

Forum: Security Council (SC)

Issue: The Question of Reforming the Security Council Framework

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Introduction

Established on October 24, 1945, the United Nations was created to solve international economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian problems around the world. The victors of World War II—China, France, the Soviet Union (now Russia), United Kingdom and United States—served as the five permanent members of the Security Council. This council serves as a principal organ for peacekeeping and conflict management around the world, and resolutions passed in the Security Council are legally binding. The Security Council is, ironically, both a very powerful and a very weak organ; it can force domestic jurisdictions, impose sanctions, and demand alteration in domestic law. However, its resolutions could be easily blocked with one veto from a permanent member. Compared to the General Assembly, which is often praised for its global comprehensiveness and legitimacy, the Security Council has been heavily criticized and many member states have been calling for a possible reformation of the Security Council.

When establishing rules that guided the UN, the bulk of the disagreement happened between the United States, United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union. One of the main disagreements was centered around the Security Council and what voting procedure to adopt. The issue regarding the voting system soon becoming known as the “veto problem.” Although the number of vetoes have drastically decreased since the Cold War, the vetoes cast post-Cold War are seen as biased and tailored to individual member state’s agenda. As of right now, the Security Council suffers from obsolete membership, lack of representativeness, anachronism in working methods and the veto. Permanent member states in the Security Council are stated to have unrivaled status; since the council’s establishment, the veto vote has been used 242 times, with the bulk of the vetoes coming under the USSR and the United States. Many member states also argue that the current composition of the Security Council does not reflect the geopolitical situation of the status quo, and that representation in the council needs to be further diversified. With new emerging threats such as cyber security and transactional crime, the world will need an effective and legitimate Security Council. In a rapidly changing world, the Security Council still remains unchanged since its establishment. Despite a near unanimous consensus on the need for the Security Council to be reformed, progress is halted due to self-guided agenda and power politics.

Definition of Key Terms

P5 member state

At the end of the World War II, the 5 permanent members (P5) were the dominant world powers and were active in the negotiations about the UN Charter. Article 23 on the United Nations Charter says that “the Republic of China, France, The Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States shall be permanent members of the Security Council.” Unlike the non-permanent member states of the council, the P5 do not need to be elected by the General Assembly and has the right to veto a resolution.

Veto

To quote, veto is defined as an “unilaterally stop an official action, which is deemed absolute,” which is reflected in the UN Charter. In Article 27, part 3 of the UN Charter, it states that “Decisions of the Security Council on all other matters shall be made by affirmative vote of nine members including the concurring votes of the permanent members.” This clause entails that just one or more negative votes by the P5 members are considered a veto, and that the resolution presented would not be passed.

G4 Countries

The G4 Nations is comprised of Brazil, India, Germany, and Japan. The G4's primary goal is to become one of the permanent members on the Security Council. Since the end of World War II, the economic and political influence has grown significantly, reaching a scope comparable to the permanent members (P5). Currently, the United Kingdom and France have backed the G4's bid for permanent seats, and Japan has support from the United States. All the permanent members of P5 have supported India's bids for a permanent seat, but China states that they would only support India if it disassociates its bid from Japan.

Background Information

Brief history of Security Council

The Security Council is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations, and has the goal of maintaining international peace and security, approving changes to the UN Charter, and accepting applicants to the United Nations, as well as accepting new members to the United Nations. The Security Council held its first session on 17 January 1946. All resolutions passed in the Security Council are legally binding, and thus the resolutions can establish economic sanctions, peacekeeping operations,

and authorize the use of military. The original Security Council consisted of 11 member states, with 5 permanent members and 6 rotating non-permanent members. However, member states agreed to raise the number of non-permanent member states from 6 to 10 in 1965. Since the initial minor reform, a variety of plans and ideas have been presented, yet none of them can truly garner enough support for it to be ratified.

Different point of views

After a time gap, the UN General Assembly finally started to entertain a possible Security Council reformation in 1993. Member states formed blocs that aligned with their own interest, and soon groups such as the G4 Nations, African Union, and Uniting for Consensus all put forth their ideal way for an effective Security Council reformation: G4 Nations wanted to see additional permanent member states added to the council, African Union wanted African member states to play a larger role and receive more representation, and Uniting for Consensus disagrees with adding more permanent members, instead opting for more non-permanent members of the council. Another group, self-identified as the Small Five (S-5), has put forward a series of proposals for Council reform as well. This group wanted to see the Security Council increase its cooperation with other committees and organs of the United Nations, with the emphasis placed on the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). They also wanted to implement certain guidelines on the veto vote.

