



Focus 78 – Saving the United Nations from the Shadow of The Great Hall of People - Perspectives from an Indo-Italian Dialogue

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Abstract

The future of global security, peace, and power balance is presently being shaped by conflicts and cooperation among major powers. China's rise on the international stage, as well as its growing dominance in the United Nations, poses a threat to US hegemony. The brief explores the evolution of the United Nations through the Cold War era so as to show how two superpowers acted beyond the UN's mandate and misused their Veto Power. After recounting history, we aim to explain how China's ascent poses a challenge to the United Nations as an 'international organization,' a dynamic which demands immediate reforms. We examine three related areas: the United Nations itself, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and the Veto Power mechanism. Finally, we make recommendations regarding which model would be the most effective in the twenty-first century. South Asia, the most populous region in the world is not represented on the UNSC, and so are not either Africa or South America. A new United Nations Security Council model that is more





inclusive, fair, and logically based is proposed. In order to ensure an adequate functioning of such model, an inclusive yet simple decision-making process is suggested to replace the current Veto Power mechanism.

Keywords: United Nations, China, South Asia, US, Veto Power, United Nations Security Council Reform, Political Continent

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) was founded on October 24, 1945, after World War II (*History of the UN / United Nations Seventieth Anniversary*, 2021). The winners of World War II (WWII), Allied Powers, were significant actors in UN development, whilst the Axis Powers' were not. As stated in the UN Preamble, the fundamental purpose was to protect future generations from the scourge of war. For that objective, the United Nations established a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) with Five Permanent (P5) members: The United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), France, the Soviet Union (USSR), and the Republic of China. These five powers have since then functioned as global policemen and peacekeepers.

Countries were given a constitutional right to reject a substantive resolution proposed by a legislative body, the so-called Veto Power (*Voting System / United Nations Security Council*, 2021). Rather than a privilege, this authority came with responsibilities and a unique obligation imposed by the UN Charter. It was anticipated that veto would allow the P5-powers to "check" the law-making body by scrutinizing acts passed by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and blocking measures deemed unconstitutional, unjust, or misguided. Above all, it aimed to prevent major powers from taking unilateral action against any nation that violated sovereignty for private advantage.

Within a few years of the UN's formation, geopolitics, forces among the P5 powers,





along with diverse phenomena such as the waves of decolonization sweeping the globe transformed the international political landscape. The world was quickly engulfed in a Superpower rivalry, swiftly morphing the United Nations into a Cold War battleground and resulting in a lopsided International Organization. Every organ of the UN was compromised, and the Security Council was routinely paralyzed since the United States and the Soviet Union were constantly at odds. This limited U.N. peacekeeping efforts to situations where Cold War interests were not in conflict.

Throughout this period, the United States exerted a tremendous influence over the UN, which was directed in an unlawful and discriminatory manner, as evidenced by multiple incidents of economic sanctions and embargoes for disobeying Washington's directions (*Cold War Sanctions - Embargoes and Sanctions*, 2021). If one adds the relentless Vietnam War, and the second Gulf War, it becomes clear that the United States was operating outside the UN's mandate. On the other hand, between 1946 and 1956, the USSR, vetoed 50 resolutions, including one to prohibit any new nation from entering the council, before other permanent members even used the privilege (Kuele, 2014).

Fast forward to the 21st century, the waves of decolonization (1945-2000) resulted in the mushrooming of numerous new nations on the world map. Today, nations are woven in an increasingly complex interdependence, with a diversity of interests in different world regions. Such interdependence plays out on three levels: individual, regional, and global. At the same time, China's meteoric growth on the global stage became a crucial dynamic. Other nations such as Germany, Japan, India, Brazil, and South Africa have also been experiencing tremendous growth, resulting in the emergence of various centres of power. The rise of new power centres and the complexities of multidimensional power relations make it extremely difficult for P5 nations to employ their Veto Power objectively. In the current geopolitical environment, Veto Power is used to protect national interests, enforce a foreign policy principle, or, in some instances, to advocate for a serious strategy that is particularly pertinent to a specific country's own strategic thinking.

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the ever-lasting conflict in Syria, Russia's





annexation of Crimea, the Kabul tragedy, the Yemen Crisis, and China's everincreasing threat to Taiwan's sovereignty have all delegitimized the United Nations. The P5 have unconsciously reengineered the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to suit their own strategic priorities, thus betraying foundational values. The United Nations was born out of war, and it stands for state cooperation and liberal institutionalism. Within the UNSC, the Veto system symbolizes neither.

