CHAPTER 20

THE UNITED NATIONS

It has been common for political leaders to borrow a phrase from Abraham Lincoln and refer to the United Nations as "the last, best hope of earth." Any discussion of a world order that excludes war must include the United Nations because, for all its imperfections, it does exist and is the only global organization dedicated to peace and security.

THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

The United Nations Charter, signed in 1945, set up a system with seven main parts. Two have passed into obscurity—the Economic and Social Council, intended to promote issues of welfare, and the Trusteeship Council, intended to facilitate the transfer of territories from colonial status to statehood. Two others are thought of more often as independent bodies—the International Court of Justice, and functional agencies such as the World Health Organization. A fifth component, the Secretariat, is concerned primarily with administration, although its head, the Secretary General, often plays an important role in issues of war and peace.

The remaining two components are what we normally think of when we hear references to the "United Nations"—the General Assembly and the Security Council. The General Assembly of all members who meet regularly each September often receives more publicity, but it is the smaller Security

Council that is charged, according to Article 24 of the Charter, with "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security."

To meet its responsibility, the Security Council has been given the most far-reaching authority of any existing international body. Article 39 states that the Security Council "shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measure shall be taken . . . to maintain or restore international peace and security." That is a very comprehensive mandate. There is no need to wait for overt acts of aggression, such as tanks crossing borders; a "threat to peace" is enough. Article 41 authorizes the Security Council to call on members to apply nonviolent sanctions against offenders. Article 42 authorizes the Security Council to call for military operations against offenders. And Article 43 calls on member states to make available to the Security Council military forces for operations.

On paper at least, the UN clearly limits the sovereignty of its members in two ways: It decides when they are to employ armed force, thereby taking away from states their traditional power to decide when to declare war; and it has the power to send troops against a sovereign state for some violation of international peace or threat to peace, even though the state in question might view this as a purely internal matter. The election of an extreme nationalist leader to head of state (another Hitler) might be considered by other states a "threat to peace" and be used to justify international action to nullify such an election. Nothing in the UN Charter rules out such a possibility.

But what is written down on paper does not always turn into practice. Articles 42 and 43 of the Charter became dead letters. They were never employed and no one expected them to be employed. An illustration of what happened to the section as whole is the fate of the Military Staff Committee, which, according to Article 46, was to prepare the UN military forced called for in Article 43. For years the Military Staff Committee did indeed meet quite regularly, every other Thursday, in a basement conference room. Its members were military attachés from the United States, Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and China. They would assemble for a business meeting that lasted five minutes, including time for translation into all four languages. The only item of business was to fix the time of the next meeting, which was always set for Thursday in two weeks. The only time meetings were longer was when one member was being assigned to new duties by his government; on those occasions the others gave speeches praising the contributions of the departing attaché to the work of the committee.[1]

Perhaps at some point life will be breathed back into these articles, but even in the crisis over Iraq's seizure of Kuwait the UN did not officially revive them. The crucial Security Council resolution of November 29, 1990, was worded ambiguously, merely authorizing "member states cooperating with the Government of Kuwait" to "use all necessary means to uphold and

implement" the earlier Security Council resolutions. It referred only to Chapter VII of the Charter, but not to any specific Article (such as 42 or 43) found within that chapter. The Soviet Union demanded that the Military Staff Committee be revived as a price of its support, but it was revived in a very diluted fashion, not convening at the UN headquarters itself but at the missions of the member states and attended by political as well as military advisers. Its handful of meetings were used only to exchange information and not for planning, much less directing, the military operations against Iraq.

Those who saw the UN as a first step toward world government were clearly mistaken. The unity among the victors of World War II did not last long; such unity rarely does. If the UN was to survive, it had to make only minimal demands on its members. The nation-state is still the sovereign unit of international politics. The name taken for the organization, the United Nations, reveals who has the real power in the world. States have joined the UN because they believe it will further their national interests. They may put up with some small inconveniences that membership in it causes, but if UN action seems to harm an important national interest, they will simply withdraw from it. One state has already done so. Indonesia protested the creation of the state of Malaysia in Southeast Asia. Malaysia included not only the former British colonies of Malaya and Singapore but also some territory claimed by Indonesia. In early 1965 President Sukarno of Indonesia took his country out of the UN rather than share membership with a country that he claimed had no right to exist. (President Sukarno was overthrown shortly thereafter and Indonesia then returned to the UN.)

THE UNITED NATIONS AND COLLECTIVE SECURITY

The UN does not even go so far as to outlaw all war. Article 51 states that "nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to maintain international peace and security." The difficulty of determining when an action is self-defense makes the qualification of this article next to useless. In 1971 there was a war between India and Pakistan. Pakistan claimed that it was defending itself against all-out attack from India. India claimed that it was engaged in "protective reaction" against attacks from Pakistan. Because violence between the two countries had escalated gradually, it was difficult for a neutral outsider to determine exactly when aggressive action began.

