

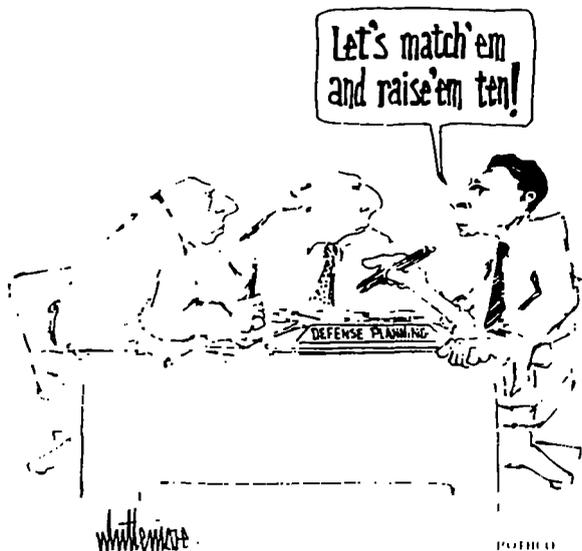
# U.N. WATCH

## Star Wars

Close to the Hofburg Palace in Vienna, recently the site of UNISPACE 82 (Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space), is the magnificent square of the Hofburg, known as the Heldenplatz (Hero's Square). There, two warriors face each other on horseback: Prince Eugen, "the noble knight," famed for turning the Turkish army back at Vienna, and Franz Joseph I, emperor of Austria and king of Hungary, who fought the Italians, the Hungarians, the French, and other assorted armies. He died just before he could enjoy World War I.

It was in the shadow of these towering militants that the nations of the world gathered to discuss the prospects for the "peaceful use of outer space." About a hundred countries sent representatives to the Vienna conference; and observers and critics came from scientific groups, nongovernmental organizations affiliated with the U.N., and agencies such as the World Meteorological and World Health organizations. Among the invited speakers were Arthur C. Clarke, a British physicist and writer who is considered the inventor of satellite communication, and Carl Sagan, the American astronomer active in space exploration and peace movements.

The August meeting was in sharp contrast to the first session in 1968, when the discussion was largely exploratory and conducted in an unfamiliar jargon. Since then extremely perceptive satellites have been placed in orbit for communication, meteorology, navigation, and, not incidentally, military observation. In the exhibit room of the conference hall were demonstrations of applied space technology for "economic, social, and cultural development," including live video transmission from Moscow, medical services by satellite to remote areas, maritime communication, and the dissemination of weather data. In addition to governmental exhibits, there were company displays from Europe, Japan, and the U.S.



The primary purpose of the meeting was to find the means to prevent the militarization of outer space. The agenda covered a variety of aspects, from "Preserving Peace in Space" to biomedical developments, legal and political problems, energy, impact on the Third World, and even philosophical implications.

Speaker after speaker deplored the plans of the superpowers to use outer space in a future war. Both the U.S. and the USSR have refused to renounce such projects, leaving the rest of the world puzzled and uneasy. Most helpless are the small, nonindustrialized nations with neither the funds nor the scientists for outer space development.

In 1967 the U.N. proposed a "treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space." This was an early attempt to ban nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in space. In 1981 the General Assembly asked the Committee on Disarmament to work on a draft treaty. The U.N. report on the Vienna conference, just published, says the paragraphs dealing "directly with militarization of outer space were among the most difficult for the Conference to negotiate. On August 18, the chairmen of the three main committees reported they had been unable to reach a consensus on those paragraphs." A fifteen-member group was asked to draw up a document that could be agreed upon; a statement was approved at a final meeting. The key sentences are:

The extension of an arms race into outer space is a matter of grave concern to the international community.

The maintenance of peace and security in outer space is of great importance for international peace and security.

The Conference strongly recommends that the competent organs of the United Nations, in particular the General Assembly, and also the Committee on Disarmament when dealing with measures aimed at a prevention of an arms race in outer space, in particular those mentioned in the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, give appropriate attention and high priority to the grave concern expressed above.

What does this mean? Was the conference a success?

A positive view is that there are thousands of knowledgeable men and women from ninety-six countries and every continent seriously concerned about the military use of outer space. These are not peace marchers, or antinukes, or science-fiction dreamers. Many are scientists in satellite operations who are alarmed at the military potential. Others are in key government positions and feel a strong statement by an international body can help bring some sanity to the situation. A large percentage at the conference were national and international civil servants who feel their numbers might have some effect on the actions of governments.

In sum, there appeared to be two forces at work in Vienna: one with financial and political power, leaning to the military; the other with little money or power but great goodwill. The heroes in the Heldenplatz would have no difficulty picking the winner.

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