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REFORMING THE UNITED NATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE

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Abstract

The call for the reform of the United Nations (UN) has been made repeatedly over the years, causing significant changes particularly in the areas of Charter's amendments, membership expansion, creation of new committees, and commissions among other things. However, in the face of growing menace of terrorist attacks worldwide and raging wars in Syria, Yemen, and Libya, the credibility of the highest decision-making body of the world remains largely questionable. This desk research relied on secondary data and it engaged the literature on the working of the UN. In the light of the balance of power theory of alliances, the paper found out that beyond an apparent inability of the five permanent members of the Security Council to unanimously respond to the world's urgency for peace and security was hidden a *modus vivendi* within an alliance of powerful nations: keeping the lid on dissent and maintaining the status quo without addressing the core causes of insecurity in the world. It is therefore recommended that poor nations look inward and develop a people-centered model of peace that does not require the Security Council's approval.

Keywords: Balance of Power, Alliance, Security Council, Reform, Peace, Veto power

Introduction

Since its inception by the end of the Second World War in 1945, the United Nations (UN) has undergone a series of transformations in an attempt to make it more responsive to the changing world. Over the years the reform has focused on membership expansion, Charter's amendments, new Committees, and Commissions as well as additional Specialized Agencies. So far, a few amendments have been made to the Charter under the provision of Article 109, with regard to Article 23, 27 and 61. For instance, the membership of the Economic and Social Council expanded from eighteen to twenty-seven in 1965 and it reached fifty-four

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in 1973 (Bailey and Daws 1995). With the independence of the last UN Trust Territory, Palau, the Trusteeship Council formally suspended its operations on November 1, 1994 (Childers & Urquhart 1994). As for the Security Council, a few procedural changes have taken place so far. These include an increase in membership from eleven to fifteen in 1965. In the same year, the Council extended the affirmative vote on all procedural matters to the nine permanent members (formerly seven). However, infidelity with the Charter, the unanimity of votes by the five permanent members (P-5) of the UN Security Council on matters related to peace and security remains sacrosanct. In practice, this potent instrument (unanimity among policymakers) has transformed the P-5 into an alliance of powerful nations, which is exclusive by nature. Against this background, the need to reform the UN becomes even more urgent than ever before given the fact that since September 11, 2001, terrorist attack in the US, an increasing number of non-state actors under different labels (rebel groups, liberation movements, militants, insurgents, and terrorist groups) are well prepared to wage asymmetric warfare against state governments, causing untold hardship on civilian populations.

It is worth noting that UN General Assembly Resolution 62/557 of 2008 authorised the launch of intergovernmental negotiations to make the Security Council "more broadly representative, efficient and transparent to enhance its effectiveness and the legitimacy and the implementation of its decisions" (Patrick, 2019). But it seems that the gridlock has rather taken the place of true reform. The study addressed the question as to how does the politics of alliance downplay the call for the reform of the UN Security Council. The argument is organised around five sections. To begin with, a theoretical framework of the balance of power serves as a useful entry point through which the discussion on the UNSC construed as a grand alliance of winners of war takes place. The paper proceeds with a brief appraisal of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as a military alliance of a few powerful nations against the interests of many poor ones before exposing the double-standard intervention of Peace Support Operations (enforcing peace here but keeping the lid on dissent there). In the end, the study highlights some bottlenecks surrounding the reform of the Security Council.

Theoretical Framework

The oldest explanation of alliances as a policy of states' survival is derived from the balance of power theory (Dwivedi 2012: 227). From a realist perspective, independent states form alliances to maximise their chances of survival in self-help and a hostile environment that characterises the international system. As such an alliance carries both positive and negative connotations. On the one hand, states enter into alliances with one another to augment their capabilities. On the other hand, alliance formation helps to reduce the level of threat posed by antagonistic powers. Put differently, strong states enter into an alliance not only to pre-empt any attack from other strong states but also and more importantly to maintain a balance of power. The apparent motive of balancing powers is to prevent any

nation or group of nations from reaching a dominant position (Liska 1962; Snyder 1990; Walt 1987). Snyder (1990) contends that alliances are formed during peacetime while coalitions usually take place during a war. However, both weak and strong nations enter into an alliance to preserve their respective national interests against perceived enemies. They do so either by balancing powers or simply band-wagoning. Balancing consists of allying with others against the prevailing threat whereas band-wagoning is the fact of joining the stronger side for the sake of protection and payoffs (Walt 1987).

