

# An International Agenda for Change

EDWARD J. PERKINS

*University of Oklahoma*

*Former U.S. Ambassador to Australia*

*Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations*

**Dean Bobrow, I really appreciate** that very innovative introduction. Thank you very much. And I'd like to say to Chancellor O'Connor, and to Senator Wofford, students and faculty, I couldn't be more pleased to be with you to talk about this business of initiating change and just to talk about change itself. Public policy—whether it's in the guise of public administration, political science, or international relations—touches foreign policy. I think that's a given. When I got here today I was handed a couple of papers by Charles Lindblom and Chris Argyris, both seminal names in the study of public administration, familiar to me, unpleasant sometimes and sometimes pleasant. Nevertheless, they both have at times in their academic careers, or theoretical posturing, touched upon international relations and foreign policy as an adjunct to public policy. It is in that guise that I am delighted to talk to you tonight.

About 2 years ago as the year of 1989 was coming to a close, Vaclav Havel remarked that, and I quote, "the speedometer of change is accelerating." His observation was rapidly followed, for example, by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the cold war, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the resulting Gulf War, accompanied by the acceleration of violent civil war in southern Europe, still going on, and the beginning of the peaceful division of Havel's own country. Now he's known for understatement and that certainly was an understatement that he made. As the world around us changes, we as a nation must also change. We can't help it. The fact is, and I'm sure that Havel would agree, that we are living in the most fluid, most change-oriented international environment of this century.

I must confess that when I was asked to come here, my first reaction to the proposed subject was, "We've got enough things on our plate already signifying change. Why ask for more?" My second reaction was, of course, more judicious. The reality is that change in international politics is a constant, and to initiate or manage the change, one wants to beg first an understanding of these changes. That suggests to me that the process of initiating change among many ideas comes down to two, recognizing an opportunity and knowing what to do with that opportunity. I'd like to use my brief remarks to share with you several

illustrations from the world of multilateral diplomacy. On each occasion, the momentum of a change or a group of changes was, in a sense, borrowed to give impulse to often other unrelated goals.

I start off with a resolution under the title of "Zionism is Racism." That UN (United Nations) resolution equating Zionism with racism is an example. It was adopted in 1975. It was the high watermark of the political power of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The PLO initiative rode the wave of nonaligned movement militancy typical of the 1970s. Yet the resolution would not have passed without the highly effective support and cosponsorship of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc of nations. On December 16, 1991 by a vote of 111 to 13, the resolution was revoked. Many factors played a role in this revocation. The Middle East peace process that started in 1991 brought Israel, the Palestinians, and the frontline Arab states together at the same table in a kind of unprecedented fashion. At the same time, the failure of Saddam Hussein's bid for hegemony discredited the radical approach to Middle East politics. Moreover, Moscow switched from embracing to actively discouraging extremist solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict. This, in turn, left the PLO with fewer cards to play. The Soviet Union, at the same time, decided in Southern Africa that the time to finance wars of liberation was over and that the time to try and push for political change and economic stability was with us. In addition, the end of the cold war ended Moscow's tendency to judge UN issues by the degree to which they made the United States unhappy. And by the fall of 1991, Russia and most of the formerly Communist Europe had diplomatic relations with Israel. Thus many of the formerly Communist countries that cosponsored the Zionism-Racism resolution reversed themselves and voted to repeal. In the end, a combination of East-West geopolitical shifts, intra-Arab politics, and a desire not to injure the Mideast peace process made revocation possible. That fact of revocation, in turn, triggered other positive changes. One of these is the beginning of a rehabilitation of the UN itself in Israeli eyes, manifested in an action taken by me and my Russian colleague, inviting the secretary-general representing the UN to engage in the multilateral aspects of the Middle East peace process.