This article also qualifies the right of self-defense by limiting it to the period before the Security Council can act. But the Security Council often does not act, indeed cannot act, and for this reason the UN cannot be called a

collective security organization. The essence of collective security is "all for one." If one state is attacked, all the others must come to the victim's aid. It is especially important that the major states participate in collective security; their absence was a major reason for the failure of the League of Nations. Yet the United Nations Charter provides an explicit escape clause for major states. This is the "unanimity rule," more commonly called "the veto." The Security Council was set up with eleven members. Five of them were permanent members, and these five were actual or potential great powers—United States, USSR, Britain, France, and China. (It was not such a bad selection. These were the first five countries to acquire nuclear weapons.) The other six members of the Security Council were elected for two-year terms. Action by the Security Council on matters affecting peace and security (including the employment of military force) required a vote of seven out of eleven, but that seven had to include "the concurring votes of the permanent members." In other words, unanimity by the five major powers was required; any one of them, by refusing to give its concurrence, could in effect veto any proposal. (The membership of the Security Council was enlarged in 1965 to include ten nonpermanent members. Now nine votes are required for action, but the unanimity rule still holds.)

This was not an oversight. It was a deliberate plan to keep the organization from destroying itself on the opposition of the major states. There is little point in trying to mount collective action against a state that is a threat to peace if the major states are not giving that action their support. The League of Nations discovered this in Manchuria, the Chaco, and Ethiopia. There is also no point in trying to mount collective action against a major state. Even before the power of nuclear weapons was evident, states were aware that such an attempt could end only in a major war. The unanimity principle acts as a fuse for the UN machinery—when too great a load is placed on the machine, the fuse blows out and keeps the overload from destroying the machine. Like the League of Nations before it, the UN has failed to solve some major international conflicts; unlike the League, the UN was not itself destroyed by this failure.

THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE KOREAN WAR

For a brief time in 1950, it looked as though the UN might transform itself into a collective security organization after all, regardless of the wishes of its founders or even of all its members. The occasion was the North Korean attack on South Korea. The United States had said that it did not consider South Korea within its defensive perimeter and that seemed to mean that the United States would not resist a North Korean attack, inside the UN or out. But then US leaders acted contrary to their own publicly stated policy and decided to use military force against North Korea. Following the decision to

deploy American forces, the United States went to the UN for an endorsement of this action. At this time the Russians were boycotting meetings of the Security Council to protest against its failure to allow the newly victorious Chinese Communists to take the Chinese seat, so the Russians were not present to veto the US move in Korea. (By this time, the unanimity rule had come to be interpreted to mean "no negative vote by a permanent member of the Security Council." In other words, action could be taken if a permanent member was absent or abstained.)

The Russians quickly abandoned their boycott and returned to their place on the Security Council. They could not retract UN support already given, but they could prevent any further Security Council action. In September 1950 a successful American landing at Inchon turned the war around. For the first time the Americans saw the possibility not just of driving the North Koreans back across the 38th parallel but of actually defeating them altogether so that Korea could be reunited under South Korean leadership. Russian presence in the Security Council guaranteed that such a change in goal for the UN forces in Korea would be vetoed, and the United States devised what it called the "Uniting for Peace" resolution. This was passed by the General Assembly on November 3, 1950. It stated that if the Security Council failed to act because of the great power veto, the item could then be transferred to the General Assembly. The General Assembly could not *require* action (as the Security Council could, under the Charter), but by a two-thirds majority it could ***recommend*** collective action. (Participation in the Korean effort was voluntary in any case, even though the Security Council had approved it—only sixteen countries of the membership of sixty were contributing to the UN force.) The Uniting for Peace resolution reveals its American parentage by its obvious parallels to the American constitutional system for overriding presidential vetoes. Unfortunately other parts of the UN system are not at all analogous to the American system. If the unanimity rule was the fuse to protect the UN, then the Uniting for Peace resolution was the penny in the fuse box. It kept the organization functioning despite the opposition of one of its most powerful members and increased the risk of total breakdown.

