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Positionality, Tension
and Instability in the
UN Security Council

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EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE

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in the UN Security Council**

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Abstract

This paper* examines the ability of the UN Security Council to adapt to shifts in the relative power of UN members. It analyses the German and Japanese campaigns for permanent membership of the Security Council and the response that they have elicited from the current permanent members. It outlines the main areas of disagreement that exist in the current debate on Security Council reform and appraises the UN organisation's attempts to resolve them. It concludes that the UN Security Council is an unstable institution of international governance both because it is exceedingly difficult for rising states to gain permanent membership and because it is impossible to demote current permanent members.

* Forthcoming in *Global Governance*.

“[i]f... the Security Council emerges as defender or apologist for the status-quo, it will become the agent of the disorder it strives to avoid.”¹

¹ P. J. Fromuth, "The Making of a Security Community; The United Nations After the Cold War," *Journal of International Affairs* 46, no. 2 (1993): 365-66.

1. Introduction²

UN member states are currently engaged in a debate on Security Council reform that, in contrast to a similar debate in the first half of the 1960s, goes far beyond the question of simply increasing the Council's non-permanent membership. At stake in the current debate is the question of permanent membership and whether, and to whom, it should be extended. Although the debate is far from over, an examination of how the UN organisation deals with contemporary calls for fundamental reform of the Security Council serves to answer an important question: How well does the Security Council adapt to shifts in the relative power of UN members? In other words, how *stable* an institution of international governance is the Security Council?

The concept of stability used in this analysis may be distinguished from the conventional usage of the concept in the analysis of international relations. Stability is understood not as the preservation of the status-quo despite the occurrence of underlying change, but as the incremental and peaceful adaptation to such change. In this sense, the definition of stability used in this analysis is akin to Gilpin's concept of *homeostatic equilibrium*,³ i.e., the incremental adjustment of the international system to small changes in the distribution of power among states. It may also be differentiated from this concept, however, insofar as it is based on the following specific assumptions about state behaviour.

The first assumption concerns states' reactions to the relative growth of their own power. When a state perceives that its power is growing faster than other states in the international system, it will attempt to increase the influence it exerts on the governance of the system. In other words, it will attempt to improve upon its position in what I will call the international *hierarchy of influence* or, as Gilpin prefers to call it, the international *hierarchy of prestige*.⁴ This type of behaviour will be referred to as *upward positionality*, i.e., the attempt by a state,

² Patrick A. Mc Carthy is a Ph.D. candidate in International Relations at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. This article is an edited version of a chapter of his Ph.D. dissertation which is entitled *International Stability; Revitalising an Abused Concept*. It was written while the author was a visiting researcher at the University of California, Berkeley. The author is especially grateful to the numerous senior UN officials who granted him interviews. For their helpful comments on earlier drafts, the author also wishes to thank Ernst B. Haas, Alan W. Cafruny, Sir Brian Urquhart, three anonymous reviewers for *Global Governance*, and all of his colleagues in the seminar *The Future of the United Nations System*, held at the University of California, Berkeley, during the spring semester of 1996.

³ R. Gilpin, *War & Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

as a result of the relative growth of its power, to move upward in the hierarchy of influence.

The second assertion concerns states' reactions to the relative decline of their own power. When a state perceives that its power is not growing as fast as most other states in the international system—or that its power is, in fact, declining absolutely—it will nevertheless attempt to maintain its influence on the governance of the international system. In other words, it will attempt to maintain its position in the international hierarchy of influence. This type of behaviour will be referred to as *downward positionality*, i.e., a state's aversion to moving downward in the hierarchy of influence despite the relative decline of its power.

These two types of behaviour are necessarily antagonistic since one state cannot move upward in the hierarchy of influence without another state being relegated therein. When upward and downward positionality coexist, therefore, a certain amount of *tension* is generated. Rising states become dissatisfied with their failure to increase their influence on the governance of the international system while those states they would like to dislodge become increasingly committed to the preservation of the status-quo. If downwardly positional states are successful in preserving the status-quo, the dissatisfaction of rising states may turn to disillusionment, tension may rise to a very high level, and conflict may occur. A system of international governance is *stable*, therefore, only if it is able to diffuse the tension generated by the interplay of upward and downward positionality and thereby avoid conflict that could lead to a breakdown of the system of governance.

The structure of the following analysis of the Security Council is dictated by this approach to conceptualising the stability of governance systems. The first and second parts provide evidence for the existence in the UN organisation of upward and downward positionality, respectively, with regard to permanent membership of the Security Council. The third part appraises the degree of tension generated within the organisation by the interplay of these opposing positional forces. The final part examines the mechanisms that have been employed by the UN organisation in order to diffuse this tension and appraises their effectiveness.

2. Upward Positionality

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Security Council has been the focus of especially strong upward positionality. There are three main reasons for this, the first two of which concern the increased dissatisfaction of developing countries with the structure and membership of the Security Council and the last of which concerns the desire of Japan and Germany to play a bigger role in the Council's decision-making.

2.1 *Dissatisfaction in the Developing World*

First, between 1963 and 1995, UN membership has increased from 110 to 185 countries—an increase of over 68 percent. Since most of these new members come from the developing world, this increase in membership has skewed even more the geographical distribution of representation on the Security Council in favour of developed states. It has also made it more difficult for individual developing states to be elected as non-permanent members of the Security Council. Finally, it has caused a relative decrease in the representation of the developed world in the UN in general and has, accordingly, led the developing world to demand stronger representation on the Security Council.

Second, the end of the Cold War has significantly contributed to the dissatisfaction of developing countries with the structure and membership of the Security Council. During the Cold War, developing countries had less cause to worry that the Security Council would be used as an instrument against them by powerful industrialised states acting in concert. Cold war rivalries within the Council and their ramifications in certain regions of the Third World largely precluded this from happening. Since the end of the Cold War, however, rivalries within the Security Council have become much less intense. The result has been a striking reduction in the use of the veto and a significant improvement in decision-making capacity.

These developments have heightened fear among developing countries that control of the Security Council has fallen into the hands of powerful northern states.⁵ A strong foundation for this fear was provided by the 1991 Gulf War during which “the West demonstrated its overwhelming military superiority over a ‘Third World’ country... and was able to do it with full legitimacy afforded by

⁵ B. Russett, B. O'Neill & J. Sutterlin, "Breaking the Security Council Restructuring Logjam," *Global Governance* 2 (1996): 65-80; W. Wagner, "Der ständige Sitz im Sicherheitsrat; Wer braucht wen: Die Deutschen diesen Sitz? Der Sicherheitsrat die Deutschen?," *Europa Archiv* 19 (1993): 533-540; E. C. Luck & T. T. Gati, "Whose Collective Security?" *The Washington Quarterly* (Spring 1992): 45-46.

the UN Charter.”⁶ In order to wrest control of the Security Council from the relatively unified influence of the industrialised world and so protect itself from similar future occurrences, the developing world demands that the Council be reformed so as to make it more representative and legitimate.⁷

2.2 *Dissatisfaction in Japan and Germany*

Finally, differential growth in power among states has generated a great deal of upward positionality in the UN. Since 1945, and even since 1965, the concentration of power in individual states has tended to decline as power has disseminated among a larger number of states. True, the most powerful states in the international system at the time of the Security Council’s previous reform in 1965 remain, for the most part, the most powerful states but their power has declined relative to the power of other states in the system.

