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USIA

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REACTION

SPECIAL REPORT

Wednesday, April 1, 1992

U.S. UNCED ROLE CRITICIZED

The foreign press has been unanimous in stressing the importance of President Bush's presence at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio, saying U.S. leadership and cooperation are needed to strike a North-South bargain to protect the environment and safeguard economic progress.

Commentators expressed their frustration with the President's refusal to announce whether he will attend the conference. The current policies of the Administration, they argued, are "narrow and backward" (Rio's conservative O Globo), mere "slogans" (business-oriented Handelsblatt of Duesseldorf) and "negative" (Gabarone's independent Guardia).

Writers were dismayed, too, by the Administration's reluctance to agree to targets for the reduction of "greenhouse" gases and to help fund programs for environmental aid to the Third World. While some were understanding of Mr. Bush's domestic constraints, most agreed that a lack of U.S. cooperation at Rio-92 would cast America as the "international villain of ecology" (conservative O Estado de Sao Paulo) and turn the meeting into a "summit of hypocrisy" (Hamburg's left-of-center Die Zeit).

Some argued that other industrialized countries will use the U.S. posture as an excuse for their own inaction.

Despite all the pessimism apparent in the press, some journalists held that the UN conference would still be worth holding, even if President Bush does not show up. They judged that reaching "ecology" accords will be as difficult a process as arms control, and Rio-92 might as well be the starting point.

* This report is based on over 50 articles, dated March 16-April 1, from 14 countries.

LATIN AMERICA

BRAZIL: "Vanity Fair"

A byliner wrote March 31 for conservative O Estado de Sao Paulo, "The sparring between the G-7 and the G-77 about the division of obligations is jeopardizing the success of this vanity fair, which is what Rio-92 has become.... The New York preparatory conference has considered the conclusions of the October seminar of the Business Council for Sustainable Development—the voice of the private sector at Rio-92. One of the conclusions is that the pollution of poverty in the Third World is more traumatic than the pollution of wealth. Before cleaning automobile exhaust pipes, the city sewers must be cleaned."

"Environment And Jobs"

Conservative O Estado de Sao Paulo's lead editorial March 30 commented that the success of UNCED will depend on investments from the rich nations: "This is the problem...that worried the UNCED organizers until a few days ago, especially given the reluctance of some countries, including the United States to pledge themselves to these expenditures...."

"Bush's presence at the Rio conference will depend on the march of the U.S. electoral process.... The President was very clear last week about the U.S. position in relation to the control of pollutants. The Rio-92 [U.S.] agenda must be regarded from two points of view: to do what is right for the environment and accept nothing that causes unemployment in the United States.... The EC environment commission believes that the American position as to pollutants is antagonistic to the Conference and jeopardizes its results. The fact is that the U.S. Government does not want to commit itself to reducing...the levels of emissions of pollutant gases resulting from the burning of fossil fuels because of the economic cost of the operation...."

"If the problem of resources to save the environment in the 21st century is not resolved, and if the United States...continues wanting to preserve jobs in an economy in recession, the only thing that may be achieved at Rio-92 may be resolutions recommending the creation of new Indian reserves in Brazil so as to preserve the mineral wealth for the moment when they become scarce in the United States and the EC."

"If the rich [countries] do not reach an agreement on how to avoid the continuation of the destruction they started centuries ago, it won't be easy for Rio-92 to produce something positive for the world in general."

"Structural Changes In American Economy"

Rio's conservative O Globo editorialized March 30, "The position President Bush has taken publicly is to work for the environment and, at the same time, to fight so that Americans do not lose their jobs. It could be a risky strategy, too narrow and backward for a time like this. Discussions on the environment are getting more sophisticated every day. Reducing waste and polluting agents will require structural changes in the American economy...."

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"A weak American participation in the forum, above all, would hurt the United States itself."

"Bush's Quandary"

Washington correspondent Paulo Sotero filed March 26 for conservative O Estado de Sao Paulo on the Bush statements regarding the Rio Earth Summit and the control of carbon dioxide emissions: "If President Bush attends the conference without reaching an agreement on those two topics, he will incur the serious risk of seeing his country in the role of the great international villain of ecology. If he does not go, he will put the seal of failure on the event and certainly will have difficulty in justifying the title of 'the environment President' he took for himself during the 1988 Presidential campaign. In both instances, Bush will be giving strong ammunition to the Democratic Party."

