

# Fever Chart of the U.N.

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Recent events in the United Nations have called into question American support for the world organization—particularly resolutions of the Twenty-Ninth General Assembly (1974) giving observer status to the Palestine Liberation Organization, resolutions of the Thirtieth Assembly (1975) equating Zionism with racism, and recent actions of the U.N. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Labor Organization. What I plan here, using polling data primarily, is an analysis of the current state of American public opinion about the U.N., and I want to place the current attitude in historical perspective.

In the early years of the organization—roughly from the signing of the Charter in 1945 through the Korean armistice in 1953—the American public tended to have great expectations of the United Nations. A generation that had lived through a great war now looked toward the new organization to organize and implement a new peace. The U.N. was frequently described in such phrases as the “last, best hope for mankind.” But even in the beginning it was apparent to those who understood the severe limitations placed by the Charter on the independent powers of the new organization that the U.N.’s successes and failures in maintaining peace would do little more than mirror the determination (or lack of it) of the Great Powers to cooperate in constructing a peaceful world.

In these early years there existed a broad bipartisan support for the U.N. Opposition tended to concentrate in “fringe” groups, such as the John Birch Society, which persist to this day in viewing the U.N. as a Communist Trojan horse aimed at subverting our free society.

As criticism of the Korean War grew, disillusionment with the U.N. became more evident, but public opinion polls indicated that a large percentage of Americans felt the U.S. should continue participation in the U.N. In January, 1951, the Gallup Organization asked a representative sample of Americans: “*Do you think the*

*United States should give up its membership in the United Nations, or not?*” Seventy-two per cent of the respondents said we should not relinquish membership; 14 per cent said we should; and another 14 per cent had no opinion on the matter. When the same question was posed in May and November of the same year, 75 per cent of the respondents recommended retaining our U.N. membership.

During the 1960’s Gallup posed the same question about continued U.S. membership in the U.N. The responses indicated an even greater conviction that the U.S. and U.N. should not part company. In January, 1962, 86 per cent felt we should remain; in November, 1963, 79 per cent; and in August, 1967, 85 per cent. In none of these three polls did more than 10 per cent of the respondents favor withdrawal.

It was a different matter when people were queried about whether the U.N. was achieving its goals. Gallup had also asked in 1967: “*In general, do you feel that the United Nations is doing a good job or a poor job in trying to solve the problems it has had to face?*” Forty-nine per cent felt it was doing a good job; 35 per cent a poor job; and 16 per cent expressed no opinion. Three years later, in October, 1970, the number who felt the U.N. was doing a good job had declined to 44 per cent, and a greater number than previously—40 per cent—felt it was not. In November, 1971, only 35 per cent of those polled felt the U.N. was doing a good job; 43 per cent felt it was not; and 22 per cent ventured no opinion.

By the late 1960’s there were many changes at the U.N. itself. The Great Power veto held by the United States, the United Kingdom, France, China, and the Soviet Union continued to protect the U.S. position in the Security Council, and the weighted voting formula based on financial contributions still guarded Western interests in the two most powerful specialized agencies, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. But in other bodies of the U.N. the “one nation-one vote” rule enabled the Third World to grasp control of formal decision-making. Initially,

