

**FORUM:** Security Council  
**ISSUE:** Security Council Reform  
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**POSITION:** Assistant Chair

### **Introduction**

*What is the UNSC and how does it work?*

The United Nations Security Council is an organ of the United Nations with “primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security”. Its powers include the establishment of international sanctions and peacekeeping operations, as well as the authorization of military action and investigation of conflicts. It is the only UN body that can issue binding resolutions to other member states – in other words, you have to do what it says. Furthermore, it deals with the admittance of new UN member states and Secretary-General (UN “leader”) candidacies. It is thus a very powerful body within the UN, and has been involved in serious international issues, including the Korean War, the Suez Canal Crisis and more recently the Rwandan Genocide.

The UNSC has a complicated set-up. It has 15 members, five of whom are permanent members: France, the UK, the USA, China and Russia (essentially the victors from WW2). These permanent members have **veto powers**; should they vote against a resolution, it automatically does not pass. Resolutions otherwise require a 2/3 majority to pass, or 10 votes in favour. The 10 non-permanent members are elected for two year terms on a regional basis; the African Group holds 3 seats, the Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia-Pacific, and Western European and Others groups, 2 seats, and the Eastern European group, 1 seat. The presidency of the UNSC rotates monthly.

UNSC non-permanent members in 2019 are: Germany, Belgium, South Africa, the Dominican Republic, Indonesia, the Ivory Coast, Equatorial Guinea, Kuwait, Peru, and Poland.

*Why might it need reform?*

Several issues tend to come up as regards UNSC reform: the veto, fair representation on the UNSC leading to the issue of expanding the UNSC, and the UNSC’s relationship with the UN General Assembly. Most of these issues are essentially linked to the UNSC’s establishment in 1945 post-WW2; the Big 5 were able to set terms that were extremely favourable to them, at the expense perhaps of smaller countries. From roughly the 1990s onwards, as it became ever more apparent that the UNSC did not seem to represent a changing, globalising and increasingly multicultural world order, demands for reform from new powers, such as India and Brazil, those states that had recovered from WW2, such as Germany and Japan, and Africa became considerable. Reform would seek to decolonise, expand and equalise the UNSC – or even abolish it altogether and transfer its powers to the General Assembly.

*Why is reform a contentious issue?*

While almost all states agree that some form of UNSC reform is needed, there is disagreement on how much and what kind. A complex network of proposals and support has sprung up over the past 30 years. Smaller countries worry that adding more permanent members will just entrench the current world order; the Big 5 don’t want to relinquish too much power; generally there is concern that expanding the UNSC might

make it ineffectual. Whatever reform you support, ensuring an appropriate transition is essential, also.

To make it even more complicated, reform would require a 2/3 majority in the General Assembly as well as the support of all permanent members.

### **Key Terms**

**Veto** – ability to prevent any resolution passing by voting against it, held by the permanent members of the UNSC.

**Interest/Advocacy group** – association of individuals or organisations that on the basis of shared goals or concerns, attempts to influence policy in its favour.

**Non-permanent member** – a nation state elected to the UNSC for a period of two years, on a regional basis. They can vote in the UNSC but do not have veto powers.

**Permanent member** – a nation state that is always a member of the UNSC, and has veto powers.

**IGN (Inter-Governmental Negotiations)** – a group of nation-states working within the UN to further UNSC reform. Comprises the G4, the African Union, UfC, L.69, the Arab League, and CARICOM.

### **Main Interest Groups**

*(please note, these are loose coalitions with internal divisions on exactly what they want in some cases, and some countries are part of more than one)*

**The Group of Four (G4).** Comprises Brazil, India, Germany and Japan; they essentially advocate for a permanent seat each, and two for Africa. They, especially India, have quite a bit of support from the P5– and also significant opposition from other member states.

**Uniting for Consensus (previously the ‘Coffee Club’).** Founding members are Italy, Pakistan, Mexico and Egypt; it is currently led by Italy and has a diverse membership of at least a dozen countries, usually regional rivals of the G4 or countries objecting to permanent seats/veto powers on principle. They are opposed to adding new permanent seats to the UNSC, but support longer-term seats and more non-permanent seats.

