

# The UN's mid-life crisis

**C**andide, in the French film version of Voltaire's classic, finds himself in darkest Africa, captured by hostile natives and immersed in a huge pot. There next appears the tribe's chief, resplendent in top hat, frock coat and medals. "Damn!" says the chief after consulting his watch, "I wanted to simmer them but I guess I'll have to boil them. I have to be at the UN in an hour."

It is easy to heap criticism on the UN which now, having just turned 40, is deep in mid-life crisis. Early expectations that the UN would somehow defuse the world's crises and settle them by civilized discourse proved, not surprisingly, illusory. Even as a forum the UN has greatly disappointed its original western proponents.

A generation ago, schoolchildren in North America were brought up to believe that the UN was good, noble and just. That was when the U.S. commanded the majority of votes in the General Assembly. Today, by contrast, the accession of scores of new nations has permanently altered the viewpoint of the UN from being pro-western to one of leftist Third Worldism.

Much has been written and said lately about the UN's anti-western bias. A most angry Reagan administration has pulled out of UNESCO, a hotbed of militant Third Worldism, and even don't-ever-rock-the-boat Canada is thinking of doing the same. Conservative elements in the U.S. are demanding a total American withdrawal from the UN. So, to varying degrees, do American supporters of Israel who see a venomous hatred of the Jewish state manifest in the UN.

The North American media have responded to growing anti-American and anti-Israel feeling in the UN by altering public perception of the UN

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from one of roseate hope to growing cynicism and disdain. The UN is no longer depicted as a savior but rather as a hodge-podge of spies, do-nothings, windbags and Third World bon vivants.

These criticisms are, in good part, correct. Billions of words, tens of millions of pages of empty verbosity, millions of memos, lunches, cocktail parties, dinners, junkets. At least half the East-bloc delegates are intelligence agents. A number of nations, including Haiti, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Liberia are infamous for selling their votes for cash.

Delegates from black Africa drive about in limos, occupy \$12,000-a-month apartments and spend their time with blondes and booze while their nations starve. More money is spent by lunching UN delegates than goes to famine relief in Africa. In the Third World, a job at the UN is considered the next best thing to a poolside cabana in paradise.

The denizens of this sinecure have spent an inordinate amount of time denouncing the U.S., Israel, South Africa and Chile, while largely ignoring the glaring misdeeds of the communist and black tyrannies. Only lately has the UN taken notice of Afghanistan.

Why then should we continue to fund such a monstrous waste of money, time and people? Because the UN, for all its sins, does perform a number of important functions. Its aid, education and health programs are generally quite successful, if over-staffed and ponderous. They should be made more efficient by forcing the UN to cut personnel and lower its bloated overhead.

Most important, the UN continues to represent the best means available for making face-saving ends to wars. Belligerent nations, such as the Arabs and Israelis, have been able to stop fighting thanks to the arrival of UN troops — Canadians among them. Since many world crises occur because of the participant's need to avoid losing face, the UN offers an ideal means of backing away from confrontation without the appearance of giving in to one's enemies.

For this reason alone, the UN should be preserved. If it prevents one war — or one nuclear war — its cost will have been worthwhile. And, we should not forget, the UN also exercises a minor, but still important, restraining degree on some of its members. Even the Soviets get nervous when the UN condemns their barbarism in Afghanistan; smaller nations are loath to be pilloried in public before the world press.

Were I a doctor of medicine, my prescription for the middle-aged spread of the UN would be: More fibre, more exercise, more clear thinking. Lose weight, cut out 25% of your staff. More regularity. Cut out the booze, blondes, parties and limos. Do something effective every day. And don't forget to send some money home to your starving relatives — it's good for the soul.

## Punch



"Yes, lots of black pepper — and while you're at it, a little chervil, some grated onion, two crushed cloves of garlic, a sprinkling of parsley, a couple of chilis and a dash of Worcester sauce."