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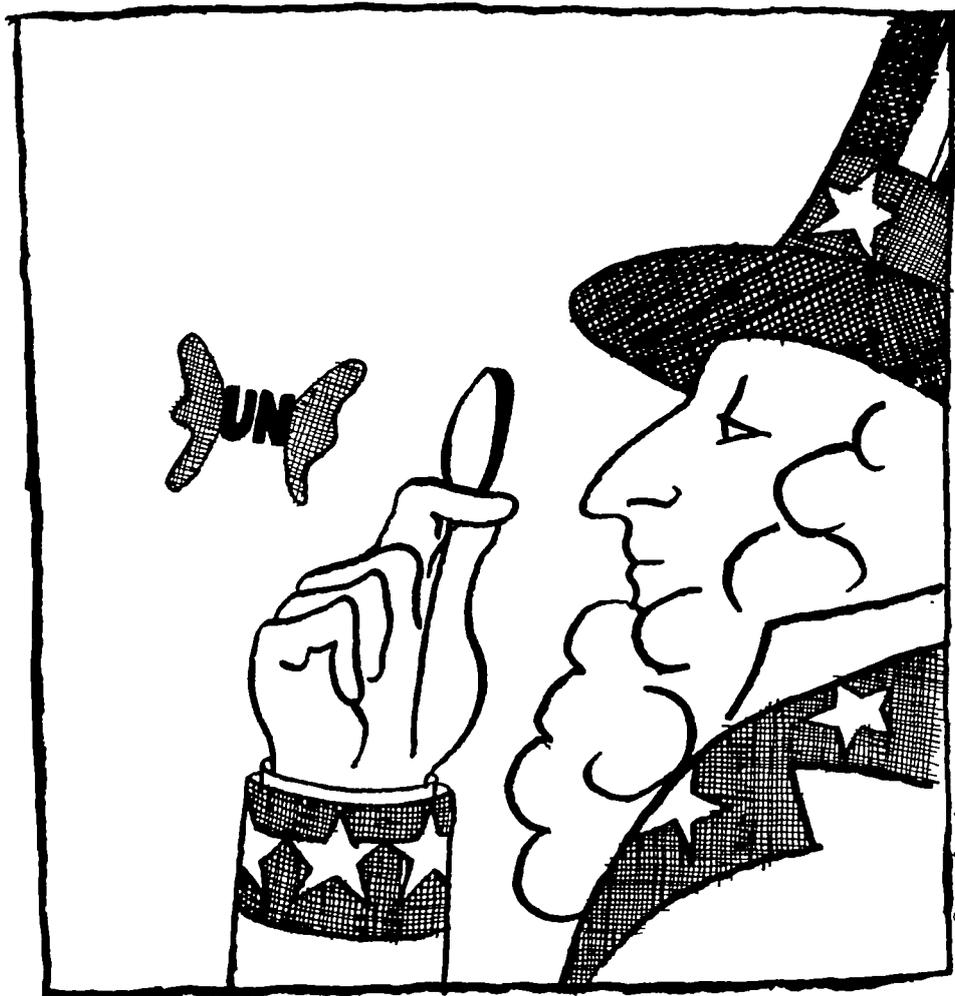
this control remained more potential than actual; its full exercise depended on developing cohesion on many key issues—a cohesion that, for a time, evaded the Third World. However, the dramatic quadrupling of petroleum prices by OPEC in 1973 gave tremendous impetus to the growing unity of the “Group of 77” (now numbering 113). Whether or not justified in economic terms, it is undeniable that the Group of 77 viewed the OPEC action as a model for its own future dealings with the developed world.

This led to strong demands by the Third World for economic justice—for example, to the New International Economic Order, expressed in the one-sided Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States that the Group of 77 rammed through the Sixth Special Session of the General Assembly in September, 1974. But it was not such demands that disturbed the American public and the Congress. Rather, it was the decision of the Arab

short of expulsion that the Arab states are considering.

Foremost among these methods—and foremost among the worries of United States policy-makers charged with preparing for this fall’s General Assembly session—is an effort to exclude Israel from participation in the Assembly, probably through an attack on its credentials. There is already an example for such an action: Behind a ruling of dubious legality by the President of the 1974 Assembly, Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria, the representatives of South Africa were excluded. (South Africa did not present its credentials at the 1975 Assembly; its boycott of the Assembly meant that the question of exclusion was not raised again.)

Prior to the 1975 Assembly, momentum seemed to be gathering for an effort to exclude Israel. It collapsed, however, due primarily to the refusal of a majority of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to endorse such a move before the opening of the Assembly.



states—with broad, though not unanimous, backing from the Group of 77—to use the entire U.N. system as a primary vehicle for obtaining what they view as the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The Arabs sought not only to use U.N. bodies to condemn specific actions of Israel, but also to challenge, and ultimately to deny, the very legitimacy of the State of Israel. Since expulsion of a member state of the United Nations can be accomplished only by an affirmative recommendation of the Security Council, it is clear that Israel will not be expelled from the world body. But there are methods

The 1975 General Assembly got off to an excellent start. The Seventh Special Session, which preceded the regular session in September, reached landmark consensus on a resolution on North-South economic relations. Even so skeptical a participant as U.S. Ambassador Daniel Patrick Moynihan exulted: “This system works.” But the harmony was short-lived. In October the Third Committee of the General Assembly—a normally uncontroversial committee that deals with social, humanitarian, and cultural matters—approved an Arab-initiated resolution stating

that "Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination."

