

# Is the successful reform of the united nations security

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Reform of the United Nations Security Council has the support of the majority of the member states; theoretically, there is consensus on the issue. Ideas for reform include expansion of the number of permanent members of the Security Council and extending the veto powers currently held by the permanent members. However, this consensus has so far proved illusory, because agreement only exists in a vague form. When the debate is teased out it emerges that there is a lot of differing views on what reforms should take place and which states they should include.

This essay aims to argue that UNSC reform is not possible because no consensus exists on who enlargement should include and whether the P-5 should remain the only veto holders. It is the intention of this essay to tiptoe through this political minefield and ultimately to argue that the Security Council must become more representative – that more members should be admitted to better reflect the world and the diverse opinions therein.

The purpose of the United Nations is to bring the states of the world together in one place to resolve international issues and there can be no greater issue than that of security; it is imperative that the UNSC reflects world opinion not a minority of states. The proposed ideas for reform are mainly concerning expansion of the UNSC's membership. It is argued by many that the power wielded by the P-5 is disproportionate and that this does not fairly reflect the world. As Kofi Annan stated: "in the eyes of much of the world, the size and composition of the Security Council appear insufficiently representative. (Annan 2002, quoted by Fassbender 2004, p. 341).

Latin America, Africa and large parts of Asia and the Caribbean all lack a permanent member and that leaves these regions underrepresented in terms of UNSC security policy. It is felt that permanent membership and crucially the veto should be extended to states from these regions of the world. That no longer should the P-5 have such a crucial say in the security of the world, that these powers should be opened up to other states in other parts of the world.

The other criticisms of the UNSC P-5 are that although they were the preminent powers in 1945 this is no longer the case. This criticism largely falls upon the UK and France and Russia who in 1945 were global empires but now longer are nowhere near as powerful and influential as they used to be. That there are now many states in the world that can equal the economic and military powers of the UK, France and Russia. It is argued that the UNSC should better represent the great powers of today rather than those of over sixty years ago.

There is some consensus and support for the idea of expansion. However, many states put forward provisos with their messages of support. The United States is concerned that new members should be economically powerful with a large population and has a solid history in terms of democracy and human rights. The joint British-French statement argued the need for representation for Africa and quizzically did not put forward an African candidate and instead named their choices; Germany, Brazil, India and Japan (Joint UK-France Declaration, 2008).

India expressed the need for the UNSC to also include developing states and that increase of permanent and non-permanent members was necessary. (India and the United Nations; UN Reform. ) Brazil argued that the UNSC does not represent today's world and the limited number of states in its current composition was not a multilateral approach. The debate about veto reform is a non event as none of the P-5 will accept any reform to their veto rights (Rath, 2006, p. 59). There does not seem any way the P-5 could be stripped off the veto without their compliance and without a fundamental change in attitude, veto reform is impossible.

The question of who should become new members of an enlarged Security Council is a very divisive issue. For every likely candidate there are several detractors as well as supporters. The most prominent candidates for becoming permanent members are the G-4 consisting of Japan, Germany, India and Brazil. These four are all seen as contributing generously to the UN and all have either large populations or economies. However, the most fundamental criticism of the G-4 is that it although it does expand the Council it still neglects a permanent seat for an African state.

It also further weighs the Security Council with more industrialised rich countries (Bourantonis, 2005, p. 69). The group Uniting for Consensus actively argues against the accession of the G-4 to the UNSC and instead argues for an increase of non-permanent members. Uniting for Consensus is often seen as being driven by member states regional rivalries; Italy's opposition to Germany's bid is one example. Indeed, all of the G-4 have opponents, in South American it is argued primarily by Argentina that

Portuguese speaking Brazil can not represent the rest of the Spanish speaking continent.

Not all the criticisms of these candidates are to do with regional rivalries; the US was publicly supportive of Germany's bid but the souring of relations over Iraq prompted Washington to change policy (Fassbender, 2004, p. 342). The issue of who supports who and why is a complicated issue but these examples stand to show that there is very little consensus amongst states about who might join a reformed UNSC and is the reason reform debate is so deadlocked. Reform of the Security Council is possible but will be very difficult; selecting members for expansion will prove divisive in international politics.

The desirability of reform has been covered to some extent above with the need to better represent the world in the Security Council but the main issue for debate in this regard is the effect expansion could have on the workings of the UNSC. The argument against expansion conceptually posits that a Security Council with too many members loses its executive function. That the whole idea of this tier of the UN system is to have a few powerful and influential states to act together decisively.

Thus enlargement -particularly of the veto- would cause more division among UNSC members and render the Council prone to deadlock, based on the simple logic that it is easier to get a smaller group to agree collectively than it is a larger group. The oft cited example is the failings of the League of Nations which was constantly paralysed by the need for unanimity among members to act (Weiss, 2003, p. 148). Although conceptually it is easy to

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argue this case, it does require some qualification with examples and there is an argument to be made that the UNSC is not at the moment a decisive body which has little to do with its size (Lund, 2010).

Whether enlargement would make the UNSC more or less efficient depends upon whether we consider the current incarnation to be so. A better argument for enlargement not making the Council a committee was made by the German diplomat Dr. Gunter Pleuger, stating that enlargement of NATO had not made that body less effective which now include one more state, 26 than the proposed UNSC increase to 25 (Pleuger, 2005). This is a good example of an international body being able to act in concert whilst having a large membership, but NATO and the UN are very different.

NATO members all share sympathetic policy goals and to some extent would consider themselves allies. However, the present P-5 alone or with the G-4 are not allies in great sense and although they might all support the idea of international peace and security they would have a much larger difference of viewpoint on conflicts than NATO. In conclusion, reform of the Security Council would require substantial work to be achieved and does risk souring of relations around the world.

The prospect that the veto will be abolished seems very remote, whether new permanent members might have the veto extended to them is tied up with the question of the possibility of enlargement. So many factors remain to be agreed over reform, expansion is not possible without widespread consensus over the shape and size of a new Security Council. If those

debates were resolved then the world could look to deciding candidates, another set of hard choices.

To definitively state that reform is possible or is not possible is in itself impossible. There are arguments to be made for and against reform, we will have to wait and see what happens. Perhaps the more important part of the question is the desirability of reform, this in its vague sense does have some consensus in international politics. There does need to be a widening of the members of the Security Council; it does need to better represent the world. How this can be effectively implemented is where the debate really starts.

The prospect of a deadlocked Security Council, paralysed by a lack of consensus among members is not desirable. Certainly, the simple solution to this would be to abolish the veto and rely upon a majority vote to pass resolutions, however this is not even vaguely a possibility. It is quite possible that an enlarged Security Council could be able to act decisively but it would certainly be a risky experiment and is therefore too much of a risk to take seriously. Desirable reform of the Security Council would require an overhaul and rethink of the whole system.

### Bibliography

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