On the other hand, certain other states have significantly improved their relative standing in international relations since 1945. The two most important states in this respect are Japan and Germany. Both countries have moved from defeat and devastation to build, respectively, the second- and third-largest economies in the world. Furthermore, Germany, through re-unification, has significantly added to its population and territory. As a result of the increase in their relative capabilities, both countries have clearly indicated that they aspire to permanent representation on the Security Council.

2.3 *A Coalition of Dissatisfactions*

The upward positionality displayed by the developing world on the one hand and by Japan and Germany on the other would seem, at first glance, to be essentially incompatible. Developing countries in general do not wish to see increased representation for developed northern states on the Security Council and they are seriously opposed to further European representation therein. Nevertheless, these two sources of dissatisfaction with the status-quo have combined to create a

⁶ J. Ciechanski, "Restructuring of the UN Security Council," *International Peacekeeping* 1, no. 4 (1994): 414.

⁷ It is important to point out that, despite the impression that this very general analysis may give, developing countries do not hold identical views on how the Security Council should be reformed. On the contrary, there is a rich debate among developing countries as to how the membership of the Security Council should be recast. This is, nevertheless, a debate about the details, not the necessity, of reform. For a survey of the different reform preferences of developing countries, see W. Kühne & K. Baumann, *Reform des VN-Sicherheitsrats zum 50Jährigen Jubiläum: Auswertung und Analyse der Stellungnahmen der Mitgliedstaaten im Überblick* (Ebenhausen/Isartal: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik; Forschungsinstitut für internationale Politik und Sicherheit [SWP-AP 2919], July 1995).

strong concerted push for reform with the dual aims, generally speaking, of permanent representation for Japan and Germany *and* greater representation for the developing south. This unlikely coalition of interests has formed due to the fact that, on the one hand, Japan and Germany need the support of the developing world if they are to succeed in becoming permanent members of the Security Council and, on the other, that developing countries need the support of Japan and Germany to ensure that the debate on Security Council reform maintains its current momentum.

Japan and Germany have found it necessary to court the developing world since without the support of a sizeable number of developing countries, neither has a chance of generating the two-thirds majority support necessary under Article 108 to amend the Charter in order to allow them to become permanent members of the Security Council. As a result, both Japan and Germany have incorporated within their respective campaigns for permanent membership the imperative of improving upon the representation of developing countries on the Council. Japan supports the inclusion as permanent members of "such qualified countries as may be selected by agreement from Asia, Africa and Latin America based on judgement of their capacity and willingness to assume global responsibilities."⁸ Germany supports granting permanent seats to an unspecified number of countries from the developing world. Its preferred reform solution is the so-called "two-plus" formula by which the permanent membership of the Security Council would be expanded to include Germany and Japan (two) and some other unspecified countries from Africa, Latin America, and Asia (plus).⁹

The developing world needs the support of Japan and Germany, on the other hand, because without their active involvement in the debate on Security Council reform, no progress on the matter is likely to be made and the debate is likely to lose its current momentum. A glance at the recent history of reform debate within the UN suffices to support this contention. The topic of Security Council reform re-emerged during the 34th General Assembly in 1980 but

⁸ D. Lau, "Japan Backs Wider Expansion of UNSC," *The Daily Yomiuri* (February 10, 1995). See also "Statement to the United Nations' 50th General Assembly by H.E. Mr. Hisashi Owada, Representative of Japan, on item 47: Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters," (New York: Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations, November 13, 1995).

⁹ "Statement by Ambassador Detlev Graf zu Rantzau, Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, to the United Nations' 49th General Assembly. Agenda item 33: Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council," (New York: Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations, October 13, 1994).

“lingered hopelessly for several years in General Assembly commissions.”¹⁰ In marked contrast, the beginning of the current dynamic debate on Security Council reform coincided with indications by Japan and Germany in the early 1990s that both would pursue permanent membership. Japan and Germany were the catalysts for, and continue to be the main engine of, the current reform process. Without their engagement, the debate would either never have reached its current stage or would have taken significantly longer to do so.

2.4 *The German and Japanese Campaigns for Permanent Membership*

The permanent membership campaigns conducted by Japan and Germany have been aimed at winning support from the general UN membership, on the one hand, and from the five permanent members of the Security Council, on the other. Different, and not altogether compatible, strategies have been used in each case. To win the support of the general UN membership, both countries have been careful to communicate their desire for permanent representation on the Security Council in ways that avoid the perception that they are conducting independent, aggressive campaigns. This strategy has involved relying on the solicitation of other states and on playing down the military responsibility normally associated with permanent membership.

To win the support of the permanent members of the Security Council, on the other hand, Japan and Germany have taken steps towards bolstering their international military responsibility. By doing so, they have attempted to deflect the complaints of some permanent members that constitutional barriers against foreign troop deployments in place in both countries would make them privileged permanent members of the Security Council insofar as they would enjoy strong decision-making influence without playing a corresponding role in international military affairs.

Both Japan and Germany have long been sensitive to the argument that permanent membership of the Security Council has as a prerequisite a high degree of international military responsibility that includes the ability to participate in UN peacekeeping activities. Both countries agree with the opinion often expressed by UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali that no formal link exists between permanent membership of the Security Council and peacekeeping responsibility.¹¹ They concur, however, with the opinion of the current permanent

¹⁰ J. Ciechanski, "Restructuring of the UN Security Council," *International Peacekeeping* 1, no. 4 (1994): 414.

¹¹ "Ghali Less Sure About Early U.N. Security Council Reform," *Kyodo News International, Inc* (September 5, 1994).

membership that a moral link does exist between the two.¹² For this reason, both Japan and Germany have taken steps to facilitate their participation in UN peacekeeping operations in order to increase their capacity to accept greater international military responsibility and thereby improve their chances of being accepted by the current permanent membership as permanent members with full responsibilities.

2.4.1 Japan and International Military Responsibility

In June 1993, after almost two years of acrimonious debate, the Japanese Diet passed an International Peace Cooperation Law (IPCL) which allows Japanese troops to take part in UN peacekeeping operations subject to five essential conditions; (1) that a cease-fire agreement is already in place, (2) that the parties to the conflict have given their consent to the deployment of peacekeeping troops and to the participation of Japanese troops, (3) that the peacekeeping force maintains impartiality, (4) that the use of weapons is limited to the minimum necessary to protect the lives of Japanese armed forces and (5) that the Japanese government may withdraw its contingent should any of the other conditions cease to apply.¹³

At present, Japanese troops deployed abroad may not participate in operations that may involve the use of force for purposes other than self-defence. They are limited to providing logistical support to other UN units and to participating in civilian peacekeeping activities. Under the IPCL, Japan has sent Japanese electoral observers to Angola, Cambodia and El Salvador; it has deployed military observers, civilian police and a 600-strong construction unit in Cambodia, and has also sent staff officers and a movement control unit to Mozambique. Most recently, it has deployed self-defence forces to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) operating in the Golan Heights.

