The United Nations Security Council: Reforms concerning its membership - An Overview

The United Nations Security Council – function and power

According to the UN Charter, the Security Council's (UNSC) main function is to **maintain international peace and security**. Its decisions are **binding for UN Member States**.

Reasons for reform

Changes in global power structure

In spite of the UNSC enlargement in 1965, its permanent members still represent the global power structure that existed after World War II when the institution was created. Since the UNSC's creation, however, new centers of power have risen.

Representation of UN Members States

The **number of UN Member States has increased** significantly since the UN's creation in 1945, from 51 to 118 until 1965. In this year, the number of UNSC seats was increased. Originally, there were 11 seats consisting of five permanent and six non-permanent seats. Since the 1965 **enlargement**, the UNSC seats total 15, with four added non-permanent seats but no changes were made with regards

	Member States	UNSC seats
1945	51	11 (5 permanent, 6 non-permanent)
1965	118	15 (5 permanent, 10 non-permanent)
2007	192	?

to the permanent seats. Today, the number of UN members is 192, much higher than when the enlargement took place, and this is considered to be the main **reason** why the UNSC should be enlarged once again.

The **distribution** of the 10 non-permanent seats in the UNSC is based on geographical representation as well as on contributions made to maintaining peace and security. Regional groups make recommendations for non-permanent seats and the General Assembly elects them. There are five non-permanent seats allocated for Africa and Asia, and two each for the Latin American and the Caribbean group as well as for the Western European and Others group. One seat is assigned to Eastern Europe. Also, one of the non-permanent members

Regional groups	Non-permanent seats
Africa + Asia	5
Latin America and the Caribbean	2
Western Europe and others	2
Eastern Europe	1

traditionally is an Arab country, either from Africa or from the Asian bloc. **Non-permanent members are elected for two-year terms**, and **membership is not immediately renewable**.

Representation in the UNSC, as far as the permanent members (China, France, Russian Federation, UK and USA) are concerned,

is not proportional, neither geographically nor in terms of population or number of UN members per region. **No country from Latin America or Africa has a permanent seat**. **Africa's** population is the world's second largest, and with **53 UN members** it has the largest number of UN members per continent. **Asia** accounts approximately **for more than half** of the **world population**, but **only China** has a permanent seat.

Disadvantages of the current structure

The UNSC's lack of **ability to respond quickly** to an emerging crisis is seen as one of the most acute problems. It is often mentioned that the problem stems from a combination of the veto's paralyzing effect on the one hand and insufficient representation from the 192 Member States on the other. This may lead to difficulties concerning the need for peacekeepers. The countries providing troops, and those that supply funds or material, understandably want to have a bigger part in the decision making process.

Actors and reform proposals

The Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change

Former Secretary-General Annan, on the basis of the recommendations of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, suggested that those UN members that contribute most financially, militarily and diplomatically should be increasingly involved in the decision-making process. But he also pointed out that the reforms should not impair the effectiveness of the UNSC.

The High-level Panel proposed two possible models, **Model A** and **Model B,** and recommended that the UNSC's membership be revised in 2020. Both models do not use the present groupings, but divide the world by different categories: Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, and the Americas.

Model A

Model A suggests **expanding** the number of UNSC **members to 24**, including **three non-permanent seats** and **six new permanent seats without veto power**, which would include one seat for Europe, one for the Americas, two for Africa and two for Asia Pacific. Establishing these new permanent seats now might be difficult to change in 2020.

Model B

Model B also **expands** the number of UNSC **seats to 24**, but it **does not establish new permanent seats**. It instead creates eight seats with four-year renewable terms. In this model, Africa, Asia and the Pacific each, receive two seats, as do Europe and the Americas. In addition, one extra non-permanent seat is created.
PROBLEMS:
Because of the huge population disparity, the continental groupings could raise doubts whether the UN's democratic principles are properly employed. The Americas, Europe and Africa have roughly similar population numbers, ranging between 727 million and 857 million. However, the Asia Pacific group accounts for a population of approximately 3 billion 836 million people.

Also, for Model B, the question remains as to whom the 4-year renewable seats would be allocated to.

Group of Four

The **Group of Four** (G4) consists of four countries **aspiring to permanent seats without veto power** in a UNSC expanded to 25 members. The Group of Four includes **Japan, Germany, India** and **Brazil**.

These countries are seen as the candidates most likely to gain a permanent seat if more are created. Japan contributes the second largest sum to the UN's regular budget, and Germany is the third largest contributor. India has the world's second largest population and is the world's largest democracy. Also, it is one of the world's largest economies and is the third largest contributor of troops to UN peace-keeping missions. In Latin America, Brazil is the largest country in terms of territory, and it also has the largest population and economy.

The G4's aspirations are supported by three out of the five permanent UNSC members, namely the UK, France and Russia.

PROBLEMS:

Different states oppose the G4's proposal, some rejecting only one of the four G4 states. One example is Pakistan's concern with India become a permanent member. Others claim that adding the G4 to the permanent members would not contribute to the UN's ideal of equality, but instead create new centres of power.

The G4 proposal did not succeed in 2005 because it did not achieve the required two-thirds majority in the General Assembly. Since then, each of them, especially Japan, have continued their efforts independently.

Uniting for Consensus

Uniting for Consensus consists of a group of middle-ranking countries, namely **Italy, Canada, Colombia and Pakistan**. They call for the equality of all UN Member States and **oppose** the permanent membership of the Group of Four and **any other new permanent memberships**, claiming that this addition of permanent seats would violate the principle of sovereign equality and create new centres of power. They brought the **Green Model** and the **Blue Model** into the discussion on how to reform the UNSC. Both models use the regional groupings currently used for the UNSC.

