

THE NEW WORLD ORDER AND THE UNITED NATIONS

Address by the Senator Gareth Evans, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, to UNAA Seminar, Lakeside Hotel, Canberra, 13 May 1991.

President Bush may not have been the first statesman to use the expression "new world order" to describe the kind of international environment we might hope would emerge in the aftermath of the Cold War. That honour seems to belong to General Secretary Gorbachev in his 1988 United Nations General Assembly address, when he referred to "a quest for universal consensus in the movement towards a new world order". But it was President Bush's speech to Congress on 11 September 1990 which gave the idea most of its current momentum. He spoke then of "a new world ... struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we have known, a world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle, a world in which nations recognise the shared responsibility for freedom and justice, a world where the strong respect the rights of the weak". Subsequent speeches by the President and other US spokesmen have talked of the new world order as involving, variously, the promotion of democratic practices; the consolidation of free market economics; collective resistance to aggression; and the upholding of "universal values".

If these themes are to be the touchstones of the new world order, one can't help but feel that its time has not quite yet come. The new world order will seem a long way away if you are an Iraqi Kurd, a cyclone-ravaged Bangladeshi, a starving Ethiopian, a Serb or Croat living in fear of civil war, or a Palestinian waiting for the post-Gulf peace talks to bear fruit. Same old victims, same old victors. Just as historians have delighted in pointing out that the Holy Roman Empire of the Middle Ages was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire, so too have there been many heard to claim that the new world order is not very new, nor very orderly, and not especially global.

But all that said, it would be wrong to assert that nothing at all has changed in world affairs since the heady days of 1989-90. First, the Cold War has come to an end, and with it - it is reasonable to hope - the debilitating reliance on a balance of fear to ensure global security. East-West strategic competition is no longer the overriding constant of international relations, and cooperation is replacing

confrontation as the leitmotif. For all the stops and starts associated with domestic developments in the Soviet Union, significant new arms control and disarmament measures are coming to fruition, with each building upon the last. And the vicious circle of the nuclear arms race is breaking: for the first time in the nuclear age we have the prospect of replacing a vicious circle with a virtuous circle, where confidence builds on itself, cooperation extends and security is strengthened.

Secondly, we have had with the Gulf War a resounding reaffirmation and demonstration of the effectiveness of the principles of collective security. For the first time since the Korean War (and this time, unlike then, with the cooperation of every major power) the principles which the United Nations founders, including Dr Evatt, strove so hard to incorporate in the UN Charter in 1945, have been made to work.

And thirdly, we have had an emerging pattern of cooperation by the major powers in the resolution of regional conflict - not just in the context of Kuwait, but elsewhere: in Cambodia, in Namibia, in Afghanistan and in the resolution of the original Iran-Iraq conflict.

There is a constant theme underlying most of these developments which I believe is the essential defining characteristic of the new world order: it is, simply, cooperation by the major powers in the containment and resolution of conflict, under the umbrella of the United Nations and using its institutional processes.

That characterisation, I acknowledge, doesn't have quite the rhetorical ring about it of some other descriptions of the new world order: it does not cram in nearly so many hopes and dreams and aspirations; it does not look at the new world order in terms of human rights and social and economic justice; it focuses only on the question of security. But in a world hungry not only for social and economic justice, but for a secure environment in which to pursue it, it's not a bad place to start.

The question which has to be addressed is whether the new momentum is sustainable. Will the emerging pattern of "Permanent Five" cooperation continue? Was the successful handling of the Gulf crisis simply a product of its own particular circumstances - the particular villainy and obduracy of Saddam Hussein, the threat to world oil prices, accidents of timing - or does it genuinely presage a new era of internationalist solutions to security problems? Can the

surge of enthusiasm for the new disarmament and arms controls measures - at both superpower and multilateral level - be maintained?

It is simply too early to give a definitive answer to these questions at this stage. Everything depends, in the first instance, on the attitude struck by the USSR and the United States. No-one can be sure, in the present environment of turmoil and fragmentation, that the highly constructive foreign policy orientation of the Soviet Union under President Gorbachev will continue indefinitely. And for all its conspicuous success in working through United Nations processes in the Gulf crisis, and for all the much greater commitment to United Nations principles evident in President Bush as compared to almost any of his predecessors, it cannot be assumed that the United States will routinely see its national interests being advanced by multilateral diplomacy through the United Nations.