"Bush's Caution Understandable"

An editorial March 24 in independent Jornal da Tarde of Sao Paulo said, "It will be a terrible blow for UNCED-92 if the biggest economic power in the world does not endorse the Letter of the Earth. Bush's caution, however, is entirely understandable. After all, no unquestionable scientific truth has been established about the greenhouse effect. And this is a decisive factor, because the question involves important economic decisions about the reorganization of several industries and also disbursement of massive resources.... Such decisions cannot be made without a solid base.... For the same reason the preservationist hysteria—which has nothing to do with the real and indispensable defense of the environment—should not stop Brazil from exploring its natural resources in a rational and balanced manner."

"Importance Of U.S. Leadership"

Brasilia's business-oriented Gazeta Mercantil commented March 24, "There is another important factor to be considered due to [the United States'] enormous political and strategic relevance: the leadership that the United States has in the world today. This capability to influence everything that happens in the world, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union, requires the United States and its President to assume a moral and ethical posture, which is not evident now due to this current reluctance to undertake a sacrifice that most developed nations are willing to do in order to benefit future generations."

"Reconciling Development And Conservation"

Independent Jornal do Brasil of Rio concluded in a March 22 editorial, "Today we know that the world's only option is to unite development with conservation of resources. The priorities vary with each country's situation, but the central theme of Rio-92 is a new question—a question of world policy, which should be approached in the area of global interdependence."

CHILE: "Bush's Absence Casts Shadow Of Uncertainty Over Summit"

On March 31, government-owned La Nacion commented editorially, "Our country had recently reached an agreement with Argentina on seconding the motion during next June's...ECO '92, which demands that developed nations compensate Third World countries damaged in their environments by the [First World's] industrialization process. This position is supported by the majority of South American countries, but which Argentina and Chile feel more directly because of the ozone layer hole--one of the industrialization effects--that affects us directly...."

"President's Bush refusal to attend the conference and sign these commitments casts a shadow of uncertainty over the meaning of the Rio meeting and the future of the planet."

COLOMBIA: "Missing: U.S."

Liberal Party-oriented El Espectador editorialized March 28, "The only country that is missing in the consensus that already exists is the most powerful and most polluting one."

"Need To Replace Spirit Of Confrontation"

In an editorial March 30, Liberal Party-oriented El Tiempo noted, "Modern technology, which is the mother and guide of industrial societies, not only causes confrontations between rich and poor, between weak and strong, between those from the North and those from the South; it has also managed to confront the human race itself with its own self-destruction. This is in simple terms what is called the ecological crisis. The worst aspect in this complex situation is that in order to avoid such a huge and imminent catastrophe, the first thing that needs to be done is to change the intellectual processes with which we analyze these global problems."

"It is necessary to go from the spirit of confrontation, of mutual recrimination and rivalry with which we usually discuss these problems to an effective cooperation in order to face the shared dangers."

EUROPE

BRITAIN: "Bush's Absence Serious Setback For Summit"

The independent Financial Times' Brussels, Washington and New York correspondents reported March 26, "Mr. Bush's name is the most conspicuous omission from the list of heads of government who have agreed so far to go to the summit. His absence would mark a serious, perhaps fatal, setback for the event."

"Promising Global Environment Facility"

On March 24, the centrist Independent's editorial wondered, "How can the developed world help [the developing nations] without offensively interfering? One notion aired by the staff of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade is attractive in principle, although tricky in practice: tradeable pollution permits. The total level of permits would set a limit on worldwide pollution, with the less developed nations being given wider licence to pollute than the richer countries."

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"Developing nations could raise funds to clean up by selling their permit to pollute.

"More promising is the Global Environment Facility, jointly managed by the United Nations and the World Bank, which provides as yet limited funds to help poorer nations reduce global warming, ozone depletion, pollution of international waters and habitat destruction. China has recently benefited with aid to tackle greenhouse gas emissions, and Poland has received funds to diversify forests. The facility provides a prototype mechanism for distributing environmental aid; it should grow into a self-standing organization."