The Korean action was for many years the closest the UN came to acting like a collective security organization. In succeeding years it began backing away for several reasons. One was the acquisition of a nuclear arsenal by the Soviet Union—not just a single atomic "device," such as had been tested as early as 1949, but quantities of usable weapons of the thermonuclear type. If collective security seemed risky in 1945, it had become foolhardy by 1955. Another reason was a shift in the composition of the UN. In 1950 the UN consisted of so many dependable allies of the United States that critics could justifiably speak of an "automatic majority" for US policies. Getting an item transferred to the General Assembly, as the "Uniting for Peace" procedure

called for, was a guarantee that the US position would prevail. But in 1955 the UN began to grow. Of sixteen countries admitted that year, six were allies of neither the United States nor the Soviet Union. This shift continued, as Table 20.1 shows. This table does not try to summarize actual voting behavior. In fact, some countries formally allied with the United States often voted against the United States. But the table makes clear the trend. The UN expanded in size, and most of the members were not allied with either of the superpowers. Many called themselves nonaligned and formed their own bloc. Cold War issues and even fundamental questions of war and peace were often of less importance to the nonaligned states than colonialism and the distribution of the world's resources. Furthermore, the willingness of the Soviet Union and its allies to support the nonaligned states on many of these issues meant that, if anything, the General Assembly was more likely to produce a two-thirds majority opposed to the interests of the United States.

The Cold War thus paralyzed the two major organs of the UN. The Security Council was paralyzed by the veto power of the permanent members. There was almost no issue of war and peace that did not involve either one of the superpowers or one or more of its allies. The General Assembly had turned into an auction, in which the Soviet Union generally was more successful than the United States in bidding for the votes of the nonaligned bloc.

THE UNITED NATIONS AND PREVENTION OF WAR

If you accept the argument that the UN was never intended to be a collective security organization, you are less likely to be disappointed by its failures to maintain international peace and security. It has not prevented wars because it is not capable of doing so without going beyond the guidelines that its members have agreed to. Attempts to use it to prevent war would mean not success but massive defections.

Table 20.1 UN MEMBERSHIP

Year	*Total UN Membership*	*US and Allies*	*Communist Bloc*	*Others*
1945	51	34	5	12
1950	60	37	5	18
1955	76	39	9	28
1960	100	40	9	51
1965	118	41	11	66
1970	132	42	11	79
1975	141	42	13	86
1980	152	35	12	105

The inability of the UN to prevent war was evident in 1967 in the Middle East. It seemed to be the ideal place for the organization to be effective. Two previous wars in the area, in 1948 to 1949 and in 1956, had been ended by UN cease-fires; a UN Truce Supervisory Organization was still in operation from the 1948 to 1949 war; a UN Emergency Force (UNEF) of several thousand men was patrolling an area that Israel had evacuated after the 1956 war. United Nations attention was focussed on the Middle East when the crisis began in May 1967. The Security Council considered the issue; the Secretary General urged caution. Then the Egyptians ordered the expulsion of the UNEF. It left in a matter of hours, and Egypt moved troops into the Sinai area it vacated. President Nasser stated privately that his intention was to provoke Israel into an attack, in order to put the blame for starting the war on Israel.[2] Israel did what Nasser wanted, although with greater success than he had predicted.

The UN in general, and the Secretary General (as the one responsible for the UNEF) in particular, have been criticized for this rapid withdrawal. Yet the UN had no alternative. The UNEF was stationed on only the Egyptian side of the armistice line; Israel had refused to allow the UNEF on its soil. The conditions under which such UN forces were dispatched clearly included the provision that they would not violate the host state's sovereignty, that they were present only with the host state's permission, and that they could be removed at any time. In any case, Egypt had already arranged through diplomacy with India and Yugoslavia for withdrawing their contingents of UNEF and, with their departure, the smaller remaining contingents had no wish to remain. An international force could have prevented the war in 1967, but one operating under the conditions imposed by UN members on the UNEF could not.

The war in 1971 between India and Pakistan also illustrates the fundamental inability of the UN to prevent war. The crisis between the two countries began building up in February 1971, long before full-scale war broke out in December. Yet no country would even put the matter on the agenda of the Security Council. Perhaps this refusal came from recognition of how futile such a move would be—with one permanent member (the USSR) backing India and another permanent member (China) backing Pakistan, any proposal not acceptable to both would have been vetoed. Faced with this potential Council deadlock, Secretary General U Thant tried quiet diplomacy, but three months of secret negotiations were fruitless. Even the Secretary General's suggestion for a modest force of a hundred civilian observers on the border was not accepted.[3] Pakistan for its part claimed that there was no threat to peace, because events inside East Pakistan were a purely internal matter. India was already giving military aid to the rebels and planning large-scale military action and wanted no UN interference.