Green Model:
The Green Model increases the number of non-permanent seats to 20 and would make all non-permanent seats renewable. Doing so, avoids creating a new category of members.

Blue Model:
The Blue Model is closer to Model B, and also creates a third category of membership with three or four-year terms and also creates more two-year non-permanent seats. It does not define whether these new seats should be renewable and leaves some space for negotiation here. This, in combination with the different groupings, is the main difference between this model and Model B.

PROBLEMS:
These models, by using existing groupings result in a more Euro-centric composition, as three permanent members are already from Europe and these models assign more seats to smaller European countries.

Regional Model (Italian Proposal)

This proposal also uses the regional groupings used by the General Assembly. It creates **ten new permanent seats without veto power**. The crucial difference from other proposals is that these permanent **seats are not assigned to particular countries, but to regions**, relying on the regions to develop a process in order to choose their permanent representatives.

PROBLEMS:

Mechanisms or organizations for agreeing on a representative do not yet exist. Even if there is a regional organization, such as the European Union, not all European countries are members of it. So, it might be difficult to ensure fair representation.

Panama Proposal

Panama proposes to **enlarge** the membership with six to **21 members** in total. The distribution of these new seats uses the current geographical groups and allocates one seat for Latin America and the Caribbean, one for the Western Europe and Others group, and two each for Africa and Asia. In order to provide a **long and stable participation**, the six new members would be elected for a period of five years. If a country was elected for four times consecutively, it would **automatically become a permanent member** without veto power, as **Panama** wants to **limit and finally eliminate the veto**, hereby referring to the S5-proposals. Panama suggests **rationalizing the composition and working methods** of the subsidiary organs in order to prevent inefficiency which could be caused by enlargement.

PROBLEMS:

Some aspects of Panama's proposal of automatically becoming a permanent member after being elected into the UNSC four times in a row are still unclear. For example, would there be a permanent seat added for the respective country, enlarging the UNSC by one member? Or would there be one non-permanent seat less available, thereby keeping the number of members at 21?

Regional actors

Africa

There is international support for a better representation of Africa in the UNSC. The African Union insists on **11 new seats**, **six** of which would be **permanent and two of these permanent seats** should be assigned **to African countries**. They also propose veto power for those permanent seats if other permanent members retain theirs. The African countries usually mentioned as having the best chances for permanent seats are **South Africa, Nigeria** and **Egypt**. Also, part of the proposal would assign two out of the five new non-permanent seats to Africa.

A strong reason for giving Africa permanent seats is to increase the UNSC's credibility as well as legitimacy as a large part of its decisions deal with conflicts in Africa. Assigning one or more permanent seats to African countries would attract wider support for

its decision from the international community and from the African Union. Also, in terms of representation, African leaders make the point that Africa is the continent with the second-largest population and the most UN members.

The Arab World

The Arab world is only represented in the UNSC with one non-permanent seat, but is not explicitly mentioned in many reform models.

Other actors

Other States that call for **better representation** are from **Latin America** and the **smaller European countries**. It is likely that they will mainly concentrate on improving their representation by influencing the regional distribution of non-permanent seats and also the way the regional groupings will be defined. Brazil, being part of the Group of Four, claims a permanent seat and finds some international support for its claim.

Example of other models

There are countless additional proposals on how to reform the UNSC. For example, a **new Model C**, based on Models A and B, was developed by Prof. Walter Hoffmann. He uses the new groupings by the High-level Panel as a basis and **divides** the **Asia Pacific group in two**, creating a group constituting of **China with South and Southwest Asia**; **and** a group called the **Pacific Rim countries**, containing the remainder of the former group. He also identifies a problem concerning the proposed eight new renewable four-year seats. Their distribution is likely to cause political trouble, as Hoffmann expects that some countries, which were not selected, will argue that they deserve one of these important seats. He uses a possible solution suggested by Professor Louis Sohn many years ago which makes the four-term seats shareable between two countries. These two countries would have their ambassadors sitting in the UNSC in turns and would have to work together closely. **Model C also rewards top troop and other personnel contributors with four-year seats**.

Obstacles to the feasibility of the proposed reforms

Ban Ki-moon

Some diplomats fear that the selection of the South Korean **Ban Ki-moon** as Secretary-General of the United Nations **might delay** or even deadlock **UNSC reform**. The concerns regarding Ban Ki-moon are due to the fact that **South Korea opposes** the UNSC reforms, especially **Japan's bid for a permanent seat**. Some Japanese officials predict that "Japan's bid for a permanent seat in the U.N. Security Council may become very difficult" as long as Ban Ki-moon is Secretary-General.

On the other hand, Ban Ki-moon promised to pursue crucial reforms of the UN before his election, without, however, explicitly mentioning the UNSC. It remains to be seen if these concerns are justified.

The veto dilemma

To avoid a two-level hierarchy within permanent members, all of them would have to have the same amount of power within the UNSC. But, none of the common reform models suggest reducing the permanent members' veto power or giving veto power to other UNSC members that do not already have it.

One reason for not increasing the number of permanent members with veto power is the fact that the **veto hinders quick actions**

in the UNSC as each of the members with veto power can block the proceedings by voting against the respective resolution. This would get even worse if more UNSC members were able to do so. Expanding the number of members with veto power would therefore also contradict Annan's recommendation that the UNSC's effectiveness should not be impaired by the reform.

A possible solution might be to **limit the use of the veto,** for example by not allowing a veto in cases of genocide or restricting it to vital national security issues. Any reform of the UNSC will require a change in the UN Charter, and this is only possible with all five permanent members of the UNSC agreeing and a two-thirds majority of the GA. It is generally seen as impossible to change the veto as the permanent members are unlikely to give up part of their power by either expanding the number of permanent members with veto power or by abolishing the veto.

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