While these are undoubtedly important peacekeeping contributions, they do not significantly add to Japan's share of international military responsibility. Foreign Minister Kono made it clear that, even with a fully operational IPCL, Japan will be unable to participate in peace-enforcement operations as envisioned by Boutros-Ghali.¹⁴ According to Mr. Kono, Japan is only willing to fulfil its responsibilities as a permanent member "in accordance with its basic philosophy

¹² Interviews, New York (February 5-7, 1996).

¹³ T. Susumu, "Japan's Contribution to UN Peacekeeping," *Social Science Japan* 6 (1996): 7-10.

¹⁴ Anonymous interview of Japanese Foreign Minister, Yohei Kono (April 24, 1995 [<http://www.nttl.cs.jp/infomofa/press/fm/interview.html#2>]).

regarding international contributions, including the non-resort to the use of force prohibited by its constitution".¹⁵

However, Japan's inability to participate in military-style peace-enforcement operations does not deter it from continuing with its campaign for permanent membership since it argues that the resources needed to contribute to international peace and security in the modern world differ from those needed in the past. According to Japan, nowadays such a contribution depends more and more on economic and non-military factors.¹⁶

2.4.2 Germany and International Military Responsibility

Like Japan, Germany has also taken steps towards improving its international military responsibility. Unlike Japan, however, it has largely succeeded in doing so. In order to reinforce the fact that the German campaign for permanent membership had begun, Foreign Minister Kinkel told the 47th General Assembly in September 1992 that Germany was determined to amend its constitution to allow its troops to participate in UN peacekeeping and peacemaking operations in order to end "any discrepancy between our verbal commitment to peace and human rights and our active involvement in their defence."¹⁷ It was not Kinkel's active petitioning, however, but the dissatisfaction of opposition parties with the use of German troops in Bosnia and Somalia that eventually led to the loosening of the constitutional restrictions. Neither was it necessary to amend the Grundgesetz. A more liberal interpretation of its provisions by the German Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) sufficed to give the German government more freedom in deploying its armed forces abroad.

In effect, the German government is now in a position to deploy its troops world-wide provided they participate in UN-sponsored multilateral operations. Under normal circumstances, the prior support of the Bundestag is required for such deployments. However, the FCC ruling also allows the German government, in cases of particular emergency, to deploy its troops first and seek parliamentary support later.¹⁸ As a consequence of this new-found freedom in the area of

¹⁵ "Statement by Japanese Foreign Minister Yohei Kono at the 50th Session of the UN General Assembly" (September 26, 1995 [<http://www.nttl.co.jp/infomofa/press/fm/92850th.html>]).

¹⁶ UN Doc. A/48/264: 54. See also P. J. Katzenstein, "Culture, Norms, and Japanese Security," *Social Science Japan* 7 (August 1996): 9-11.

¹⁷ H. Pick, "Allies Resist German Push for Big-Power Seat at UN," *The Guardian* (September 25, 1992): 8.

¹⁸ *Urteil des Bundesverfassungsgerichts vom 12. Juli 1994 zu Auslandseinsätzen der Bundeswehr* (Bonn: Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung; Referat Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik, August 1994): 15-16.

foreign troop deployment, Germany has declared itself ready to provide "stand-by forces" to the UN for use in peacekeeping operations. These will be established, according to Generalleutnant Manfred Eisele of the UN department for peacekeeping operations, after the restructuring of the Bundeswehr is completed; probably early in the next century.¹⁹

At present, Germany is deploying soldiers, military observers, civilian police, or medical personnel to UN operations in Iraq, Bosnia, Georgia, Angola, Kuwait and Liberia. Of these, 4,000 soldiers and 150 state and federal police officers are deployed in the former Yugoslavia. Thus, Germany has been largely successful in increasing its international military responsibility. Unlike Japan, its troops may now carry out multilateral military operations in support of Security Council resolutions.

Both Germany and Japan, therefore, have attempted to increase their international military responsibility in order to strengthen their respective cases for permanent membership of the Security Council. In this respect, Germany has met with more success than has Japan. Nevertheless, the actions of both countries clearly indicate that each aspires to a greater share in the governance of the international system. The current climate in the UN, therefore, is characterised by the strong upward positionality of Japan and Germany and, to a lesser extent, by the upward positionality of developing countries who wish to see their increased representation in the UN organisation translated into greater decision-making influence.

¹⁹ R. Moniac, "Deutsche Soldaten für Krisenfeuerwehr der UNO," *Die Welt* (November 20, 1995).

3. Downward Positionality

The same factors that have led to the upward positionality of Japan, Germany and the developing world have also led the current permanent members of the Security Council to display strong downward positionality; i.e., to behave so as to protect their privileged position in the UN's hierarchy of influence.

Even before Japan and Germany made public their intention to campaign for permanent seats, the permanent members were careful not to encourage debate on the question of altering the membership of the Security Council. For example, in December 1991, Britain, as chair of the Security Council, smoothed the way for the Russian Federation to take over the Soviet Union's permanent seat despite the fact that the process by which this was achieved is suspect under international law.²⁰ Britain, France and the US feared that indecisiveness in appointing the Soviet Union's successor would lead to a deeper questioning by UN member states of the validity of Council membership and, therefore, preferred a quick, if legally dubious, solution to a more protracted, politically sensitive one. The inheritance by Russia of the Soviet Union's permanent seat did not meet with much opposition from the UN membership at large, suggesting that the permanent members were successful in expediting the process and, thus, minimising debate on it.

3.1 Initial Opposition to Reforming the Security Council

When Germany and Japan made official their intentions to push for permanent membership, the reaction of most of the permanent members was negative. Certain among them offered various reasons as to why the addition of extra permanent members to the Security Council was not to be desired. France focused on the detrimental effects that enlargement would have on the effectiveness of Security Council decision-making.²¹ British Prime Minister, John Major, insisted that "Security Council reform is neither necessary nor desirable"²² and in a UN report Britain expressed its satisfaction with the way the Council

²⁰ Y. Z. Blum, "Russia Takes Over the Soviet Union's Seat at the United Nations," *European Journal of International Law* 3, no. 2 (1992): 354-361; T. Daley, *Russia's "Continuation" of the Soviet Security Council Membership and Prospective Russian Policies toward the United Nations* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1992 [P-7778-RGS]). This is not the first occasion, however, on which the representation of a permanent member has been altered. In 1973, the communist government of mainland China took over the Chinese permanent seat from the nationalist Chinese government in Taiwan.

