

reversed. The Reagan administration continues to demonstrate that it can be obstructionist, as evidenced by its recent performance in the Preparatory Committee meetings for the Third Special Session on Disarmament. However, the Reagan administration, especially Ambassador Vernon Walters, has been more supportive of the UN in its second term.

During the Forty-Second Session of the General Assembly held in the fall of last year, both the US and the USSR suffered defeats. Even after paying more than two hundred million dollars in arrears to the UN, the USSR was soundly criticized for its adventurism in Afghanistan and Kampuchea. The United States lost on budgetary issues and decided to abstain on the adoption of the UN's two billion dollar budget for the next two years.

UN struggling back

Overall, there is a surge of realism at the UN. Gone are any remnants of the notion that a multilateral institution can somehow solve all international problems overnight. The fury of unqualified critics who blamed an international institution for the collective and individual failures of its members has been dampened. The United Nations is slowly regaining credence in the world's capitals and among popular opinion. More and more international issues are being effectively dealt with by the UN system and sovereign states have come to a mature realization of the important role of multilateral organizations. Canada and Canadians remained firm adherents, and there is little evidence to suggest our faith in multilateralism has diminished.

Examples of the resurgence of the UN abound. In the maintenance of peace and security, the Security Council in particular is regaining at least in part the role it played during the first twenty-five years of the UN's existence. The five permanent members of the Security Council are once again at least occasionally using that forum to express their collective will and interests. This they have not done for at least sixteen years.

The major potential for immediate success is Afghanistan. Now that a tentative timetable for withdrawal of Soviet troops is being discussed, the momentum is building towards a UN-mediated solution. A question that remains is whether the Secretary-General and his representative will get the credit they so deserve and need. In the Iran-Iraq conflict, the Security Council is increasingly acting in cohesion and may yet have some influence in ending that bloody conflict.

In the Middle East, recent violence in the Gaza and the West Bank have forced the parties to seriously reconsider a long-proposed international conference under UN auspices. The Security Council acted in concert on the question of Israeli deportations of Palestinians. In southern Lebanon, the kidnapping of a US colonel has focused attention on the UN observers in the area. The UN peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon, UNIFIL, is now widely recognized as having been a stabilizing influence that has kept order in a very volatile region.

In southern Africa, the UN has been able to build pressure on South Africa, although without much success. More hopeful are indications that a UN plan to bring independence to Namibia that has long been ready will finally be implemented. The plan involves a peacekeeping force or observer groups, something that has not been used in Africa for a long time.

Achievements continue

In Western Sahara, the Secretary-General has been holding

talks with the Moroccans and the Polisario Front, promoting a plan for a referendum on the future of the territory. Efforts continue in Cyprus where the election of a new President may present new opportunities. The UN has also been a useful mediator in other areas of conflict or points of pressure. The list is long, ranging from the Central American peace process to talks between various parties in Kampuchea, to almost unnoticed discussions on the problem of East Timor.

On the economic and social front, the recent achievements have been substantial. In the past year, the UN has directed the world's attention to protecting the environment, drug trafficking and the relationship between disarmament and development. A new round of the GATT is underway and the recent session of UNCTAD achieved unexpected success. The international financial institutions are moving on the enormous external debt of Third World countries and the World Bank is getting a significant increase in its capital. The international community is able to respond more quickly and effectively to another African food crisis, in part because of the UN.

One expects that the momentum will be carried on. But a great danger facing the UN is that that momentum may end. Setbacks now could result in the UN plunging to new depths, greater than that of the 1980s. And the next time the political crisis will be conjoined with financial and staff morale crises.

Leadership needed

The next Canadian Ambassador to the UN will find severe personnel problems. The reforms agreed to by the General Assembly called for overall staff cutbacks of 15 percent to be achieved mainly by attrition. A freeze on hiring has been in place for some time and the vacancy rate at the UN is presently at about 15 percent. The remaining staff are feeling the extra load.

At the highest level, the Secretary-General has provided very low-keyed leadership, but the expectations of him are mounting as he heads into the last half of his second term. He has the chance to produce a string of achievements and many are hoping he can deliver. It is widely assumed that Pérez de Cuellar will not run for a third term at the conclusion of 1991 and that the next Secretary-General will be an African, the only major grouping not to have held the top post. The style and ability of the Secretary-General shape to some extent the effectiveness and public image of the entire UN system, although he probably finds his individual capacity to act limited. There is an enormous need for the Secretary-General to be allowed to be more powerful and bolder, even audacious. The next election of the Secretary-General is far enough away to permit the new spirit of cooperation to take hold in the Security Council and a more unfettered Secretary-General may emerge.

The various factors combined seem to point to the imperative of having as the next Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations a person with broad experience in multilateral institutions. Unfortunately, the remarkable abilities of Stephen Lewis to grasp quickly the labyrinthine complexities of the UN and to articulate so well a vigorous foreign policy are not likely to be found in another debutant. The next three or four years may or may not equal the drama of the founding of the UN or of the Congo or Korean conflicts, but will set the stage for the UN's next forty years. It is an era of choices, opportunities and pitfalls. The next Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations will be in the middle of it. □