China's meteoric growth in the past two decades has been mirrored in its willingness to play a more substantial role in the United Nations. It is the largest contributor of peace troops among the P5 and the second largest contributor to the budget (Ashta et al., 2021). This expanding influence is enabled by China's increased monetary contribution to the UN, both mandatory as a UN member and increasingly through voluntary donations as well. These have risen by 1096% and 346%, respectively, from 2010 to 2019 (A United Nations with Chinese Characteristics?, 2021). China works hard to influence several crucial multilateral bodies and is now investing in institutions that oversee soft power (heritage, trade, and commerce), such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and the Universal Postal Union. Beijing has infiltrated strategic officials inside the system to pursue its strategic interests. As this influence solidifies, Washington's appears to be losing ground in the UN. China has also strategically worked to elect agencies that favour its larger, global purposes. These clusters of agencies are both directly and indirectly linked to domestic agendas such as the Belt and Road Initiative, Make in China 2025, and the rise of Chinese companies (Ashta et al., 2021).

With the turn of the century, scholars began referring to the United Nations as "UN with Chinese Characteristics." Considering Beijing's reconstruction and expansion of foreign policy, and thus its growing global lobbying effort to mobilize members of the United Nations General Assembly, the UN itself may soon be referred to as an extension of 'The Great Hall of the People'. The United Nations has continuously operated under the shadow of mighty nations, weakening both its neutrality and impartiality. As an autonomous international organization, it has much disappointed. The UN's hue has changed as power dynamics have shifted, exposing a more profound structural deficit. Veto Power, which can impact the global



geopolitical landscape, may have been necessary for the UN in its early days. However, it is now a weapon to impede strategic advancements by a given nation in a critical geopolitical region. As of July 2020, Russia (former USSR) has used its veto 117 times, the United States 82 times, the UK 29 times, France 16 times and China 17 times (*The Veto: UN Security Council Working Methods: Security Council Report*, 2020).

China's dominance in international organizations will have major consequences for both India and South Asia as a whole. Beijing will utilize its clout to bolster its encirclement policy (String of Pearls) to contain India, as well as its debt trap strategy to acquire territory in New Delhi's neighbourhood. Sri Lanka has already lost control of the Hambantota port, and the Maldives was on the verge of losing a relevant piece of land until India stepped in and paid a \$5 million-worth loan interest. As a result, China, alarmed, began sponsoring the 'India-Out Campaign' in the Maldives. Similarly, India should not be surprised if China takes over Pakistan's Gwadar port soon. Bangladesh is unquestionably the next target in Beijing's plan to control South Asia. That is why it is critical for India to advocate for UNSC reform. New Delhi should utilise both soft and hard power to win the support of other nations in the UN General Assembly for a much-needed reform plan, while also strategically and diplomatically persuading permanent members. China is abusing the present UNSC framework to promote its nefarious colonial objectives. Structural dynamics seem to be more favourable to Beijing than ever before, which does not bode well for New Delhi. The moment has arrived for New Delhi to lead the pack of emerging/major nations competing for a UNSC seat by pressuring incumbents to reform.

Where does the problem lie?

There are three layers to the problem. First, there is a lack of dynamism within the United Nations. Second, the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) has a rigid architecture. Third, the concept of 'Veto Power' has become unfair and unjustifiable. The world's structure has changed over the last 75 years; however, the UNSC has not. The emergence of new powers has transformed power dynamics, resulting in a shift from the transatlantic to the Indo-Pacific. The UN system needs an overhaul





so as to match modern geopolitics. If the United Nations is to remain relevant and avoid the League of Nations' fate, it must adapt to current times. Substantial reforms in the UN are required at all above-mentioned three levels so as to avoid being shadowed by any specific regime – not to mention, so as to remain loyal to its own preamble.

First, the United Nations lacks 'Internationalism' as a 'World Organization'. As previously stated, Beijing's rising clout within the UN resulted in manning the many crucial specialized agencies. China heads 4 of the 15 of the UN's principal agencies (the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the International Telecommunication Union, and the International Civil Aviation Organisation) and has deputies in nine other agencies (Chaudhury, 2021). Diversification in UNSC members will bring more nations on board, competing for critical positions within various UN specialized agencies, giving the UN itself a more realistic world-organization image. Furthermore, electronic warfare - cyber and space - is a new combat dimension in the twentyfirst century, yet the United Nations lacks any specialized body to deal with and adjudicate on it. The growing number of cyber-attacks on both civilian and military arsenals via sophisticated information technology networks, combined with a lack of consistency in data security policy prescriptions, clearly demand the creation of an overarching body that can bring all nations together to discuss and coordinate properly. The United Nations must widen its scope and reach so as to include new elements now directing human existence. A better grasp of both current and future requirements is needed.