²¹ UN Doc. A/48/264: 41; M. Walker, "France Plays Nuclear Card Over UN Veto," *The Guardian* (June 11, 1993): 24; "United Nations: 'Big Five' Split Over Security Council Reforms," *Inter Press Service* (August 3, 1993).

²² R. Oakley, "Major Defends Trident," *The Times* (February 4, 1992).

was operating and warned against any initiative that might interfere with its effectiveness.²³ Both France and the UK also played the nuclear card in their opposition to permanent membership for Japan and Germany. French UN Ambassador Merimee referred to the “unwritten rules” surrounding the nuclear status of all current permanent members and a British official argued in June 1993 that “the nuclear status lurks understood in the background.”²⁴

The United States, on the other hand, has been an consistent supporter since the early 1990s of adding Germany and Japan to the permanent membership of the Security Council. As early as January 1992, US President Bush expressed support for the idea that Japan be granted a permanent seat on the Security Council. During his presidential campaign in 1992, Bill Clinton also expressed support for making both Japan and Germany permanent members. The Clinton administration has since maintained this position. In 1993, U.S. Ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright, made it official that adding Germany and Japan to the Security Council had become an integral part of U.S. proposals to reform the UN.²⁵ “It was time the Security Council reflected the world of the 1990s and not that of 1945,” she explained,²⁶ adding that US support for expanding permanent membership to include Japan and Germany was based on the US conviction that both countries had gained economic and political significance and were able to contribute to the promotion of international peace and order.²⁷

US support for the addition of Japan and Germany as permanent members of the Security Council does not correspond with the behaviour to be expected from a downwardly positional state. Instead of jealously guarding its privileged position in the upper echelons of the UN’s hierarchy of influence—a strategy that both Britain and France initially followed—the US has actively supported the granting of additional shares in the governance of the international system to Japan and Germany. How can this deviant behaviour be explained? One explanation might be that, because the US is still the most powerful state in the international system, it feels less threatened by the aspirations of Japan and Germany than do, for example, Britain and France who fear that their influence in the UN organisation may be eclipsed if Germany and Japan are granted permanent membership. Another explanation might be that US support of

²³ UN Doc. A/48/264: 90-91.

²⁴ M. Walker, “France Plays Nuclear Card Over UN Veto,” *The Guardian* (June 11, 1993): 24.

²⁵ UN Doc. A/48/264: 91-92.

²⁶ M. Walker, “France Plays Nuclear Card Over UN Veto,” *The Guardian* (June 11, 1993): 24.

²⁷ S. Masui, “Govt. Should be More Open on Gaining Seat in UNSC,” *The Daily Yomiuri* (October 26, 1994).

Japanese and German permanent membership is a manifestation of the desire of a declining hegemon to underwrite its global activity by granting additional decision-making powers to the like-minded, rich countries.

3.2 *Subsequent Acquiescence to the Necessity of Limited Reform*

Britain and France hoped that their strict initial opposition to reforming the Security Council would quell interest in the topic. As soon as it became apparent, however, that a major debate on Council reform was developing within the United Nations, both realised that their opposition to reform would soon become untenable in the face of strong support for reform among the general UN membership. Faced with this dilemma, both modified their official positions and declared themselves open, in principle, to the idea of extending the membership of the Council to reflect both the increase in membership of the UN and the changes that had taken place in international relations since 1945. France and the UK began publicly to support Japan and Germany as future permanent members of the Security Council. Both reasoned that, if reform was inevitable, it would be best to add those countries with whom positive relations already existed.²⁸

The “shift in emphasis” of the British position was particularly abrupt. During the course of the same July 1993 G7 summit meeting at which John Major had expressed his cautious opposition to Japanese permanent membership, Foreign Secretary Hurd stated that Britain come to accept the need for Security Council reform and that, if agreement on the matter were reached, Japan and Germany would be the “natural beneficiaries” of permanent seats.²⁹ This statement marked the beginning of a new British policy on Security Council reform that has since remained steadfast. As if to underline the drastic change in British policy since the early ‘90s, John Major, speaking before the 50th anniversary commemorative session of the General Assembly on October 23, 1995, asked “should the Security Council be reformed?” and answered “I believe it should. The subject has been on the agenda for too long. It raises difficult questions; but the issues are clear, and decisions are needed.”³⁰ In the words of

²⁸ Interviews, New York (February 5-7, 1996).

²⁹ “G7 Summit: Britain Starts to Bow towards the Inevitable: Hurd and Major Give First Signs of Accepting German and Japanese Claims to Seats on UN Security Council,” *The Independent* (July 9, 1993): 10.

³⁰ *UN 50th Anniversary, Statement by British Prime Minister, John Major, to the Special Commemorative Meeting of the General Assembly on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations, at UN Headquarters, New York on October 23, 1995.* [http://www.fco.gov.uk/current/1995/oct/23/major_statement-to-united-nations.txt].

one British UN official, the UK has become an “enthusiastic convert” to the idea of Security Council reform.³¹

Change in the official French position on Security Council reform was just as striking. On the eve of his visit to Tokyo on March 29, 1994, French Foreign Minister, Alain Juppé, expressed support for the idea of extending permanent membership, with full responsibilities, to Germany and Japan stating that France considered it a “necessity” to enlarge the Council and that “il est donc naturel de donner un siège à L’Allemagne et au Japon.”³² Addressing the 49th General Assembly, Mr. Juppé was the only foreign minister to refer specifically to Japan and Germany in the context of Security Council reform.

Despite the fundamental change in its position, however, France is still of the opinion that neither Germany nor Japan are yet ready to assume the responsibilities of permanent membership. It is not satisfied with the level of international military responsibility that either has assumed thus far. According to one senior French UN official, further change—most likely constitutional—is necessary in both countries if international military responsibility is to be brought to a level commensurate with the responsibilities of permanent members of the Security Council.³³ France’s current support for the permanent membership of Japan and Germany is, therefore, based on the priority that each has placed on increasing international military responsibility and on the steps that each has already taken towards achieving this goal. France’s support, however, is conditional upon the achievement of this goal.

China and the Russian Federation did not actively oppose the idea of German and Japanese permanent membership from the outset but preferred instead to urge great caution and reserve when dealing with such an important question. China agrees that there is a need to expand the membership of the Security Council “in an appropriate manner when the time is ripe”³⁴ and is concerned that any reform should not have an adverse impact on the effectiveness of the Council. It foresees a long, careful process of reform the end result of which will be reached by “broad consensus and universal acceptance of the Member States.”³⁵

³¹ Interviews, New York (February 5-7, 1996).

³² “L’avenir des Nations unies: Alain Juppé favorable à un droit de veto pour le Japon et l’Allemagne au Conseil de sécurité,” *Le Monde* (March 29, 1994).

³³ Interviews, New York (February 5-7, 1996).

³⁴ UN Doc. A/48/264: 18.

