

There is nothing new about these observations except, perhaps, that they have become so familiar that we take less account of them than we should. Forty years ago, freshly conscious of the devastation that can grow when nations go their separate ways to war, world leaders established the United Nations system. Much of our successful history since that time has been a history of alliances - the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the European Community, and a multitude of more local arrangements - whether bringing together the nations of South-East Asia, or keeping peace in Cyprus or the Sinai.

Shocked by war, we found ways to work together. Now, sheltered by relative peace, we are drifting away from the international system that helped build that peace. The United States, Great Britain and Singapore, after careful consideration of their national interests, have served notice on UNESCO. India and Brazil and others resist renewal of multilateral trading negotiations. Greece is reconsidering its role in NATO. Instead of sending signals of leadership, the European Community is characterized by its bureaucracy and disputes, the General Assembly by its cacophony, the Security Council by willful impotence. In Central America, the Contadora process seems stalled. In Namibia, the Contact Group, including Canada, has taken no effective initiatives. While bombs kill baggage handlers, and the hostage taking at Beirut is treated as live soap opera, all civilised nations lament terrorism, but are slow in finding practical ways to fight it.

Against that trend, of course, there are solid new international initiatives - the response to the famine in Ethiopia; the refreshing possibility of a summit of Francophone countries; the new attention that is being paid to terrorism and to the trade in drugs.

And there are brilliant, unsung, successes. I spent part of last week in a refugee camp just inside Thailand, where UNBRO - The United Nations Border Relief Organization - is working with some of the bravest people I have ever met - Cambodians uprooted from their homes and, with UNBRO, building literacy and hope and health in the shadow of Vietnamese shelling.

The world works. UNICEF is saving 400,000 children each year from death by malnutrition and disease. The crushing debts of Mexico and Brazil are gradually being worked down by international agreement, as was India's earlier. While local wars have taken countless lives, and atrocities continue daily in Afghanistan, and South-Africa, and Cambodia, and Chile, the striking fact of these last four