In the tradition of alliance forming, the Holy Alliance signed on September 26, 1815, in Paris by the monarchs of Austria, Russia, and Prussia brought an end to the Holy Roman Empire in the aftermath of Napoleonic wars (Cannon, 2002). The idea of keeping France in check later brought Great Britain into the Holy Alliance (Morgenthau 2006: 467). Although it was officially pronounced dead in 1825, the Holy Alliance left the legacy of ad hoc conferences (diplomacy) which evolved into the Concert of Europe, the League of the Nations, and later the United Nations Organization. In the following paragraphs, the study makes a case for the United Nations Security Council as a strong alliance of winners of war that seems to defy any substantial reform.

United Nations Security Council as a Grand Alliance

European history can be summed up as a period during which states were preparing for war, waging war, or recovering from war (Minogue, 1995:52). As far as post-war recovery is concerned, it matters to focus on the end of both World Wars. Towards the end of the First World War, all parties were exhausted and the new world order was needed. Under the impulsion of the United States, the League of Nations came into being in 1920. It was composed of the following political agencies: the General Assembly, the Council, and the Permanent Secretariat. Concerning the decision-making process, both Assembly and the Council had the power to deliberate on matters of common interests, including the prevention of war. It is important to note that membership, in this case, was inclusive, while preponderant power was jointly organised against potential aggressors. However, the invasion of China in 1931 by Japan sent a strong message to Italy and Germany to breach the Covenant at will by aggressing Ethiopia and Poland respectively (Morgenthau 2006: 481). The lack of enforcement mechanism quickly transformed the League of Nations into a toothless bulldog that was unable to prevent the outbreak of World War II (Hanhimaki, 2008).

The Second World War was a truly global conflict, opposing the so-called Grand Alliance headed by the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union to the Axis powers made up of Germany, Italy, and Japan (UN, 2019). In August 1944, delegates from China, the Soviet Union, the United States, and the United Kingdom met at Dumbarton Oaks, Washington DC, to draw up the Charter of the new organisation. Eventually, it was at the Yalta Conference on February 11, 1945,

that leaders of the three major undefeated Allied powers coined a body devoted to international peace and security as the United Nations (Dupre 2010). The new institution that started as an alliance of great powers came into existence when its Charter was finally ratified on June 26, 1945, following the defeat of Germany and the end of the Pacific war between the US and Japan (Hanhimaki, 2008: 13). The UN Charter assigns the responsibility of maintaining peace and security to the members of the Security Council (SC) according to Chapters VI (peaceful settlement of disputes) and Chapter VII (use of force). This highest decision-making body, the Security Council, is made up of 15 member states among which five are permanent (P-5), namely United States, Great Britain, France, China, and Russia whose selection goes back to the Grand Alliance of winners of the war. The ten non-permanent members hold their respective seats for two years only and they are selected by the UN General Assembly to reflect the regional balance. Without any significant power of their own, these nonpermanent members are expected to bandwagon any P-5. Three seats go to Africa while Western Europe/Oceania, Asia, Latin America/the Caribbean get two seats by region and Eastern Europe takes the tenth seat. It is important to note that each year, five of these nonpermanent members leave the SC and are replaced (Hanhimaki 2008: 32).

