

limitation. Other kinds of confrontation, moreover, have helped the United Nations to reach eventual consensus, as in progress towards decolonization, economic development, human rights and the development of international law. Confrontation has on occasion degenerated into war, but armed conflicts have been localized and many have been terminated rapidly; for a generation, major wars have been avoided. Fundamental disagreement among member states about the nature and functions of the United Nations or about the meaning of the Charter has never led to the permanent withdrawal of a member or, until recently, to the threat of suspension or expulsion.

Previous confrontations in the United Nations have been resolved, or at least mitigated, partly because of changing circumstances and partly as a result of actions – usually, a long series of actions – taken in accordance with the generally-accepted principles and spirit of the Charter. In recent years, there has appeared a new form of confrontation that poses a challenge to some of the principles enshrined in the Charter and undermines conventions that were generally accepted in earlier years. If it intensifies, it could affect adversely the ability of the United Nations to pursue its primary purposes and might even endanger the measure of progress it has achieved over the years.

The new confrontation had its origins in the early 1960s when, as former colonies achieved independence, the newly-emerging states joined other developing countries to form a majority in the United Nations. The formation of the original "Group of 77" (now numbering well over 100), and its far-reaching efforts to achieve a "New International Economic Order", have been discussed in Chapter Six. Although the primary objectives of the group have been in the economic field, many of the same states have also gathered to pursue political objectives, particularly in Africa and the Middle East. At the General Assembly of 1974, tension between developed countries and the Group of 77 over the latter's tactics in pursuing its economic objectives, exacerbated by additional tension arising out of efforts to promote the Palestine Liberation Organization at the expense of Israel, and to expel South Africa, gave