GERMANY: "Focusing On Rio's Likely Failure"

Friedrich Mann wrote April 1 in left-of-center Neues Deutschland of Berlin, "Already now, two months before the beginning of the Rio conference, the Earth Summit has already resulted in one important result. It has made clear how little space the protection of the environment has in the thinking of politicians, and how much any activity depends on political and, above all, economic premises.

"When the UN decided in 1989 to convene such a conference, that seemed to be a new beginning. But today, the discussion focuses more on its possible or likely failure than on a successful conclusion.... Again the industrialized nations of the North, above all the United States, act as brakesmen. They bear the main responsibility for the increase in carbon dioxide emissions and other gases that cause the greenhouse effect."

"A Policy Of Slogans"

Washington correspondent Dietrich Zwaetz filed March 31 for business-oriented Handelsblatt of Duesseldorf, "Unfortunately, in Washington [the Administration] does not pursue an environment policy with heart, but an environment policy that is based on economic policy opportunity. This means that it is, like the profit performance of U.S. companies, based on a short-term and shortsighted strategy....

"The U.S. Administration will base measures against global warming on the opportunity for its economy...and we may supplement this remark by saying that these measures are not in the interest of other nations or the future of this globe. George Bush is unmasking the previous U.S. environment policy as a policy of slogans."

"Go For Adventure Of Summit"

Right-of-center Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung front-paged this piece by Hans-Anton Papendieck, "Never before has a failure of a conference been so clearly predicted as for the Rio environment conference scheduled for June.... Above all the United States, Japan and China are acting as brakesmen....

"There is only one alternative: The dreams of environment activists will not become true in Rio, but it would be completely wrong to twiddle one's thumbs. The fact that so many states have recognized the significance of the topic and dare to venture on a poker game of interests should be enough to engage in the adventure of the environmental summit."

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"Everybody Stay Home"

On March 28, left-of-center Frankfurter Rundschau remarked: "Everything has been booked for Rio...but now everybody can almost stay at home. The only remaining superpower on this globe...says 'no' to the central points which are supposed to lead out of the global dilemma. And this superpower sets the tune. George Bush could have hardly been clearer in announcing his cancellation of the trip to Rio.... But it was this man who let himself be called 'environmental President' at the beginning of his term. Meanwhile, he has forgotten about this...."

"All this offers only meager chances to achieve the hoped-for breakthrough to a joint policy of the states from the North and the South. It is of no use to rely on the insight of the Western superpower and its leader. It is now up to the EC to become the champion for the environment."

"The 'Earth Summit': U.S. Alone At The Dock?"

Right-of-center Rheinische Post of Duesseldorf observed March 27, "In the final round of the preparatory conference which is currently taking place at UN headquarters in New York, the disputes about the success and failure of the conference are revolving almost exclusively around one question: Will President Bush be attending? If he does not attend—and he has already given clear indications that he may not—the meeting may be regarded as more or less failed before it has even started. Bush is reluctant to go to Rio because the United States could stand alone in the dock there."

"Prospects Dwindle For Carbon Dioxide Convention"

President Bush's statement on carbon dioxide emissions prompted this editorial by Heinz Heck in right-of-center Frankfurter Allgemeine: "The prospects for the Rio 'Earth Summit' to agree on a convention on the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions have dwindled. The industrialized countries as the main producers of carbon dioxide emissions bear a special responsibility for a success of the conference. We cannot expect a similar responsibility from the Third World.... Consequently the problems focuses on the leadership role of the West, as the EC accepts in principle without agreeing on financial consequences. With his statement, George Bush offers others who are hesitating, such as Japan, the possibility of hiding behind his broad back."

"The global economy is ailing. In this situation, it seems understandable that governmental leaders shy away from burdening their economies.... But the door for Rio should not be slammed. Certain commitments can be accepted even if all doubts have not yet been removed."

"Hoping For Shocking Report On Carbon Dioxide"

Right-of-center Berliner Morgenpost's editorial by Bruno Walter said. "We can only hope that—in time for the Rio conference—a carbon dioxide report will shock the Americans as did a report on CFCs a while ago."

