

PERSPECTIVE

U.N. should verify treaties

By A. WALTER DORN

**A verification agency under U.N. auspices can be flexible—
and will make treaty implementation quicker and cheaper.**

The U.N. role in arms control has traditionally been confined to discussion and negotiation. But as disarmament prospects have brightened and proposals have multiplied, many members feel it is time for the United Nations to play a more active part by creating a U.N. system to verify treaties. Proponents include the Soviet Union, which has said that the United Nations needs an agency that can employ sophisticated tools, including a satellite monitoring capability and a worldwide system of seismic stations. The United States, in opposing a U.N. agency, has stressed that new treaties require specific sets of verification measures which an agency is unlikely to anticipate.

In 1988, members of the "Six-Nation Initiative"—Argentina, Greece, India, Mexico, Sweden, and Tanzania—proposed that the General Assembly commission a report outlining a U.N. verification system. This proposal was merged with another resolution drafted by Canada, France, and the Netherlands. The result was a final resolution asking the secretary-general to prepare a comprehensive report on the role of the United Nations in verification. The secretary-general's study, which is being undertaken with the assistance of governmental experts from 20 countries, is due at the General Assembly's fall session. Although most members favor the creation of a U.N. verification arm, whether the secretary-general's report will make an outright recommendation is unclear. The report is expected to reflect many of the arguments that have been made during the long debate at the United Nations over verification of arms control agreements.

In 1946, the United States proposed the Baruch plan for the control of atomic energy. This plan would have created a powerful control agency. The Soviet Union rejected the Baruch proposal, interpreting it as a means of assuring that the United States would retain its nuclear-weapon monopoly.

For nearly twenty years, disarmament negotiations remained deadlocked. The East charged that the West

wanted "control without disarmament," and the West charged that the East wanted "disarmament without control." The United States was unwilling to disarm without a system that could detect and punish violators, but the Soviets were unwilling to allow inspection of their secret military installations until after disarmament was assured. The Soviets wanted only verification of disarmament, regarding monitoring of existing armaments as legalized espionage. But the United States considered monitoring essential in order to check that accepted limits were not exceeded.

In a dramatic policy reversal, the Soviet Union has now accepted intrusive and wide-ranging international inspections—in some cases even before disarmament negotiations are completed. And at the Third U.N. Special Session on Disarmament in 1988, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze proposed the creation of an "international monitoring and verification agency" under U.N. auspices. He suggested that a "multilateral center to assist in verification" be established under the secretary-general for "rendering assistance in verification matters to the parties of bilateral and regional agreements." During the 1988 regular session, he cited "the acute need for new mechanisms of verification and control," including a worldwide seismic monitoring system and an international satellite monitoring agency.

The United States, on the other hand, now opposes a U.N. verification agency. It cast the single negative vote against the resolution initiating the secretary-general's study and expressed the view that verification must be developed and agreed to by negotiating parties. The United States "did not see how the Secretary-General could undertake an in-depth study of the role of the United Nations in the field of verification in the abstract, in the absence of any parameters that specific agreements might provide for such a role in individual cases." Although the United Kingdom expressed the same view, it supported the resolution, declaring that a study of verification issues would nonetheless be useful.

Canada, the main driving force behind the development of verification resolutions in the General Assembly, has taken

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a progressive but cautious approach. Canada has sought a variety of verification measures short of a comprehensive agency, and has expressed the view that separate verification organizations created under different treaties might serve as stepping stones to the development of a single agency. Most NATO countries and Japan hold similarly cautious views.

Nearly all other member nations support U.N.-sponsored verification. The heads of state of 102 nonaligned nations recently endorsed the "establishment of an integrated multilateral verification system" within the framework of the United Nations.²

An effective U.N. verification agency would offer a number of advantages:

■ **Speed in treaty implementation.** If international expertise is available before a treaty is signed, a verification system can be in place when most needed—when the treaty is first implemented. A frequently cited example is the International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards system, which was in place before the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty was signed; the safeguards system was quickly extended to cover the treaty. Similarly, an existing agency could not only hasten treaty implementation, but agency experts might also be able to assist negotiators in drafting specific provisions.