**L69.** A grouping of 40 developing countries; notably Brazil, India, some African states, small island states, all CARICOM members and other Latin American states. It calls for expansion of both permanent and non-permanent membership and is divided on the question of the veto. They are named for the draft L.69 resolution they submitted in 2007, which began the process of inter-governmental negotiation on the issue.

**CARICOM (Caribbean Community and Common Market).** An organisation of 15 Caribbean nations promoting economic integration, it is essentially aligned with L69.

**The African Group, or C10.** Consists of Algeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Kenya, Libya, Namibia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia. The African Union’s committee on UNSC reform. It has asked for 2 permanent seats with veto rights for Africa, elected by the AU, and 5 non-permanent seats for the region.

Much internal division exists on who would get the permanent seats (South Africa and Nigeria have self-nominated, among others), whether rotating seats would be preferable, whether the C10 should join forces with the G4, etc.

**The Permanent Five (P5).** All permanent members of the UNSC. Extremely diverse and is not really a 'group', just a convenient acronym. All members support reform, but differ wildly on what this would entail.

**The S5 or Small Five group.** Comprised of Costa Rica, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Singapore and Sweden. A group of small nations in the UN who aim to improve UNSC working methods, it dissolved in 2013.

**The Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency Group (ACT).** A cross-regional group of 27 smallish countries coordinated by Switzerland working to further its eponymous values in the UNSC. Formed in 2013, a sort of spiritual successor to the S5.

**The Arab Group.** Comprises most Middle Eastern nations; proposes a permanent Arab seat.

**Organisation for Islamic Co-operation.** Comprises 57 nation states, mostly in the Middle East and Africa, of which 53 are majority Muslim. Called for a permanent Muslim seat on the UNSC

**Eastern European States.** What it says on the tin; proposes a second dedicated non-permanent seat for their grouping.

**Small Island Developing States.** Also what it says on the tin; request a dedicated cross-regional non-permanent seat in return for their support for new permanent seats.

### **General Overview (1992-present)**

UNSC reform was first added to the General assembly in 1992, as growing globalisation and calls for decolonisation made the then UNSC set up seem out-dated. The open-ended Working Group, a committee to discuss reform, was created. This led to the formation of groups that remain the focal points of the debate today: the G4, UfC and the African Group.

Germany and Japan had become some of the UN's largest donors and thus thought they deserved permanent seats; Brazil and India requested seats as major regional powers and growing economies. They formed the G4 to push for permanent seats for each other. UfC was then formed by countries who opposed the G4 and rejected what they saw as the growing domination of a few 'large powers'. The African Group wanted permanent seats as a recompense for colonialism and historic injustice.

Understanding these groups is key to understanding the issue of UNSC reform. Their conflicting goals and agendas make reform a knotty issue with no clear solution, as the UNSC has become to some extent a proxy for the global stage.

Other groups, such as the S5 and then ACT, are concerned with the smooth running of the UNSC. The SC itself is increasingly seen as a challenge to the legitimacy of the UN

itself, as its procedure is complicated and it is often seen as ineffectual and easily manipulated, as evidenced by Russia's use of the veto on the Syrian issue, for example. However, the UNSC is arguably the UN's most important organ and that with the most capacity to influence global events. Groups like ACT aim to clarify and improve the UNSC's operating procedure to make it more accountable, transparent and effective. They are still often subject to political pressures and face pushback from the larger, more powerful coalitions.

By 2005, the G4, UfC and the African Group were calling for radical change. They submitted resolutions at the 2005 World Summit that, had they been passed, would have very much changed the make up of the UNSC. However, each group blocked the others' resolutions and none passed. The need for change was more obvious than ever, and the Annan Plan was proposed later that year. It offered 2 models for UN reform and stressed the need for rapid implementation, but it was ultimately not adopted.

In the following years, reform was much discussed. In 2007, the L69 resolution was proposed, a call for reform from smaller states. While it was ultimately withdrawn, it led to the formation of IGN in 2008, where most UNSC reform discussion still happens and in which all member states can participate. It also led to the definition of the five main issues of UNSC reform: categories of membership, the question of the veto held by the five permanent members, regional representation, the size of an enlarged Council and its working methods, and the Security Council-General Assembly relationship. As IGN is one of the most complicated bodies in the UN, however, this can be seen as a 'two steps forward, one step back' situation. L69 did however open up the question of UNSC reform and was an indicator of the role that smaller states would play in negotiations.

