

EXTERNAL OVERSIGHT: THE JIU

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The UN General Assembly has a number of external oversight bodies available to exercise "expert" vigilance and advice on administrative matters. Only one of them, the Joint Inspection Unit, works on a full-time basis, but its professionalism has always been low, and its impact has been at best variable and in recent years trending sharply downward.

The JIU history is, above all, a remarkable example of how "barons" of the UN and their diplomatic friends in Member State missions in New York, once they locate highly-paid senior posts with few duties, will defend them zealously and forever against all comers. No other UN unit has been so consistently criticized and deprecated, to no effect.

A second crucial lesson is also involved -- how those same barons and their allies in the General Assembly can seize even a critical managerial function (independent oversight and improvement of UN operations) -- for more than 35 years, providing "horse and buggy" oversight services even into the 21st century. The story of the little-known JIU thus deserves some detailed exposition, to show just how the processes of amateurism and "jobs for the boys" can entrench themselves and greatly retard effective UN operations.

The continuing JIU ineptitude is even more disturbing because it is, as it always repeats, the one and only independent, system-wide "subsidiary organ" available to ensure

the proper use of funds, and efficient programmes, not just for the UN but throughout the entire UN system as well. Based on the analysis which follows, IO Watch concludes that, until its resources are finally transferred to professional oversight units, the UN external oversight system in the 21st century can only be regarded as a farce.