

actions that are really motivated by purely American interests. Such a charge neglects two key points. First, the United Nations had long been allowed to slip so low in American public esteem -- and its recent recovery had still been so limited -- that no US President could have hoped to cash in on the moral force of the UN to support risky or unpopular commitments abroad. Instead, Mr. Bush has gambled on a major campaign to help rehabilitate the UN in American esteem, a campaign that will be ill-received by jingoistic right-wingers (including many in his own party) who have long crusaded against the UN and all its works.

To accept, on the other hand, that Mr. Bush has sought, from the very outset, to promote a collective international response under UN auspices as a support for the legitimacy of US actions is surely no criticism. It is a welcome departure, and an indication that this US President has recognized the historic opportunity offered by the end of the Cold War. The objective was to check aggression in a strategic and volatile region, without running afoul of Soviet or Chinese interests, and without playing into Saddam's pretensions as champion of the Arabs or the Third World. These needs provide ample justification for a strategy of pursuing measures through the Security Council and with wide international, and especially Arab and Islamic participation. Nor is there anything reprehensible in such a strategy -- all Security Council members and all force contributors have made their own determinations of the situation and their own decisions to act.

The legitimate world body and most individual nations have, in effect, recognized that what is at stake here is not exclusively, or even primarily, an American interest, but a wider set of interests and principles shared by all. Many others depend far more than the US on Gulf oil and would be far more vulnerable to the further depredations of a successful Iraqi aggressor. The critical positive precedent value of stopping Saddam Hussein and the critical negative precedent of not stopping him are also widely accepted.

Gradually, and still not equitably, other nations have moved to share the military burden, and where they could not do that, the underlying economic costs. If, for whatever