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"Cancel Rio"

Michael Brandt wrote for centrist Koelner Stadt-Anzeiger, "If the most important Western country, which, at the same time, wastes the most energy, does not want to accept any targets, the conference should be cancelled."

"Summit Of Hypocrisy?"

On March 19, left-of-center weekly Die Zeit of Hamburg's editorial observed, "The global summit--the most expensive meeting ever held--threatens to end as 'summit of hypocrisy.' In nearly 1,000 pages of draft papers in fancy Green rhetoric, there is a lot of talk about global partnership. In reality, the interests of North and South are an ice-cold poker game...."

"Twelve conference days in Rio alone are not going to change the world. But similar to the tough negotiations on tanks and missiles finally a long process of ecological conversion has to begin."

CANADA: "Seeing Green In Rio"

Commenting on the lack of U.S. support for the climate change agreement, the leading Toronto Globe & Mail opined March 25 that "the Bush Administration should reconsider its stance.... The proposals for greenhouse gas reductions are not radical. Washington's foot dragging, however, is hardly the result of U.S. environmental backwardness--the Great Satan has usually been the world leader when it comes to anti-pollution legislation--and is probably in large part spurred by a desire to avoid having the domestic agenda even partially dictated by foreigners. But the only effective way of getting Third World nations to clean up their environmental acts is to tie them to Western standards by means of international protocols. The alternative--unilateral erection of trade barriers to goods not produced in a sufficiently environmentally friendly manner--is far less desirable."

DENMARK: "Victims: Trade, Aid To Russia, Environment"

An editorial March 31 in leftist Information said, "The most likely victims in the American political-economic war, however, will be those initiatives that require action and money, such as the world trade negotiations and aid to the former Soviet Union. And the environment.... This summer's environmental summit in Rio de Janeiro risks suffering a similar fate."

THE NETHERLANDS: "Bush Prefers Jobs To Cleaner Environment"

Conservative Algemeen Dagblad reported March 26, "According to critics the President is already sabotaging the Rio conference by his statement that he will not sign a greenhouse effect treaty if this would endanger American jobs."

SWEDEN: "Silver Lining In Dark Clouds Over Rio Meeting"

Liberal Dagens Nyheter's editorial March 29 held, "The decision by George Bush that the United States will not accept any plan for reducing carbon dioxide emissions was not unexpected, but it came at a bad point and drastically reduced the possibilities of reaching a climate convention worth the name...."

"The Rio meeting will be important even if it is a political failure. The dialogue between industrial and developing countries during the preparations appears to have been built on a willingness to improve global life. Even a complete fiasco in Rio will not undo that."

FAR EAST AND PACIFIC

MALAYSIA: "U.S. Crimes Against Environment"

The government-controlled English-language New Straits Times commented March 30, "The 1992 Information Please Environment Almanac' compiled by the Washington-based World Resources Institute is a clear, ringing indictment of U.S. crimes against the environment... No more can the United States sit with hands folded like Caesar's wife, above reproach.... What should be sufficiently clear to the United States is that with so much wrong at home, it should spend some time putting its own house in order before picking on others."

SOUTH ASIA

INDIA: "Earth Summit Fate Is Sealed"

Under the headline above, the independent Times of India's N. Suresh observed March 31, "Last week's refusal of the United States at the...preparatory commission to consider any reduction in emission of gases...has more or less sealed the fate of the summit...unless efforts led by countries like India bring about a change before June."

"Montreal Protocol: No To Noose On Future"

The independent Economic Times March 29 put the "Green Politics" column by Delhi-based environmental NGO officials Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain on its editorial page: "We strongly believe that the Montreal Protocol is a noose by which we are going to be hanged, even in the future.... [It will be] used as a precedent for many international conventions.... The amended protocol means....that we accept that ozone depletion is a global problem, and that we must share the burden...with developed countries who have caused the problem...but not the ownership of common global resources like the atmosphere...."

"India will use during the entire 1990s less than four percent of all CFCs already emitted by the United States by 1985, and less than two-thirds of the United States' CFC and halon use in just one year, 1985. Shouldn't this damage be compensated for in no uncertain terms? But that would need fixing entitlements over the atmosphere--something the West shies away from...."

