

PREFACE

The United Nations has been a constant in my personal and professional life. In 1946 my father was invited to join the world organization and for a quarter of a century he was an international civil servant. While still in short pants I visited the UN's provisional offices at Lake Success (in the outskirts of New York City) and later I went quite frequently to the splendid new Headquarters in Manhattan. In my house one spoke often and one spoke well of the United Nations.

My interest in multilateral diplomacy which the UN embodies grew after 1971 when, a year after entering the Mexican Foreign Service, I was posted to the Permanent Mission to international organizations in Geneva. It was to be the first of three tours there (1971–1974, 1977–1978 and 1989–1995). I served twice at the Mission in New York (1975 and 1983–1988). And it was my good fortune to know Isidro Fabela and Luis Padilla Nervo and to work closely with two other convinced internationalists: Alfonso García Robles and Jorge Castañeda.

Multilateral diplomacy can be very frustrating. Progress is slow and the fronts one has to cover are varied and difficult. But to me it is fascinating: first, because I have been lucky enough to represent a country whose foreign policy is relatively consistent and therefore widely respected and, second, because the dynamics of multilateral relations are still being defined. In bilateral relations the differences or asymmetries between countries are always evident (often felt and at times resented). In the multilateral world those differences also appear but there is a different, more egalitarian relationship among States. And the UN General Assembly is by definition the international community's most representative and egalitarian forum. To put it differently, a great virtue of the UN is that it allows us to dream.

For over twenty-five years I attended the autumn ritual of the General Assembly in New York. And I have witnessed how the UN has been used and abused by individual countries or groups of countries. It has had its good times and its not so good times. It had (and still has) its defenders and its detractors. There are those who believe in the UN and those who do not. I believe in the United Nations.

The idea for this study emerged in the mid-eighties when I was accredited as Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN in New York. It was a time of furious attacks against the Organization by some United States officials and institutions, especially the ultra-right Heritage Foundation.

The Executive Branch of the United States is required to submit an annual report to Congress on the "behavior" of countries at the United Nations, that is, how they conduct themselves in relation to US foreign policy

objectives and interests. To fulfill that requirement, the State Department developed the practice of classifying countries according to the degree of coincidence with US votes in the General Assembly.

For years, votes cast in the General Assembly have been compared and voting patterns analyzed. The organization Planetary Citizens, for example, identified some twenty resolutions, decided what was the "correct" vote (in favor, against or abstention) in light of certain "world order values" (especially those aimed at strengthening multilateral action) and graded countries accordingly.

For its part, the United States chose ten resolutions of "special interest" and classified countries according to their coincidence with it. This or that country was a friend because in eight or nine of those votes it coincided with the United States. Not one, by the way, coincided in all ten votes with the United States which often found itself alone pressing the red button.

It was precisely to document US isolation in the Assembly that I began to study the negative votes cast since 1946. The initial results of my research appeared in an article entitled "How nations vote in the General Assembly of the United Nations", published in *International Organization* in the autumn of 1987. Then I became interested in the comparison of the votes of UN Members. The next step was to feed into a computer all the registered votes in the General Assembly Plenary and to design a program to compare the voting patterns of Member States. This produced the "coincidence index" that served as the basis for part of my analysis of how countries vote in the Assembly. With rare exceptions, States do not vote in favor of or against one another; they vote in favor of certain causes and, in general, according to the principles and purposes enshrined in the UN Charter.

In this book I have omitted the academic apparatus (footnotes, bibliography, etc.) which usually accompanies studies such as this one. Almost all bibliographical references are to UN documents which are identified by letters: A/..., in the case of the General Assembly, and S/..., for the Security Council. These are verbatim records (PV. or *procès-verbaux*) of the meetings and official documents, including the texts of resolutions and decisions.

Until 1975 Assembly documents were numbered consecutively. Thus, for example, resolutions were identified by their number and, in parenthesis in Roman numerals, by the session in which they were adopted. The last one was 3541 (XXX). Since 1976, the abbreviations were simplified in such a way that the first resolution of the thirty-first session was 31/1.

This book was written in both English and Spanish. This edition is a revised and abridged version of the text that first appeared in Mexico in 1994, *Votos y vetos en la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas*.

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