

REVIEWS



United Nations, Divided World: The UN's Roles in International Relations

Adam Roberts and Benedict
Kingsbury (editors)

Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, 287
pgs., \$82.50 cloth

■ This is an important book – written by a distinguished group of UN officials, including Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, national delegates to the UN, scholars like the eminent British historian Sir Michael Howard – which analyses the dilemmas and demands facing the United Nations. The work is broader in scope than most comparable studies on the UN and, in addition to chapters on the UN's primary function in the field of international peace and security, it covers other important activities like economic development, international law and human rights. Despite the complexity of the subject, the themes are presented with admirable clarity and should thus appeal to an audience wider than the restricted circle of UN specialists.

Most contributors maintain a position of muted optimism which recognizes both the limitations and the services of the organization, while avoiding a utopian stand or seeking recourse in utter cynicism, as can so often be observed in the treatment of the subject. The general tone is set by Sir Michael Howard who reminds us that the UN has failed in its primary task to create a new world order where members derive their strength from the collective strength of the whole. Instead it reflects the disorders and rivalries of the world, "and does what it can to mitigate them." The question – what can be done by the UN, given the political realities, and what might be done more ef-

fectively – forms the essence of most chapters and is capably summarized in the form of a ten-point programme in Evan Luard's concluding chapter. If there are any reservations, it is that the proposals all stress good will and common sense in an organization not always noted for dispassionate discourse.

The reflective chapter by Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar, and the accompanying analysis of case studies by Thomas Franck, will be of particular interest to the student of international conflict. Both chapters discuss the Secretary-General's formal responsibility for international peace and security as established by the UN Charter, and contrast this with the private diplomacy that has emerged in practice which entails discreet inquiries, good offices and mediation efforts. As Pérez de Cuéllar notes, the UN Secretary-General served as the sole channel of communication between all parties involved in the wars in Afghanistan, the Gulf and southern Lebanon, and the tense situation in Cyprus. Under these circumstances, he was often forced to improvise and sometimes to suggest means which diverged from those initially envisaged by the Security Council. Even with such liberties, it is the Security Council, as he insists, which has the responsibility and the Secretary-General who exercises a supportive role. If one takes the case of the 1988 Iran-Iraq ceasefire agreement, which occurred after the publication of the book, the relationship may well be reserved, for here was an instance where the leadership was clearly provided by the Secretary-General, with the Security Council lending support.

The Secretary-General also justifies his reluctance to invoke Article 99 for fear that bringing an issue to the formal attention of the Security Council might escalate an international conflict. Evan

Luard and Sir Anthony Parsons argue the contrary point: by taking bolder action and invoking Article 99, the Secretary-General would enhance his authority and force the Council to take a more active stand. The argument is of particular interest, given that it is made by former senior officials of the British government which, like all other Permanent Members of the Council, has been reluctant to enhance the authority of the Secretary-General.

In contrast to the well-tempered optimism of most contributors, Maurice Bertrand strikes a distinctly more pessimistic note. He questions the ability of the UN to achieve any meaningful internal reform. In his view, the principal failure of the UN, and its growing marginalization, stems from its inability to develop a political framework capable of providing a global response to the problems of increased international interdependence. There is partial evidence of such frameworks emerging elsewhere, as for example the Economic Summit and the European Economic Community, but these developments have bypassed the UN. As a remedy, Bertrand suggests the creation of a UN Economic Security Council, which would duplicate in the economic sphere the formal authority and effective decision-making structure of the Security Council. It promises to be more successful than the latter because the economic sphere offers a greater potential for consensus.

– Harald von Riekhoff

Mr. von Riekhoff is a professor of
political science at Carleton University

The Demilitarized Society: Disarmament and Conversion

Seymour Melman

Montreal: Harvest House, 1988,
120 pgs., \$9.95 paper

■ Columbia University professor and economist Seymour Melman argues that the United States economy is heavily militarized and

dominated by the arms procurement and defence contract bureaucrats of the Pentagon. The concentration of economic power and decision-making in the hands of the Pentagon, which began in the Kennedy administration, has resulted in unproductive state capitalism, the militarization of society and economic malaise and decline for the US.

Melman claims that the United States is already a second-rate industrial country because production has declined and incomes are no longer rising. He calls this situation "industrial depletion" and claims it is a direct consequence of the diversion of half the US industrial economy to military purposes. The production of guns, fighter planes and missiles makes no contribution to either ordinary consumption or to the means of economic production. At the same time that the US economy has been diverted to military production, the physical infrastructure has fallen into disrepair. Roads, railways and bridges are not being fixed; school, medical, public housing and other needs are not being met. "If the processes of depletion continue," writes Melman, "the United States could become a third-rate nation characterized by the pervasive inability to find and organize the resources necessary to restore economic competence."

The solution is economic conversion, says Melman. Conversion of military industries to civilian output would generate enough product and wealth to rebuild the entire physical infrastructure of the United States, he claims. In this 120-page essay, Melman sketches out the steps that could be taken to achieve this goal, and summarizes some of the political and economic obstacles that have so far prevented any serious effort in this direction.

What is lacking in polished writing is made up for in enthusiasm. Much of the value of this