³⁵ UN Doc. A/48/264: 19. See also “China Calls for Prudence in Security Council Reform,” *Xinhua General Overseas News Service* (July 1, 1993); and L. Jianxiong, “Nations Push for Security Council Reform,” *Xinhua General Overseas News Service* (October 8, 1993).

Likewise, the Russian Federation has approached the question of reforming the Security Council with a great deal of caution. It recognises that changes in the international system over the past fifty years have led to the need for reform of the United Nations system as a whole and that “expansion of the Security Council should be considered in a wider context of the general task of adapting the United Nations to realities of today.”³⁶ Russia’s support is tempered with reservations, however. It has argued that any reform of the Security Council should strengthen its new-found effectiveness and has gone as far as to argue that the UN “cannot afford to engage in an overhaul of machinery which not only is not broken but is in fact in good working order.”³⁷ It has also suggested various ways in which the operation of the Security Council might be improved without having to resort to expanding its membership.³⁸

In sum, despite the fact that all permanent members have acquiesced to the necessity of limited reform of the Security Council, their motivations for doing so and the general reserved nature of their support clearly indicate characteristics of downward positionality. All permanent members recognise that the reform debate has achieved a critical momentum within the UN and that opposing the general will of the UN membership by refusing to countenance reform is not a viable course of action. Their support of reform, for the most part, is motivated more by a desire to make the most out of a difficult situation by salvaging as many of their privileges as possible intact than by a belief that reforming the Security Council is a virtuous goal in its own right. Permanent members have not, on the whole, been willing collaborators in the reform process. Rather, they have been reluctant participants in a process driven by the ambitions of rising states.

4. Tension

The interplay of the upward positionality of Japan and Germany, on the one hand, and the downward positionality of the permanent members of the Security Council, on the other, has generated a significant amount of tension in the United Nations organisation. This tension manifests itself, in increasing order of

China’s cautious position on Security Council reform is also influenced by its “unofficial” opposition to Japanese permanent membership.

³⁶ *Statement by Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Yuri V. Fedotov, at the Meeting of the UN General Assembly on the Question of Equitable Representation and Expansion of the Security Council, November 15, 1995*, (New York: Russian Federation, Permanent Mission to the United Nations, Press Release No. 33, November 16, 1995 [Unofficial Translation]).

³⁷ UN Doc. A/48/264: 82.

³⁸ UN Doc. A/48/264: 83.

importance, in the different levels of urgency with which various states view the necessity of reforming the Security Council, in the acrimonious debate on the future of the veto, and in the major disagreements over how many permanent and non-permanent seats should be added to the Council and who should fill them.

4.1 *The Urgency of Reform*

Tension is generated by the interplay of the different degrees of urgency that states attach to the need for reform. Some states consider reform to be essential, some to be necessary and others merely consider it hypothetically desirable. The urgency attached by states to achieving reform tends to correlate with whether they are attempting to improve their position in the UN's hierarchy of influence or to maintain their position therein. On the one hand, states displaying upward positionality—Japan and Germany, for example—tend to attach great urgency to achieving reform. The German Permanent Representative, for example, called for “substantial achievements” to be made on the subject of reforming the Security Council during the 50th General Assembly, warning that “we must make good use of the momentum created. It will not last forever.”³⁹ Likewise, Japan sought to begin the reform process by 1995⁴⁰ and, when that deadline passed, pushed to resolve the question of Security Council reform by September 1996.⁴¹

On the other hand, states displaying downward positionality—the permanent members of the Security Council—tend to approach the subject of reform in a more casual manner and tend also to foresee the process of reform taking longer to complete. China, for example, foresees a long process of reform characterised by prudence and caution and by the aim of achieving unanimous agreement. Likewise, the Russian Federation has stressed that it will co-operate in the reform debate so long as “any steps taken in this field are gradual and decided on by consensus, after general agreement has been reached in the

³⁹ *Statement by Ambassador Tono Eitel, Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, to the United Nations' 50th General Assembly. Agenda item 47: Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters* (New York: Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations, November 13, 1995).

⁴⁰ UN Doc. A/48/264.

⁴¹ *Statement by Japanese Foreign Minister Yohei Kono at the 50th Session of the UN General Assembly* [<http://www.nttl.co.jp/infomofa/press/fm/92850th.html>]; *Statement to the United Nations' 50th General Assembly by H.E. Mr. Hisashi Owada, Representative of Japan, on item 47: Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters* (New York: Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations, November 13, 1995); “Japan Calls for Reform of UNSC by September 1996,” *Kyodo News International Inc* (June 12, 1995).

Council and universally acceptable criteria have been worked out."⁴² In the same vein, British Foreign Secretary Hurd admitted in 1993, that "this is a huge debate and it will go on for a long time... An outcome will be very hard and slow to reach."⁴³

Once more, the US constitutes somewhat of an exception in this regard. As a permanent member of the Security Council, it has an obvious interest in maintaining its privileged position in the institutional hierarchy. Nevertheless, it is most concerned that reform of the Security Council be carried out quickly. The US Assistant Secretary for International Organisations, for example, has advised that "the [Security] Council should not proceed too far into its second half-century without updating its membership"⁴⁴ and the US does not rule out that some major agreement on reform is possible before the end of 1996.⁴⁵

4.2 *The Veto*

A significant amount of tension is also generated by the controversy surrounding the question of how best to deal with the veto in the context of Security Council reform. Generally speaking, four opposing positions dominate the debate according to which the right of veto should be (1) phased out altogether, (2) limited in scope, (3) retained by the existing permanent members but not extended to new permanent members, or (4) extended to new permanent members.

The first proposal, that the veto should be abolished altogether,⁴⁶ is a non-starter since all permanent members have indicated that they are not willing to relinquish their right of veto. From the point of view of the P-5, the function of the veto has not changed since 1945. It still fulfils the task of preventing concerted action being taken against a permanent member of the Security

⁴² UN Doc. A/48/264: 83.

⁴³ L. Doyle, "Hurd Warning Over 'Slide into Disorder': Foreign Secretary Backs Imperial UN and Defends Britain's Global Role to Justify Permanent Security Council Seat," *The Independent* (January, 28, 1993): 1.

⁴⁴ G. F. Ward Jr., *The United States and the United Nations*, Address by Assistant Secretary for International Organizations at Chapman University, Orange County, California (February 10, 1995 [gopher://dosfan.lib.uic.edu:70/0F-1%3A19376%3A95/ 02/10]).

⁴⁵ Interviews, New York (February 5-7, 1996).

⁴⁶ For examples of this proposal, see *Our Global Neighbourhood: The Report of the Commission on Global Governance* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); W. Hoffmann, *United Nations Security Council Reform and Restructuring* (Livingston, N.J.: The Center for U.N. Reform and Education [Monograph # 14], 1994); K. L. Sellen, "The United Nations Security Council Veto in the New World Order," *Military Law Review* 138 (Fall 1992): 187-262.

