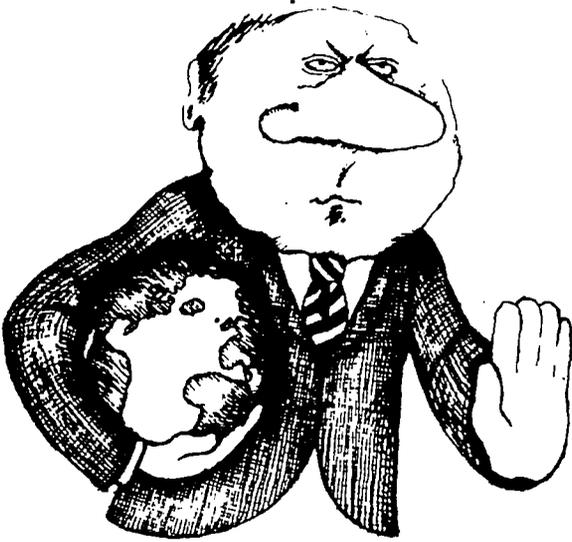


EXCURSUS II

The U.N.: A Dangerous Place



Janice Stapleton

gun. But these initiatives are moving very slowly and are quickly outpaced by events.

McNamara proposed a 5 per cent increase in the lending program of the Bank, but this figure does not even match the amount the Bank's own study says will be needed to rescue the less developed nations from distress. The report categorically states that \$58 billion is required just to maintain Third World growth at the present unspectacular rate. It adds: "Given the difficulties of securing large increases in aid appropriations in the present climate, there appears to be no likelihood of reaching this objective."

This dismal prospect is not the result of a conjunction of natural forces. It is Malthusian only in its gloominess; none of this was in the stars. The crisis was man-made, and its resolution is a political problem. The calculations of the World Bank do not take account of the possible political reactions of the peoples affected by these dire economic turns.

Neither, however, is Lin Piao's Third World theory a guide to comprehension. It fails to account for certain economic realities. Lin neglected to foresee that food reserves would be stored in the cities. The advanced nations control the world food supply and can retaliate against upstart combinations. (Bauxite is indigestible.) The Third World is defined not only by its possession of key commodities, but also by its vulnerability to famine. The peasant nations are linked to the industrial nations in a direct and fateful way.

Sidney Blumenthal

Writer for the Boston Phoenix, currently at work on a book on the American labor movement.

The excitement and general enthusiasm provoked by the opening of negotiations in Geneva between Israel and some of her Arab neighbors contrast dramatically with the general pessimism provoked by the recent General Assembly debate and resolutions concerning the Palestine Liberation Organization. Arab-Israeli relations have, after all, absorbed more of the time and energy of the United Nations than any other conflict. Hundreds of thousands of words have been expended on this issue in the Assembly and Security Council since 1947. Why, then, did the Geneva meeting inspire a sudden upsurge of hope that war could be averted?

The brutal truth is that the Geneva negotiations are a major attempt to break through the obstacles to peace erected in the U.N. It will not be easy. Statesmen must overcome hatreds nurtured by countless insults, one-sided resolutions, condemnations, and hypocritical attachment to "universal" principles. If the peace talks ever resume and then become prolonged and difficult, Arabs especially will be tempted to abandon them again in favor of easy victories at the U.N. The difference between diplomacy at the United Nations and real negotiations is enormous and obvious. It is the difference between war and peace.

The Middle East is not the exception—it is the rule. Wherever the U.N. has been a constant adjunct of foreign policies, the chances for peaceful settlements are diminished, relations among states embittered, and the dangers of war increased. In these situations international peace requires a flight from the U.N. This is true for Pakistan and India after three wars and twenty-five years of "peacemaking" by the United Nations in Kashmir, for the two Koreas after the devastation of the Korean War and a quarter-century of United Nations resolutions favoring South Korea's claims to the entire peninsula, for the United States and China after decades of insults, condemnations, and exclusion of China from the organization, and for Soviet-American relations after more than twenty years of cold war in which the United Nations was a principal instrument for the maintenance of tensions and a crusade atmosphere. It will be true eventually, too, between black Africans and the strongholds of white supremacy in southern Africa. In all of these instances the availability and use of the United Nations have encouraged diplomatic habits which are directly opposed to those necessary

for the negotiation of peaceful solutions to complex problems.

