

France and the United Kingdom on UN Security Council Reform¹

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After coming out on the winning side of World War II, France and the United Kingdom became two of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. This gave them veto power and the prestige of belonging to the club of the great powers. However, with time, both came to think that the Security Council did not reflect the distribution of international power and to support the possibility of increasing the number of permanent members and revising its functioning.

The aim of this article is to discern whether these two members have changed their position in the face of a possible UN reform and to examine their attitude in 2008 and 2009. It also analyzes the implications for France and the United Kingdom of transforming the Security Council. Finally, it will look at Mexico's position regarding the reform in order to see if it has any points of agreement with the French and British position.

THE FORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

Toward the end of World War II, the leaders of the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union agreed to adjust their military alliance, known as the United Nations, to turn it into an international organization by creating a council for maintaining international peace and security that would reflect the outcome of the war. In that security council there were permanent seats, including those of France and China, and they were about to give another to India. Thus, the main victors of the war turned into the five permanent members.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE REFORM

The need for a reform of the UN, beginning with its Security Council, which was born with 11 members (five permanent and six non-permanent ones), has been discussed for decades. However, there were no changes until 1963, when, as the result of the end of colonialism, the General Assembly decided to increase the number of non-permanent members from six to ten, beginning in 1965.

This reform did not satisfy most of the member states. In fact the UN continued to grow: from 113 members in 1963, it went to 152 in 1979. In that same year, a group of countries—the majority were so-called developing nations—requested an increase in the number of permanent and non-permanent Security Council (SC) members to 21, changing over to a system of equitable geographical distribution.²

In 1989, Brazil's President José Sarney proposed creating a new category of permanent members without veto power, and presented his country's candidacy for this kind of membership. But he was not taken into account. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia, new states emerged that became UN members, bringing the total to 188.³

The first concrete SC reform initiative was made in 1991, with a proposal presented by India. From that time on, the General Assembly began to study the possibility of increasing the number of SC members; it created a Working Group on the topic that began operating in 1994. However, no agreement has been reached until now about how many and who the new members would be or how they would be chosen. In 1994, the group was unable to make recommendations based on any agreement. Shortly thereafter, Japan started an open campaign to be admitted as a permanent member, and Germany followed suit.

On March 20, 1997, the Malaysian ambassador and president of the General Assembly presented a proposal known as the Razali or "2+3" proposal, wherein two developed

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countries (the most widely accepted candidates were Germany and Japan) plus one state from every developing region would be added. After this proposal, on July 17, 1997, U.S. Ambassador Bill Richardson admitted for the first time the possibility that the permanent members could accept a reform proposed by the Working Group. However, the United States never officially declared its support. The only permanent member that came out in favor of it was France.⁴

In Latin America, the “natural candidate” was Brazil because of its geographical size, population, economic weight and history of cooperation with the UN. Mexico and Argentina joined forces to present the proposal that the three countries be represented in the SC, rotating to occupy a single seat. This idea generated a lot of debate, which died down when the possibility arose of including two representatives from Latin America.⁵ However, since the proposal

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seemed unviable, it was left pending and the differences in positions and formulas for an eventual reform persist.

So, what should the profile of a permanent member be? The debate emerged when the growing economic power of Japan and Germany was pointed out, since there are also other candidates, like India, which was on the verge of being made a permanent member in 1945, and Brazil. The same is true of Nigeria and South Africa. There is talk of a permanent position for the European Union, but in that case, France and the United Kingdom would have to give up their vetoes. On the other hand, in light of the conflicting positions of the members of the European Union about the war in Iraq, it is clear that the European Union does not have a common foreign and security policy. In 1997 and 1998, Italy's Ambassador to the UN Paolo Fulci headed up a group of developing countries called the Coffee Club, opposed to the Razali Plan.⁶

In March 2005, a high-level panel presented the proposal of two possible systems for reform: Plans A and B.⁷ Plan A proposes six new permanent positions without veto

power and three new non-permanent positions to last two years each, assigned by region. Plan B proposes no new permanent positions, but would create a new category of eight positions with a mandate renewable every four years, and one with a non-renewable mandate, also distributed by regions.