The resolution on apartheid is another recent example. The United Nation's recent treatment of that subject followed a similar path. Although apartheid was universally condemned, for many years the General Assembly's statements on South Africa were not necessarily universally supported. Typically, they assigned Pretoria 100% responsibility for all of what was going on. That seemed morally correct and, in fact, it was morally correct. The original resolution, though, did not seek ways to promote change in South Africa and was not supported by many critics of apartheid, including the United States and the United Kingdom. Pretoria regarded the UN as its enemy.

In 1989, the General Assembly adopted a new approach. In December of that year, with strong U.S. leadership, a contact group developed a completely new

text. It was commendatory but it was also condemnatory. It did reach out to moderates encouraging them along. As a result, and perhaps for the first time, the assembly adopted a statement unanimously supported by its members and bearing the full weight of world opinion. Pretoria could not afford to ignore it. The resolution had become a change agent. While domestic and other international factors were compelling change in South Africa, there is no question that the apartheid resolution adopted that December contributed to the growing momentum of change and reform.

**Terrorism.** The evolution of the United Nations' treatment of international terrorism, an evolution still continuing, shows a different process at work. For apartheid and Zionism, change occurred in the relationship of the world community to a specific country. For terrorism, it is the world community's view of itself that changed. A point of departure for measuring that change is a General Assembly resolution on terrorism adopted in 1972. It followed on the heels of the massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics. Yet it was a triumph of cynicism. By asserting that terrorism was a political, not a criminal, act, it replaced normality with situational ethics and aided those seeking ways to rationalize a resort to terror tactics.

But most societies, domestic or international, can't survive for very long if they tolerate terrorist violence to effect political change. The 46th General Assembly embraced that view by explicitly condemning terrorism in all its aspects, at any time, in any place, for any reason, and by anyone. The Security Council went even further and imposed an air and arms embargo against Libya for failure to cooperate with the United States, the United Kingdom, and French investigations of two of its citizens suspected of involvement in the bombing of Pan Am 102 and the bombing of a UTA flight from Chad. Also noteworthy is the failure of Saddam Hussein's threat to use terrorism to undermine the sanctions regime.

Much of international terrorism in the last 20 years has been associated with the Middle East conflict. Thus, to some degree, the factors responsible for change include many of those behind the revocation of the Zionism resolution. In addition, the Security Council vote was helped by the knowledge that those seeking justice or a theory of justice behind the Lockerbie and UTA bombings could, under Article 51 of the charter, employ unilateral means against Libya. The world community's attitudinal shift on terrorism, as on South Africa and Israel, has also set in motion positive ripple effects in the form of wide support and accelerated movement toward development of some form of an international criminal court. That's a seminal move.

The permanent five. Less notable than other important UN changes but critical to all of them has been the metamorphosis of what we call the "Perm Five." Throughout the cold war the UN was a hot rhetorical battleground. Relations between the Western and Communist permanent members of the Security Council were rarely cooperative and often confrontational. Because the

permanent members would not sit together at one table, former Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar regularly organized three separate lunches when he needed to consult—one for the Soviets, one for the Chinese, and one for the Westerners.

In 1987, however, it was apparent that all five were anxious to end the extremely bloody conflict between Iraq and Iran. Perez de Cuellar saw his chance. In early fall of that year, he hosted the first “Perm Five” power lunch as the permanent representatives of each of the five joined him at his rectangular dining room table on the 38th floor. That lunch was followed by discreet meetings at the working level. The immediate result was Resolution 585 establishing a cease-fire between Iran and Iraq. But its long-term significance was much greater. Perm Five consultations are now an institution. One member of the Perm Five is a coordinating element and serves in that position for 3 months. Perm Five regularly consults with the secretary-general, bringing to that person’s attention issues that stretch across the Perm Five. In addition to that, Perm Five members regularly consult with other members nonpermanent of the Security Council.

Multilateral efforts to protect the environment demonstrate an innovative approach to managing change. On many important environmental issues, international policy has to develop effective ways to reconcile public and governmental interests in promoting ecological goals, with sometimes limited scientific and technical knowledge. That’s the basis for action. These limitations and the varying response to them by governments make a traditional treaty approach with its cumbersome amendment process problematic. Thus the framework has become the first element in reaching for agreement, and following the framework then come several protocols that bring to bear the basis of issues discussed by all nations involved in it.