Interestingly, each permanent member enjoys the veto power or the ability to reject any decision that impinges on their respective national interests. Put differently, all matters require the majority of votes of Council's members but when it comes to critical issues (sanctions, military intervention in conflict zones, admission of a new member, choice of a new secretary-general, and reform of the SC among other things) such a decision must obtain the unanimity of the P-5. This veto power is a reliable instrument for the maintenance of the balance of power construed as a method of conflict management that provides a practical political solution to the problem of coexistence in a decentralised international system (Evans & Newnham 1998). As such the veto game playing among P-5 can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, each permanent member must be always present at the table of decisions if they want to protect their national interests and they must unanimously support any action that has to do with collective security, thus renewing their common stand as a solid alliance of victor nations against the Axis Powers and by extension the rest of the world. On the other hand, the UN is expected to maintain the balance of power among member states instead of becoming, in itself, a supranational power that would run roughshod over its founding members (Mansbach and Rafferty 2008: 486). The claim of the Security Council acting as an alliance of the winners of World War II against the rest is summarised thus:

Today's UN remains essentially dependent on the whims of the P-5 and the specific power constellations among them. At the moment this means that the P-5 is in danger of becoming the P-1, with the United States playing the role of a global hegemon, directing or blocking UN interventions as befits its national interests (Hanhimaki 2008: 69).

Therefore, the prospect of peace as enunciated in the UN Charter (1945) seems to reflect the particular interests of survivors of World War II and their allies throughout the world. A close look at the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) sheds more light on the question of alliance making that pays lip service to peace deficit elsewhere in the world.

NATO as a Military Alliance

Four years after the creation of the UN, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom came together and revived the Holy Alliance's tradition by creating the Western European Union on 17 March 1949. This politico-military alliance was meant to keep Germany at bay but in less than a month it had identified new allies: a new Treaty signed in Washington under the name of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) extended its membership to the United States and Canada (NATO, 1949). In a bid to secure its survival in a hostile environment, Russia allied with its satellite states, and together they signed the Warsaw Pact on 14 May 1955. While the end of the Cold War (1990) brought the Warsaw Pact to collapse, it caused NATO to enlarge its membership and capabilities. Today, NATO as the world's most powerful military alliance is committed to the defence of its 30 member states, consisting of 26 European countries; US and Canada in North America; Turkey and North Macedonia recently in Eurasia. Its standing forces on active duty contribute to the Alliance's collective defence efforts permanently (NATO, 2018).

NATO draws its legitimacy from Article 52 which guarantees the existence of regional arrangements or agencies construed as a division of labour, partnership, or delegation of powers between UNSC and such bodies (Fawcett, 2003). However, Lundestad (1998: 167) observes that the founding principle of NATO was to "keep the Russians out, the German down, and the Americans in." In the same way, Rogers (2000: 4) contends that "the function of the Western military is one of keeping the violent peace, being able to project military force anywhere in the world where Western interests are affected." NATO gradually extends its activities to areas that have not been formerly its concerns such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Worthy of note, however, is the fact that the NATO intervention in Libya that facilitated the capture and execution of Colonel Gadhafi, by rebel groups in October 2011, was backed by UNSC resolutions 1970 and 1973 (Albert 2013). Unfortunately, it seems that this kind of double standard approach of enforcing peace here and keeping the peace there has become the norm.

Keeping the Lid on Instability Elsewhere

During the Cold War, the East and West Blocs were entangled in proxy wars and as a result, the SC members were unable to develop a joint but neutral military force under the provision of Chapter VII of the UN Charter as earlier discussed. While the Council was bogged down with 'collective suspicion,' the

General Assembly under the presidency of Lester Pearson took over the security agenda and developed the peacekeeping strategy. Given that the concept does not appear in the UN Charter, the then Secretary General Hammarskjöld conceived a technique to be construed as the “Chapter Six and a half” because it was meant to be more robust than Chapter VI but less provocative than Chapter VII (Bailey and Daws 1995: 49; Mansbach and Rafferty: 419; Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, 2005: 134). Initially, UN forces were deployed after warring parties had agreed on a ceasefire and jointly consented to have the UN in-between to monitor the implementation of peace agreements under the provision of Chapter VI. A classic example of this first-generation peacekeeping force took place in 1956, during the Suez Canal crisis when the French and British secretly conspired with the Israelis to drive Egypt away from the territory it had occupied along the Canal (Marten 2004; Ramsbotham et al, 2005).

