

II. MAIN FUNCTIONS

As an organization of sovereign nation states, the United Nations must rely essentially on the force of exhortation, moral suasion, international co-operation and multilateral diplomacy to achieve in practice the objectives of the Charter. Its behaviour and evolution reflect the collective behaviour and evolution of states as they are, not as we should like them to be. Its achievements have been the most enduring when states have been ready to strengthen its resources in order to give meaning to the common aspirations of humanity; its failures have been the most pronounced when states have put the pursuit of narrow national interests ahead of the goals and purposes of the Charter. A special responsibility rests in this regard on the permanent members of the Security Council, whose status is entrenched in the Charter by their right to veto its amendment.

The success the nations of the Third World have recently achieved in projecting their aspirations through the United Nations has tended to overshadow the more traditional and routine but far from insignificant activities of the UN family of organizations. Nevertheless, one cannot fairly assess the continuing value of the United Nations to the world community, and in particular to the West, without weighing the performance of these tasks in the balance along with the stresses perturbing the organization in the current phase of its evolution.

A. Maintenance of international peace and security

The provisions of the UN Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security were based on the assumption that the great powers would co-operate to this end, if necessary by the threat or use of collective force. As everyone knows, rivalries between the great powers, especially the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., prevented such co-operation. Except for Korea in 1950, therefore, the UN has never been able collectively to enforce the peace. To the extent that it has managed, by peace-keeping and other methods, to contain regional conflicts, the United Nations has nevertheless contributed to the avoidance of major wars since 1945.

Peace-keeping is the interposition between the parties to a conflict with their consent of disinterested forces or observers authorized by the international community. The role of peace-keeping is to assist the parties involved to draw back from a conflict when they are prepared to recognize that this is in their interest and to provide a framework of security in which their differences can be settled by negotiation. The spectrum of peace-keeping activities ranges from an unarmed mission with a role of observation and reporting only (UNTSO, UNMOGIP, UNOGIL, UNYOM), through roles of investigation, supervision and control (UNTEA, UNIPOM), to armed military units and formations that separate the combatants and may help to bring about a return to normal