

U.N. WATCH

Late to the Battle

The media boys have discovered disarmament and who knows what that can lead to. Four years ago, when the first U.N. Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD I) was held in New York, its warnings about the dangers of nuclear war or accident went unnoticed by the press, public, and politicians.

This time a combination of circumstances had frightened millions throughout the world: An American president spoke of building thousands more bombs in the next few years, underwritten by the largest armaments budget in history; the U.S. secretary of defense announced that more bombs would make us more secure and that we must be prepared to strike first; talk drifted out from official levels about a limited nuclear war in which only 80 to 100 million would die; wars raged in Afghanistan, the Falklands, and the Middle East. The media could not help but take notice.

SSOD II is a hit show, complete with SRO vigils, parades, posters, T-shirts, and petitions. It may have come too late. Retired U.S. Admiral Gene LaRoque, who now runs the Center for Defense Information in Washington and has spent years working for disarmament, told a group of U.N. observers that unless the superpowers radically alter their defense strategies, we should expect a nuclear war within years, by accident or design.

The antiwar march and rally in New York City was a magnificent spectacle. Well organized and peaceable, hundreds of thousands turned out for what was possibly the largest demonstration in this country's history. (At the same time, Soviet and U.S. negotiators in Geneva were meeting for the thirty-second time to discuss nuclear disarmament; the U.S. Special Session was in weekend recess.)

Like the chorus of a Greek tragedy, the "experts" responded. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger remarked that a nation's leaders are obliged to make their own decisions and that such demonstrations do not change government policies. A few days later Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, speaking for President Brezhnev at the U.N. conference, pledged that the Soviet Union would not be the first to use nuclear weapons and repeated an earlier call for general arms reductions. The USSR has long advocated a no-first-use concept, but this was the first time it had made such a public pledge. Put on the defensive, the U.S. State Department immediately reaffirmed its first-strike policy, an option in the event of Soviet invasion of Western Europe. Speaking at the U.N. later that same week, President Reagan offered nothing in the way of conciliation. He bitterly denounced the Soviet Union, calling it a tyrannizing power that controls by force the countries of Eastern Europe and violates international agreements by using chemical weapons in Afghanistan and Laos. He called for disarmament on terms the Russians already had rejected.

A procession of small nations also mounted the rostrum at the U.N. to call upon the superpowers to

reduce conventional arms and renounce nuclear war. Many of these same nations currently are utilizing their limited funds to buy as many planes, tanks, and guns as they can for cash and credit. A few of the more industrialized are trying to develop a nuclear capability of their own.

What can the U.N. do? The organization has the machinery to make peace a reality but none of the power. A Disarmament Commission was established when the Charter was signed, and there is a Committee on Disarmament that is considered a negotiating body. The representatives sent by member nations to discuss arms reductions are either high-ranking military officers or civilian military experts—hardly a group inclined to give up their war toys.

The U.N. also has an International Court of Justice to settle disputes between nations, though most states neglect it. It has the International Atomic Energy Commission to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, though even the Agency's new director admits it has difficulty with inspections and cannot ascertain exactly how atomic fuels are being used.

Unless the "peace movement" can be translated into political action, we will live under the threat of nuclear destruction until that threat becomes a reality.

Foreign Policy Flap

In a characteristically blunt statement, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, U.S. delegate to the U.N., said Americans "behaved like a bunch of amateurs" in foreign affairs. Expanding on the theme at a meeting of the Heritage Foundation, she said the U.S. is powerless at the U.N. because we stumble from issue to issue with no established policy.

This is hardly news, but nobody else in the Reagan Cabinet has had the courage to say it. And the Reagan administration is not the first in recent history to stand so condemned. As Kirkpatrick noted, "ineptitude has persisted through several decades, several administrations."

Consider the present case: In a recent vote on the Falklands matter, Mrs. Kirkpatrick vetoed a Security Council resolution, only to be instructed by Washington to abstain. This failure of communication was later explained by Alexander Haig, then secretary of state: Generals do not speak to company commanders, he said.

Look at the past record:

- Andrew Young's resignation over an unauthorized meeting with representatives of the PLO.

- The misunderstanding that led to Donald McHenry's confusion over a U.N. resolution on Israel.

- The speech U.N. Representative Adlai Stevenson delivered that soon revealed to the world he had not been taken into the government's confidence about the Bay of Pigs invasion.

The U.N. ambassadorship is a special problem—a subsidiary State Department that often has a mind of its own. This does not obscure the truth of the Kirkpatrick statement that the leading country of the world has no coherent foreign policy and, in another of her phrases, acts like the "Mad Hatter."

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