

Security Council reform

MEGASTHENES

IN performance and achievement, the UN has not quite measured up to the great expectations that the peoples of the world had of it in 1945. And yet the Organisation's has been a beneficent presence; there are many who see in it proof of man's wisdom, and indeed count its very existence to be a gain. Where the UN has faltered, particularly in the broad area of international peace and security -- primary responsibility for which is vested in the Security Council -- the reasons are related more to a lack of political will on the part of key member-states than to any structural deficiencies.

The framers of the UN Charter, of course, drew from and built upon the experience and example of the League of Nations. The League had three principal organs, an Assembly, a Council and a permanent Secretariat. The Council was the executive arm of the League, with joint responsibility with the Assembly for "any matter within the sphere of action of the League or affecting the peace of the world."

As per Article 4.1 of the Covenant, the Council was to consist of "Representatives of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers, together with Representatives of four other Members of the League." The principal powers were the US, Britain, France, Italy and Japan; the US, of course, did not become member of the League. Council decisions were by unanimous vote. Or in other words every Council member, permanent and non-permanent, had veto powers.

The League has rightly been described as the "first effective move towards the organisation of a worldwide political and social order, in which the common interests of humanity could be seen and served." During 1920-30, the organisation did enjoy a certain prestige and its achievements were not negligible. In the area of world peace and security, however, it was clearly less than successful.

The US seat in the permanent category was given to Germany in 1926, and following Japan's departure from the organisation, the USSR became a permanent member. By 1940, Japan, Germany and Italy had left the League, and the USSR had been expelled. The League was thus left with only two permanent mem-

bers, Britain and France.

In 1945, the delegates at San Francisco, in the words of the first UN Secretary General, Trygve Lie, created "as strong an organisation as all of them could agree upon and as.....could, in practice, be effective at this stage in the history of the world." The Security Council comprised eleven members, including five permanent members, US, UK, France, USSR and China. By Charter amendment, which came into force in 1965, Council membership was enlarged to fifteen; the category of permanent membership was not affected.

The unanimity rule of the League's Council was diluted; only the permanent members were conferred veto powers. At San Francisco, none of the great powers would countenance the possibility of fighting a war without its own consent, even to enforce peace. The veto was a concession to reality; any attempt at peace-enforcement in the face of overt opposition of a major power could only end in confrontation and disaster. In effect, this meant that peace and security issues involving big power interests were placed outside the purview of the Security Council. Thus the Council could not address the Hungarian revolt and the Suez war of 1956, the Czech crisis of 1968 or the Vietnam War.

At its inception, the UN had 51 member-states; by 1965, when the size of the Security Council was expanded, membership had grown to 114. By the early 1990's some 185 states were members of the UN. Many felt that a modest expansion of the Council was warranted, to better reflect the considerably increased membership of the organisation. The broad objective in general was more democratisation of the UN. In 1992, the 47th UN General Assembly adopted without vote a resolution on the question of equitable representation on, and increase in the membership of, the Security Council.

The resolution reaffirmed the principle of sovereign equality of all member states and requested the secretary general to invite member states to submit written comments on a possible review of the membership of the Council. The following year, the 48th UNGA, in a consensus resolution on the same subject, established an open-ended

working group to consider all aspects of the matter. Since then the issue of Security Council expansion and reform has been the subject of both formal and informal discussions and negotiations, without much progress towards agreement or a consensus.

Prior to the 47th UNGA resolution, there were feelers that Security Council reform could include an increase in permanent seats. *The New York Times*, in an editorial, argued that the permanent five represented the military realities of 1945, and that present day economic realities should be accommodated by the inclusion of Japan and Germany in the permanent ranks.

US advocacy for Japan and Germany perhaps related more to financial concerns than to any genuine conviction that this would necessarily make for a more dynamic and effective Council. In the early '90s, peace-keeping operations had

the UN and its bodies should avoid perpetuating the current inequalities by creating new centres of privilege, and be pursued in the spirit of sovereign equality of all States."

The NAM position was subsequently modified, as a few NAM members aspired to permanent membership of the Council. The foreign ministers of the organisation agreed at a meeting that NAM countries should not be excluded from any increase in membership of the Council. In other words, NAM countries should be included in any expansion of the permanent category. This position was reaffirmed at the 11th NAM summit at Cartagena in October, 1995.

Over the years there has been a variety of ideas on Council reform. The simplest formula called for an expansion of non-permanent seats only. The object was a somewhat larger Council, one that would be more representative of the present

process of natural selection, bigger states should over time opt to contest for the longer term.

The arrangement would be similar to the US Congress, where senators serve for six years and representatives for two. A few states argued for regional permanent seats, or floating regional permanent seats with veto powers. In effect, this would give veto powers to unspecified countries to be chosen by the regions. In more recent years, the idea of additional permanent seats without the veto has also been mooted.

A persuasive case can perhaps be made for a floating permanent seat for the most vulnerable member-states, those that have the most vital stakes in an effective UN. Such states should bring to bear a distinct perspective on the Security Council's deliberations.