The actual uses of the United Nations have been ignored, distorted, or suppressed by wishful-thinking idealists, a multitude of scholars and associates of the organization with professional and other vested interests, and the general public, which has had little choice but to accept the images projected by "experts" and publicists. Why do states bring issues into the United Nations? They do so in order to: embarrass and humiliate; legitimize war and preparation for war; promote the juridical status of peoples and governments; and to augment national power or reduce that of enemies. It is in relation to these national strategies that the impact of the U.N. on world politics must be analyzed.

There are no *United Nations* successes or failures. It is pure fiction, for example, to describe the Korean War as an application of the principle of collective security and to refer to United Nations inaction in Hungary in 1956 as an abandonment of that ideal. During the 1950's the U.N. served the interests of American foreign policy. By using the U.N. to *legitimize* America's reaction to North Korean aggression President Truman maximized domestic and foreign support for his decisions. Six years later President Eisenhower decided *not* to risk nuclear war when Soviet tanks crushed the Hungarian freedom fighters. To bolster *that* decision the United States opted for the politics of *embarrassment* at the United Nations. *Both* uses of the organization were successful, but they were in the service of different strategies.

For the developing world the politics of status at the United Nations has been a major weapon in the assault on colonialism and racism. In their relentless struggle against Israel the Arabs resort constantly to the United Nations. It should be clear even to apologists for the United Nations that more powerful than the missiles and tanks supplied by the Soviet Union is the availability of Arab-dictated cease-fires. They encourage aggression and adventurism by guaranteeing against defeat on the battlefield, thereby preserving the military, territorial, and psychological bases for the next war. Between wars one-sided resolutions in the United Nations become substitutes for negotiations. Given such U.N. contributions to peace, it is hardly surprising that the meeting of a few fighting men in a desert tent at Kilometer 101 was greeted with deep relief.

Ideals inscribed in the Charter of the United Nations lose their value when they are applied opportunistically by shifting majorities. Israel is solemnly warned that the organization cannot accept the acquirement of territory by force, but the

principle is ignored by those who voted for it. To take only India, which has been perhaps the most consistent non-Arab critic of Israel in the United Nations, application of this rule would require restoration of the independence of Hyderabad, return of Goa to Portugal, and withdrawal from Kashmir. One wonders, too, why the Indians fought the Chinese if not to establish India's version of secure boundaries by use of force. And the rights of blacks in South Africa are not really advanced by an organization which condemns apartheid but remains silent concerning Ibos in Biafra, other blacks in Burundi and Sudan, or Indians in Uganda. Israel is condemned for the nonfatal hijacking of an airplane by the same states which ignored the hanging of Jews in a public square in Iraq and who found that the Israeli Olympians in Munich were guilty of provoking their own murder.

There is more, much more, including the threat to détente among the superpowers posed by small states which provoke the Big Three into assuming conflicting positions in the United Nations, or the destruction of neutral havens by the constant public pressure on states to take sides. The "deal" between black Africans who wanted to silence the South African delegation and the Arabs who wanted to promote the status of the Palestine Liberation Organization illustrates perfectly this last point.

If an analogy is permitted, the United Nations might be compared to a building labeled "Hospital," into which persons with various illnesses enter and from which emerge only corpses and cripples. Because of the name over the entrance and because of the assurance by hospital administrators, doctors, and health experts that the "Hospital" was man's last hope against an all-consuming plague, critics do no more than suggest that the hospital is inefficient and in need of a few reforms. None dare confront the truth. We cannot follow that example. Man's survival in the nuclear age is too tenuous. We must recognize the U.N. for what it is . . . It is a dangerous place.

Abraham Yeselson & Anthony Gaglione
Authors of A Dangerous Place: The United Nations as a Weapon in World Politics (Grossman).

EXCURSUS III

The U.N. as Sandbox

Recent actions by the U.N. General Assembly suggest troubling parallels with certain goings on in U.S. race relations only a few years ago.