

tawa's initiative in hosting the Open Skies Conference in February, as a follow-up to the Bush proposal to the Soviets about verification in the countries of NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

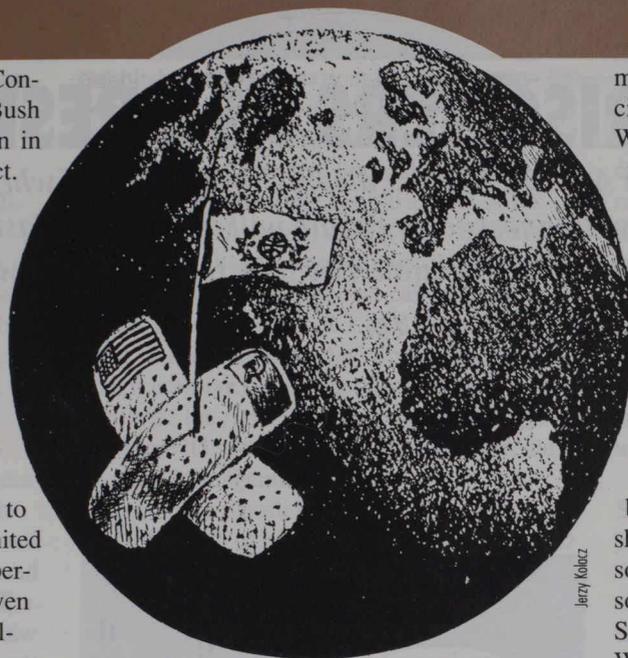
WITH DRAMATIC IMPROVEMENTS IN EAST-West relations, the regime for international security is indeed at a critical juncture. The UN has become more activist in the management of regional armed conflicts. Yet, the support of countries like Canada and the distinction for the UN attached to winning the 1988 Nobel Peace Prize are clearly not enough.

Non-superpowers might find it difficult to admit, but while it is insufficient for the United Nations to have only the backing of the superpowers, it can not realize its potential, or even function effectively, without their active collaboration. As former UN Under Secretary-General Sir Brian Urquhart has said, past UN successes have amounted to "tiptoeing around the Cold War." The waning of bipolar confrontation thus provides an unparalleled opportunity for the superpowers to join forces.

Ottawa should not hesitate to stress that the UN may even be able to function more along the lines that its founders intended, a point that even some of the UN's most trenchant critics have recently realized. As Jeane Kirkpatrick has written, "One peace dividend of the Cold War's end may be a more effective UN."

Moscow's dizzying array of proposals about the UN system – over one thousand according to one tally – contains many naive ideas formulated with the zeal of a recent convert. Yet, among them are a wide variety of proposals to make the existing peacekeeping regime more financially solvent, politically active, and geared to preventive diplomacy: national earmarking of funds, equipment, and troops for rapid deployment; the stationing of UN soldiers in potential hot spots; improved training and management; a UN standing military reserve; more autonomy for the Secretary-General; war-risk reduction centres; and improved logistics and intelligence. Interestingly enough, many of these Soviet proposals had been previously floated by Western governments.

THE MOMENT IS PROPITIOUS. BEFORE THE RECENT backsliding over the status of the PLO, Washington had begun to react positively. Reversing previous policy, the US had joined the Soviet Union, Canada and all other members of the Security Council in authorizing military observers for Central America, the first such use of the UN in America's "back yard." While the so-called "Operation Just Cause" in Panama indicated that the US government in certain circumstances still regards unilateral armed intervention as beneficial to its interests – at least in the short run – there should be no



Jerry Kolacz

question about the critical significance of Washington's agreeing to the first truly international peacekeeping operation in the Western Hemisphere.

The Central American UN Observer Group's mission is initially to monitor the commitment by the region's governments to stop aiding insurgents; and subsequently there are plans to send armed UN forces to collect weapons from guerrillas. These UN soldiers (from Canada, Colombia, Spain, and Venezuela) are teaming-up with civilians from the UN and the Organization of American States (which Canada has just recently joined) to monitor Nicaragua's elections. The success of these undertakings is hardly guaranteed; it never is. Yet, the efforts to reduce violence and arms shipments and to foster national reconciliation through democratic elections are worthwhile endeavours – supposedly at the very foundation of the Western system of values.

A few days prior to the approval of the UN Observer Group in Central America, two other "firsts" took place in New York. After forty-four years of bickering, the superpowers co-sponsored a General Assembly resolution aimed at reinforcing the work of the organization, and also held a joint press conference to introduce their text. These symbolic actions were consistent with Moscow's increasing commitment to multilateralism and an encouraging sign of Washington's growing realization of the UN's contribution to international peace and security. In fact, at the conclusion of the 44th session, there was a rare meeting of minds. The Nigerian President of the General Assembly, Joseph Garba, agreed with Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Petrovsky and with US Ambassador to the UN Thomas Pickering, that the world organization had benefitted immensely from the warming of superpower relations.

In the past, Canada has frequently been an effective "bridge" between East and West in

many fora. As a member of the Security Council, Ottawa's role should now be to convince Washington of the historic opportunity for multilateralism. The world organization is finally earning praise across the globe as a mechanism for mitigating violence rather than being disparaged as a hot-air platform for invectives, posturing, and oneupmanship.

THE KREMLIN HAS BEGUN TO UNDERSTAND the limits of its power. It has learned the hard way about the waning utility of force to settle Third World disputes. The alleged benefits of overseas bases and attendant arms shipments have been exposed as largely illusory. Domestic restructuring requires these resources, and its success is more important for Soviet security than an over-extended Third World empire. Most significantly, the Soviets have realized that competition with the US in the Third World has had negative consequences for the bilateral Soviet-American relationship.

If this logic applies in Moscow, should it not also in Washington? As power becomes more diffuse and difficult to exercise effectively in the Third World, Washington too must understand the potential of international institutions for attacking transnational problems. Even in the face of post-Panama invasion euphoria, it is beneficial to speculate about the UN's potential in a situation like this.

Is it not plausible that the Security Council could act when a suspected drug-dealer cum head-of-state's flagrant violations of human rights, and the use of force to nullify elections, eliminate virtually all diplomatic support in his own region? By the end of the 1990s a UN with more teeth could, for instance, help combat illicit drugs and terrorism, ensure the security of small states and the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and verify arms control and elections. Moreover, consolidation of the peacekeeping regime might spill over into the economic, and environmental arenas.

This opportunity is too important for American and global interests, to be derailed by the dated prejudices of a few US domestic lobbies. The Bush administration should realize that peacekeeping is a relatively inexpensive means of protecting US interests in areas of strategic importance. The US contribution to the Namibian operation is US \$175 million, approximately four percent of the annual operating budget for the 82nd Airborne Division (on the ground, not in action), and one-third of the purchase price of one highly controversial B-2 Stealth bomber. The actual operating costs of multilateralism pale in comparison with the alternatives. Washington needs to be reminded of these facts by a trusted ally like Canada. □