"Today, India and others will go out again with a begging bowl to ask for ozone-friendly funds. Tomorrow, it will be climate-friendly money; and the day after, bio-diversity-friendly money.... The government must realize that it has sold us out even on an issue in which morality is on our side."

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"North, Not South, Is Destroying Earth"

Under the above headline, the independent Times of India featured this piece by Bunker Roy, "Today, the world is being destroyed because there are too many cars, factories, power plants...contaminating the earth's atmosphere and polluting the water; it is not being destroyed because there are too many people."

"Rio Convention Heavily Weighted Against South"

The independent Times of India held March 27, "It is becoming increasingly clear that India is articulating the position of the South in its debate with the industrialized North over the treaties that are to be signed at UNCED.... The catch to the Rio convention is that the North wants access to the genetic resources of the South...in return for bankrolling conservation efforts.... An indication of the scant respect the draft convention pays to the sovereignty of developing countries is the proposal that every nation earmark one-tenth of its geographical area for the preservation of its bio-diversity.... It is outrageous, in a poor country where every hectare sustains people—if not for food, for grazing or even fuelwood....

"All in all, the terms of the bio-diversity convention are heavily weighted against the interest of the South."

"Watch Your Step"

An editorial in the independent Economic Times made this point March 26: "The reported decision by the government of India to sign the...Montreal Protocol is not surprising, because the...London Amendments to it do mark a substantial improvement over the original Act.... Even so, the treaty still puts an iniquitous burden on developing countries.... The depletion of the ozone layer is due to the high consumption of ozone-depleting chemicals by the industrialized countries. Consumption in India is several orders of magnitude less than in the developed world.... India may not have anything obvious to gain by becoming a party unless there is a 'quid pro quo'—like international support in multilateral fora, and the removal of any scope for foreign aid getting tied to domestic environmental practices."

"Earth Politics Still Rich Vs. Poor"

Under the headline above, an analysis March 17 in the independent Times of India by former UN official Bhaskar Menon said, "There is general gloom at the prospect that the conference will do little more than adopt a largely meaningless declarative resolution."

BANGLADESH: "Concerns Of Countries Facing Inundation"

The independent Bangladesh Observer commented in an editorial March 17, "As the world approaches the meeting of nations at the UN Earth summit...the constant anxiety felt by low-lying countries faced with possible inundation due to a rise in the sea level can possibly be conveyed if leaders and environmentalists know how to present their case. Add to this the renewed concern we all must be feeling by the news the hole in the ozone layer has never been as wide as recorded this year.

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"The physical loss of arable land for Bangladesh is likely to be somewhere in the region of 14 percent of the present total in a country where land is always at a premium and population is expanding. Our mission must be to present our case at the coming meeting as effectively as is possible to awaken an awareness among the world body of our ensuing plight and be ready to support our contention with facts and figures."

MIDDLE EAST

SAUDI ARABIA: "Bush's Absence Will Scuttle Accord Efforts"

The largest English-language, liberal-leaning Arab News of March 30 said, "Next June, in Brazil, Rio de Janeiro will be the site of an Earth Summit.... Environmentalists, youth, blacks, women, religious leaders, you name it, will converge on the Brazilian city, but one gentleman in particular might be conspicuously absent, and he is George Bush."

"If Bush fails to show up, his absence would scuttle efforts to reach a meaningful accord on protecting the environment. If the New World Order, a term which Bush himself coined, means anything, it means we are all wedded to this planet. [We must move] beyond national prerogatives and onto global needs."

AFRICA

BOTSWANA: "U.S. Obstinace Threatens Success Of Earth Summit"

On March 20, the independent weekly Guardia ran this report from Washington under the headline above, "The United States is finding itself increasingly isolated in its opposition to proposals for protecting the earth's natural environment. The Administration of President George Bush has consistently been the main negative voice at international meetings held in preparation for this June's Earth Summit...."

"Third World countries are the most outspoken critics of Washington's generally hard-line position. But the United States has also found itself at odds with other industrialized nations on many issues to be discussed at the...conference...."

"Washington's main aim in Rio, suggests a report by Greenpeace, appears to be nothing more than to limit the damage to its international political standing."

EDITOR: Mildred Sola Neely

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