In some ways a greater tragedy was the failure of the UN to do anything about the civil war in Nigeria. In 1967 one tribal group, the Ibos, attempted to set up their own state in the southeastern third of the country, which they named Biafra. From then until early 1969 they fought a war with the central Nigerian government that caused about 2 million deaths. Compared with the Vietnam War, which drew much more attention, this was a vastly more destructive conflict. Yet no effort was made in the UN to stop it. Unlike the Vietnam War, the Middle East conflict, or even the India–Pakistan dispute, this was in no way a Cold War issue. The major powers had no stakes in the conflict. Yet the UN was unable to act. Too many members feared secessionist movements in their own countries. Any move that would have given legitimacy to the secessionist movement of Biafra, even engaging in negotiations with them, might have encouraged movement elsewhere. When a large number of the UN's members are reluctant to act, the UN can do nothing.

The inability of the UN to prevent war is built into its very structure. Thus we should not be surprised to see the pattern of inaction established in past decades repeated again and again. In the 1970s the regimes of Pol Pot in Cambodia and Idi Amin in Uganda murdered large numbers of their own citizens (perhaps one-quarter of the population in Cambodia). These murderous regimes were eventually removed by wars waged by neighboring states, yet in these wars, as in the case of the India–Pakistan War and the Nigerian civil war, the UN did not act. China on its own launched a retaliatory attack on Vietnam in early 1979 in response to the Vietnamese attack against its client state Cambodia. The UN Security Council did no more than debate the attack for two weeks; in the end no resolution was even brought to a vote. After Iraq attacked Iran in 1980, the Security Council did go a step further, passing resolutions requesting the withdrawal of foreign troops, but never mentioning Iraq by name. Not until 1987 did a Security Council resolution mandate a cease-fire in the Gulf War, a mandate that was ignored for almost a year.

The failure of the UN to act on obvious questions of international peace has been accompanied by an all-too-great willingness to act on other issues. Action is the wrong word, because what the UN does is pass resolutions that have no chance of being implemented. These are usually directed against one or more of the major powers. They may be supported by large majorities in the General Assembly, but all these votes may represent very little in the way of total and economic strength. As critics of the UN like to point out, one could put together in the General Assembly a two-thirds majority of states whose contribution to the UN budget is only 2.75 percent of the total budget. Because dues are assessed according to a country's ability to pay, budget contribution is a fair if rough estimate of a state's power. Another way of illustrating the same point is to consider that a two-thirds majority can

consist of states whose combined total population is only 10 percent that of the world's; again, such a vote is hardly a reflection of actual power.

Many of these resolutions, far from aiming at the pacific settlement of disputes, are meant to increase tension. The countries sponsoring the resolutions are using the UN as a tool of their foreign policy; they want to bring pressure on their enemies and force a capitulation instead of seeking a compromise solution. It is generally agreed that the United States was not wise to attempt to use the UN in this way in the first decade of the organization's existence (keeping China out of the UN while condemning it for aggression in Korea), and it does not seem wise for others to do so today.

An example of a resolution used for combat rather than conciliation was the 1975 General Assembly resolution declaring "Zionism is a form of racism." The resolution was directed at Israel, which considered Zionism no more than its version of national liberation. To Israelis, the desire for Jews to live together in a country that observes Jewish holidays and bases its legal code on Jewish religious precepts is no more racist than Saudi Arabian laws prohibiting Christmas trees or Swiss restrictions on Greek and Turkish immigrants. The purpose of the Arab sponsors of the resolution was not of course to settle a philosophic question but to further the process of isolating Israel in the world and to embarrass Egypt, which had been moving toward independent peace initiatives. Thus, far from promoting peaceful settlement of a dispute, the resolution was intended to thwart it.[4] (The resolution was revoked in December 1991, at the insistence of the United States, but even the revocation did little to promote peace. The United States was able to win votes because of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the disunity of the Arab world following the war with Iraq over Kuwait, and the weakened influence of oil-rich states in a world where oil was no longer scarce. But neither the United States nor the United Nations were then able to take advantage of changed conditions in the world to prevail on Israel to make serious moves toward a settlement with the Palestinians.)

The judgment that the United Nations has served more often to heighten tension than to abate it is reinforced by the observation that states with fundamentally friendly relations do not turn to the UN for help in settling disputes. The United States settled disputes with Mexico on water from the Colorado River and with Canada on fishing rights entirely outside the UN system. Even with Cuba, the United States was able to negotiate an agreement on extraditing airplane hijackers outside the UN. Only when states do not seriously expect agreement do they turn to the UN—as illustrated by Cuban resolutions asking for an end to "colonialism" in Puerto Rico.[5]

United Nations resolutions reflect not a world community but the sum of selfish interests of the states that can put together a majority. These states may claim to be acting on principle, but when their interests change, the principle they claim to espouse changes. In October 1973, when Egypt

attacked Israel, the Arab oil-producing states imposed an embargo of oil products on states that did not support the Arab side. Yet three years earlier, the UN had passed a resolution proposed by Third World countries declaring that "no state may use or encourage the use of economic, political or any other type of measures to coerce another state in order to obtain from it the subordination of the exercise of its sovereign rights and to secure from it advantages of any kind."[6] States threatened with the loss of oil were reluctant to point out the inconsistency between the oil embargo and this resolution, but the Russians and Chinese went so far as to praise the Arab states for using oil as a political weapon.

