

is the business end of the Special Session and is given the task of drafting an expression of the Session's views, which the General Assembly, setting in plenary, then ratifies. During the second week of UNSSOD, it broke into three working groups to discuss the substantive agenda items. In the best of all worlds, each working group would forward consensus papers to the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole who would then plug them into the final document of the Special Session. After two weeks of effort, however, consensus eluded each working group and there was a clear change in the prospects for the conference. The burden of drafting final language then fell to the Mansur Ahmad, Chairman of the Committee of the Whole.

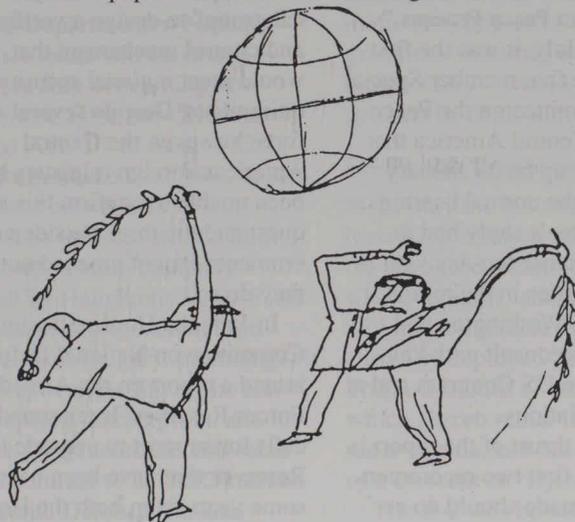
AS THE WORKING GROUPS DREW to a close, rumour had it that Chairman Ahmad, reading the situation accurately, had already begun drafting a paper on his own. The chairman's paper was released to the Committee of the Whole with only four days remaining. Presumably, Chairman Ahmad sought to introduce an element of time pressure to the conference. The Committee did not meet again until the last day of the session. In the intervening time, there occurred two and a half days of consultations with two dozen or so "friends of the chair." The friends were representatives of the regional groupings at the UN and brought together the major players from these groups. These meetings were to build a consensus which could then be carried into a formal meeting of the Committee of the Whole.

What emerged, however, was a continual reassertion of national positions which had been, by this time, well aired. In addition, numerous amendments and proposals were put forward which called into question the seriousness some states attached to the process. An especially rich example was Iraq (recently implicated in the use of chemical weapons in the war against Iran) putting for-

ward new language on the Secretary General's role in investing incidents of chemical weapons use in war.

The meeting of the friends became a drafting and redrafting exercise which substituted for the work of the Committee of the Whole. This approach was a break with traditional UN procedure which angered those not invited to participate.

The Committee of the Whole met on 25 June and once again the Chairman's paper was scruti-



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nized paragraph by paragraph. By early evening, Chairman Ahmad's paper was unrecognizable, with much of it set aside due to disagreement. The committee adjourned for consultations. At 11:30 pm, the General Assembly stopped the clock to allow for more time, but the cause was lost; the Special Session ended in the early morning of 26 June without a statement to make to the world.

TO WHAT CAN ONE ATTRIBUTE THE collapse of UNSSOD III? Three factors stand out: the position of the United States; the position of the Neutral and Non-Aligned states; and the procedures of Chairman Ahmad.

The United States has clearly placed its disarmament eggs in the bilateral basket. Secretary of State Shultz's plenary address represented an accounting of recent, and hoped-for bilateral successes, with mention of multilateral approaches added as an afterthought. The US simply does not see a role for the UN in many substantive issues in disarmament. In the matter of naval disar-

mament, the US insisted there be no reference at all. It also rejected the proposal for a UN study on verification – the product of extensive consultations between the two main proponents of the idea, Canada and the Netherlands (later joined by France) on the one hand; and the Group of Six Nations/Five Continent Initiative (Argentina, Greece, India, Mexico, Sweden, and Tanzania) on the other. A paragraph on the "importance and urgency of preventing an arms race in outer

space ..." which called for intensified negotiations to deal with the issue, was rejected as well.

On the part of the Non-Aligned states, early indications of a more moderate stance were replaced by efforts to keep the burden of disarmament on nuclear weapons states. The Non-Aligned were unwilling to countenance any shift in responsibility for disarmament which would require them to face up to their own spending on arms and involvement in local conflicts. When France suggested that the elimination of all war, both nuclear and conventional, be the objective of disarmament efforts, a flurry of Non-Aligned delegates took to the floor to condemn the proposal. The Non-Aligned continued to pursue broad political and declaratory approaches to arms control – rhetoric in other words – rather than commit themselves to dealing with concrete measures. This difference in philosophy between Western countries and the Non-

Aligned will continue to bedevil efforts at multilateral arms control.

Lastly, Chairman Ahmad's strategy of holding back his paper, and his heavy reliance on informal consultations was not helpful. Allowing the meeting of the friends to become a redrafting exercise negated the benefits to be gained by moving to a smaller group. Those who were not "friends" justly felt excluded from the process and took full advantage of the final meeting of the Committee of the Whole to insert their preferred words and punctuation into the Chair's paper. The "friends" process would only have worked had there been a spirit of consensus and urgency among the participants and a chairman who had the ability to pull together the threads of consensus; UNSSOD III lacked both.

ONE OF THE POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS to emerge from UNSSOD III is that it did not call for UNSSOD IV. What is needed is time for sober reflection and consideration as to the purpose, value and relevance of the UNSSOD process. Looking back, UNSSOD I represents a remarkable statement of international concern and priorities with regard to disarmament. Having made that statement in 1978, the international community has failed twice to improve upon it or agree to changes – perhaps it shouldn't try. It is time to consider other means of asserting the "central role and primary responsibility" of the UN in the field of disarmament, which, while less ambitious than the current UNSSOD approach, might lend themselves to greater success.

In trying to address the entire spectrum of disarmament issues in one fell swoop, the UNSSOD process has proved unwieldy and incapable of forward movement. Rather than uniting the international community in the cause of disarmament, it has served to challenge the relevance of multilateral, particularly UN, approaches to disarmament. Reclaiming that relevance will be that much more difficult in the aftermath of UNSSOD III. □