■ **Cost.** An agency that verifies a number of treaties can save costs by sharing many scientific, technical, and administrative resources. Since satellite data would be used to verify a number of treaties, the agency could employ a single team of expert image- and photo-interpreters.³ Since verification costs would be spread over a longer time period, an existing agency might also flatten the "funding bubble" that treaties can create—the extraordinary costs incurred at the beginning of disarmament, when weapons are destroyed and verification begins. Much of the cost of personnel and institutional machinery involved in negotiating and maintaining a new agency for each treaty would also be eliminated.

■ **Protection of intelligence gathering.** A nation that obtains evidence of a treaty violation or suspicious activity may not wish to reveal its intelligence sources, although it may want the matter investigated by an objective body. If a U.N. agency investigated possible acts of noncompliance on request, the requesting state would not have to reveal the details of its sources or its "national technical means," such as secret satellite monitoring methods.

■ **Confidence.** The many peace-keeping and peace-making functions entrusted to the United Nations demonstrate that the nations of the world have confidence in the impartiality and objectivity of the secretary-general and the U.N. Secretariat. A verification agency would allow nations with little experience or expertise to exercise their right to know if other parties to a treaty are in compliance. By involving the United Nations in verification, a civilian role would be assured.

Former U.N. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld urged that any agency overseeing multilateral disarmament be part of the United Nations. Otherwise, he said, there would be "a hollowing out of the U.N. of one of its main fields of activity."⁴

A number of existing multilateral treaties contain no effective verification provisions. These include the 1925 Geneva Protocol banning chemical and biological weapons, the 1963

Partial Test Ban Treaty, the 1971 Sea-Bed Treaty (which prohibits placing nuclear weapons on the ocean floor), and the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention. A chemical weapons convention, a comprehensive test ban, and other anticipated arms limitation and disarmament agreements will require international verification. Future nuclear-weapon-free and demilitarized zones could benefit from a U.N. verification agency, and nations undertaking unilateral disarmament measures might request that the agency confirm their actions. If it were appropriate, the activities of the agency could also be expanded to include verification of cease-fire agreements, assistance with peace-keeping operations, and implementation of a global open skies plan.

Opponents of a U.N. verification agency argue that specific measures must be designed by the parties to each treaty. But the agency would have sufficient flexibility to respond to all requests by the negotiating parties. It could have separate divisions to develop special expertise covering the provisions of individual treaties. Each treaty would still be overseen by its own parties, who could meet regularly with agency officials to discuss compliance. The costs for each treaty-specific division could be borne by the parties to the treaty, while the overhead costs of the agency would be a part of U.N. membership fees.

Treaty compliance is the most sensitive issue in arms control. A U.N. agency need not automatically be given authority to evaluate compliance; decisions based on agency fact-finding could potentially be made at any level—an executive council of states overseeing the treaty, the agency's director, or the secretary-general, or by each party individually. However, the agency should at least be able to express an opinion or make recommendations, since the agency's scientists and staff would probably be regarded as the most objective judges of the facts when a treaty violation is suspected.

A U.N. verification agency could meet the demand for effective multilateral arms control in coming decades. While bilateral agreements between the superpowers may continue to be based on adversarial inspection and surveillance, regional and global treaties require a strong multilateral framework for verification. The secretary-general has recently been given a mandate to develop verification capability for the Geneva Protocol, which might be an appropriate first task for the agency.

A U.N. verification agency is the best means to develop an effective, treaty-specific, flexible, and objective system of multilateral verification, one which avoids wasteful duplication and can grow over time. The secretary-general's report should encourage the evolution of such an agency and lay the foundation for a vital U.N. contribution to progressive disarmament and a safer world. ■

1. *United Nations Disarmament Yearbook 1988* (New York: United Nations, 1989), p. 368.

2. Final documents of the Ninth Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, Belgrade, September 1989.

3. A. Walter Dorn, "Peace-keeping Satellites: The Case for International Surveillance and Verification," *Peace Research Reviews*, vol. 10 (May and June, 1987).

4. Brian Urquhart, *Hammarskjöld* (New York: Knopf, 1972), p. 325.