Moreover, the sustaining of a new internationalist momentum in security matters is not wholly dependent on the superpowers alone. They, and the other Permanent Five members, will need to take into account the mood of the rest of the United Nations membership. Richer countries among them - not least Japan and Germany, who both feel keenly their exclusion from the P5 inner circle - are going to be cautious about the financial implications for them of major new peace-keeping or peace-enforcement commitments. And smaller countries are becoming aware of the political and economic effects that can flow for them from Security Council resolutions in which they have no part, and are beginning to express concerns that great power cooperation, if not handled sensitively, may develop - as one country put it recently - into a "great power directorate".

But all that said, a new mood of optimism about the future does generally prevail. There are few policy makers around the world who believe that the new prominence of the United Nations in peace and security matters - and the demonstrated willingness of the major powers to work within this framework - is anything other than a beneficial and important new development in world affairs.

The United Nations has in fact four distinctly different roles in peace and security matters, although they often tend to be muddled together - peace-enforcement, peace-keeping, peace-making and arms control and disarmament. At a time when so much attention is now being concentrated on what the UN can do for peace when major power cooperation allows its potential to be realised, it may be useful for me in the time remaining to say something about the potential for achievement now in each of the four areas I have mentioned.

Peace-Enforcement. An obvious lesson to be drawn from Iraq's invasion of Kuwait is that the habits of millenia - greed, violence, the unbridled quest for power and dominance - have not disappeared with the Cold War. But equally there is a particular significance in the successful international effort to reverse Iraq's aggression: the outcome of the Gulf War was a triumphant reaffirmation of the United Nation's collective security role so clearly envisaged for it by its founders but so long in limbo. Whether that collective security role is likely to develop substantially depends essentially on two factors: the willingness, as I have already said, of the United States and other Permanent Five members to go down this path again, and the nature of the conflicts likely to arise.

The position of the United States really is crucial, for without the United States there can be no UN role at all in collective security. That is both for procedural and practical reasons: the dominance of the Permanent Five is written into the Charter, with collective security action requiring at least the tacit assent of each of them; but in any case, the reality of world power dictates that UN collective security action could not be mounted, or even credibly threatened, without drawing on the United States' military capability.

It will be difficult, however, for the United States to pick and choose, from the perspective of its own national interests, between those conflicts it will bring to the UN and those which it will deal with unilaterally. If the United States bypasses the UN on a series of issues, the system of collective security will lose credibility, and cooperation - which has to be not assumed but nurtured, as it was in the Gulf crisis - will simply not be available when the United States does decide it is time to turn to the UN. An enlightened view of self-interest would, from this perspective, be one that maintained and nourished the UN system.

As to the likelihood of the kinds of conflict arising which will stimulate UN peace-enforcement action in the future, it has to be acknowledged that the Gulf circumstances were exceptional: albeit a textbook case of what the founders had in mind. The UN Charter was written retrospectively to avert World War II, and in Saddam Hussein the UN found a 1930s type aggressor: the aggression was unprovoked, across recognised boundaries and by a national army invading and occupying another member state, in a region, moreover, engaging the vital interests of great powers. Such a conjunction is unlikely to occur again soon. Most disputes in which the UN is asked to intervene have a strong element of purely internal conflict, perhaps of an ethnic or religious nature, perhaps with one

of both factions aligned with outside powers; they often have long-standing root causes overlaid by many years of retaliation and response, and claim and counterclaim; rarely does one of the parties have a monopoly of right on its side behind which the international community can unite.

But obviously a system of collective security, to be worth the name, must be universal in its application, and if Saddam-style aggression reoccurs elsewhere - even in a region of less strategic or economic importance - then the international community will need to respond through the United Nations with the same forthrightness. There is, I believe, no present basis to doubt that such a response would in fact take place. At the very least, any country contemplating aggression must now take into account that possibility.

