

LEADING THE HORSE TO WATER

Now that the Soviets have embraced the UN and other international organizations, the only superpower left to be convinced is the USA.

BY THOMAS G. WEISS

IN A SIGNIFICANT DEPARTURE FROM THEIR past words and actions, the Soviets have renounced previous doctrine and are now embracing multilateralism, especially United Nations mechanisms for preventing and limiting regional conflicts. In the revised Soviet lexicon for the Third World, "International peacekeeping and peacemaking" has replaced "support for national liberation struggles." While prominent in Western social sciences since the 1970s, "interdependence" has been anathema in Moscow until only recently.

The Kremlin's declared new policy is unequivocal. After decades of indifference or antagonism, the Soviets are now among the most vocal supporters of UN conflict management and resolution. Moreover, Soviet deeds are increasingly matching their rhetoric – acceptance of the UN in Afghanistan and Angola, pressure on the Vietnamese to withdraw from Cambodia, steps to repay UN hard-currency arrears, and a slow-down in arms shipments.

While Moscow was discovering the UN, however, the US was beginning to abandon the world body. This reversal of roles was striking, for the UN would hardly have existed without almost four decades of solid American financial and political support. In many ways, peacekeeping was a pragmatic American reaction when the Cold War meant that collective security had to be discarded as 1940s idealism. More particularly, the United States had traditionally paid for at least thirty percent of the peacekeeping bills, and sometimes much more. During Ronald Reagan's presidential tenure, however, official US support plummeted as Washington became the organization's leading foot-dragger and debtor. Multilateralism has not yet fully recovered from this period of American aloofness and hostility.

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION SEEMS TO VIEW THE UN as less inimical to US interests than did its predecessor. While it is too early to tell whether a page has been turned regarding renewed US support for the United Nations, developments over the last eighteen months give rise to guarded optimism. UN-bashing ceased to be Washington entertainment in 1988, when

even Ronald Reagan set aside his "doctrine" of unilateral intervention and support for anti-communist insurgents in favour of selected UN action in the Third World. Five new peacekeeping operations have been deployed since. All were backed fully by the US, and all were helpful to American foreign policy: extracting the Red Army from Afghanistan and Cuban combat troops from Angola, stopping the carnage between Iran and Iraq, ensuring the peaceful transition to Namibian independence, and helping to depoliticize Central America. Moreover, the recently proposed UN interim administration, and large peacekeeping force for Cambodia, will permit the US to abandon a policy that was neither moral nor sensible. Until now, the US was committed, in effect, to Khmer Rouge participation in a Cambodian government.

Canada, as a strong ally and pillar of peacekeeping, must do what it can to usher the US fully back into the multilateral fold. Having relinquished its leadership role on First Avenue, the United States must come to grips with the Kremlin's volte-face there, as well as with a number of its worthwhile initiatives. Soviet proposals can no longer be dismissed simply because of their provenance.

While they are hardly household terms in the United States or anywhere else, Canada should lose no opportunity to emphasize the extent to which UNGOMAP (UN Military Observer Group India-Pakistan), ONUVEN (UN Observation Mission for the Verification of Elections in Nicaragua), UNIIMOG (UN Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group), UNTAG (UN Transition Assistance Group), and ONUCA (UN Observer Group Central America) serve and have served US interests. While the US is now responsible for over half of the approximately \$1 billion of UN debt and often resorts to financial intimidation, others are carrying large responsibilities. Some 80,000 Canadian soldiers (about the size of Canada's present armed force) have worn blue berets; of 14,000 UN troops world wide today, 1,200 of them are Canadians. Canada and other countries are putting their soldiers' lives at risk and

receiving only partial reimbursement for international service that ultimately serve US and Western interests.

CANADA SHOULD INJECT ITS OWN STRONG VIEWS about UN peacekeeping onto the bilateral US-Canada agenda and into NATO's discussions about appropriate military force structures and about the nature of burden sharing. Domestic politics in the United States – a strong pro-Israeli lobby and the right wing of the Republican party that occasionally needs to be pacified – could reverse the new-found and fledgling support for the UN in the Bush administration. In December for example, Washington once again cast into doubt UN financing and multilateralism, this time over a possible upgrading of the PLO's status at the United Nations. Vice-President Quayle immediately escalated the campaign with the politically mischievous suggestion that future American financing might well be linked to a repeal of the 1975 General Assembly resolution that defines Zionism as a "form of racism." This declaration is long forgotten as a mistake in most quarters, but the need to repeal it is viscerally appealing in Congress, which instead needs to understand how counterproductive and impossible such a reversal would be without a breakthrough in the Middle East.

This strangely-timed regression is hard to fathom for serious UN-watchers in New York or Washington, and from north of the border, US fickleness appears absolutely arcane. Not unreasonably, Canadians take seriously international treaty obligations that commit member states to paying their assessments. They ask their southern neighbour: why the double standard? Are you or are you not members of the UN? Do not peacekeepers serve US interests?

Canada should make clear that its firm support for peacekeeping and multilateralism emanates not only from middle-power instincts, but also from hard-headed calculations about Western interests and values. Canadian views on this matter count. Neither neutral nor woolly-headed, Canada is a bulwark of NATO and a crucial US ally. There is, for instance, widespread appreciation in Washington for Ot-