Council. The threat of veto—or the “hidden veto”—is also a powerful negotiation tool. It can deter states from bringing certain issues to the negotiation table in the first place—an example is the Soviet Union’s promise to veto reform proposals in the early 1960s—or, once negotiation has commenced, it can be used to force important concessions. Following the end of the Cold War, increased use of the hidden veto has provided permanent members with the added advantage of being able to exercise veto power without having to be exposed to the indignation of the international community. Without the acquiescence of the permanent members in the matter of abolishing the veto, therefore, it remains essentially unassailable for the simple reason that each permanent member has a veto over the question of abolishing the veto. As one Russian UN official put it, until the p-5 agree to contemplate phasing out the veto, it is not at all productive to discuss that option.⁴⁷

Proposals to limit the scope of the veto by restricting the range of issues to which it applies have also been made.⁴⁸ It has been suggested, for example, that the range of matters treated as procedural—to which the veto does not apply—be expanded so as more closely to comply with the spirit of the Charter. One concrete expression of this proposal could be the non-application of the veto to the election of the Secretary General or to the admission of new members. Another popular proposal is that the veto not be applied to action under Chapter VI (Pacific Settlement of Disputes) but restricted instead to action under Chapter VII (Enforcement Action).

There are several problems associated with this proposal that seriously impinge upon its chances of success. First, although only three vetoes have been cast since 1988, recent evidence suggests that permanent members are not willing to accept restrictions on their use of the veto. Russia, for example, cast one of these three vetoes on a minor budgetary matter⁴⁹ “mainly to demonstrate that it was still willing to use its privilege and thus reinforce the credibility of its

⁴⁷ Interviews, New York (February 5-7, 1996).

⁴⁸ For examples of this type of proposal, see *The United Nations in its Second Half-Century* (Yale University: The Report of the Independent Working Group on the Future of the United Nations [<http://www.library.yale.edu/un/unhome.htm>]); and *Reform of the Security Council*, Memorandum submitted to the president of the UN General assembly; Chair of the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council, from the International Peace Academy and The Stanley Foundation (May 20, 1994).

⁴⁹ Russia cast this veto in May of 1993 killing a resolution aimed at restructuring UN peacekeeping in Cyprus. Moscow opposed joining with other UN members in paying its share (less than \$2 million) to support a smaller peacekeeping force that would have taken over from a larger force financed by Britain. See J. Bone, “Russia Vetoes Plan to Cut UN Cyprus Force,” *The Times* (May 12, 1993): 11.

threat.”⁵⁰ Second, any such restriction on the use of the veto would have to be voluntarily accepted by all of the permanent members. Since compliance with the restriction would be at the discretion of each permanent member, it is unlikely that veto use would be restricted for longer than was convenient for a given permanent member. Finally, voluntarily restricting the use of the veto would involve relinquishing the application of the hidden veto in negotiations that fall outside of the scope of Chapter VII, seriously curtailing the negotiating leverage of the permanent members. It is unlikely that the permanent members will agree to restrict their own influence.

The proposal that veto power be retained by existing permanent members but not extended to new permanent members is, understandably, vehemently opposed by both Japan and Germany. Japan is acutely aware of the negotiation leverage associated with the right of veto and is against the creation, as part of an overall strategy to reform the Security Council, of a new class of permanent membership without veto powers.⁵¹ Likewise, Germany’s Chancellor Kohl has clearly stated that his country would not accept a permanent seat on the Security Council if it did not come with all usual rights, including the right of veto.⁵² The Acting German Permanent Representative explained that, “the right to veto is per se not an objective for us. But our bottom line is clear: If Germany... shall become permanent member of the Security Council this has to be on an equal footing with the other permanent members, without discrimination, i.e. with the same rights and the same obligations.”⁵³ If Germany were to achieve permanent membership of the Security Council without veto rights, so the argument goes, the German government would find it extremely difficult to explain to its citizens

⁵⁰ B. Russett, B. O’Neill & J. Sutterlin, “Breaking the Security Council Restructuring Logjam,” *Global Governance* 2 (1996): 65-80.

⁵¹ “Japan is not enthusiastic about proposals to establish a new category of membership of the Security Council, be it in the form of semi-permanent membership or otherwise” (Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs document [<http://www.nttl.co.jp/infomofa/unj/reform.html>]).

⁵² “Kohl Opposes Taking UNSC Seat Without Veto Power,” *Kyodo News Service, Japan Economic Newswire* (July 9, 1993). See also *Europe and the UN: Focal Points for German Foreign Policy*, Report Marking the Sixth Anniversary of Germany Unification (October 3, 1996 [http://www.auswaertiges-amt.government.de/de/what_new/p960918a.htm]).

⁵³ *Modalities for Bringing Change into Effect and Consideration of Related Charter Amendments*, Statement by Ambassador Dr. Gerhard Henze, Acting Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, to the Open-Ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council (New York: Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations, May 17, 1994).

why Germany was being treated differently than, for example, France or the UK.⁵⁴

The proposal that the right of veto be extended to any new permanent members of the Security Council is supported, therefore, by Japan and Germany. A number of permanent members have also expressed support for this option. Former French Foreign Minister, Alain Juppé, has underlined that "Les nouveaux membres permanents devront jouir des droits et assumer les responsabilités de leur charge."⁵⁵ Likewise, British Foreign Minister, Douglas Hurd, stressed that "any extension of the permanent membership should be on a normal basis, that is to say, new permanent members should have the same rights as existing permanent members."⁵⁶ Russia has also expressed its support for extending veto rights to new permanent members.⁵⁷

It would seem at first glance that by supporting the extension of veto-rights to new permanent members, these permanent members are collaborating in the dilution of their own influence. It is not difficult to understand, however, why they are following this course of action. Extending veto-privileges to states that achieve permanent membership of the Security Council is, in fact, in the best interests of the current permanent members. If they were to refuse to do so, the veto would lose most of the scant legitimacy it has left since it would essentially become a relic of the past,⁵⁸ attributable only to the historical fact of having been an original permanent member.

⁵⁴ For examples of this argument, see W. Kühne, "Erweiterung und Reform des UN-Sicherheitsrats: keine weltpolitische Nebensache," *Europa Archiv* 24 (1994): 685-692; and W. Kühne & K. Baumann, *Reform des VN-Sicherheitsrats zum 50Jährigen Jubiläum: Auswertung und Analyse der Stellungnahmen der Mitgliedstaaten im Überblick* (Ebenhausen/Isartal: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik; Forschungsinstitut für internationale Politik und Sicherheit [SWP-AP 2919], July 1995).

⁵⁵ "L'avenir des Nations unies: Alain Juppé favorable à un droit de veto pour le Japon et l'Allemagne au Conseil de sécurité," *Le Monde* (March 29, 1994).

⁵⁶ "Britain and France Reaffirm Support for Permanent Membership for Germany and Japan," *The Daily Yomiuri* (September 30, 1994): 2.

