

A NEW, BIPARTISAN FOREIGN POLICY

In the years immediately after World War II, American foreign policy was both largely successful and constructively bipartisan. Typically, serious political disagreement stopped at the water's edge. Then the U.S. proposed a U.N. agency to control all atomic weapons and gave ten times more for foreign economic aid, as a portion of GNP, than it does today. A key element of the nation's successful foreign policy was strong support for the U.N. In later years, support for the U.N. waned and, increasingly, unilateral ventures replaced multilateral diplomacy. Not coincidentally, what followed was a series of failures in foreign ventures, in Vietnam, Lebanon and elsewhere. These setbacks were accompanied by bitter, divisive arguments among the public and in Congress.

In the past two years, important reasons have surfaced for a return to an American bipartisan foreign policy centered around the U.N. Strident nationalism from the Administration is being replaced by support for both the U.N. and meaningful arms reductions. The Administration has been backing full funding of the U.N. and supplied the leadership in persuading the Security Council to call for an end of the Iran-Iraq War. The July 20, 1987, vote was the first time in decades the U.N. took decisive action to end an ongoing war.

Paralleling the shift by the Administration is possibly even a more significant change from the Soviets. General Secretary Gorbachev is now calling for U.N. improvements in the areas of arms control verification, peacekeeping, compulsory jurisdiction of the World Court and the creation of a U.N. tribunal to deal with terrorists. And the Soviets have reversed course, and are now paying for ongoing U.N. peacekeeping.

In the earlier decades when the U.S. was strongly supportive of the U.N., the Soviets tried to weaken it. Now, however, the leaders of both superpowers are turning to the U.N. This new, bipolar backing presents an unprecedented opportunity. Although the U.S. has not yet come full cycle and centered most of its foreign policy around the world organization, the hope is that it will do so. If done, then comity and bipartisanship might again characterize American foreign policy. The change would be quite salutary for our civic hygiene and, more importantly, for our endangered, interdependent planet.

ACTION FOR WORLD FOOD DAY

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