

Revitalizing the United Nations: Reform Through Weighted Voting

By Joseph Schwartzberg

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Review by Ron Glossop

A persistent question addressed to champions of world federation is, "How do we get from where we are now to that ideal democratic world federation?" A noteworthy answer is provided by Joseph Schwartzberg. Ron Glossop's review summarizes this radical new weighted voting proposal.

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The argument is well-reasoned and thoroughly documented. If the UN is to be taken seriously as a policy-making body, the voting system in both the main bodies, the Security Council and the General Assembly, must be revised. In the Security Council veto power has been granted "in perpetuity" to five nations that happened in 1945 to be on the winning side of World War II, and two of them named in the UN Charter (the Republic of China and the Soviet Union) no longer even exist. In the General Assembly, each country has one vote regardless of its population (but 42 of the 191 members have a population of less than a million persons while China and India each has over a 1,000 million) or economic influence (52 of the 191 members have a GNP which is less than 0.01 percent of the total GNP of all UN members while the United States has 29.95 percent of the total and Japan has 13.68 percent). Only after a rational voting system has been established will the UN be transformed into a credible policy-making body for the world community.

The solution, Schwartzberg argues persuasively, is a weighted voting system that takes into account population (the democratic/demographic principle), contribution to the UN budget (the economic principle), and share of the total membership (the legal principle). Each country is assigned a weighted vote on the basis of these three factors. To determine the weighted vote of any country, one must add its P (that nation's percentage of the total population of all UN members) plus its C (that nation's percentage of the total contributions to the UN budget) plus its M (that nation's percentage of the total UN membership, which of course would be the same for all members) and then divide that sum by 3 to get the average. Schwartzberg provides the weighted vote each country would have based on current data. For example, the weighted vote for the U.S. would be 9.1 percent of the total. For China it would be 7.7 percent. For the smallest microstates it would be 0.17 percent.

The application of the weighted voting system in the General Assembly where all nations are represented is straightforward. An amendment to the Charter would stipulate the level of support required (majority, 2/3 majority, or some special condition such as support of countries representing a majority of the world's population) to make binding decisions in various carefully defined spheres of concern. On pages 27 and 28 Schwartzberg provides sample wording for the amendment needed to implement this revised voting system.

Applying the weighted voting system to the Security Council gets much more complicated, though the readiness of international leaders to make some revisions here seems greater than in the case of the General Assembly. Schwartzberg argues cogently that designating Permanent Members by name is not sufficiently adaptable as changes take place in the world

and that allowing Permanent Members (who together represent only 30 percent of the world's population) to have a veto is unjust. There must be objective criteria for determining which countries are always on the Security Council, and the veto power of some members must be eliminated. Furthermore, the size of the Security Council should be increased in such a way that a significant proportion of the world's population is represented while keeping it from becoming so big that decisions cannot be made efficiently.

Rather than the present system where non-permanent members are selected by the General Assembly for two-year terms to represent pre-determined "regions," Schwartzberg says that there should be three-year terms with countries negotiating among themselves to decide who will be in which "bloc." The weighted voting system provides a basis for doing this. He proposes a Security Council of 18 representatives, each with one vote. The four countries which have a weighted vote of more than the agreed-upon 4 percent threshold (presently the U.S., China, Japan, and India) would each thereby be entitled to their own individual seat on the SC. Other countries would be free to work with one another to form a bloc or caucus where the weighted vote of the countries together would exceed the 4 percent threshold, thus entitling that bloc to a seat on the SC. For example, Germany (WV = 3.84) and Austria (WV = .53) together would have a WV of 4.37 and thus could form a bloc to get a seat on the SC. Northern European countries Denmark (WV = .45), Finland (WV = .37), Iceland (WV = .19), Ireland (WV = .29), Norway (WV = .41), Sweden (WV = .56) and United Kingdom (WV = 2.32) together would have a WV of 4.59 and thus could form a bloc to get a seat on the SC. Some blocs for a seat on the SC might consist of up to 23 countries, as would be the case for the Meso-American bloc or the bloc comprising Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa. There would undoubtedly be many countries not in any bloc, but one or two of the 18 seats on the SC would come from this group.

Schwartzberg works out a scenario wherein the 18-member SC has 4 seats filled by individual countries, 12 filled by plausible blocs, and 2 seats by those countries which are not a part of any bloc. At the same time he stresses that in actuality, the countries themselves would form their blocs in accord with their own calculations and that they would probably seek to form caucuses of cooperation that would endure. He also offers an alternative system of constituting the SC in case it were decided that the present permanent members could keep their seats on the SC during a 15-year transitional period (in order to placate France, Russia and the United Kingdom who according to the basic plan would immediately lose their seats on the SC).

Having set out the system for determining which countries or blocs are represented on the Security Council, Schwartzberg sketches alternative ways of choosing the individual representatives. There would be no question about how to select the representative of the four countries who exceed the minimum on their own, but how should the representative be selected in the case of the blocs?

Schwartzberg's more radical proposal is that each bloc would nominate from two to five individuals, with no more than one individual from any given country. This nomination process would take place every three years in the spring. In the fall when the General Assembly convenes, it would vote to determine the individual representative from each bloc, with the runner-up in that voting becoming the alternate for that bloc. Such a system encourages intra-bloc consultation to determine the candidates to be nominated. It also has the advantage of conducing to meritocracy since it would foster nominating individuals likely to get elected by the General Assembly as a whole. Furthermore, this system would promote the sense of democratic decision-making in the UN because the General Assembly would be electing the particular individuals who would serve on the Security Council. Allowing for the reelection of individual representatives would promote accountability to the whole world community rather than just to one's own bloc.

Schwartzberg's less radical proposal is that each bloc could decide on some kind of rotational system for which country gets to appoint the Security Council representative for that bloc. The larger the bloc, the more difficult that would be to do. Of course, one could also work out some compromise between these two systems. For example, the General Assembly might

select the country to appoint the representative rather than the particular individual. Regardless of which particular system is used for determining the representatives on the Security Council, one would begin by recognizing the blocs with the largest WV and then proceed to those with smaller WVs. This process would continue until all eligible caucuses or blocs were formed or until 17 seats had been filled. Then additional at-large seats would be filled from the remaining countries that are not part of any bloc. Countries chosen to fill at-large seats would be barred from serving consecutive terms.

Veto power in the Security Council would be eliminated. But, in order to overcome the resistance to such a change by countries that now have a veto, this modification might need to be phased in over a period of time. For example, the number of vetoes required to stop a resolution might be gradually increased from one to two to three. For another example, there might be a narrowing range of matters where a veto would be permitted.

In his concluding chapter Schwartzberg discusses the difficulty of effecting the changes he proposes. Still, he argues, the present situation resulting from the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S. requires that world leaders "come to grips with the new global realities." He pleads for action to reform the UN, either by adopting specific amendments to the Charter such as he is proposing or by holding a conference to review the Charter. The UN must be reformed so that it can "realize the dream that its creators set forth in the preamble to the Charter: to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war . . ."

In addition to the wealth of information in the text, this monograph contains six appendices containing massive amounts of valuable data about the 191 member-states of the UN and how that information is related to the proposals for weighted voting. This is an invaluable booklet that all world federalists should have in their personal library.

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