Second, the UNSC is now an elitist club which does not represent contemporary power dynamics. There is simply no reason why these five countries should be the only ones ruling on our common destinies. The UNSC also presents ten nonpermanent members elected by the UN General Assembly for two-year terms. Yet what is the purpose of having an additional ten members if their voice has no ultimate impact on the decision-making process? The UNSC's first shortcoming is its inability to reflect current demographic and power dynamics across the world. Urgent expansion based on logic, rationality, and greater inclusion is needed, precisely because this is the primary decision-making body for security and peace,



one on which our collective survival depends. Further, because of Veto Power, the United Nations Security Council has failed to become an inclusive institution that holds its members accountable for their actions.

Third, whereas the UN General Assembly represents global democracy, Veto Power embodies a masked dictatorship. It may have been useful and even meaningful in the 1950s, but it is today unjustified, irrational, and devoid of any constitutional or common-sense grounding. P5 members are not the only ones who impact the world; several nations outside that privileged club should be considered equally influential, even though their army's strength or their aerial and maritime capability does not yet quite equal the US' or China's. Dismissing these forces through Veto Power is unreasonable. Using a post-WWII status quo structure today is beyond anachronistic. And yet it has been used inappropriately or with calculated interest when dealing with countries ranging from Syria to Crimea. The US has exploited it in efforts to guard its ally, Israel. China abuses its Veto Power to stifle Taiwanese rights and defend terror leaders and outfits in Pakistan. For the last six years, China and Russia have both blocked UNSC decisions with relevant consequences on the Syrian government. Both Moscow's and Beijing's approaches were shaped by their determination to avoid a "Libya 2.0". They wanted to prevent the West from imposing on Syria their "democratic agenda" and "regime change plans". As a fact, the subjective belief that the European Union's action could fuel extremism and violence has led to the obstruction of robust intervention and the failure to condemn unlawful behaviour violating international law.

The moment has come to repeal Veto Power entirely.

Finding a way out - Reform, Reform and Reform!

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the UN Security Council has failed to fulfil its responsibilities and or live up to expectations in maintaining international peace and security, as it has failed in resolving multiple large-scale military conflicts. The UNSC must be reformed so as to adapt to the new, multipolar world order. Further, since the concept of 'Veto Power' has outlived its usefulness and has





no place in the current world order (which values and adheres to a form of consensus-based decision-making) Veto should – and must – be eliminated.

Reconfiguring the UN Security Council

Based on continental distribution, population diversity, and the pressing issues of the 21st century, an alternative model of UNSC that is inclusive and reflects emerging power dynamics to the greatest extent thought possible has been drawn.

First. According to ' geographic fault lines ', there are seven continents and nearly 7.8 billion people on the planet. In order to construct a new model of UNSC, a major 'geopolitical fault line' is considered that groups Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) and Middle Eastern countries (Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Yemen), presenting them as a single, extra-Asian entity: CAME – Central Asian & Middle East. The world's landmass is thus now divided into eight entities: seven geographically-based and one geopolitical. There are two reasons for CAME: first, this region shares political and cultural linkages. Second, CAME forms a 'political continent', the world's most turbulent region, with never-ending conflicts. Thus breaking this region from Asia, which holds half the world's population, would underpin this alternative model of UNSC.

Second. The UNSC must grow to incorporate additional members based on the preceding understanding.

To begin, Australia/Oceania (population 0.43 billion, 14 nations) should send one representative to the UNSC. For the simple reason that they are the most severely affected by climate change. The inclusion of this region in the UNSC is critical because it will vigorously push for issues (called non-traditional security threats) that have been overlooked in the past.

India and Japan should also both have a seat in the Asian UNSC representation unit (excluding Central Asia and the Middle East; population 4.1bn, 29 nations). Many



arguments have been made in their favour, including as concerns their financial and peacekeeping force contributions.

Furthermore, one member from "Central Asia + Middle East" (population: 0.33 billion, 19 nations) should be sent to the UNSC, whether it be Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, or any other. This region suffers the most from wars and conflicts, as well as migration and refugee issues, and yet holds no decision-making authority position at the top levels. Which means that their issues are dealt with by other, 'elite' powers. A CAME participation is critical in the decision-making processes that determine the region's future.

The African continent (population size: 1.22 bn, 54 nations) should send an African Union member other than South Africa on a rotating basis. This would offer a more accurate portrayal of Africa's vast and diverse landscape. A total absence from the UNSC is entirely unjustifiable, for it means that their future is being determined without considering their views.