⁵⁷ W. Kühne & K. Baumann, *Reform des VN-Sicherheitsrats zum 50Jährigen Jubiläum: Auswertung und Analyse der Stellungnahmen der Mitgliedstaaten im Überblick* (Ebenhausen/Isartal: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik; Forschungsinstitut für internationale Politik und Sicherheit [SWP-AP 2919], July 1995).

⁵⁸ See also J. Ciechanski, "Restructuring of the UN Security Council," *International Peacekeeping* 1, no. 4 (1994): 413-431.

4.3 Adding Permanent and Non-permanent Seats

Most tension is generated, however, by the question of how to expand the membership of the Security Council. On this issue, broad agreement exists on several general points but deep-seated disagreement plagues specific reform proposals. For example, there is broad agreement among UN member states that the number of seats on the Security Council should be increased. A sizeable number of UN member states, including most of the permanent members, also agree that Japan and Germany should have permanent representation, albeit on certain conditions. Furthermore, there is widespread agreement that any reform should improve the representation of Asia, Africa and Latin America. This is about as far as agreement stretches, however. On the subject of how many permanent and non-permanent seats should be added, and on who should fill them, broad disagreement reigns.

The majority of tension in the reform debate is generated by differences of opinion over how best to reconcile two broad areas of agreement—that Germany and Japan should become permanent members and that developing countries should be better represented. This is the problem at the heart of the reform debate. Developing countries, while generally supporting the permanent membership campaigns of Japan and Germany, have long argued that permanent membership of the Security Council should not be limited to industrialised countries of the north. The P-5, on the other hand, are generally supportive—with the possible exceptions of China and Russia—of the idea of adding Japan and Germany as permanent members but are not supportive—with the possible exception of China—of the idea of adding developing countries as permanent members of the Security Council. From the point of view of those permanent members that are both rich and industrialised—the US, Britain and France—there is good reason for this since:

Germany and Japan vote regularly with other rich industrial states in the General Assembly, and in the security Council when they happen to hold nonpermanent seats. So long as their alignment in international politics holds relatively constant..., their acquisition of permanent (and veto-wielding) membership would not fundamentally alter the balance of political forces on the council. Anything they might wish to veto would probably be opposed by the United Kingdom, France, and/or the United States anyway. However, giving such membership to members of the Nonaligned Movement (for example, India, Nigeria, or to a lesser degree Brazil) would greatly complicate efforts to pass resolutions [since] ...a new nonaligned permanent member would be likely to have substantive views quite different from those of the developed northern countries...⁵⁹

⁵⁹ B. Russett, B. O'Neill & J. Sutterlin, "Breaking the Security Council Restructuring Logjam," *Global Governance* 2 (1996): 71.

For China and Russia, on the other hand, the temptation does exist to loosen the grip of rich western states on the Security Council by supporting the permanent representation of developing countries, although neither has openly supported such a course of action. For China, having developing countries permanently represented on the Council would provide it with allies who could support it in its ideological struggle with the West. China's approach to date, however, suggests that it prefers no reform at all even to reform that might include the permanent representation of developing countries. Its vague and general statements, its conviction that debate on reform will carry on for a very long time, and, most important, its insistence that agreement on reform must be arrived at by consensus—a most unlikely development—all point to its overwhelming preference for maintaining the status-quo.

Russia, likewise, has good reason to prefer the status-quo. Its permanent seat on the Security Council is a relic of the Superpower status enjoyed by the Soviet Union. It elevates Russia to a formal position of international influence that belies its de facto capabilities and ensures that, despite its relative decline, it retains a strong voice in world affairs. Were Russia to risk, in the words of Kozyrev, turning the Security Council "into a mini General Assembly"⁶⁰ by supporting the permanent representation of developing countries, it would be a conspirator in the sabotage of the one institution that provides it with disproportionate influence in international politics. Such a course of action would be tantamount to political suicide.

The interplay of upward and downward positionality, therefore, has generated tension in three main areas—in the debate over how urgently the Security Council needs to be reformed, in the debate over the future of the veto, and in the debate over the number of permanent and non-permanent seats that should be added to the Council. To different extents in each of these debates, the preferences of upwardly and downwardly positional states stand in opposition to one another.

5. Diffusing the Tension

How has the UN organisation fared in diffusing this tension? The UN does not possess a formal review mechanism that periodically assesses the need for reforming the UN's hierarchy of influence in light of significant shifts in the distribution of power among states. However, the UN organisation has made use

⁶⁰ D. Gornostayev, "Kozyrev is Busy; Russian Foreign Minister Continues to Participate in UN General Assembly," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (October 5, 1994).

of a separate mechanism—its power to appoint working groups—in order to tackle the problem of diffusing tension and reaching agreement on reform. Despite significant short-comings in the procedural and decision-making rules governing the operation of the UN working-group established to examine the issue of Security Council reform, it has succeeded in making an important contribution to advancing the reform debate.

5.1 *The Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG)*

Although the question of expanding the membership of the Security Council has been raised intermittently since the Council underwent its last, and only, reform in 1965, it was only given official institutional recognition on December 11, 1992, when the 47th General Assembly unanimously adopted resolution 47/62 on the “question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council.” In accordance with the resolution, Boutros-Ghali submitted a report to the 48th General Assembly containing details of the reform preferences of about one third of UN member states.⁶¹ During the same session, the General Assembly established an “Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council” (OEWG), consisting of all UN member states, to consider all aspects of Security Council reform.

The OEWG met on 22 occasions during the 48th General Assembly but submitted only a two-page progress report at the end of the session. Needless to say, little progress had been made. The report stated, in essence, that “there was a convergence of views that the membership of the Security Council should be enlarged” but that “there was also agreement that the scope and nature of such enlargement require further discussion.”⁶²

During the course of the 49th General Assembly, the co-chairmen of the OEWG—Wilhelm Breitenstein of Finland and Nitya Pibulsonggram of Thailand—produced, on their own initiative, a “compendium of observations” on Security Council reform.⁶³ The document was an improvement on the Secretary General’s earlier report—which simply listed given state preferences—insofar as it attempted systematically to assess state preferences and to underline areas of broad agreement among groups of states. The document’s main contribution was that it broke the general problem of Security Council reform into a set of specific sub-problems. Its aim was to advance the debate to a new level by dispensing

⁶¹ UN Doc. A/48/264.

⁶² UN Doc. A/48/47: 2.

