

irresponsibly denounce them and expect their bounty, ignoring as well the enormous contribution the U.S. has made to the establishment of the UN system. The UN cannot act, however, unless it is managed by a consortium of member states in appropriate balance. It needs in particular the ballast of the largest Western power, but the U.S. in the Assembly stands aloof, barely concealing its scorn, apparently getting satisfaction from the number of times its red light flashes alone on the voting machine.

"If the Russians were much more often on the winning side, it was not because it was really their side. They voted to please, joining the majority without worrying much about the text. It must be said of the Americans that they were more scrupulous about approving language they didn't agree with. However, they had instructions, for example, to vote against resolutions with budgetary implications, a well-intentioned policy carried to unreasonable lengths.

"The present U.S. team, although it came in with a new ambassador only recently and has much to learn, struck me as considerably more professional [than the one it succeeded], or at least UN-smart. General Walters, who has replaced Jeane Kirkpatrick, is at least less abrasive than his predecessor, and one might hope that he will recognize that the General Assembly cannot be scorned away. It is a potent force in the international system which, for good or ill, cannot be exorcised.

"Critics like to say that the world of the powerful is the real world. The Assembly, without power, is the unreal world. It depends on how you calculate power and how it can be applied. Granted that the control of nuclear weapons is the most important issue in the world and only the superpowers can do much about it, surely almost all the rest of the world's problems are to be found on the agenda of the Assembly or some other UN body. Few of them could be managed alone by the superpowers, whose power is too ungainly.

"The Assembly, needless to say, is groping with a horrifying agenda with little spectacular success. Success, however, is not necessarily spectacular. Perhaps it can be found in the slow grinding down of conflict and the gradual instinct for consensus. And when a decision is reached everyone feels a responsibility for it.

"Mine is admittedly an upbeat assessment. My observations are frankly intended as a corrective. The dark side of the UN is what we hear of most often. The UN is a long, continuing experiment in international self-discipline. We need to heed the lessons of failure, but it is more important to seek out what works and build on it."