Inside the UN, various groups have formed around different proposals:

1. The Group of Four (Germany, Brazil, India and Japan), which supports the creation of nine new permanent positions;
2. The Group of Like-Minded Countries “Uniting for Consensus,” which is against creating new permanent positions;⁸ and
3. The Group of Friends, which until now has not come out with a position on Security Council reform, but rather has promoted reforms on other issues like development, the use of force and human rights, among others.⁹

FRANCE AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

The French and British position on an eventual reform of the Security Council is presented jointly, although their individual positions actually do differ on one point. They have also come to a consensus about the possibility of transforming other international bodies, among them the G-8 and the World Bank. On February 19, 2009, France supported the launch of intergovernmental negotiations for Security Council reform. It also favors increasing the number of permanent and non-permanent seats, supports the candidacy of Germany, Brazil, India and Japan as new permanent members, proposes increasing Africa's presence, particularly as permanent members, and the candidacy of an Arab country as a permanent member. This is the point on which it does not agree with the United Kingdom, which does not specify whom it would include.¹⁰

Given this impasse, both countries have stated their support for an intermediate proposal, and on March 27, 2008, they proposed:

1. The creation of a new category of non-permanent members who would have a longer mandate (more than two years), subject to reelection; and
2. The possibility of transforming the category of new non-permanent members to eventually make them permanent.¹¹

A year later, during the March-April 2009 UN General Assembly, intergovernmental negotiations were carried out dealing with five issues: the category of the members (what kind of members would increase in the council), the right to veto, regional representation, the size of an enlarged Security Council as well as its working methods and relations between the Security Council and the General Assembly.¹²

THE FRENCH/BRITISH POSITION COMPARED TO MEXICO'S

Mexico's position on the possibility of Security Council reform can be summarized in four points: first, our country wants to see a UN General Conference held to deal with the reform; second, the goal would be a comprehensive reform and not one limited to the Security Council; third, priority must be given to the debate about how the council would have to operate before thinking about the characteristics of its members; and four, no reform should be approved that includes new permanent members, and any reform should increase the number of members based on a system of regional representation with the possibility of members who have played their role very well on the council being eligible for immediate reelection to the seat.¹³

For Mexico, it is difficult to clash with the positions of the United States, and for that reason, it has little room for maneuver.¹⁴ However, Mexico's position on UN reform is opposite to that of its northern neighbor, which is not interested in changing the status quo in order to not lose its privileges. With regard to its relationship with the United States, the same is true of the United Kingdom, which generally supports its ally, France, which, in turn, has shown itself to be more independent.

In short, the Mexican position is different from France and Britain's in that it does not support the creation of new permanent SC seats. However, it does agree with some points of the new intermediate position, although it is unlikely that Mexico would support the candidacy of new permanent members, unless it were among them.

Security Council reform would mean that France and the United Kingdom would have to share their privileges, but it should be underlined that they have the power to negotiate with those who aspire to the permanent seats. It is important to analyze what relationship France and the United Kingdom have with the G-4 and what negotiations

they have already held. On the other hand, it would be interesting to study in depth what kind of relations France and the United Kingdom have been developing with Germany, Brazil, India, Japan and Africa in order to see what they are offering in exchange for supporting their candidacies. ■■■

NOTES

¹ This article was presented at the conference "Mexico in the UN Security Council: The Agenda and the Permanent Members," at the UNAM's CISAN, May 13, 2009 in Mexico City.

² For a detailed explanation of the 1979 reform proposals, see E. Zawels, *Hacia un sistema de seguridad colectiva para el siglo XXI. El Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU en la década del 90* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 2000), pp. 192-194.

³ In September 1999, the total number was 188. In 2009, there are now 192 member states.

⁴ Demitris Bourantonis, *The History and Politics of UN Security Council Reform* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

⁵ R. Daló, "La reforma del Consejo de Seguridad: motivos y alternativas posibles desde la perspectiva argentina," *Relaciones Internacionales* 16, vol. 9 (December-May 1998), p. 53.

⁶ This group had 15 members in 1997, and by 1998, it already had 50.

⁷ The panel was made up of a group of experts from different countries, among them the Brazilian João Clemente Baena Soares. See the document on line at <http://www.un.int/mexico/a59565esp.pdf>.

⁸ This group includes Argentina, Algeria, Colombia, Spain, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Pakistan and the Republic of Korea.

⁹ This group is made up of Germany, Algeria, Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Spain, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Singapore and Sweden.

¹⁰ On its official website, the United Kingdom's Mission to the UN only refers to its support for permanent membership for the G-4 and Africa. See *The UK Mission to the UN, International Institutional Reform*, available on line at http://ukun.fco.gov.uk/en/uk-at-un/thematic-issues/institutional-reform/international_inst_reform.

¹¹ See <http://www.franceonu.org/spip.php?article3768#Textes-de-refer-ence>.

¹² See <http://franceonu.org/spip.php?article3768>.

¹³ Alejandro Basáñez, Mexico's UN Mission Press Attaché explained these points in an interview in New York on May 10, 2005. The Mexican position has been maintained. About Mexico's official position, see "Documento de posición de México en el Sexagésimo Tercer Período de Sesiones de la Asamblea General de la Organización de las Naciones Unidas," available on line at <http://www.sre.gob.mx/onu/>.

¹⁴ Valeria M. Valle, "La reforma del Consejo de Seguridad de la ONU: la posición de Brasil y México," *Comercio Exterior* 10, vol. 55 (October 2005), pp. 861-873.