Recently states have seized on the weapon of expulsion from the UN as a way to punish their enemies. Targets of campaigns for expulsion have been Taiwan, Cambodia, South Africa, and Israel. Although no state has been formally expelled, the same effect has been achieved by the refusal to recognize the credentials of a state's delegates. This device was used in 1981 to exclude South Africa from a special session of the General Assembly on Namibia, a former German colony under South African control and whose future South Africa considered a matter of vital national interest. However much emotional satisfaction a state may derive from seeing an enemy banished by a majority of the General Assembly, it is hard to see how this behavior increases the possibilities for world peace. Expulsion both reduces the likelihood that the expelled state will comply with UN requests and cuts down on the communication that is the prime purpose of diplomacy.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS TO PEACE

It is clear that the UN, as it is now constituted and as it now functions, is not a world government. It is not even a collective security organization. In some cases it is more likely to increase than decrease international conflicts. But this is not to say that it is totally without value. The UN's contributions to peace are similar to those of third parties in disputes. Its advantages are that it is permanently available and, in some cases, more dependably neutral than other third parties.

One thing a third party can do is provide good offices, and the UN has done this. The Secretary General, officially the head of the Secretariat and in practice spokesman for the entire organization, has frequently been called on to provide good offices. A notable success for Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld came when eleven American fliers, held in Chinese prisons after coming down on Chinese territory during the Korean War, were released by the Chinese. The United States, having no diplomatic relations with China, asked the Secretary General to use his good offices to secure their release. Hammarskjöld was an exceedingly discreet diplomat and never took credit

for the release of the fliers, but their release followed a trip of his to Peking and it took place on the occasion of his birthday.[7]

Another contribution the UN makes to peaceful relations between states is providing a neutral place where diplomats can meet. A survey in 1960 of randomly selected delegates revealed that 86 percent believed they had more contact with other diplomats at the UN than at a post in a national capital. Moreover, 91 percent said that they had more contact with delegates from unfriendly countries. Some reported that they had been instructed to stay away from the foreign ministry when posted to an unfriendly country. A visit by the Ethiopian ambassador to the Foreign Ministry of Somalia (when those two countries were quarreling over the boundary between them) might have given rise to speculation about secret deals or concessions by one country or the other. The UN headquarters in New York provides greater anonymity. If tentative contact toward an unfriendly country is fruitless, it can always be denied.[8]

The UN can also be used as a fact-finding body, although not much use has been made of this potential. The immediate cause of the Middle East war of 1967 was a report Egypt received that Israel was mobilizing troops against Syria. Israel denied this and invited the Russian ambassador to inspect the area himself. He declined but the UN Truce Supervisory Organization reported that the charges were unfounded. Unfortunately events were out of control by that time and the finding came too late to prevent the war.[9]

Another area in which the UN has been employed without complete success is truce supervision and observation. A UN Truce Supervisory Organization has kept a record of violations in the Middle East since the 1949 armistices but that has not prevented additional wars. In 1958 the UN was called into Lebanon during a civil war. The Lebanese Christians charged that the Lebanese Muslims were getting arms from across the border in Syria (which at that time was joined to Egypt in the United Arab Republic). Anthony Nutting, a pro-Arab British diplomat who was friendly with President Nasser, revealed in his biography of Nasser that weapons were indeed being smuggled and the UN teams were unable to discover them. He wrote:

> A team of United Nations observers, led by representatives of India, Norway and Ecuador, was sent to Lebanon to investigate these complaints. But since they were unable to operate at night when the main traffic in arms from Syria took place, the observers reported to Hammarskjöld that they had found no evidence of any large-scale gun-running.[10]

The UN has also supplied mediators, again not always with success. In the Arab–Israeli conflict, the UN has appointed a number of mediators, with mixed results. Count Folke Bernadotte was appointed at the time the first war broke out in 1948. He was assassinated by Jewish extremists in September but even in the period before that his efforts were of no avail. The Israelis noticed that his peace proposals always reflected the actual military situation

and so broke several cease-fires to improve their military situation before returning to bargain with him.[11] United Nations efforts also failed after the 1967 war. Gunnar Jarring, Swedish ambassador to the Soviet Union, was appointed mediator in the same Security Council resolution that was to lay a basis for settlement. Despite praise from all sides for the professional competence with which he handled his job, he had no success.

