

*General Assembly
reflects interplay
of the realities
in global context*

tions might be a more important and relevant factor in assessing the influence a member should have in the Assembly than its economic resources or population.

Weighted voting in the United Nations General Assembly would strike at the fundamental principle of the sovereign equality of states enunciated in Article 2 (1) of the Charter. The rule of sovereign equality in the General Assembly may be viewed in a sense as a counterpoise to the pattern in the Security Council, where the permanent members enjoy an overriding veto power on substantive questions.

It may be true that there is imbalance between voting procedures and power realities in the United Nations General Assembly. Resolutions may be drafted by the majority despite the differing views of the small minority of members whose co-operative contribution is invariably essential to the success of any United Nations activity. In the Canadian view, the importance of this consideration can be exaggerated. The General Assembly is a diplomatic convocation in which the interplay of delegations cannot but reflect the interplay of political realities in the international community.

It is precisely because of those realities that those who value the United Nations for what it is, no less than for what it might become, must be sensitive to the risk of grave damage to the organization itself which could result from a direct confrontation of irreconcilable political forces within the membership. In this light, the principle of unanimity of the five permanent members of the Security Council must be accepted as an indispensable mechanism to prevent intolerable strains on the fabric of the organization.

New member category

Suggestions for Charter amendment have also been made regarding membership of the Security Council, including, for example, a proposal for a new category of permanent or semi-permanent members, drawn from among those states regarded as best able to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security. Such suggestions give rise to many of the same difficulties and objections noted above.

In practice, as in the case of proposals for weighted voting in the General Assembly, it would be very difficult to determine acceptable criteria for creating a further category of states, in addition to the permanent members, who would be entitled to preferred treatment in elections to the Security Council. One criterion which is sometimes proposed on the basis of a

somewhat narrow reading of Article 23 is the ability to contribute materially to the maintenance of international peace and security. From an examination of the membership of the Security Council over the last 26 years, it is clear that there has in fact been a significant correlation between the size of assessed contributions to the regular budget and the frequency with which member states have served as non-permanent members of the Council. It is to be anticipated, however, that an increasing number of non-permanent members will be drawn from among these states which each pay assessments of less than 0.1 per cent of the budget (currently some 65 per cent of the total membership). It would be difficult to sustain the view that these smaller states should be discouraged from taking an active part in the work of one of the principal organs of the United Nations. It would be equally difficult to assert that larger or wealthier states should be singled out by virtue of their wealth alone as being in a special position to contribute responsibility and constructively to the work of the Council.

Difficulties of a comparable nature are created by proposals to reconstruct the regional basis on which non-permanent members of the Security Council are now elected. Most of these proposals tend to produce an imbalance, to the disadvantage of smaller states, and to imply more or less arbitrary judgments of the fitness of particular members for service on the Council.

In Canada's view, the election of members to the Security Council is best left to consultations within the regional groups, with each group exercising discretion to ensure that the candidates put forward for membership are able and willing to make a substantial contribution to the Council's work.

A number of thoughtful observers, including the Secretary-General, have quite rightly underlined the likelihood that if the world were called upon to repeat the experience of San Francisco the results would not be nearly as impressive as our present Charter. The decisive element in the evolution of the United Nations over the past 26 years has been not the relatively minor changes that have been made in the Charter but the changing purposes and aspirations of its members. The Government of Canada is of the view that what is needed is not so much an overhaul of the Charter as a more effective implementation and utilization of the existing framework for positive international co-operation in order to achieve the goal of making the United Nations an effective instrument in harmonizing the actions of nations.