Between committee action and consideration by the full General Assembly, the United States, with little help from its Western and other allies, made a concerted effort to postpone consideration of the vote until a future session of the Assembly. It will long be debated, but never determined, whether this effort might have succeeded had not U.S. Ambassador Moynihan alienated a significant number of Third World nations through his widely publicized verbal barrages. In any event, the key motion to postpone consideration of the resolution for a year was defeated by a vote of 67 to 55, with 15 abstentions. Immediately thereafter the resolution labeling Zionism a form of racism and racial discrimination was passed: 72 in favor, 35 against, 32 abstentions. The impact of this resolution upon American public opinion was immediate and strong.

Between November 22 and 29, 1975, the Harris Survey asked a cross section of adults nationwide *how they felt about the Zionism/racism resolution*. Only 9 per cent approved it; 49 per cent opposed it; and a surprisingly high 42 per cent were unsure how they felt about it. Among the better educated segments of the public, disapproval was significantly higher: 66 per cent of the college-educated respondents disapproved the resolution, as did 70 per cent of those who were professional people. Paralleling this, Harris found that by a 49-24 per cent plurality Americans favored reducing U.S. financial support of the U.N.; and a 43-26 per cent plurality supported "the U.S. putting the U.N. on notice that it will depart from the U.N. if such prejudice is shown in the future."

Still, in a poll conducted by the Gallup Organization in the very same month it was found that although the public's rating of the U.N.'s *performance* was at a thirty-year low, three Americans out of four—the same ratio that had prevailed in the early 1950's—favored *continued U.S. membership in the U.N.*

An historical perspective. Earlier in the year, in January, a Gallup survey had revealed that 41 per cent of the respondents felt the U.N. was doing a good job; 38 per cent a poor job; and 21 per cent were voicing no opinion. In the wake of the Zionism/racism vote, the November Gallup poll revealed, support of the U.N.'s performance took a significant downturn: only 33 per cent now felt the U.N. was doing a good job; 51 per cent rated it a poor job; and 16 per cent had no opinion. But the same poll indicated that 74 per cent of the respondents felt the U.S. should remain in the U.N. (down just 1 per cent from the previous February). It is thus evident that the American public did not view the Zionism/racism vote as sufficient cause for the severance of U.S. ties with the U.N. Among the college-educated respondents in the November poll, 82 per cent felt we should remain in the U.N.

**I**t also became clear in late 1975 and early 1976 that the U.S. public felt we were being "pushed around" in the U.N. and had come to favor the style adopted by then Ambassador Moynihan. On

January 12, 1976, the Opinion Research Corporation (OPR) released the results of a poll that asked two questions. First: "*Our United Nations Ambassador, Daniel Moynihan, has been praised by some people for speaking frankly and criticized by others for his lack of diplomacy. In your opinion, should he continue to speak frankly and forthrightly, or should he be more diplomatic and tactful?*" Seventy per cent of the respondents felt he should continue to speak frankly; 16 per cent felt he should be more diplomatic; and 14 per cent had no opinion. (The phrasing here is worrisome. It would be interesting to see the results of a sample who had been asked: In your opinion, should U.S. representatives in any international body be "frank and forthright" or should they be "diplomatic and tactful." A better measure of reactions to words, perhaps, than to opinion about specific performance in the U.N.)

The OPR poll also asked: "*Should United States financial support for the United Nations be increased, decreased, or kept at the current level?*" Only 9 per cent favored an increase; 36 per cent favored decreasing our support; 42 per cent felt it should be kept at the current level; and 13 per cent had no opinion. (There were some interesting subgroup variations in the OPR data. Forty-four per cent of male respondents favored reduced U.S. support for the U.N., while only 28 per cent of the females favored reductions. The strongest regional support—though still small—for increased U.S. contributions was in the South: 13 per cent. The weakest regional support for increased contributions was to be found in the Northeast: 5 per cent.)