In the humanitarian area, I would call to your attention what we call humanitarian intervention—a new issue accepted by the Security Council as a role within the security concerns of all nations. For most of the 20th century, humanitarian concerns and international opinion formed a forceful motivation to assist the victims of humanitarian crisis when the victims’ government either failed to act or instigated the suffering. But not very much happened. It was feared that a right of intervention invoked on humanitarian grounds would be exercised for political aims. These concerns were felt by, but also because of, the two superpowers. And they gained added stature from rigid interpretations of the UN Charter prohibition, contained in Article 2-7, on intervention in domestic affairs of member states. The end of the cold war has not ended those fears, but it has certainly diluted them. Because at this time intervention on a humanitarian basis is regularly included in Security Council resolutions, although all members of the Permanent Five do not agree, especially the Chinese who always vote to abstain rather than vote for intervention for humanitarian reasons.

However, an important factor is the growing respect for human rights. Recently, Zimbabwe declared at the Security Council Summit last January that the principle of noninterference must “accommodate efforts by the United Nations to protect basic human rights of individuals and social groups”—a seminal change. We see ample evidence of this change in the increasing involvement of the United Nations in stricken Somalia, in the UN acting on behalf of the Bosnian Muslims, and the UN-authorized steps to aid the persecuted Shiite and Kurd minorities in the north and south of Iraq. Of course, this change in the attitude toward sovereignty and intervention, a change we have helped produce, will produce other changes that we are just starting to think about. For example, the act of intervening in a country—no matter how well motivated—tends to have consequences that are hard to control. We may be unwilling or unable to simply stand back and let civil wars and massive humanitarian crises burn out of control. Yet intervention to put the fire out will raise practical and maybe even moral dilemmas about the scope and effects of intervention itself.

Finally, I am moved to suggest that change ideas in an international sense can be related to our domestic agenda. South Africa offers two such ideas. First, as South Africa emerges from its dark period of apartheid, it must also concentrate on the reclamation of people. Simply put, it means employing unconventional means to enable those economically disenfranchised citizens to participate in the economic agenda of the new South Africa. Such an approach recognizes that income redistribution is possible not by government-controlled economies, but by enabling all citizens to be educated and to contribute to the well-being of their society through enlightened partnership of government and private-sector activities. This might well be a motivation for our own society, which, although it is the world’s most advanced economy, has pockets of nonproducing citizens that we can’t afford to allow for very long.

Second, the Western world or the developed world cannot afford to tolerate indefinitely an underdeveloped world. In this case, Africa is that which I talk about. As South Africa goes through its transition, its success will not just affect that country but southern Africa as well in commercial routes, educational innovations, conservation programs, and economic trading blocs. This will no doubt affect the entire continent. It will also affect our country as well.

Finally, I would mention before I close the secretary-general’s Agenda for Peace, the United Nations as a corporate entity responsible for managing change and for producing conflict resolution and for dealing with issues that come with increasing rapidity. He’s working with a structure designed for 1950, but must deal with issues coming about as a result of 1992. I doubt whether there’s going to be another world war any time soon, but I think that I can guarantee that there will be numerous small-scale conflicts. It’s not enough to say that they don’t concern us, because if allowed to go out of control, they will affect you and certainly me. The United Nations thus has to reform itself—a better budgeting

system; a better system of priorities; a better way of coordinating the efforts of UNDP, of the population program, of the food program, of UNICEF—such that overlapping programs are a thing of the past. And, finally, the UN must be supported by the United States and the Western world. We are in arrears at the UN. The United States must get right with the UN. I am pleased that the president and the Congress have agreed on a payback schedule, which has us paying our share by the end of 1995. If the truth were known, I'd recommend that we do it right away.

All that I have talked about suggests further proof that public administration, international relations, political science must indeed be holistic if they are to be relevant in the world. And we live in the world. Thank you very much.