

A sample of expert opinion

How the ratings worked

The low rating of population as a factor of influence was often explained by a reference to China, whose performance was disappointing, or to a mini-power such as Singapore whose representative, Tommy Koh, was extolled from all directions; he was described as "the single most effective person in the system," and, by a long-time observer, "the Lester Pearson of the 1980s." Almost as much admired was the youthful Ambassador of Uganda, Olara Otunnu, who had shone as President of the Security Council. The philosophic Ambassador of the Bahamas, Davidson Hepburn, was also cited as proof of the high importance of personality, in contrast to population, in explaining UN influence.

The high ranking of "influence within a group," and the much lower ranking of "reputation for independence," were linked. Many interviewees enthused about the quality and significance of the discussion within groups such as the European Community, the Nordic Union or ASEAN. There was no enthusiasm for the quality of the deliberations within the Group of 77, and several stressed the diverse nature of its membership, but no one could overlook its significance in the contemporary UN, or that of the nonaligned movement, its political counterpart. Several respondents made the point that Albania was the most independent member of the UN and, largely for that very reason, among the least influential. Cuba ranked high in influence despite its close bonds to the Communist bloc.

The relatively low ranking of "assessed contribution to the UN budget" was surprising, and was also contradicted by several subsequent responses. The respondents appeared reluctant to concede that it mattered who paid the piper, especially when the principal players, the US and USSR, were being so unpleasant about paying.

Also surprising was the middle ranking of "military power." Certainly in the issue areas where the UN was now making its most solid contribution, such as development, military muscle may well be irrelevant. However, to the extent that members recognized the inescapable primacy of peace as a UN objective, they must accept the central responsibility, and influence, of the superpowers. (In subsequent responses, the interviewees appeared to do so.) The lesson Canadians might well draw from this question is that a country of modest economic and military means, and membership in a bloc, can nevertheless exert significant influence in UN affairs.

Superpower ratings

Criticizing the United States was a principal pastime of most of our respondents. The criticism had less to do with the substance of US policies, provocative as these often were, than with the arrogance, abrasiveness, absenteeism and incompetence of the US mission. The senior US Ambassador at the time, Mrs. Jeane Kirkpatrick, herself criticized the "amateurishness" of the US performance, especially compared to the British. One of her American associates agreed, and added that the US could be "four times" as effective in the UN if it took the organization seriously. Indeed, if one measures the US performance against the ranking of twelve factors of UN influence, one would conclude that the US must be ranked as close to the

bottom of the influence heap; it was strong by the *lowest* five criteria, but weak by five on the first seven.

The Soviet Union, by contrast, was represented by a thoroughly experienced mission, headed by a long time ambassador of notable talent and affability. A senior American working for the Secretariat commented that the Soviet mission contained the best expert on almost every item on the UN agenda. The Soviet diplomats were not only active and knowledgeable but tactful enough to limit the length of their speeches. Measured against our respondents' ranking of factors of influence, the Soviet Union would be expected to come out number one. In fact the USSR was far more likely than the US to be on the winning side of contested votes. The United States was increasingly in a minority of one, or isolated with Israel in a lonely twosome.

Nevertheless, when we asked our respondents directly to name the most influential members, the response favored the United States by a wide margin. Of the large majority that named the two superpowers, three-quarters estimated that the United States was out in front. Frequently, it was noted, the Americans seemed indifferent to the outcome of votes, or even to the way their allies were leaning. A number observed that the US seemed to enjoy its "Lone Ranger" role.

On issues the US judged to be of paramount importance, however, such as Arab moves to expel Israel, or Cuba's attempt to inscribe Puerto Rico on the UN agenda, the United States exerted its full influence, and the result could not be in doubt. The Soviet Union followed the Third World majority, it was contended, rather than giving it leadership. Its invasion of Afghanistan had probably cost it more respect than the US had lost through its bully tactics in Central America and elsewhere.

More certain is the influence gained by the United States as the principal source of the UN's financial support. Although decidedly less generous in per capita terms than the Scandinavians or Canada, US contributions, assessed and voluntary, remain by far the most substantial. An American threat to cutback, or withdraw, is difficult to ignore, and US wishes are quietly taken into account in the drafting of most resolutions. Soviet contributions are much smaller, and yet almost as grudging; indeed the two superpowers now collaborate in efforts to hold down the UN's relatively modest budget. It is hardly surprising that Soviet influence is notably weaker than that of the US in dealing with issues, such as international development, that are costly.

Third World leaders

When we asked our interviewees to name the most influential member of the Third World majority, India emerged far in front, with almost twice the mentions given the second place runner, Yugoslavia. India was also rated as second only to the two superpowers in overall UN influence. Comments suggested that this was a tribute as much to the quality of India's officials as it was to its size and relative maturity.

Ranked fourth and fifth in overall UN influence were France and Britain. Notably *not* mentioned were two weightier members of the western community, Japan and West Germany. This suggests that influence is perceived to