Secretary General Hammarskjöld had some limited success in working out arrangements between Israel and Egypt to de-escalate violence along the border in 1956. But the greatest success for a UN mediator was the series of armistice agreements ending the 1948–1949 war, mediated by a deputy to the secretary general, Ralph Bunche. Under what became known as the "Rhodes formula," Bunche met with Arab and Israeli delegations in a hotel on the Greek island of Rhodes. Because the Arabs did not recognize Israel, Bunche had to carry messages from one floor of the hotel to another. His efforts resulted in signed agreements that are the closest to recognized international frontiers that Israel has come.

We have compiled quite a list of contributions the UN can make to world peace. But notice something about every item on this list. Each contribution could be (and often is) made equally effectively by some other agency. Take "good offices." They can be provided by any neutral party. In the chapter on third parties we used as an example the 1968 hijacking of an Israeli airliner to Algeria. First Israel and then Algeria requested the UN Secretary General to use his good offices to secure the release of the plane, passengers, and crew. Although the hostages were eventually let go, the release was arranged through the good offices not of the UN but of Italy, in whose airspace the Palestinian guerrilla group had initially hijacked the plane. In 1985, in a well-publicized hijacking of a TWA airliner, the passengers of which eventually were held hostage in Beirut by Shiite Muslims, the UN Secretary General had to ask if he could be of help. But both sides virtually ignored him and it was the International Committee of the Red Cross that played the major role in arranging a settlement.[12]

The UN may provide a better meeting place for diplomats than national capitals, on the whole, but before the UN existed the capital of a major power (Paris or London or Washington) provided neutral meeting places for diplomats; even with the UN in New York City these other cities still function as "diplomatic capitals," where ambassadors from quarreling countries can meet unobtrusively to sound each other out. Fact finding and truce observation can also be performed by other groups, as in one of the minor diplomatic exchanges during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. The United States asked that the UN verify that Soviet missiles had indeed been removed from Cuba; the Russians suggested representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross instead. (In the end, no group verified the removal of missiles.)[13] Finally, mediators have as often come from outside the UN as within. United

Nations officials Ralph Bunche and Dag Hammarskjöld had successes in the Middle East but so did US officials Cyrus Vance and Henry Kissinger.

In one way the UN is unique, and that is as a world forum for speech-making. If the UN were to disappear, such activity would diminish. It is not clear that speeches always further the cause of peace. You could make a good case that often they do the opposite. One may doubt that the Israelis were made more willing to make concessions to Arabs after repeatedly hearing themselves compared to Nazis. Those who argue that virulent rhetoric is a substitute for war would have to argue that the Czechs should have been reassured by Hitler's rhetorical attacks on them in 1938—shortly before he took over their country.[14]

Still, there have been occasions when the purely rhetorical function of the UN may have made a contribution to peace. In 1956 the Hungarians rose in revolt against Russian control of their country. The Russians, judging a pro-Russian government in Hungary to be of vital interest, sent large numbers of troops into Hungary to put down the revolt. The Republicans, who then controlled the executive branch in the United States, had for years been talking about liberating Eastern Europe. The Hungarian revolt provided an excuse. But by this time the Republicans wished to avoid an armed confrontation with the Russians, especially with President Eisenhower seeking reelection that year on the theme of peace and prosperity. Instead of sending troops to Hungary, the United States sent debaters to the UN, where they roundly condemned the Russians. The Russians ignored the UN but great publicity was given to its debates in the United States, conveying the impression to the American people that their government was doing something to aid the cause of the Hungarians.

The UN provided the same service for the Russians in 1967. Israel attacked Egypt and destroyed most of its aircraft, which had been supplied by the USSR; it overran the Egyptian armies, which had been equipped and trained by the Russians. Thus Russian prestige was called into question by the war. But instead of committing troops to aid the Egyptians, they chose to go to the UN and attack the Israelis verbally. As a world forum, the UN provides a way of meeting obligations to give support without going to war.

A REVIVAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS

As the UN approached the end of its fourth decade, its influence was at an all-time low. The recently named Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar referred in his first annual report in 1982 to "the erosion of the authority and status" of the organization and warned, "We are perilously near to a new international anarchy."[15] In the long list of violent conflicts between states during that preceding year—the Falkland Islands, Lebanon, Iraq and Iran, Afghanistan, Southeast Asia, Africa, and Central America—

the Secretary General admitted his organization had played no significant role at all.