Broad agreement on Security Council reform has been elusive, and this is largely because member-states are divided on the issue of any enlargement of permanent seats. Apart from Japan and Germany, the main contenders for a permanent seat are India, Brazil, Indonesia, Egypt, South Africa and Nigeria.

There are countries that can contribute intellectually and materially to the work of the Council. Japan, for example, has for years been the second highest contributor to the UN budget. In 2005 Japan's contribution, at that time nearly 20% of the budget, exceeded the combined contributions of four permanent members, Britain, France, China and Russia. The Japanese constitution renounces war as a sovereign right, disavows force or the threat of force as a means to settle international disputes, and does not recognise the right of belligerency of the state.

Certainly, permanent membership of the Council would add to a country's prestige and image. And yet the idea of an expansion in the permanent ranks begs awkward questions. Permanent members are accountable to none but themselves, and have absolute immunity from peace-enforcement mechanisms of the Council. How exactly would extending this privilege to more states add to the Council's effectiveness?

The veto, or the threat of it, has stymied the Council in some of the intractable peace and security issues at different times. Would adding to the ranks of the veto-wielding members

facilitate or further complicate decision-making by the Council? And then there is a very perplexing aspect. For developing countries in particular, the broad purpose of reform is to have a Council that is more democratic, accountable, transparent and efficient in its working methods and decision-making. The provision of permanent membership is not the most democratic feature of the UN system; how would adding to it conduce to a more democratic, accountable and transparent Council?

One would expect a state's policy in respect of UN Security Council reform to be premised on two considerations, and these may or may not pull in the same direction. Countries would naturally wish to support reform measures that could enhance the Security Council's effectiveness, and also make it more democratic in its procedures. This, however, is almost an abstraction, unlikely to impinge in the short run on vital national interests of a member-state.

Secondly there is the element of national interest. It is perhaps moot whether expansion of permanent membership will make for a more effective Council. However, there can be benefits -- in the shape of goodwill or possibly even of a more tangible nature, such as investments and trade concessions -- from supporting the aspirations of permanent membership of a particular country or countries. A state may have to strive for the right balance between the two. The ideal, of course, should not be the enemy of the achievable.

Addressing the United States Committee for United Nations Day on September 23, 1953, President Eisenhower said: "With all its (the UN's) defects, with all the failures that we can check up against it, it still represents man's best organised hope to substitute the conference table for the battlefield. It has had its failures, but it has had its successes too. Who knows what could have happened in these past years of strain and struggle if we hadn't had the UN? I think it is far more than merely a desirable organisation in these days. I think the UN has become sheer necessity."

Eisenhower was speaking eight years after the establishment of the UN, in Cold War times. Nearly sixty years on, his words are still valid; especially so for smaller countries. Reforms that would serve to make the UN more effective are surely welcome.

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become the UN's most high profile -- and also a very expensive -- activity. Its budget at one point of time was more than three times the UN's regular budget. Permanent members were assessed at a much higher rate for contributions to the peace-keeping budget.

As permanent members, Japan and Germany, respectively the second and third highest contributors to the regular budget after US, would be contributing considerably more to peace-keeping, and thus relieve US of some of its burden. There was a strong feeling in Congress that US contribution to the UN budget should be reduced.

At that time not too many states were enthused at the prospect of any increase of permanent members. British Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, reportedly made a wry comment: "If it ain't broke, don't mend it." NAM also had reservations in this regard. At the Jakarta summit in 1992, NAM leaders agreed that the "democratisation of

UN membership. This enjoyed considerable support among member-states. Italy favoured the addition of ten more seats, of which five would be non-permanent and five, semi-permanent. The semi-permanent category would be reserved for 25 members or so, on the basis of certain criteria, including ability to contribute to the work of the UN. They would serve more frequently on the Council.

Support for the idea was limited; pre-determination of members states, who would be eligible to serve as semi-permanent members, is clearly inconsistent with the basic UN principle of sovereign equality of member-states. A more acceptable variation of the idea perhaps would be to have two categories of non-permanent seats in an enlarged Council. The first category would be for a term of two years as at present, while states elected to the second and new category would have four or six year terms. States would be free to contest in either category. By a

New coal-fired steam power plant

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LIKE on several occasions in the past, a Master Plan for electricity sector has been prepared for the period up to 2030, envisaging a coal-based additional generation capacity of 15,000 MW. This is apparently logical as addition of generating capacity with plants of higher efficiency and attaining economy of scale is required.

Universally accepted engineering norms and practices need to be followed. Least cost solution commensurate with required safety and quality need to be attained. Sustenance of built system on a viable commercial basis is essential.

In the case of large investment economic and financial viability need to be carefully examined. All identifiable aspects of engineering and problems of implementation followed by subsequent operation and maintenance need to be considered.

Huge investment is needed for a power plant. Unless capable persons are available to operate and maintain them, the expected and projected benefits will not be available and electricity failure will become frequent, causing financial loss to the utility and to the nation.