Annan Plan

As member states continue to disagree on the method to reform the Security Council, Secretary-General Kofi Annan proposed possible changes to the Security Council in December of 2004. He had two possible plans of reformation. The first plan was to add 6 permanent members, along with 3 non-permanent members to give way for fairer representation inside the Security Council. His second plan was to create a new category of member states in the council. He wanted to add 8 new seats in the Security Council, and these member states would serve 4 year terms instead of 2. Despite Annan's attempt for pushing these reforms, both plans ended up failing as member states continue to disagree and fail to compromise.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

African Union (UN)

The African Union consists of 55 sovereign African member states. These member states support the reformation of the Security Council, and wants to see the council expand to include a total of 26 members. Additionally, they want the reformation to include an increase representation of African

nation, which they proposed to give 2 permanent seats for Africa, accompanied by the right to veto, and 2 non-permanent seats.

China

Chinese officials have stated their willingness for reforms through an expansion of the Security Council members. To quote, “China supports the UN Security Council reform so as to enhance its authority and effectiveness.” Despite being the only P5 member state to have not directly accepted India’s bid as a permanent member, China claims that it stands ready to work with all parties to find out a solution that accommodates for the interest of all.

India

As a large funder of UN peace keeping missions and a fervent supporter of implementing goals listed in the UN Charter, the influence that India exerts on the international level have been rapidly growing. India has been calling for a Security Reformation as early as 2004, and believes a reformation is necessary as the council currently reflects the imperatives of 20th century, which would be ineffective in the 21st century. China’s bid for a permanent membership has been backed by 4 P5 member states with the exclusion of China, which demands India to disconnect its bid from that of Japan’s.

Uniting for Consensus (UfC)

Founding states of the Uniting for Consensus — Italy, Mexico, Egypt, and Pakistan— were first united with the rejection of a Security Council reform that sought to increase the number permanent members. Instead, these countries want to encourage the expansion of non-permanent seats. The number of countries supporting this group grew exponentially, and soon included roughly 50 countries. In the 59th session of the General Assembly, the group united and proposed to double the non-permanent seats in the Security Council. Additionally, they urged that non-permanent member states should be eligible for immediate re-election through the General Assembly.

United States

The United States have been quite open about the need for a Security Council reformation. Currently, the United States support Japan and India’s bid as permanent members to the council as a way to broaden its international influence and relations. Despite being open to reforms, the United States stated on multiple occasions that the veto vote must remain.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
October 24th, 1945	The United Nation Charter was ratified and the Security Council was formed.
1965	The Security Council agreed to increase the number of non-permanent members of the council from 6 to 10, marking the only significant Security Council reform to date.
1993	The General Assembly started to debate about a possible Security Council reformation.
March 21th, 2005	UN Secretary General Kofi Annan called on the UN to reach a consensus on Security Council reformation.
September 26th, 2015	The Elders Proposal that sought restrict or prevent the use of the veto, were critically assessed.
2017	It was reported that the G4 nations were willing to temporarily forgo veto power if granted a permanent UNSC seat.

Relevant UN Resolutions and Treaties

- The Charter of the United Nations (1945)
- Annan Plan (2005)

Possible Solutions

Adding more members in the Security Council would obviously yield to better and fairer representation. This solution also has the highest potential for success as it is important to note the only Security Council reformation to have passed worked on increasing representation in the council. However, within the broad term of including more member states, it could be further sub-divided into

additional permanent/non-permanent member states. For permanent member states, delegates need to clearly define the criteria and quota, as these member states would possess the veto problem. Although adding more permanent member states would better the inequity in the Security Council, a few problems can also arise. Adding more permanent member states have the possibility of worsening the problem, as more permanent member nations imply the increase in a likelihood of a veto in general. Additionally, adding permanent member states can further accentuated the disparity between the member countries. Delegates can also try an alternative approach; to add non-permanent member states or to create another category of member states which can enjoy re-election immediately after their respective terms or have longer terms in general.

Setting limitations on the veto power, or abolishing the veto vote completely would be another option that delegates can consider. This method directly gives way for fairer representation, and further removes the oligarchic situation in the Security Council. However, it is highly unlikely that the veto vote could be changed or limited without outrage from the current permanent member states; removing the veto vote comes at the cost of compromising the sovereignty of P5 nations. When thinking about ways to effectively limit the veto vote, delegates need to think creatively and think of solutions that have not been proposed before. This way of trying to resolve this issue is much more flexible and could be agreed upon easier if done correctly.

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