In 1985 the UN celebrated its fortieth anniversary. That year the General Assembly passed 259 resolutions during its annual session, but time ran out before it could consider such issues as the war between Iran and Iraq or conflict in Central America. The only action taken by the UN on the most serious conflicts facing the world during its anniversary year was to put them on the agenda for the coming year.[16]

Then several events contributed to a change in UN fortunes. In the same year the UN celebrated its fortieth anniversary, Mikhail Gorbachev became party leader in the Soviet Union. The next year the Soviet Union signaled a renewed interest in the UN by agreeing to start paying its share of a special UN operation it had previously opposed. This signal was followed by a major announcement in September 1987 of an entirely new orientation. In an extended article, run in both *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, Gorbachev argued for strengthening the UN in a host of ways: to give it expanded authority to regulate military conflicts, economic relations, and the environment; to verify compliance with arms control and peace treaties; even to set up a tribunal to investigate acts of international terrorism.[17] Nor were these mere hollow words. The declaratory policy was soon followed by concrete acts. The next month the Soviet Union announced it would pay all outstanding debts, including $197 million for peace-keeping operations.[18] Several months later, in a move all the more significant because it was made without fanfare, the Soviet Union changed its policy toward Soviet citizens assigned to the UN headquarters staff, meeting a long-standing US demand by allowing them to serve longer terms and, by implication, making them less subject to Soviet control.[19]

This shift in Soviet interest toward the UN coincided with the stalemate in the Iraq–Iran war. The usefulness of a neutral third party is clearly illustrated by its role in this war. When large numbers of Iraqi troops crossed the border into Iran in 1980, the UN could not bring itself to even name Iraq as an aggressor. Although fighting raged for years, UN efforts to stop it were feeble. The spiritual leader of Iran, Ruhollah Khomeini, defiantly proclaimed, "Even if the Security Council orders, we will not make peace." Until 1987 Khomeini's boast was not even challenged. Only in that year did the UN Security Council pass a resolution that explicitly ordered a cease-fire. Iraq, for whom the war was going badly, agreed immediately. But not until a year later did Iran agree as well.

Only the most naïve would claim that the UN resolution, devoid of any enforcement action, had produced the cease-fire. Iran agreed to it because by 1988 it was too exhausted to continue fighting. The role of the UN lay elsewhere. When the two sides were ready to make peace, they had a third party to turn to. Not only did the Security Council resolution provide a basis

for a settlement, the UN could also provide machinery to help implement it. Shortly after the acceptance of the resolution by both sides, the Secretary General dispatched a team of military observers to monitor the armistice.

In the same year the UN provided help to the Soviet Union in withdrawing from Afghanistan. Although the UN had begun mediation efforts in 1981, a little over a year after the Soviet invasion, only after seven years of talks did the parties to the conflict sign an agreement. The *fact* of the agreement resulted not from mediation but from high-technology anti-aircraft missiles supplied by the United States to the anti-Soviet guerrillas.[20] But the *shape* of the agreement resulted from the mediation of the UN under Secretary General Diego Cordovez. The Soviets could argue that they had negotiated a settlement and hence achieved their objectives in Afghanistan. Pakistan and the United States for their part promised to wind down assistance to the rebels. A UN force of fifty observers was put into place to monitor compliance. In fact the agreement was mostly cosmetic. The Soviets were prepared to evacuate Afghanistan no matter what happened, and the UN observers contributed almost nothing.

The UN had not by itself brought these conflicts to an end. Only when the parties themselves decided they were ready to end the conflict was the UN able to provide its services to facilitate agreement. But having participated in the settlements in Afghanistan and the Iraq–Iran War, the UN was emboldened to try new initiatives in old conflicts it had previously ignored. The Secretary General turned to the thirteen-year-old conflict between Morocco and the Polisario guerrillas over the former Spanish Sahara. In August 1988 he proposed a cease-fire, to be patrolled by a UN peace-keeping force, followed by a UN-supervised referendum to see if inhabitants would prefer to live under Polisario or Morocco. Within two weeks, the Moroccan Foreign Minister and a senior Polisario official told him they were ready to accept the peace plan.[21] Again, the war ended not because the UN ordered it to, but because both sides were exhausted by the stalemate. Still, they had not taken a step toward peace until the Secretary General pushed them, and once they agreed, the UN could provide machinery to implement the solution.

A RETURN TO COLLECTIVE SECURITY?

Conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran, and Morocco were already moving toward resolution with the help of the UN when, on August 2, 1990, Iraqi forces seized the small neighboring country of Kuwait. The UN Security Council met and condemned the move, as it had condemned similar aggression many times in the past. One observer noted that Saddam Hussein obviously expected such condemnation and obviously discounted it in advance.[22]

But then, contrary to past experience, the UN did not content itself with resolutions. The condemnation was followed by a resolution calling for a mandatory boycott of all sales from Iraq and an embargo on all sales to Iraq. Although the UN had asked for economic sanctions on a few occasions in the past (against Rhodesia and South Africa), on August 25 it took the unprecedented step of endorsing the use of naval power to enforce the sanctions. Finally, on November 29, 1990, the UN Security Council endorsed the use of military force to reverse the results of the August invasion.

