

**ODUMUNC 2009 Issue Brief
General Assembly Plenary Session
Security Council Reform**



**“United We Stand”
The Economist (July 30th, 2005)**

The Americans may have miscalculated. Their attempt to nip reform of the United Nations Security Council in the bud has been foiled—for the moment at least. This week, the momentum for a bigger, more representative council got a vital new fillip when the four countries pressing for permanent seats—Japan, India, Brazil and Germany—clinched an agreement with the 53-member African Union (AU) to present a joint resolution on expansion to the General Assembly, thereby greatly increasing its chances of success.

Hitherto, the Africans had been insisting on seven new council seats for Africa, including two permanent ones with full veto powers. But at a last-ditch meeting in London on July 25th, the foreign ministers of the so-called Group of Four (G4) managed to persuade their AU counterparts that holding out for veto rights would scupper all chance of reform. They themselves have already agreed to abandon their pretensions to such rights.

As a quid pro quo, the G4 has agreed to accept the AU's proposal for an extra 11 new members, instead of the ten it was proposing, bringing total Security Council membership to 26. Besides the six new permanent members, on which both groups are agreed—two from Africa, two from Asia, one from Latin America and one from Europe—there would be five new non-permanent members elected for two-year terms—one each from Africa, Asia, Latin America and eastern Europe, with a fifth assigned to the developing countries.

The AU is expected to call for a summit in Addis Ababa next week, at which it hopes to get the necessary two-thirds approval of its own members for the new position. A joint resolution has already been drawn up, which the G4 and AU hope to put to the General Assembly before the UN summit on September 14th-16th. But timing is tight. Many delegations to the UN close shop during August. Their absence would make it even more difficult to win the two-thirds vote of the UN's 191 members required for any charter amendment. So the two groups may decide to defer a vote until early in September.

They claim to be confident of success. But the closer they get to achieving their goal, the greater the opposition will be. Many of their most ferocious opponents, including Pakistan, Italy, Spain, Colombia, and Mexico—though not China—have joined together, in what is unofficially known as the "Coffee Club", to put forward a rival proposal involving the addition of ten new members to the council, all non-permanent. But it has little support outside their own ranks.

For a long time, America, which would probably prefer to maintain the status quo, declined to join in the debate other than to say that it supported Japan for a permanent seat. Last month its under-secretary of state for political affairs, Nick Burns, appeared to open the door a little further by suggesting that America might be willing to consider "two or so" new permanent members, plus "two or three" new non-permanent ones, bringing the total membership to 19 or 20.

But in evidence last week to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Mr Burns lashed

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out at the G4's proposals, calling them "highly divisive", saying that America would vote against them and urging others to do the same. Indeed, he suggested that any attempt at Security Council reform at this stage would not be "timely", serving merely to distract from more urgent matters. Some fear that the United States could still block the whole process. But others are beginning to believe that, perhaps, it may not be able to.

http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?Story_ID=E1_QNPNNJG (subscription or academic database access required).

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“Report Urges Big Changes for the U.N.”
Warren Hoge (New York Times, December 1st, 2008)

The United Nations on Tuesday proposed the most sweeping changes in its history, recommending the overhaul of its top decision-making group, the Security Council, and holding out the possibility that it could grant legitimacy to pre-emptive military strikes.

The changes were outlined in a much-anticipated report commissioned by Secretary General Kofi Annan a year ago after bruising division over the Iraq war left the United Nations feeling ill-equipped to meet modern challenges represented by terrorism, failed states, nuclear proliferation, poverty and violence.

In its most attention-getting recommendation, the panel called for an expansion of the Security Council to 24 members from 15. But the panel was unable to agree on one proposal and ended up suggesting two options. Both are intended to broaden the membership of the Council to reflect the world of today rather than the one that existed at the United Nations' beginning nearly 60 years ago.

The Council now has 5 veto-bearing permanent members -- Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States -- and 10 members elected to two-year terms.

One alternative would add 6 new permanent members -- the likely candidates are Brazil, Germany, India, Japan, Egypt and either Nigeria or South Africa -- as well as 3 new two-year term members.

The other would create a new tier of 8 semipermanent members chosen for renewable four-year terms and one additional two-year term seat to the existing 10.

The right to cast vetoes, a power coveted by the nations seeking permanent status and one they are likely to press for, would continue to be limited to the 5 original permanent members.

The panel's 101 recommendations will inform a report in March from Mr. Annan, who is expected to refine them to 8 to 10 principal subjects to be taken up at a summit meeting of heads of state at the United Nations in September before the opening of the General Assembly.

