

U.N. WATCH

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Diplomacy and Terrorism

The United Nations record on combatting terrorism is as bleak as its record on human rights. One assumes diplomats would be concerned about their own skins at least, what with so many kidnappings and assassinations of envoys. But a certain inertia, and something unspoken, has undermined every effort at effective action.

That unspoken something is the fact that many—most—of the members of the U.N. are represented by governments that came to power and retain control through terrorism. Of the 154 U.N. member nations only slightly more than a score have an elected leadership. For the rest, Chairman Mao's precept says it all: "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun."

Following what has become standard in humanitarian matters, the Nordic countries—Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden—took the lead during the current General Assembly session in proposing a resolution that condemns violence against diplomats. Turkey wanted something stronger, having just lost a consul general and his bodyguard to a gunman in Australia. Assassins are rarely caught, and there is general recognition that police departments do not extend themselves where political murders are concerned.

There was strong pressure to table the resolution, and only after weeks of negotiation came agreement on some mild reporting measures, to wit: All member states are to report to the General Assembly attacks on diplomats, the actions that have been taken to find the assailants, and a description of plans to prevent further attacks.

The reporting measures were not supported by countries that are host to large contingents of foreign personnel, like the United States, France, Austria, and Great Britain, for whom reports of unsolved murders could prove embarrassing. The resolution was about to die when Turkey threatened to demand a roll-call vote. Nobody wanted to go on record in opposition, and the resolution was adopted by consensus.

Global Negotiations

Global Negotiations is the code phrase for the interminable meetings on the restructuring of the world economic order. The ambitious goal is to get the rich, industrialized Northern countries to help the poor Southern tier. Conceived in the General Assembly in 1974 and called either the New Economic Order (NEO) or the New International Economic Order (NIEO), there is also no agreement on an agenda or on how to proceed. Baron von Wechmar of the Federal Republic of Germany, the current General Assembly president, has been meeting privately with representatives of North and South to hammer out a planning document. There seems little hope of success. The so-called wealthy nations are in an economic slump and more worried about energy sources than the plight of the poorer nations.

Urbi or Not to Be

"Cities have always attracted people. They were seats of government, the headquarters of trading and financial houses, the centers of culture....Then, with the beginning of the industrial revolution, cities became the hub of economic activity and of transportation networks, and also the means of livelihood for a growing industrial proletariat. In those days, cities were designed to solve problems....Now many have become problems due to rapid and unplanned growth." So notes R. M. Salas, executive director of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, in his 1980 report reprinted in *Populi*, the Fund's publication. This latest issue is devoted to The City—its glories and horrors.

UNFPA is one of the youngest offshoots of the U.N. "Population activities" covers urban growth and decay, food supply, agricultural developments, birth control, migration, urban sprawl, and city crime. The 1980 report shows movement from the poorer parts of the world to the richer, and from country to city—referring to an Interurban Man (obviously the U.N. has not kept up with the feminist movement). City planner J. B. D'Souza makes two predictions about the cities of the Third World: They will continue to grow in population (by the year 2000, Mexico City's population will be up from 12 million to 32 million, and Djakarta's from 5 to 17 million, for example), and city management will remain inadequate. The report concludes that, unless we learn to manage better, "our prophets of gloom and doom, our poets, professors and planners, who so regularly tell us how rapidly our cities are deteriorating, will have the satisfaction of being right."



Water Music

On a more optimistic note, the Law of the Sea Conference reconvenes in New York in March. This is another U.N. marathon, six years in the running but high in achievement. A draft treaty, into which almost every country in the world put its oar, is ready for consideration. If approved by the sea powers and the landlocked nations, a true Law of the Sea may come into being.

STEPHEN S. FENICHELL

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