As is the case of India, Japan, and South Africa, Germany deserves a seat on the UNSC from Europe (population: 0.74 billion, 44 nations). Furthermore, as the most powerful member of the European Union, Germany would symbolize, reflect, and advocate from the 'European Union's vantage point.

By contrast, the United States' position in the UNSC is adequate and does not necessitate the inclusion of a new member from North America (population: 0.57 billion, 23 nations).

Brazil has been a significant candidate for a UNSC seat from South America (population: 0.43, 12 nations). Because this continent is not represented at the UNSC at all, the case for Brazil's admission is pressing. The situation in South America resembles that in Africa. Both continents' inclusion in the exclusive decision-making club will have a significant influence on their respective futures.

(The above population data have been extracted in approximation from Worldometer and rounded off to nearest whole number [Worldometer, 2021])





Third. Based on the above arguments, the UNSC should be restructured by removing non-permanent seats and including 8 new permanent member-states. The revised UNSC would have a total of 13 members. Each of these 13 members represents a population of between 0.45 and 0.60 billion and comes from a different geographic and political continent, so that all are adequately represented. This works out to be a fair and justified compromise, grounded on a solid mathematical reasoning representation within the highest echelon of the decision-making body. This type of structure would not only keep the UN from being overshadowed by a specific superpower, but would also make the UN a genuinely International Organization, reflecting colours from all corners of the globe and, most crucially, reflecting the current world order. New member states will also compete for top positions in various UN organs and specialized bodies. Rather than being shackled by the P5, these organs and agencies will be freed and infused with fresh vigour. Significantly diverse human resources at the top imply more cooperation and deliberation, lowering the risk of inappropriate influence.

Replace Veto Power with a Broad, Consensus-based Decision-making Process

Veto Power must be abolished. Instead, a simple decision-making procedure must be implemented under an "expanded" UNSC with 13 members. It should be based on a "Simple Majority" (more than 50 per cent of votes cast, i.e., 7 or more votes) and a "Special Majority" (more than 75 per cent votes cast, i.e., 10 or more votes). In this "revised" UNSC, each member will hold one vote.

First, each resolution/proposal/declaration presented to the UNSC will be subjected to a test vote to establish if it requires a "simple majority" or a "special majority" to be approved. In order to be accepted, the first procedure - case determination – needs a "special majority."

Second, once the resolution/proposal/declaration has been accepted, it will be voted upon based on the first stage's decision. The resolution/proposal/declaration is considered passed when it receives the requisite number of votes.





This voting method considers all members, regardless of their geopolitical status. Every country would be responsible for representing an umbrella of other nations (i.e., Brazil would also reflect the voices of Peru, Bolivia, Chile etc.) and via preparatory meetings taking place before the voting of a resolution, the speaker country would deliver the his region's democratic wishes to the UNSC. Unlike Veto Power, this overall framework is democratic in design and puts everyone on an equal footing in world affairs. In the twenty-first century, a "revised" UNSC with a "consensus-based Decision-Making" approach should be the way forward since everyone must have a fair voice in defining their own future rather than toeing lines prescribed by a hegemon.

Conclusion

The P5 no longer represents the security and peace matrix of the twenty-first century, and the existing structure of the UNSC with Veto Power reflects the international politics scene as it was in 1945. Power dynamics have evolved dramatically, prompting urgent UNSC reform. The UN's functioning is heavily influenced, making it a failed puppet organization in the hands of international powers. The abuse of veto power has fuelled the fire.

The UNSC demands reform that, to the greatest degree feasible, equitably represents the world's people and regions. Veto Power must be abolished outright. The P5 has used the veto extensively to their advantage; now is the time to share the power with other nations equally capable of shaping the world's future. The P13 is required under the existing international order, with Australia/Oceania, Japan, India, Germany, Brazil, South Africa, one African Union member, and either Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates or Israel as new members. This diversity of membership will soon be reflected in other organs and specialized agencies, which will help reduce the influence of existing powers. With that, reform is well needed to establish new specialized bodies that deal with electronic warfare and other new, critical dimensions.





If the UN does not adjust to shifting global power dynamics, it will be doomed to collapse, and its collapse will likely result in another great war. The United Nations must learn from history and take decisive action to urgently reform its anachronistic structure. This will decrease the temperature of ongoing war-like climates between the United States and China, China and India, Taiwan and China, Russia, and Ukraine, and so on. Furthermore, this will reduce China's rising influence and domination over the UN and its allied agencies, preventing it from becoming an extension of the Great Hall of People. The United Nations is slowly becoming defunct because of its inability to evolve in pace with a multipolar world. Will it be able to save humanity from hell in such a circumstance, as Dag Hammarskjold anticipated (*Statements*, 2018)?



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