief-wants-consensus-faces-antagonistic-trump) reports on incoming U.N. head Antonio Guterres, and takes the opportunity to editorialize on Donald Trump. As is so often true these days, some of what the AP reports as fact is flat-out wrong:

Antonio Guterres takes the reins of the United Nations on New Year’s Day, promising to be a “bridge-builder” but facing an antagonistic incoming U.S. administration led by Donald Trump who thinks the world body’s 193 member states do nothing except talk and have a good time.

The AP can’t get past the first sentence without garbling the facts. Trump said the UN, not its member states, is “just a club for people to get together, talk and have a good time.”

The former Portuguese prime minister and U.N. refugee chief told reporters after being sworn-in as secretary-general on Dec. 12 that he will engage all governments — “and, of course, also with the next government of the United States” — and show his willingness to cooperate on “the enormous challenges that we’ll be facing together.”

But Trump has shown little interest in multilateralism, which Guterres says is “the cornerstone” of the United Nations, and great attachment to the Republicans’ “America First” agenda.

The assertion that Trump has shown little interest in multilateralism is wrong. Trump has been critical of unilateral interventions, and has argued, credibly, that other NATO countries need to carry their weight. Likewise, the statement that Trump shows “great attachment to the Republicans’ ‘America First’ agenda” can only have been made by someone who doesn’t read the newspapers. “America First” is Trump’s mantra, not the Republican Party’s.

The AP’s implication that “America First” is incompatible with multilateralism is wrong, too. America’s interests may very well be served by multilateralism, but not by reliance on a corrupt, ineffective United Nations that is dominated by its Islamic caucus. That is, I think, what Trump believes, and it is an entirely reasonable view.

Then comes some anti-Trump editorializing:

Immediately after the United States allowed the Security Council to condemn Israeli settlements in the West Bank on Dec. 23 in a stunning rupture with past practice, Trump warned in a tweet: “As to the U.N., things will be different after Jan. 20th,” the day he takes office.

Was Trump’s tweet a “stunning rupture with past practice”? There isn’t a lot of past practice when it comes to tweeting, but the real stunning departure from past practice was Barack Obama’s executing a 180-degree change in foreign policy in the last days of his administration, for no particular reason. But the AP doesn’t want to tell you that.

In some respects, Guterres’s diagnoses of contemporary problems parallel Trump’s:

Guterres has said he will also strive to deal with the inequalities that globalization and technological progress have helped deepen, creating joblessness and despair especially among youth.

“Today’s paradox is that despite greater connectivity, societies are becoming more fragmented. More and more people live within their own bubbles, unable to appreciate their links with the whole human family,” he said after his swearing-in.

I think he was referring to urban American liberals in that last paragraph.

In more important ways, Guterres is delusional, and the AP swallows the delusion whole:

Guterres said the values enshrined in the U.N. Charter that should define the world that today’s children inherit — peace, justice, respect, human rights, tolerance and solidarity — are threatened, “most often by fear.”

This is mind-bendingly stupid. Peace, justice and human rights are threatened by tyrants like Fidel Castro, Bashar al-Assad and Vladimir Putin. They are threatened by terrorists associated with al Qaeda, ISIS and similar organizations. They are not threatened by “fear”; fear is an entirely appropriate response to tyrants and terrorists. It is a symptom of threats to human rights, peace and justice, not the cause of those threats.

As long as Guterres believes claptrap like this, the UN will continue to be as useless in the future as it has been in the recent past. But you won’t learn that from the AP. The fundamental error that American reporters and editors make is attributing superior moral status to the UN, simply because it is international. In fact, while individual UN agencies may do good work, the organization as a whole, especially as it acts politically, is often malevolent and lacks the moral stature of the United States.