From 2008 onwards, the potential solutions have been explained in extreme detail and the factions involved have clarified and expanded their positions somewhat. However, the situation is essentially one of deadlock, as each group can prevent the others reaching the 2/3 General Assembly majorities required for reform. By now, some questions are essentially uncontroversial (almost all member states agree that India should have a permanent seat, for example) but are bogged down in detail and geopolitical rivalry. It is clear that any solution found will have to seem scrupulously fair and not appear to give any advantage to one faction – which is easier said than done. Furthermore, changes to UNSC procedure are complex and tend to be unpopular.

### **Timeline**

**1945** – UNSC established. It has 5 permanent members and 6 non-permanent members.

**1965** – Only UNSC reform to date occurs. Following the enlargement of the UN membership, it increases the non-permanent membership from 6 to 10.

**1992** – Boutros-Ghali is elected Secretary General of the UN. During his term, he relaunched reform discussions as regards the UNSC.

**1992** – G4 formed.

**1992** – Coffee Club/Uniting for Consensus formed.

**1992** – African Group begins to demand two permanent seats for themselves.

**1992** – Security Council Reform was added to the General Assembly Agenda.

**1993** – ‘Open ended working group’ to discuss issues relating to UNSC expansion and the UNSC as a whole established.

**1997** – Draft resolution proposing the creation of five permanent but vetoless seats for African, Asian and GRULAC (The Latin American and Caribbean Group) developing countries and four non-permanent seats submitted. It failed mostly due to the action of Italy and NAM (Non-Aligned Movement, a group of 120 states not for or against major power groups).

**1998** - UN resolution 53/30 is passed, requiring a 2/3 majority in the General Assembly for “any resolution or decision on the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters”. A push against reform.

**2004** – UN resolution 59/565 is passed, proposing 2 models for UNSC reform and recommends a review of the UNSC’s composition in 2020, as well as “no expansion of the veto”.

**2005** - World Summit takes place. It is agreed that UNSC reform is needed to “make it more broadly representative, efficient and transparent and thus to further enhance its effectiveness and the legitimacy and implementation of its decisions”. However, draft resolutions presented by the C10 (African permanent seats with veto), G4 (G4 permanent seats with no veto until review) and UfC (10 non-permanent seats) respectively did not pass.

**2005:** -S5 form post-World Summit.

**2005-** The Annan Plan. UN Secretary General Annan calls on the UN to agree a plan to expand the UNSC to 24 members. He proposed a plan A, six new permanent members, plus three new non-permanent members, and a plan B, six new permanent members, plus three new non-permanent members

**2006-2007** – reports proposing transitional models of reform and potential new categories of seats, such as extended seats for the period of the intermediate arrangement, extended seats with and without re-election, and two-year non-permanent seats with re-election, are published. This attracted interest from the G4 as they saw it as a way of transitioning to permanent seats.

**2006:** S5 circulate a draft resolution intended to improve the workings of the UNSC. It was never put to vote, but the UNSC adopted Presidential note S/2006/507, which was in large part inspired by the appeals of the S5 Group. The note did not become part of standard UNSC operating procedure however.

**2007-** Open-Ended Working Group puts the “question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council” on the 62<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly’s agenda. This leads to the **L69** resolution being submitted then withdrawn in the closing plenary. It led to the beginning of IGN (inter-governmental negotiation) as the sponsors forced language on this topic into the report.

**2008** – Decision 62/557 adopted by consensus. It details IGN and defines the five key issues of UNSC reform. It has probably made IGN one of the most complex processes in the UN.

**2009** – UfC proposed a new model of reform, creating extended (3-5 years) non-permanent seats, allocated to regional groups on a rotational basis

**2010** – negotiation text distributed to member states based on submissions in the IGN. The negotiation text was debated in IGN from 2010 to 2014. UfC, the African group, China, and Russia were the main objectors. Some revisions were passed but the agreement ultimately fell through.

**2011:** 120 UN member states participate in a UfC meeting in Rome.

**2011** – G4 seek written support for a resolution to expand permanent and non-permanent UNSC seats and improve working methods. It gathered about 80 supporters – the G4 later claimed that they were just trying to ‘create momentum’.

