

# BETTER LATE THAN NEVER, MOSCOW COURTS THE UN

*One of the reasons for the UN's new-found vigour is that the Soviets are now paying serious attention to the organization they helped to create.*

BY NANCY GORDON

**I**N THE PROCESS OF "NEW THINKING" about foreign policy the Soviet Union is giving more emphasis to the United Nations. The curtain on the world which is now being raised has revealed to the Soviet citizens a United Nations which is to be taken seriously, and at which they are prepared to risk being a player. The UN, unaccustomed in recent years to such approving glances from the Soviets, has shown itself willing and able to accommodate the increased responsibilities thrust upon it.

During 1988 we were witness to a number of demonstrations of this "new thinking" in New York and Geneva and the other centres where the UN gathers. There was Mikhail Gorbachev in early December, choosing the General Assembly as a forum for a major announcement of conventional force reductions. There was George Shultz, listening impassively, in the same building. There was Dan Rather and CBS news covering the event live.

In September at the opening of the Assembly, Eduard Shevardnadze, making the traditional foreign minister's speech, presented a long list of proposals both for UN action and for improvements to the UN structure. The rhetoric which had come to be associated with Soviet speeches at the UN wasn't there. One of his deputy foreign ministers, Vladimir Petrovski, spelled out in detail, for the Assembly's Special Political and Sixth Committees, Soviet views on "Comprehensive Security" and what the role of the UN should be. In Kingston, Ontario, in October, Mr. Petrovski gave the keynote address at a conference on war-

risk-reduction centres; he supported the concept and suggested ways and means of moving the process forward with UN participation.

The Soviets made use of the UN to help bring about a withdrawal of their troops from Afghanistan; along with the Americans, they engaged in discreet diplomacy to involve the UN in the settlement of conflict in the Namibia-Angola region; they supported the notion of an international conference on the Middle East under UN auspices; they began to pay their debts for past peacekeeping operations.

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE? AREN'T these the same people, who not so many years ago, paid only lip-service, if that, to the UN and other international organizations? Who objected to initiatives by the Secretary-General? Who wouldn't pay portions of their dues for undertakings they didn't support? And who, above all, were cautious about playing in any multilateral game in which they couldn't control the rules and the umpires?

Soviet reassessments of the state of the world, a process in which they have been engaged since Mr. Gorbachev took office in 1985, are based on a number of assumptions which lead naturally to an increased role for the UN. In his book, *Perestroika*, written in 1986, Gorbachev stressed the interdependent nature of the world in the 1980s, the futility of reliance on nuclear weapons for security, the recognition of a multipolar, as opposed to bipolar, balance of

power, the growing threats posed by environmental degradation.

In September 1987 he spelled out more details in a much-quoted article in *Pravda* and *Izvestia* entitled "Realities and Guarantees for a Secure World." Gorbachev listed the various components of a comprehensive security package which would involve the UN, and invited states to comment on it. These ideas evolved during 1987 and 1988, and recently he has emphasized the need for the development and primacy of international law. During a series of interviews conducted in Moscow in November 1988, Soviet officials and academics discussed their specific proposals for making the UN more effective. The list is extensive. Among the measures the Soviets have proposed are meetings of the Security Council, at the foreign minister level, for discussions of nuclear and naval disarmament, and at the head of government level, to examine all disarmament and development issues before the UN; expansion of the forty-nation Conference on Disarmament to one with universal membership, meeting year-round; a UN register of conventional arms sales and transfers; and UN mechanisms to monitor and verify arms control agreements and new technologies.

IN HIS SPEECH TO THE GENERAL Assembly in September, Mr. Shevardnadze supported and proposed measures which would give more power to the Secretary-General by increasing his access to information. Shevardnadze proposed a direct communications

link between UN headquarters, Security Council members, and the chairman of the non-aligned movement — such a link, he said, might help avert international crises and conflicts. Vladimir Petrovski, in an aide-memoire and in a speech to the Sixth Committee elaborated on these ideas: the Secretary-General, on his own initiative, should warn Security Council members of potential conflicts; UN military observers might engage in preventive diplomacy in a pro-active way; and the Security Council should have the power to authorize the sending of UN military observers to potential hot-spots. Such action would alter considerably the current practice of the UN sending peacekeepers or observers only when asked by both parties, and when a cease-fire is in effect.

During the summer of 1988 the Soviets proposed a UN Naval Force for patrol in the Gulf, a suggestion to which they returned in the fall. This thinking is in line with their support of war-risk-reduction centres within the UN secretariat which would deal with prevention of both nuclear and conventional wars. They have also made suggestions about UN peacekeeping forces, and have revived a proposal for permanent UN military observers and armed forces. They have also offered to participate in specific peacekeeping operations if the circumstances were appropriate, and if other states agreed. Such a move would be a departure from the current wisdom about peacekeeping which holds that superpowers should not be involved. Citing the expense involved in maintaining a peacekeeping force in Namibia