

STUDY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

for

TRANSFORMING THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM: DESIGNS FOR A WORKABLE WORLD

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Unit 4: Reform of the Security Council (p. 64-93)

Why Is This Important? (p. 64-65)

The Security Council (SC) is the most keenly scrutinized UN agency. In contrast to the GA, its decisions are, in principle, legally binding. But, because of the lack of a standing enforcement mechanism, the Council's decisions are often flouted. This brings the system as a whole into disrepute. Further, the unfair advantages enjoyed by the P-5 powers -- permanent Council membership and the power of the veto -- create a double standard in accountability and leads to widespread resentment among other nations. The Council has, however, been instrumental in averting World War III and in stemming or preventing numerous regional conflicts. Appropriately transformed, it could be a major guarantor of peace.

Key Issues (p. 64-73)

Decreasing representativeness and legitimacy

- The SC originally consisted of eleven members -- five permanent members (the P-5: China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the US) plus six members elected for two-year, non-renewable terms. The SC thus represented more than a fifth of the original 51 UN members, and three-fifths of their total population. As new members joined the United Nations, the representativeness of the SC's membership declined substantially
 - The share of the P-5 in the UN's total population, of both the UN's members and of the world as a whole, declined substantially (from 63% to 28% and from 39% to 28% respectively), with no commensurate diminution in the P-5's institutional power.
 - Today's SC consists of the P-5 members plus ten additional non-permanent members. These 15 members represent less than 8% of the total membership.
- Non-permanent SC members are selected with due regard to "equitable geographical distribution." But, regardless of their regional origin, they are fundamentally guided by their perception of their own *national* interest.
- The selection process is highly politicized with insufficient consideration for merit.

- The votes of very small nations with non-permanent seats (e.g., Malta) count equally with those of demographic giants (e.g., India), with no relation to their weight in the world beyond the UN.

Problems with the P-5 veto power:

- The special status accorded to the P-5 flies in the face of contemporary power realities. Germany and Japan have surpassed France, the United Kingdom and Russia in economic power, and India and Brazil are expected to do so shortly.
- The veto power accorded to the P-5 members effectively immunizes them from meaningful UN censure for acts detrimental to others in the global community or for egregious offences within their own borders. This double standard diminishes the UN's moral legitimacy and is increasingly questioned by non P-5 nations.

Weaknesses of Other Reform Proposals

The SC has been the object of more recommendations for reform than any other UN entity. Yet the scores of proposals fail to address adequately the SC's core weaknesses. They shortsightedly focus on 1) how many new seats should be added, 2) whether other nations merit permanent seats, and, 3) if so, with what level of veto power, if any. They fail to critique the anachronistic regional division of the world for purposes of choosing non-permanent members, and they fail to propose an end to the veto.

QUESTIONS:

1. *Why might a Security Council with fewer than 15 seats be more efficient than a Security Council with 15 or more seats?*
2. *Why is a maximally representative SC a worthwhile goal?*
3. *Are there any valid arguments for retaining the special privileges of the P-5?*

Possible Solutions (p. 73-90)

1. **A universally representative SC with 12 regional seats, each carrying a mathematically determined weighted vote** (p. 73-89)
 - Regions should have a population, territorial extent and/or degree of economic importance such that the legitimacy of their representation in the SC will not be seriously questioned.
 - Up to four of the regions could consist of a single powerful nation, based on a proposed formula (discussed below).

- To the extent practicable, the remainder would be assemblages of more or less similar, but not necessarily contiguous, states. The ensemble of regions should be created to maximize internal regional homogeneity with regard to factors such as culture, religion, language, economic interests and shared historical experience. Each multinational region would nominate a slate of 2-5 candidates, and from each slate SC representatives would be elected by the GA.
- Each region would devise its own set of decision-making rules by which its representatives would be guided.
- Although the GA would specify the initial composition of multinational regions, individual nations would subsequently be allowed to transfer from one region to another. Nations could also be from parts of two regions, with their weight in decision-making divided equally between the two, so that their overall contribution to SC decisions would be the same as if it were only in one region.
- Weighted regional votes would be calculated by a formula based on population, paid UN contributions and a constant (8.33%) signifying that the global perspective of each of the 12 regions is equally worthy of respect.

The book notes (p. 77-78) that, based on current global conditions, three nations would qualify as single-nation regions: the United States, China and India. It also demonstrates (Table 4.1) that the formula leads to weighted voting results that reasonably reflect current real-world disparities in power and capability from one region to the next. Additionally the formula yields a reasonable balance between the global North (five regions with a combined weight of 45.3%) and the global South (seven regions with a combined weight of 54.7%).

QUESTIONS:

1. *Does the book's proposal make sense? If so, why? If not, why not? What resistance would it encounter?*
2. *Review pages 78-84, discussing the impact of this proposed regionally-based weighted-voting system on each region. Which regions would view this proposal favorably? Which are more likely to oppose it?*
3. *What are the merits of allowing individual nations to form parts of two regions (e.g., the UK as part of both Europe and Westminster League)?*

4. What steps would be needed for the book's proposal to be accepted and implemented?

- 2. Eliminating the Veto:** The anachronistic, morally indefensible veto power should be abolished. Although an overwhelming majority of UN member nations would support such a reform, the P-5 powers would resist. We suggest possible scenarios for implementation, either in one bold act or in phases.
- Enhanced voting weights for the P-5 in a reformed and more empowered GA could be a workable trade-off for the loss of veto power in the SC.
 - Weighted voting in both the GA and the SC would enhance the legitimacy of UN decisions, thereby contributing substantially to the promotion of a more lawful, just and orderly world.
 - During a transitional period, one might gradually increase the number of P-5 nations whose dissenting votes would be required to block SC resolutions, while narrowing the range of subjects to which the veto might apply.

QUESTIONS:

- 1. What arguments do the P-5 and some other nations offer in defense of retaining the veto?***
- 2. Do you agree or disagree that eliminating the veto is actually possible? If so, why? If not, why not?***