**2011** – China expressed support for a permanent Indian seat should India withdraw its support for Japan’s bid for a permanent seat.

**2012** – L69 stated in IGN that veto rights should be extended to new permanent seats, claiming convergence with the African Group. It was seen as a ‘bluff’ and the L69-C10 rapprochement fell through.

**2012** – France proposes that the P5 voluntarily withhold the veto in the case of UNSC votes on issues of ‘mass atrocities’.

**2012** – S5 present another resolution on improving UNSC working methods. It probably had a simple majority in the general Assembly, but strong P5 and UfC opposition and a demand for a 2/3 majority led the S5 to withdraw their resolution. The S5 then dissolves to form ACT.

**2013** – ACT is formed.

**2013-14:** an Advisory Group produced a concise text proposing 5 potential solutions as regards seats (enlargement in both existing categories, permanent and non-permanent; new category of seats of (x) years to be converted into permanent seats as well as enlargement in the non-permanent category; new category of (8-12) years that are immediately renewable without prejudice to the possibility of enlargement with non-permanent seat; new category of seats of (3-5) years and enlargement with non-permanent seats; enlargement in the non-permanent category only, with or without the possibility of immediate re-election) and multiple theories on the veto (extension of the veto to new permanent members; extension of the veto but subject to a moratorium on its use for 15 years; no extension of the veto. Additional options concerned limiting the use of the veto for Council action to prevent or end genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes; limiting the use of the veto to Chapter VII matters; or requiring two vetoes to block action) It was not adopted as a new negotiation text by the UfC, Africa and some of the P5, however.

**2015** – a framework document is produced in IGN, with a large contribution from the African Group. However, the Arab Group, Uniting for Consensus, China, Russian Federation and the US objected to the procedure and their contributions were only included in an annex.

**2015** – ACT circulate a code of conduct by which endorsers promise not to vote against credible UNSC resolutions to prevent or end crimes against humanity. It is endorsed by 106 countries including France and the UK.

**2017** - It was reported that the G4 were willing to temporarily forgo veto powers if granted permanent seats.

### **Potential Solutions**

#### *The question of the veto*

- Agreement that the veto will not be used in certain cases
- Extend the veto to new permanent seats with or without a moratorium for a period of time
- Not extend the veto to new permanent seats
- Get rid of the veto
- Require more than one veto for a resolution or amendment to be vetoed

#### The question of increasing membership

- Increase the number of non-permanent seats to allow greater regional representation (eg an Arab seat)
- Increase the number of permanent seats only (eg make the G4 permanent members)
- Increase the numbers of both kinds of seat
- Add a new category of seat, which would be for a longer period than two years and allow transition to a permanent seat
- Add a new category of seat, which would be for a longer period than two years but not allow transition to a permanent seat

#### The question of regional representation

- Create new seats earmarked for certain regions
- Change the number of seats allotted to the regions
- Stop election to the UNSC on a regional basis

#### The question of the UNSC's working methods

- More public and open meetings
- Include non-UNSC members more, eg via regular briefings
- Fairer and more inclusive allocations of penholderships (leading draft resolutions)
- Improving the annual report
- More transparent election processes

### **Previous UN Documents**

- 1998 General Assembly resolution on voting on UNSC reform: <https://undocs.org/A/RES/53/30>
- 2011 Tabled S5 resolution on improving UNSC working methods: [https://www.globalpolicy.org/images/pdfs/S5\\_April\\_2011\\_Tabled\\_Resolution.pdf](https://www.globalpolicy.org/images/pdfs/S5_April_2011_Tabled_Resolution.pdf)
- 2005 Tabled UfC resolution: <https://www.globalpolicy.org/images/pdfs/0721ufcresolution.pdf>
- 2005 Tabled African Union resolution: <https://www.globalpolicy.org/images/pdfs/0718auresolution.pdf>
- 2005 Tabled G4 resolution: <https://www.globalpolicy.org/images/pdfs/0706g4resolution.pdf>
- 2007 Tabled L69 resolution: <https://undocs.org/A/61/L.69/Rev.1>
- Secretary-General's note, 59/565. Very long: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/602/31/PDF/N0460231.pdf?OpenElement>

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