

UN Readies For 39th Opening

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Time Again for 'So Much UN-ery'

Much-maligned Assembly prepares to begin 39th session

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Newsday UN Bureau

United Nations — Why all the fuss?

President Ronald Reagan and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko join a passel of international luminaries this week at the General Debate of the 39th UN General Assembly, a debate that is no debate at all.

Despite its "Much Ado About Nothing" aspects, the General Assembly remains the only international forum of its kind, the only place that less powerful nations can make themselves heard. Through its protocols and kempt diplomatic avenues, the UN keeps access open for East and West.

Reagan comes first in the talkathon of some 140 speeches from heads of state, foreign ministers, deputy prime ministers, vicepresidents and stand-ins whose remarks to the assembly are restricted by neither time limit nor framework for formal rebuttal. The assembly now has 159 members, the latest entry being the sultanate of Brunei, which was formally voted in on Friday.

The debate ends Oct. 12 and then, after all the bosses have left town, General Assembly delegates get down to the real work.

Real work?

UN Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick describes the General Assembly as a somewhat problematic multinational legislative body whose principal product is resolutions. They may be interesting, she said, but they lack the status of law.

"A great deal of time is taken up in truly empty rhetoric, harsh attacks and unrealistic schemes," she said at a briefing for editors last week.

Former UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, writing in the magazine *Foreign Affairs*, decried the General Assembly's practice of adopting packages of resolutions year after year that support the cause of specific interest groups. He cited Israel's woes in credentials fights and other issues as one case in point.

"The effect of this activity," he wrote, "is to cheapen the currency of UN resolutions, and thus to reduce the effectiveness of the United Nations in the peaceful resolution of disputes."

Over the past 15 years, while the United States was busy dismissing what it considered particularly odious General Assembly votes as "so much UN-ery," the Third World captured the organization in power and influence.

Efforts since to rebuild U.S. prestige have met with mixed results. A notable exception to the negative trend was the 1982 defeat of a Cuban move to get Puerto Rico declared a colony instead of a self-governing commonwealth. The Americans lobbied for six months and won their first General Assembly floor fight in 12 years on an issue of special U.S. interest.

One U.S. diplomat suggested that the United States lost ground over the past 15 years by "playing its politics atrociously" with too great a deference to the Third World. "You can do better in this organization by playing this kind of politics better," the diplomat said.

There have been indications the Reagan administration may be fed up with the whole place. The United States decision to pull out of UNESCO in 1985 has been cited as one. And one year ago, Charles Lichtenstein, then deputy chief of the U.S. mission here, shocked delegates when he told a committee that if member states feel they are not welcome, they are welcome to leave. "We will put no impediment in your way . . . and will be down at

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AP Photo

Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko waves as he leaves China's mission to the UN yesterday. He had conferred with Chinese envoys for the second consecutive day.

Reagan's Signal to Be Flexibility

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be on the U.S. reception tonight, which Reagan hosts and to which Gromyko is invited. Tomorrow, the president addresses the General Assembly to lay out his desire for better U.S.-Soviet relations in a speech that a White House official said would end with "uplifting eloquence" on his vision of the future. On Tuesday, he will address the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund in Washington.

On Wednesday, Secretary of State George Shultz will hold a preliminary round with Gromyko to discuss regional, bilateral and arms-control issues; Gromyko will see Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale Thursday, and Friday he will be with Reagan for talks and lunch.

Together these events should assure the president that he will dominate the television news most of this week, which should do his already out-in-front re-election campaign no harm.

But the question that close observers of U.S.-Soviet relations in this country, Western Europe and elsewhere will be asking is whether the week marks the start of a thaw in the currently cold superpower relationship.

It is in part a question of how the aging collective leadership in Moscow perceives Reagan's intentions. Even before the meeting, the administration has given a series of signals that reflect both attention to Soviet concerns and inattention to the ways of normal diplomacy. And if the relationship warms slightly, the question remains: What will it lead to?

An example of a confusing signal occurred Friday. A top White House aide told reporters that Reagan would propose more frequent meetings between Shultz and Gromyko, as well as defense ministers and other cabinet officials, leading possibly to a summit with Soviet leader Konstantin Chernenko.

But the Soviets learned of the pro-

posal through the press because it was not sent in advance through normal diplomatic channels. A high State Department official who is intimately aware of the planning said the proposal in this form took him by surprise.

At the same time, there has been no hint that the administration is prepared to revive or extend two U.S.-Soviet cooperative agreements that expire this year nor six others it has allowed to expire. Soviet diplomats say these accords are an important bellweather of American intentions.

On the other hand, the administration has held up a report by a hawkish arms-control advisory panel which charges Soviet cheating on previous arms-control agreements; its prior release could have soured the atmo-

sphere at the talks. White House officials say Reagan would be happy to hear Soviet proposals for restructuring arms-control negotiations.

In a report first carried by the National Journal last week and later confirmed by State Department officials, the administration is debating whether to agree to a moratorium of up to three years on tests of weapons in space. Previous U.S. refusal to accept such a proposal led the Soviets to withdraw an invitation to talks on space weapons that were to have begun in Vienna last week. Finally, tests of U.S. anti-satellite weapons have been slipping behind schedule. Ostensibly it is for technical reasons, but officials point out it is also politically convenient.

If all goes well, the best that can be expected is "a clearing of the decks," according to one respected long-time observer of U.S.-Soviet affairs, Brent Scowcroft, a retired lieutenant general. "This may be nothing more than a sparring session in which each takes the measure of the other. It may not even result in agreement on future contracts. The fact of the meeting more than the outcome is the productive result. Ronald Reagan has never before talked with the Russians," Scowcroft, who headed a White House commission on U.S. strategic nuclear arms, said.

Scowcroft thinks the president is sincere in seeking arms control agreements. But he is not convinced that Reagan's aides all agree.