The most important consideration in all of this, and one which should govern the conduct of Australia's UN diplomacy, is that even if such enforcement action does not occur for many years, this does not reduce the importance of building a collective security system now. The more the system is elaborated, the greater the commitment countries give to it, the more likely is it that a system of deterrence based on UN collective security will work.

Peace-keeping. Situations like Namibia and Cambodia are more likely than the Gulf to set the pattern of future United Nations action. In the absence of clear cut aggression, what may well emerge is a form of peace-making activity that falls somewhere between "good offices" on one end of the spectrum and enforcement action on the other. The final settlement of a dispute will be through negotiation and agreement among the parties to it, but they will be negotiating under various forms of pressure and inducement from the permanent members of the Security Council. Such settlements will often contain a peace-keeping component.

Peace-keeping operations, defined as the non-forceful use of soldiers as a catalyst for peace (usually by the separation of combatants as a confidence-building measure) were not originally envisaged in the Charter. They are generally seen as an improvisation of the Cold War, when the enforcement provisions of the Charter could not be activated because of differences among the permanent members. Even so, they are designed precisely for the sort of circumstances which are likely to occur more often in the post-Cold War era, and thus we are likely to see more rather than less of them. The trend is already evident: six new operations of different kinds have been launched since 1988, as against sixteen over the previous forty years. The 1988 Nobel Peace Prize was won, and

deserved to be, by the UN's peace-keeping forces.

Australia's contribution to peace-keeping operations in the past has not been especially large in numerical terms; only one peace-keeper in 250 has been Australian. But we do have a standing higher than those numbers would suggest, based on the professionalism and competence of our personnel; the fact that we have been a consistent, if small contributor; the particularly significant role we played in UNTAG in Namibia; and our willingness to play a major peace-keeping role in Cambodia. But our standing in future, and our credentials to play an effective part in the UN peace and security system, will depend increasingly on our willingness to do more.

Peace-Making. In the new climate, it would be logical to anticipate a greatly expanded role for the UN in peace-making, the resolution of conflict before it escalates out of control. Insofar as conflict is caused by ignorance or mutual misunderstanding, the UN can act to bring the parties to a common appreciation of the facts and of each other's intentions; insofar as it is caused by angry reactions to specific problems, the UN can act to institute a cooling off period; insofar as it is caused by a lack of imagination in finding solutions to bilateral problems, the UN as an outside party may be able to identify pacific outcomes that the parties directly and intimately involved cannot see unaided; insofar as it is caused by the ambition of individual leaders, UN peace-making can use the spotlight of global public opinion to press for more reasonable attitudes; insofar as conflicts are perpetuated by the unwillingness of the parties to back down and make concessions to one another, UN peace-makers can be impartial third parties to whom concessions can more easily be made; and insofar as conflict is created by irreconcilable national interests, the UN can at least interpose itself between the parties until those differences lose the sort of priority that impels nations towards armed conflict, or until longer term solutions are found.

It is nonetheless likely that the UN will expand its role in this area only gradually, since many member states would view more active UN conflict resolution initiatives with great suspicion, especially since many conflicts have an internal component. Smaller member states are concerned that there will be infringement of their independence and sovereignty or, worse still, an imposition on them of solutions they do not like. Israel is not alone in its lack of affection for multilateral diplomacy. All states, not only the smaller ones, are cautious about an expansion of the UN bureaucracy.

Thus it can be expected that the Secretary-General will only very slowly be able to expand the Secretariat's information gathering capacity, and that there will be considerable opposition to the establishment of permanent structures for peace-making. Both these developments are, however, obviously desirable; the capacity, for example, for the United Nations to be aware of dangerous local build-ups in armaments and to step in to counsel and warn the parties, is an important element in the development of an effective collective security system.

There is a case for arguing that, despite the sensitivities of some countries, the UN should play a role in the internal affairs of countries if the tensions they generate are likely to spill over into international conflict or create disasters demanding international action. Some important small steps have been taken already in this respect with UN Security Council Resolutions 687 (dealing, among other things, with practical measures to reduce Iraq's military capabilities) and 688 (on assistance to minority groups in Iraq) which in effect juxtapose the traditional notion of national sovereignty with an overriding international and humanitarian purpose. And the Cambodian conflict is another whose resolution will depend ultimately on the UN playing what until now has been an unprecedented role in the internal administration of a country.

