

## Roy Meachum

# Upside down

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At the United Nations this week, Mikhail Gorbachev moved his nation in range to claim a position of moral leadership, at least on the international scene. But the real winners may have been the Palestinians.

The Soviet president's proclamation of unilateral arms and troops reductions in Eastern Europe made the headlines for its promise to reduce world tensions. However, the greater hope lies in his offer to cool off further Nicaragua, Angola and other "hot spots" — places where the superpowers have competed like small boys in a perilous form of childhood's "chicken."

The cost in human misery cannot be counted in the Third World rivalries between players in Moscow and Washington.

Long after civilized men and women have rejected the notion that birth-site, culture or religion justify any people's claim to rule over any other, the predominantly blue-eyed (in mind if not in fact) Americans and Russians have considered brown-eyed nations as expendable in their deadly games with each other.

Moscow still has a long row to hoe on human rights among its own citizens, but in that area also Mr. Gorbachev's *glasnost* has scored impressive gains. Latvia's recent attempt to re-establish its sovereignty did not result in wholesale imprisonment and exemplary executions. Tanks and bayonets were not called in to slaughter ethnic riots in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Maybe most importantly, in its bid for moral leadership, the Soviet Union has begun to swing open its doors for dissidents (Andrei Sakharov), discontented minorities (Armenians) and Jewish refuseniks (allowed to leave this year by the thousands, instead of the mere hundreds permitted out by Mr. Gorbachev's immediate predecessors.)

Ronald Reagan's one-time charge that Moscow heads an Evil Empire may have been true under Leonid Brezhnev and his like. In any event, in the decades since World War II, the Soviet Union was made to appear evil by contrast with America's record that came generally down on the side of the world's oppressed.

While the United States' official actions did not always live up to their pretensions, always present were the

words affirming equality and self-determination as the proper goals for all mankind.

During the post-war decades, despite the lapses between White House pretensions and acts, official repetitions of the words were enough to sustain the illusion that this nation was the moral leader of freedom-loving men and women. On that basis, Washington was assured the support in international dealings from other capitals, notably in Western Europe, Latin America and along the Pacific Rim.

In the past, Mr. Gorbachev's speech could have been dismissed as only one more Soviet ploy.

But in the past, other than polite pleasantries, much of the world's reaction would have waited on a White House

response, confident that Washington's traditional allies would fall in line.

However, Mikhail Gorbachev's arrival in New York found the United Nations in the process of adjourning to Geneva, driven there by the Reagan administration's abandonment of responsibility to the world body.

The Soviet leader's reaching for moral leadership among mankind happened at the precise moment Washington had declared vacant its own claim. The United States delegation goes to Switzerland bringing up the tail, not at the head, of any part of the United Nations.

In a real sense it can be said that the Reagan White House has done more to elevate today's Kremlin in the world community than any Soviet policy or leader, including Mr. Gorbachev. This irony should not be lost.

The exiting administration, particularly in its second term, acted with a heavy-handed disregard to any opinion that differed from the closely held views promoted by the myopic few who exercised its powers.

Star Wars, bombing Libya, the Nicaraguan Contras — a laundry-list can be made of instances in the past when Mr. Reagan acted in deliberate defiance of leaders whose support is necessary for U.S. foreign policy. Britain's Margaret Thatcher proved the notable exception, but not always.

In the embroglio created by Secretary

of State George Shultz's refusal to permit PLO leader Yasser Arafat to come to New York, not even London voted in the United Nations to back Washington. Mrs. Thatcher made known her disagreement with Mr. Schultz, while instructing her representative to abstain on the grounds that the U.N. resolution's language was too harsh against the United States.

The move to Geneva and the censure of Washington were sanctioned by every other nation in the world, with the sole exception of Israel, enforcing America's isolation at this point in history. Of course, the U.S. state department did not vote against its own decision.

In addition to the golden-moment for Mr. Gorbachev, the Reagan administration's ban also exalted Mr. Yasser beyond all proportion to his true importance, by any measure.

By their willingness to convene in Switzerland, for the first time in U.N. history, all the nations of the world are obliged to give great weight to the cause of the Palestinians and to the PLO, as their representative organization.

It takes no prophet to predict that there will be dancing among the refugee camps of the Gaza Strip and celebrations in West Bank villages next week. Probably, more men and boys, women and children will be wounded and die — but with a difference from the past.

The rise of Soviet influence at the U.N. and the lionization of Mr. Arafat in Geneva will be hailed among the Palestinians as victories for their uprising, which enters its second year today. Their leaders will say the children of the stones turned the world upside down. Who can prove them wrong?