Many of the recommendations in the 95-page report can be put into effect by the secretary general or the parts of the United Nations that would be affected. The new makeup of the Security Council, however, would require an amendment to the United Nations Charter, which requires approval in the General Assembly by two-thirds of the 191 member states, including all 5 permanent members, and ratification by the legislatures of their governments.

While the report created new offices and positions, it cast a critical eye on the stultifying bureaucracy of the United Nations, calling for a one-time voluntary retirement buyout for many staff members.

Asked what led to the proposal, a senior participant who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity said, "The sense that looking around the Secretariat, there is a lot of, frankly, dead wood, and that secondly there is a whole new generation within the Secretariat who are younger -- in their 30's and 40's -- who have an immense amount of field experience for the last 15 years. They're finding themselves feeling very frustrated and unable to advance."

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The panel was very critical of the Human Rights Commission, a body that has often brought the United Nations into disrepute by incorporating some of the worst rights violators like Cuba, Libya and Sudan into its membership. The commission, which is based in Geneva, "suffers from a credibility deficit that casts doubt on the overall reputation of the United Nations," the report said. The official who briefed reporters added that too often the chief motivation for countries to join was to deflect attention from deplorable rights conditions at home.

Addressing the critical issue of the legitimacy of the use of force, a source of crippling tension at the United Nations last year when the United States was seeking Security Council authorization to go to war in Iraq, the panel said it found no reason to amend the charter's Article 51, which restricts the use of force to countries that have been attacked. The report said the language did not constitute, as some have asserted, a demand that nations wait to be attacked. And it said many countries had exercised the right to attack when they had felt threatened.

But it acknowledged that a new problem had risen because of the nature of terrorist attacks "where the threat is not imminent but still claimed to be real: for example, the acquisition, with allegedly hostile intent, of nuclear weapons-making capability."

It said that if the arguments for "anticipatory self-defense" in such cases were good ones, they should be put to the Security Council, which would have the power to authorize military action under guidelines including the seriousness of the threat, the proportionality of the response, the exhaustion of all alternatives, and the balance of consequences.

Apparently in anticipation of objections from Washington over that requirement, the report said, "For those impatient with such a response, the answer must be that, in a world full of perceived potential threats, the risk to the global order and the norm of nonintervention on which it continues to be based is simply too great for the legality of unilateral preventive action, as distinct from collectively endorsed action, to be accepted. Allowing one to so act is to allow all."

Though the bitter dispute over whether to go to war in Iraq was a principal reason for the institutional crisis at the United Nations that persuaded Mr. Annan to appoint the panel, the official said members did not discuss it. He declined to speculate whether the recommended changes would have forestalled the diplomatic fallout over Iraq. "This was a forward-looking panel," he said.

The official said that at the outset, some of the panel members had been in the habit of faulting the United States for exaggerating the threat of terror and seeking what they called "perfect security." But he said the members had come to a sharp new appreciation of the menace of nuclear and chemical agents and how easily they could be infiltrated into Western societies.

The report addressed six specific and interconnected threats to international peace -- "interstate conflict, civil war, economic and social threats, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and organized international crime."

Addressing a long sought codification of terrorism that would not allow people to class it as an acceptable act of national resistance, the panel suggested defining it as any action "that is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or noncombatants, when the purpose of such act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population or to compel a government or

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an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act."

In a sentence that may have been directed at members of the United Nations who habitually condemn violence by Israel while making no mention of attacks on Israel, the report said, "There is nothing in the fact of occupation that justifies the targeting and killing of civilians."

One area where the report criticized the United Nations was the ineffectiveness of existing conventions to curb the spread of nuclear material, and the report predicted that the "erosion of the nuclear regime could become irreversible and result in a cascade of proliferation." Noting that at least 40 nations have the capacity to build nuclear weapons on short notice, it said that a way had to be found to make the nonproliferation treaty an effective constraint.

The panel also urged a more aggressive approach to interventions when states fail in their primary responsibility to protect their own citizens. "There is a collective international responsibility to protect, exercisable by the Security Council authorizing military intervention as a last resort in the event of genocide and other large-scale killing, ethnic cleansing or serious violations of international humanitarian law which sovereign governments have proved powerless or unwilling to prevent," the report said.

The panel was headed by Anand Panyarachun, a former prime minister of Thailand, and included Brent Scowcroft, the United States national security adviser under the first President Bush; Yevgeny Primakov, a former prime minister of Russia; Qian Qichen, a former foreign minister of China; and Amr Moussa of Egypt, secretary general of the League of Arab States.

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