Again, wrong selection of site increases investments, leading to higher electricity tariff for recovering cost. As an example, the Raozan power plant in Chittagong may be mentioned. In the feasibility study conducted by a Chinese company, it was recommended to establish the large power plant upstream at a

location beyond the Kaptai Dam at a point where the Karnafuly river takes a 90 degree turn. Instead, the plant was built at the present location, causing additional expenditure, and leaving a perpetual problem of cooling water supply.

Another example of wrong location is the Sikalbaha power plant located on the other side of Chittagong city. No engineer or technician wants to stay at the site because one has to use boats to cross the Karnafuly River to reach it from Chittagong city. Presence of senior engineers near a power plant is essential for safe O&M activities.

Thus, proper feasibility and engineering study is essential before deciding on the location of a major power plant. The following points need special attention:

- Facilities for transportation of imported heavy equipment from the port of entry to the site. The large plant being established in the state of Tripura requires considerable help and cooperation of the government of Bangladesh to take the route through Ashugonj river port. This was somewhat unavoidable because of other favourable factors like availability of abundant natural gas in the state of Tripura near the Bangladesh border. Again, the load demand of the area is considerable;
- Availability of fuel for running the power plant over its entire life of 40 to 50 years. Coal fuel power station based on imported coal cannot perhaps be sustained over

a long period because of reasons explained below. Our own coal must replace imported expensive coal;

- Proximity of load centre and availability of electrical transmission facility;
- Availability of not so rich agriculture land for establishing a power plant;
- Availability of cooling water. One of the best things that happened in the field of fossil fuel based commercial energy was the discovery of substantial high-quality, low-sulphur coal in the northwest region of Bangladesh. Natural gas was the basis of

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almost all our economic and industrial activities during the last 5/6 decades. It still continues to supply the major requirement of commercial energy. Now the present known gas reserve can no longer meet increasing energy demand, and indigenous coal must be the primary source of our accelerated commercial energy requirements.

Unlike natural gas, coal is not so easy to explore and mine in a densely populated country where land suitable for human habitation

and for agriculture is one of the scarcest of resources. Many of us tend to be (perhaps rightly so) suspicious about foreign investors and multinationals. Our past experience on different major projects was not always found to be in the best interest of the country.

In the case of our precious underground coal reserve every effort was made to protect the interest of the country. To that end, drafting of coal policy was embarked upon in 2006.

It is important to remember that drafting and acceptance of an excellent policy document in no way

provide guarantee to protect all the vital interests of the country. Mostly, in the case of implementation of excellent policy guidelines, we tend to be on the losing side of negotiations and contract execution.

Delay in taking the right decision is fatal for the nation. We need electricity for creating new jobs for our rapidly increasing young population. Export of goods and services needs to be increased through improvement of quality, shorter delivery period and competitive

prices. Additional food production is needed on our scarce available land. Produced and processed food need to be scientifically preserved. All these activities and others depend on uninterrupted supply of electricity at correct voltage and frequency.

To achieve this we must explore, mine, store and use coal to operate larger steam power plants. It may be mentioned that top grade quality coal is not burnt as fuel in a power plant. It is the low grade residue of mined coal that is used in power plants universally.

We cannot depend on import of expensive foreign coal to run our new power plants with envisaged total capacity of 15,000MW by 2030. Import can only be a temporary alternative due to unforeseen factors and for similar other reasons. We do not have the required physical infrastructure like port facility, round the year navigable channel, storage capacity and other facilities, to import coal in large quantity. Again, coal is no longer easily available in source countries for import. Taking lease of a coal field in a foreign land, mining of coal to meet our requirement and bringing the coal to meet our need is an almost utopian idea. We cannot even efficiently mine our own coal resources.

We live in an import-oriented country. Food, edible oil, fuel oil, raw materials etc., all have to be imported. We do not earn enough foreign exchange to meet our increasing import requirement.

Locating two power plants of individual capacity of 1,230 MW at Rumpal in Khulna and at Anowara in Chittagong is perhaps based on the need to import coal in large quantity (about 8,000 ton per day) from abroad. It may be a very difficult task, if at all possible.

In any case, we shall use indigenous coal eventually. The coal mines are located in the extreme northwest of the country. Establishment of coal fired power station near the mouth of the coal mine has been under consideration for a long time. We have a very good electricity grid system to transfer bulk power. As such, there is little cogent reason not to build new steam power stations in the northwest.

Conflicting opinions expressed through meetings, processions etc. is a normal phenomenon in an overpopulated country. Any policy that the government in power formulates faces supposedly enormous opposition. We have not been able to adopt a coal policy during the last 5 years. We have no time to form committee after committee. We have already delayed too much.

About one year ago it was decided in a high level meeting held in the Ministry of Energy that Petrobangla /BAPEX /Coal Bangla would be allocated a promising coal mine site and they would select a suitable partner at the most favourable terms and start mining of coal. Let us revive this initiative and start action.

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