The UN resolution of November 29 was worded in an ambiguous fashion, merely permitting states to come to the aid of Kuwait but not requiring them to do so. Without the lead of the United States in organizing and leading a military coalition, it is unlikely that military force would have been used.

Some people drew a parallel with the action in Korea in 1950. As had been the case in Korea, the UN was following the lead of the United States. Actual UN involvement in the war with Iraq was minimal, even less than in the war in Korea. The UN resolutions were valuable mainly for getting the US Congress to lend its support. Once the fighting started, the UN did little. The UN did not even go as far as it had in Korea, where the American commander General Douglas MacArthur had also been designated the head of UN forces. In the Persian Gulf, General Norman Schwarzkopf was never anything but commander of the coalition forces, with no official UN role and not even the pretense of reporting to the UN. President Bush tried to argue that he did not need Congressional authorization because he was acting under a UN resolution, but not even the use of the UN flag was authorized.

As time passed and Iraq continued to occupy Kuwait, support in the Security Council waned. Even the initial vote, merely calling for withdrawal, did not have unanimous approval—the Arab state of Yemen hesitated to antagonize another Arab state. When mandatory sanctions and then enforcement for the embargo were called for, both Yemen and Cuba were opposed. On the crucial vote permitting use of force, Yemen and Cuba continued to oppose and China abstained. India, a major force in the Third World, announced it would cancel refuelling rights for American military transports flying from the Pacific into the Gulf.

Even that minimal UN action was possible only because of the highly unusual circumstances surrounding events. Like Korea in 1950, it was a clear-cut case of aggression—masses of troops in uniform crossing a clearly demarcated frontier. In the case of Kuwait, the victim was a full-fledged UN member. Saddam Hussein for his part refused all effort to make a reasonable compromise or to submit to arbitration. Only such clearly delineated aggression galvanizes the UN into action. Leaders such as Saddam Hussein are unusual and after the example of the Persian Gulf War are less likely to imitate his tactics.

After hostilities ceased, the UN did almost nothing about Hussein's mistreatment of his own people. The Kurds, guaranteed rights as a minority in Iraq in 1925 by the League of Nations and hence, by extension, by its successor, the United Nations, rose up to claim those rights against the weakened regime of Saddam Hussein. By early April, military action by the Iraqi armed forces who had survived the war turned many Kurds into refugees—110,000 into Iran, 100,000 into Turkey, and 600,000 along the border. The UN did little to help them. Reverting to its old practices, it merely passed one of the hollow resolutions, similar to ones it had passed so often in the past. Cuba, Yemen, and Zimbabwe were opposed, with China and India abstaining. The resolution did not call even call for trade sanctions, although in fact sanctions were still in effect under the earlier resolutions. The situation demonstrated the impotence of economic sanctions alone. They did nothing to prevent Iraq from continuing to persecute its Kurdish minority.[23]

Fear of violating the principle of sovereignty kept most states from supporting the idea of a protected zone for Kurds. As so often in the past, the UN was paralyzed by sovereignty issue. Many member states had discontented ethnic minorities of their own and did not want to establish a precedent of international intervention to resolve minority grievances. As one representative said, who among us is without sin? Action was taken by the United States and Britain without even the minimal UN backing that the Kuwait liberation had. Only after US and British forces had provided protection from the Turkish side of the border did the UN send unarmed observers to help with the distribution of aid to the refugees.

UNITED NATIONS PEACE-KEEPING FORCES

During the years when the Security Council did little because of the Cold War, there was one area in which the UN did make a visible contribution to peace—by providing "peace-keeping forces" to areas of conflict. These forces had their beginnings in the truce supervisory organizations of the UN's first years. In 1961 Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld called the dispatch of such forces "preventive diplomacy." *Peace-keeping*, it should be emphasized, is a specialized term with a precise meaning. It is not equivalent to "collective security" or "enforcement action" or "settling disputes." It means only the use of UN troops physically to separate two sides after an armed conflict.

At first glance, the dispatch of UN troops to a crisis area may seem to be collective security. The similarity seems to have confused George McGovern, who said during his 1972 campaign for the presidency, "We need to strengthen the peacekeeping forces until they truly can keep the peace whenever war threatens and whenever conflict begins."[24] But peace-keeping operations, as now conducted by the UN, are in important ways the opposite of traditional collective security. Collective security emphasizes drawing in all states against