It is interesting to compare data gathered in public opinion polls with data gathered in a poll of the public's elected representatives. A January, 1975, survey conducted by the United Nations Association asked members of the U.S. House of Representatives some forty-one questions related to the U.N. and U.S. foreign policy, among them: "*Should U.S. contributions to the U.N. be increased, decreased, or remain about the same?*" Forty-seven per cent preferred that the level remain the same; 45 per cent favored a decrease; and only 8 per cent favored an increase. This poll, taken before the Zionism/racism resolution, indicates that attitudes in the House toward U.N. funding roughly paralleled the attitudes of the American public after the Zionism resolution. The House, it seems evident, has been highly critical of the U.N.

Given the negative public attitude toward the Zionism/racism resolution, one might have expected Congress to "penalize" the U.N. by reducing U.S. financial support. Some efforts were made in Congress to do just that. However, there is general agreement that reaction in Congress to the resolution was moderate and restrained. This is not to suggest that members of Congress were unopposed to the resolution. Indeed, it would be difficult to find a single member who did not find it factually inaccurate and morally offensive. It is apparent, though, that the Congress was aware of the background of the resolution, as well as of the nature of the General Assembly, i.e., a body with authority only to make nonbinding recommendations. It seems evident too—though quantitative data are not available to sup-

	<i>Highly or moderately effective</i>	<i>Only somewhat or not at all effective</i>	<i>No opinion</i>
Working to help underprivileged children around the world	50 per cent	37 per cent	13 per cent
Working to improve health care around the world	49	35	16
Keeping world peace	49	44	7
Providing technical know-how for underdeveloped nations	47	34	19
Helping to increase world food production	45	39	16
Helping our population problems by teaching family planning	36	44	20
Working to improve and protect the environment	35	49	16

port this view—that many members of Congress are unwilling, for now, to penalize what they view as important and generally effective U.N. programs in humanitarian and developmental areas. An indication of this is the action of the Congress in June in approving and sending to the President for signature the fiscal year 1976 foreign assistance bill, which included \$160 million for voluntary contributions to international organizations and programs, an increase of \$35 million over 1975. Most of this increase would be applied to the U.N. Development Program (\$78-100 million), reflecting, in part, a desire by key Appropriations Committee members to support the newly appointed Administrator of UNDP, Bradford Morse, a widely respected former member of Congress from Massachusetts.

The most recent indication of the continuing support of the American people for the U.N. is to be found in the Roper Organization's poll taken in March, 1976. A national sample was asked: "How do you feel about the United States being a member of the United Nations—are you strongly in favor of it, or not very much in favor of it, or not at all in favor of it?" Forty-seven per cent were strongly in favor; 30 per cent moderately in favor; 8 per cent not very much in favor; 7 per cent not at all in favor; and 8 per cent had no opinion. Thus, a total of 77 per cent of the respondents favored, either strongly or moderately, continued U.S. membership in the U.N.—again, roughly three out of four. The Roper data on subgroups indicate that 81 per cent of those with a college education, and an equal percentage of those in executive or professional positions, favored continued membership.

The same Roper poll sought to determine how the

American people evaluated the U.N.'s performance in specific areas. Respondents were asked *whether they thought the U.N. has been highly effective, moderately effective, only somewhat effective, or not at all effective* in the seven areas noted on the chart.

This poll indicates—as did Gallup polls cited earlier—that more Americans approve U.S. participation in the U.N. than feel that the U.N. is successful in its endeavors. The public seems to be saying: "There is no alternative to the United Nations, even if it hasn't accomplished all I would like to see it do."

What can be concluded from an analysis of this series of opinion polls?

*First*, it is clear that a steady three out of four Americans feel the U.S. should remain in the U.N., while only between 10 and 15 per cent feel we should withdraw.

*Second*, depending on the time and the issue, there is a rough 50-50 split—varying to 60-40 in both directions—as to whether the U.N. is meeting the problems and challenges it faces.

*Third*, most Americans feel—in roughly equal numbers—that the U.S. should either support the U.N. at about the same financial level, or cut back on our support. Only a small percentage favors increased support.

*Fourth*, the significant change in public opinion following passage of the Zionism/racism resolution indicates that, in the eyes of the American public, a critical element for continuing support of the U.N., is how the American people perceive Israel is being treated in the U.N.

*Fifth*, the data would seem to indicate a recognition on the part of Americans that, imperfect as it may be, there is no real alternative to the United Nation in the world today.