Certainly Australia should not be among those always prepared to wait for the climate to be right for a settlement of a dispute. We should rather be prepared, as has been the case in recent years, to continually encourage the United Nations and interested countries to produce confidence building measures among the parties to ensure that the right climate in fact develops.

Disarmament. It is hard to imagine an effective UN role in security in a world in which weapons of mass destruction proliferate and stocks of conventional weapons grow exponentially. While there has been encouraging progress in disarmament negotiations between the superpowers, Iraq's accumulation of weaponry, its threat to use nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, and its use of ballistic missiles, show that a great deal remains to be done on the disarmament and arms control agenda. In pursuing that agenda, the UN's General Assembly and its Conference on Disarmament in Geneva are crucial standing forums, and the Special Commission which has just been set up to oversee the destruction of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq an important example of a solution tailored to a particular disarmament problem.

One aspect of the necessary international approach, in which Australia has been

much involved, has been to strengthen export control regimes, such as the Australia Group on chemical weapons, to stem proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. But despite their valuable contribution to arms control, export controls cannot provide the long-term answer; the only effective means of controlling and eliminating these weapons lies in strong multilateral agreements.

There is now an urgent need to strengthen existing multilateral arms control arrangements, in particular the operation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Biological Weapons Convention, and to conclude a convention banning chemical weapons. The early conclusion of a CW Convention is a practical objective for the post-Gulf War period, one which can only be secured through multilateral diplomacy, and one in which a middle-level country like Australia can play an important role. In this respect I have written to the other 39 Foreign Ministers of the Conference on Disarmament to urge a Ministerial meeting to resolve outstanding issues. It will be important not only that the CW Convention be finalised quickly, but that it provide an example for progress on other fronts. The opportunity to capitalise on the momentum of arms control negotiations after the Gulf must be seized, and Australia for one will be pressing ahead vigorously - for the sake of both the international security environment and the security of our own region.

In all the ways I have mentioned the United Nations, reinvigorated after the removal of the straitjacket of superpower competition which restricted its operations for 45 years, will be a central element in emerging security practices and approaches.

It is sometimes said that emphasising the UN's role in a new world security order is to mistake cause and effect: the UN did not create the new order, but merely reflects it. And that is true enough - up to a point. The UN does indeed reflect power relations, and depends for its effectiveness, as I have already acknowledged, on the support of the United States, on the maintenance of the present foreign policy orientation of the Soviet Union, and on continuing cooperation among the major powers. But in turn, the United Nations can mobilise world opinion, and provide a justification for action which has a global imprimatur at a remove from the interests of individual nations. That was certainly important for the United States Administration in the close vote in the Senate on engagement in the Gulf. The relationship between the United Nations

and individual countries is more complex than a simple passive reflection of national power relativities. It is in fact closer to a symbiosis in which neither individual countries nor the UN itself can afford to neglect what the other can offer.

The concept of a new world order maintained through the cooperation of the major world powers is not especially new. Certainly it has to do with some old and well established principles, the Charter of the United Nations preeminently among them, and before that the ideals of statesmen such as American President Woodrow Wilson to replace the balance of power with a community of power, an overriding common purpose among the international community. In international relations there are few thorough breaks with the past; most developments have historical antecedents. But the extent of cooperation we are seeing now among the major powers is quite clearly new, and some of the initiatives now being undertaken have but few, if any parallels in the past, eg the measures being taken in and against Iraq under Security Council Resolutions 687 and 688.

The new world order as I have defined it is an approach which will help us deal with uncertainty and challenge, rather than a blueprint ushering in peace and harmony among nations. It is not clear that the approach in question will always operate smoothly; the major powers may not always agree among themselves, and welding together agreement - when it is possible - may require intensive negotiation and tough compromises. Moreover, the challenges will be substantial: the assertiveness of middle powers and the resurgence of ethnic tensions will add to the abiding problems of overpopulation, poverty and famine, and environmental degradation which remain on the international agenda and demand action.

But cooperation for peace, using the mechanisms of the United Nations, will become ever more crucial if we are to create the kind of stable international political environment in which these problems can be addressed, at last, with the attention and resources they deserve.

* * *