



**ODUMUNC 2011**  
**Issue Brief for the**  
**GA Sixth Committee: Legal**

***UN Security Council Reform***

**By: Shiwei Jiang**

**Introduction**

Security Council reform is the most fundamental and difficult of all UN reform issues. Nothing goes to the heart of UN capabilities, its international role, and its meaning as part of the international system. The Security Council is the only UN body that can demand and enforce action. Its power comes from the membership of major powers, each of them protected by the ability to veto actions that might hurt their interests.

The Council has five permanent members (the P-5), each with a veto: China, France, Russia, the United States and United Kingdom. In addition, there are 10 rotating, non-permanent seats. Each non-permanent member is elected for a term of two years. The non-permanent seats are extremely prestigious and powerful. Allocated regional between Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America, there is strong competition for these seats. The rotating seats can go to the largest or most powerful regional actors, but often go to smaller countries when only compromise is possible.

Security Council reform deals with five key issues:

- categories of membership,
- the veto held by the five permanent members,
- regional representation,
- the size of an enlarged Council, and
- working methods.<sup>1</sup>

There is widespread agreement that the system established in 1945 no longer matches global needs. The UN has grown from 57 to 194 member states, the world from 2 billion to almost 7 billion people. The Security Council is losing legitimacy, because its decisions are not made by the actors who have the most influence, nor do its decisions involve most of the world's people. As a result, the Council has a *democratic deficit*. The list of large or powerful countries to be added include at a minimum: Brazil, Germany, Japan, India and Nigeria. A more complete list might include Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Pakistan, South Africa and Turkey.

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<sup>1</sup> See letter from the Chairman, Zahir Tanin, of the intergovernmental negotiations on the question of equitable representation and increase in the membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Council: <http://www.reformtheun.org/index.php?module=uploads&func=download&fileId=4097>



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While most countries have agreed in principle that the Security Council needs reforms, including the expansion of the Security Council, there is no agreement on which countries to add or how to manage other vital reforms, the specific timing of reforms and detailed processes. Many want to keep reform to a minimum, to preserve their own importance. Others do not want to see powerful neighbor added if they cannot join (for example, Pakistan opposes India, Italy opposes Germany). There is disagreement on who gets a veto and who does not, or even the survival of the veto altogether.

**Current situation**

Interest in reform peaked in 2005. Progress has been slow since then but shows signs of increasing again. The current Security Council reform is being conducted slowly after Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon succeeded Kofi Annan in 2006. There are numerous proposals put forward by different countries and groups. Two to keep in mind are Group of Four (or *G-4*) composed of Japan, Germany, India and Brazil, and the parallel or opposing *Coffee Club*, later renamed the *Uniting for Consensus* group of Argentina, Canada, Italy, Mexico, Spain, Pakistan and South Korea. Major debates are often between the two factions. Besides, you should also research into the current positions and proposals of *African Group*, the *Arab League* and the current five permanent (*P-5*) members. The current situation of UN Security Council reform is intertwined with historical factors, nationalism, national interests, rational choice and balance of power in different regions. When you represent a country, consider not only national interest, but also other factors mentioned above.

**Major Country positions**

**Brazil:** As the largest country of South America, Brazil is an emerging global presence and is increasingly involved in major issues around the world. However, permanent Brazilian membership is objected by Argentina, Mexico and to a lesser degree by Colombia. They worry that Brazil's permanent membership will enhance the country's competitiveness in South America and are especially suspicious of a Brazilian veto.

**Germany:** Germany is the world's fourth largest economy, the economic engine of the European Union, and its armed forces play important roles in situations as diverse as Afghanistan, Kosovo, naval patrols in the eastern Mediterranean and the coast of Somalia. It has campaigned hard for a permanent Security Council role but faces serious obstacles. Italy and Spain resent being passed over for consideration themselves. There also are serious misgivings from other regions, since



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there are already two European countries (France and United Kingdom) in permanent seats. African and Muslim countries are advocating that the Security Council should balance the number of permanent membership in terms of different regions.

**India:** India is the world's second most populous country and sometime—probably by 2040—will replace China as the world's largest country. It also is a rising economic power and a restrained nuclear weapons state. Indian permanent membership is opposed by Pakistan, a long-time foe in several wars. Even today they still have trouble relations over arms racing, the disputed Kashmir region, and Pakistan-based terrorist attacks. China also has territorial disputes with India. Initially, China was opposed to India. However, due to stronger economic ties in recent years, China probably would support India's bid for a permanent seat, but without a veto.

**Japan:** Japan is the world's third largest economy and has one of the largest populations. Due to historical reasons and nationalism, Japan is objected by several East Asian countries, such as China, South Korea, and North Korea. Although the United States supports Japan becoming a permanent member, the United States does not favor granting Japan and other G-4 nations—Germany, India and Brazil—a veto power.

**African nations and the Arab League:** These two major voting blocs demand permanent representation themselves. African Union advocates that an African nation should be given a seat on the Security Council. Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa are usually regarded as the most likely contenders. Among the Arab League, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are especially interested in a permanent seats. Besides, the Organization of the Islamic Conference has called for a permanent Muslim seat on the UN Security Council in recent years.

### **General issues**

Recently, the SC reform issue has gained new attention, largely from the combined pressure of Brazil, India and other would-be permanent members. Their proposal is that “The new council will include up to half the Group of 20, an institution that has come to overshadow the UN as a forum for international decision-making on economic issues. It will include all the Brics – the alliance of emerging powers Brazil, Russia, India and China.”<sup>2</sup> Expansion will relieve some conflicts, but may worsen others. It will make the Council more legitimate and potentially more powerful, but also make it harder to reach decisions. How to balance these issues is the question that will dominate any debate.

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<sup>2</sup> Harvey Morris, “Security Council set for boost”, *Financial Times*, 10 October 2010



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**Where to find information about Security Council reform?**

The latest report of the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council can be found in document [A/63/47](#). A complete list of the reports is posted at: <http://lib-unique.un.org/lib/unique.nsf/Link/R00689>.

The full text of all reports can be retrieved through [UNBISnet](#) and the [Official Document System of the United Nations](#).” See especially <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/scfaq.htm>

The [United Nations library](#) has a full bibliography on the Security Council as well, featuring many reports and article on reform issues.

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