The UN Emergency Force (UNEF) proved successful as it provided a buffer zone between Egyptian and Israeli forces while forcing the occupying troops to withdraw without admitting defeat. But the same technique could not yield similar results when it was replicated in the Congo crisis in the 1960s (O'Neill and Rees 2005: 57) and thereafter. The 1992 UN Agenda for Peace developed by the then UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali was meant to serve as a blueprint for UN engagement in conflict zones in post-Cold War environment through five stages: preventive diplomacy; peacemaking; peacekeeping; peace enforcement; and post-conflict peacebuilding. The then UN Chief-Scribe had believed in the cooperation of the P-5 that legitimised the joint military operation in the Gulf War to rescue Kuwait from the jaws of Iraq in 1991. Whereas the first four stages of the UN Agenda for peace translate the letters of the Charter (Chapters VI and VII), post-conflict peacebuilding can be regarded as Boutros-Ghali's innovation. According to Richmond (2014), peacebuilding which is akin to a Cold War peace settlement is described as “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace to avoid a relapse into conflict.”

However, from Haiti to Somalia, Rwanda, and Angola or Burundi, there was no peace to keep when the Second Generation of Peacekeeping troops arrived with poor logistics and inadequate preparation (Francis, 2006). Marten (2004: 26) argues that “the notion of monitoring simple ceasefires became meaningless in conflicts where the warring parties were not sovereign states but informal rebel groups with factional splits.” Even though the link is not fully established, the humiliation of US troops in Somalia in 1993 led the Clinton Administration, in the national security document, Presidential Decision Directive, PDD-25 to take the hard decision on May 3, 1994, thus prohibiting US troops from participating in any subsequent peacekeeping operation which does not reflect American interests (Gasbarri 2017; Adeshina 2013). The records of the UN since 1997 in the Balkans and elsewhere paint a rather negative picture: peace support operations have become the business of poor nations by poor nations in poor nations. Concerning the protracted conflict in eastern Congo, Stearns (2011:

334) argued that: "NATO sent 50,000 troops from some of the best armies to Kosovo in 1999, a country one-fifth the size of South Kivu. In the Congo, the UN peacekeeping mission plateaued at 20,000 troops, mostly from South Asia, ill-equipped and with little to carry out risky military operations."

Given that Western Europe and North America have enjoyed an apparent peace since the end of the World War II, thanks to the veto power of the P-5, the continuous production and sale of weapons of war by the same most powerful nations raise fundamental questions surrounding the nature of mainstream peace model propagated by the UN. Chandler (2017) contends that twenty years of external engineering in conflict zones under the banner of UN (1997-2017) have produced a crisis of legitimacy in terms of less democracy and more autocratic regimes, corruption, political instability, and the likes. It is against this poor record that the reform of the decision-making body of the UN is called for.

Reforming the UNSC: Some Bottlenecks Exposed

The apparent end of rivalries in the post-Cold War era ushered in new optimism over the possibility of P-5 to reach unanimity in the decision making processes but tragic events in the Balkans in the early 1990s made a mockery of an assumed happy ending (Ferguson, 2006). In Africa, the 1993 Somali debacle produced a smokescreen that covered the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, thus preventing any concerted action in the Security Council for up to a hundred days (Gasbarri 2017). Persistent calls for reform of the UN over the years have produced membership expansion, Charter's amendments, new Committees, and Commissions as well as additional Specialized Agencies (Childers and Urquhart 2004). However, Patrick (2019) contends that "the most recent push for UNSC reform occurred around the UN World Summit of 2005." In his address to the General Assembly on September 23, 2003, the then Secretary General Kofi Annan revisited the issue of reform as he challenged the US unilateral resolve to invade Iraq. He said, "Excellences, we have come to a fork in the road... Now we must decide whether it is possible to continue on the rules agreed then, or whether radical changes are needed (Traub 2006: 204). He went on to launch a sixteen-member High -Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change. Introducing the Panel report to the General Assembly one year later, the UN Chief reiterated the call for reform: "The United Nations must be reshaped in ways not previously imagined and with boldness and speed not previously shown" (UN 2005). He argued that a comprehensive reform of the United Nations should include the SC whose membership has been anachronistic or insufficiently representative (para. 165 and 169). In the next paragraphs, the paper identified two major roadblocks surrounding the UNSC Reform, namely membership expansion and the creation of an EU seat.