⁶³ UN Doc. A/49/965.

with the general exchange of views that characterised the OEWG's first two sessions in order to "move on to the next phase of the work, i.e., a process of actual negotiations."⁶⁴

In its second report to the General Assembly, however, the OEWG as a whole displayed significantly less confidence and ambition than had its co-chairmen. It distanced itself from the co-chairmen's report complaining that it had not taken into account all opinions on reforming the Security Council, stressing that the co-chairmen's compendium "[had] no legal status, that it [did] not constitute the position of the Open-ended Working Group, nor [did] it prejudice the position of any delegation."⁶⁵ The report concluded in a similar vein as the previous one by stating that "important differences continue to exist on key issues before the Open-ended Working Group, and, therefore, further in-depth consideration of these issues is still required."⁶⁶

Despite the fact that the OEWG's reports to date have not pointed to any immediate resolution of the question of Security Council reform, the Working Group has been relatively successful in advancing the reform debate, albeit slowly. There are three main reasons for this success. First, the OEWG has facilitated the dissemination of detailed information among UN member states regarding the reform preferences of all states.

Second, as a direct result of creating an information-rich environment, the OEWG has succeeded in breaking the overarching problem of Security Council reform into a small number of more easily digestible sub-problems. Good examples of these are given in the Co-Chairmen's Report wherein they list the various issues to be addressed in resolving the question of equitable representation on and increase in membership of the Security Council⁶⁷ and provide specific questions to be addressed by each member while engaging in the debate on reform.⁶⁸

It is interesting to note, however, that many OEWG members consider these sub-problems to be tightly inter-linked, the resolution of each being dependent on the resolution of all others. In the language of organisational

⁶⁴ UN Doc. A/49/965: 16.

⁶⁵ UN Doc. A/49/47: 4.

⁶⁶ UN Doc. A/49/47: 5.

⁶⁷ The report breaks the problem of Security Council reform into the following sub-problem areas: Principles of membership expansion, optimal size of an expanded Security Council, criteria for new permanent members, extension of veto to new permanent members, removal of re-election ban, and new categories of membership.

⁶⁸ See UN Doc. A/49/965: 19.

learning, therefore, the problem of reforming the Security Council constitutes a non-decomposable, or at least a nearly non-decomposable set—a general problem area within which sub-problems may be identified but not easily dealt with in isolation from all of the other sub-problems in the set.⁶⁹ Since any reform solution will, therefore, by necessity be a “package-deal,” a great amount of negotiation, compromise and side-payments will be necessary in order to reach a solution. The OEWG provides a suitable forum for such interactions.

Finally, the OEWG has begun to learn, despite its relatively short existence, to adapt its operational procedures in order to improve its own effectiveness. The extent of this learning to date has been small but augurs well for the future effectiveness of the Working Group. As a result of disappointment with progress towards initiating actual negotiations on reform, the OEWG has adopted a number of innovations intended to increase the productivity of its deliberations. During the 49th General Assembly, it divided its discussions into two “clusters;” one dealing with equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and the other dealing with all other matters related to the Security Council. This allowed the OEWG to decouple reform-related issues from issues not directly related to the reform of Security Council membership and to advance with the former independently of the latter.

A second innovation has been the increased use of informal consultations between smaller groups of OEWG members. As well as conducting 11 formal meetings during the 49th session of the General Assembly, the OEWG met for informal consultations on an additional 21 occasions. Because these consultations normally involved the participation of a smaller number of states, they operated more like subcommittees than like a plenary session of the General Assembly. Restricting the size of meetings improved the group’s decision-making capacity since, as one observer pointed out, “when the entire group [met], it [made] no progress.”⁷⁰

Having taken into consideration these positive influences of the OEWG, however, it would be a mistake to overvalue its contribution to diffusing tension in the UN organisation. Although it has succeeded in advancing the reform debate in the ways outlined above, the OEWG has failed thus far to initiate an actual reform process. This is mainly due to the nature of the OEWG itself. It is simply an instrument of the UN member states established to bring the question of Security Council reform to the forefront of UN debate. Whether and how the

⁶⁹ E. B. Haas, *When Knowledge is Power; Three Models of Change in International Organizations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

⁷⁰ F. Bauer, “Security Council Reform Will Wait,” *World Press Review* 42, no. 6 (1995): 20.

debate is resolved depends entirely on the actions of its members, all 185 of them. The OEWG does not itself possess any special procedural mechanisms or decision-making rules that might speed agreement on reform. Furthermore, the negative reaction of the OEWG to the initiative displayed by its co-chairmen does not augur well for the future effectiveness of the working group.

6. Conclusion

Since the beginning of the current debate on Security Council reform in the early 1990s, the UN organisation has witnessed an intense interplay of positionality forces. On the one hand, rising states have displayed upward positionality by attempting to improve upon their position in the UN's hierarchy of influence. On the other hand, those states whose positions are most threatened by the aspirations of rising states have displayed downward positionality by resisting demotion therein. As a result of the interplay of these opposing positionality forces, tension has been generated. The UN organisation has responded by establishing a working-group to facilitate agreement on Security Council reform and thereby to diffuse tension in the organisation. Despite having made important progress in advancing the reform debate, however, this working-group has not succeeded in significantly reducing this tension.

According to the definition of stability presented at the outset, therefore, the UN Security Council is an unstable system of international governance. It is ill-equipped with effective mechanisms for diffusing the tension generated by the interplay of upward and downward positionality. In other words, it has difficulty adapting its hierarchy of influence in line with shifts in the distribution of power among states.

The reasons for this may be found in the Security Council's institutional structure. The rules governing the structure and procedure of the Security Council tend to bolster downward positionality and undermine upward positionality. Since only permanent members possess the right of veto, it is impossible to dislodge them from their privileged position in the UN's hierarchy of influence without their consent. In this way, downward positionality is strengthened by the institutional design of the Security Council. On the other hand, rising states that aspire to greater influence within the organisation—rather than being automatically entitled to it as a direct consequence of a relative increase in their capabilities—must gain the support of two-thirds of the UN membership, including all permanent members of the Security Council, in order rise in the UN's hierarchy of influence. In this way, upward positionality is undermined by the institutional design of the UN.

The Security Council can only be made more stable by reversing this state of affairs; i.e., by undermining downward positionality and by supporting—or at least not inhibiting—upward positionality. Providing for the latter without also ensuring the former is not enough, however. In other words, simply facilitating the achievement of permanent membership by rising states will not make the Security Council more stable unless the possibility also exists to demote current permanent members. Even if the OEWG succeeds, therefore, in reaching agreement on reform that adds a number of permanent members to the Security Council, it will not contribute to the overall stability of the Council since it is impossible to demote any of the current permanent members. This may not present much of a problem the first time that permanent members are added to the Security Council. In the longer run, however, continually adding permanent members without also demoting others will seriously undermine the Council's effectiveness.

In order to improve the stability of the Security Council, therefore, it is just as important to undermine downward positionality as it is to support upward positionality. If this could be achieved, the ability of the Security Council to adapt its hierarchy of influence in line with shifts in the relative power of UN members would be greatly facilitated and, thus, its stability greatly improved. Here lies the main problem, however. Undermining downward positionality in the Security Council will remain extremely difficult for as long as permanent members have the power to maintain their position through the use of their veto. Since it does not seem that this state of affairs will change in the foreseeable future, the prospects for improving the stability of the Security Council are not good.



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