Membership Expansion

The expansion move proposed by the High-level Panel and endorsed by Kofi Annan in 2005 was aimed at providing more permanent seats, bringing the core group to P-6 or P-7. A member of the G4 (Brazil, Japan, India, and Germany) seems to qualify based on several reasons: Brazil is the largest Latin American nation, India is the world's largest democracy and second-most populous country, Japan and Germany being second and third largest funders of the UN. In the meantime, China sees the US-backed Japan as a rival in Asia and it is prepared to oppose its integration (Mansbach et al. 2008: 429). Together with Russia, they expect the decision about the SC expansion to be consensual, which is an illusion. On the other hand, America does not favour the inclusion of Germany in SC (Traub 2006: 371). From an American perspective, the UN through the SC serves as a tool that helps to manage the world in which the US is the dominant power and as a result, a UN seal of approval is ruled out (USIP 2006). As for one African in Africa, a lot must be cast in favour of Nigeria being the most populous Black nation in the world, South Africa as the biggest economy in sub-Saharan Africa and Egypt representing the Arab League in Northern Africa (Fasulo 2004).

EU Seeking a Seat at the Security Council

The failure of France and the United Kingdom to reach an agreement on the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 indicates that sometimes national interests can clash with the EU's external policy in the Security Council Chamber and it is difficult to know which one comes first. For the EU member states as a whole, the UNSC reform means that the Union should be granted a status of sovereignty and become *ipso facto* a permanent member of the Security Council (Sylvester 2004). The point is that though many EU member states function as one single sovereign State inhabited by about 500 million people with common currency, flag, army (NATO), and territory (Smadja 2006: 371). Equally important is the view of the European Parliament: "One seat would be the logical consequence of the EU's ambition to conduct a common foreign and security policy and to speak with one voice in world affairs" (Leinen 2006: 375).

Meanwhile, the fact remains that the UN member states that must agree on the Security Council reform "are not going to put themselves out of power, nor will US work to get rid of its two best allied, France and the UK, in the Council" (Fasulo 2004: 50). In the same way, former US Ambassador to the UN, John R. Bolton says: "The most likely future role for the UN will be an approximate continuation of its muddled, incoherent and marginally important present status (Dupre 2010: 202). As Patrick (2019) puts it, "In the absence of a global catastrophe, such as a war between major powers, deadlock on UNSC reform is likely to persist." In other words, through concerted efforts among member States, the UN may one day become more democratic, efficient, and transparent as many reports have suggested

but such peripheral changes are far from affecting the way critical decisions are made at the Security Council.

Going by the UN report of the advisory group of experts which recognises a generalised misunderstanding of the nature of peacebuilding itself (UN 2015), sustaining the peace by local actors rather than exporting it into conflict zones seems to be the way forward. Chandler (2017: 7) argues that the UN's shift away from peacebuilding undertaken by Western technocrats to local actors expected to manage their own 'sustainable solutions, stems from a rejection of the interventionist approaches developed and popularised in the 1990s. This shift has the merit of putting people at the centre as both beneficiaries and architects of sustainable peace, contrary to the mainstream approach which requires the UNSC seal of approval.

Conclusion

The creation of the United Nations was not an innovative peace project but a continuation of great powers' practice in the international system to date. This paper has reopened the debate on the UN reform of the UN Security Council and found out that the P-5 would not compromise their respective national interests. The inclusion of more countries from the South for the sake of representativeness and the creation of a brand new seat for the EU are among the suggestions but they both turn the UNSC reform into pie in the sky, as long as the process of reaching unanimity of votes is undermined by the veto power. It appears, therefore, that any attempt to effect positive change to the Security Council is sacrificed on the altar of stability (balance of power). In other words, the five permanent members have entered into an alliance to prevent any nation from having hegemonic powers. At 75, the UN seems to be heading towards its natural death (old age) when it is being overtaken by non-state actors that are capable of waging asymmetric wars against sovereign states under the watch of the Security Council. The study recommends, therefore, a new conceptualisation of peace which is not only culturally rooted and in the reach of the citizenry but also free from the whims of the P-5 and cost-effective.

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