

A SHIFTING BALANCE

A DISCUSSION WITH THREE UNITED NATIONS AMBASSADORS

On March 18th 2001, the Russian, Indian, and Japanese Ambassadors to the United Nations convened at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University to discuss the expansion of the UN Security Council, an issue with wide ranging implications on the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific Region. This discussion was moderated by Bill Richardson, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. The following is a partial transcript of their discussion.

Ambassador Kamalesh Sharma of India on the need for Security Council Reform:

All institutions become chaotic with the passage of time. It happens to families; it happens to companies; and it happens to governments . . . If you are not moving with the times, the times will leave you behind. There is a sense today in the Security Council that this is beginning to happen in the Council itself. The reason for this is mainly two-fold—the creation of the Security Council with five permanent members was really the continuation, in my view, of the last act of the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

That was the last international act of balance of power. After the Second World War, people realized that the primary lesson to be gleaned from the two World Wars is that if a closely held national interest of a great power is disturbed, the ensuing destabilization has a profound effect upon other powers as well—the world is intertwined. The result of this lesson was the creation of the Security Council such that, should a situation like the Second World War threaten, by giving the veto power to the five crucial international players, their power can be used to nullify the movement of power in directions dangerous to stability, ensuring that their interests are not violated. However, when the charter was adopted, Japan and Germany were clearly regarded as enemy states, while others were clearly regarded as victor states, and so were accorded differing status in the new hierarchy of the United Nations—in short it was very much a by-product of the Second World War.

Since then, other power centers have risen and other reasons for conflict have arisen with which the Security Council has to meet. This brings me to my second point—what is the major change with which the council can



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no longer effectively cope? This change is the emergence of the developing world, a world which did not exist in 1945. No developing state existed then. Only with the independence of India in 1947 and Indonesia in 1949—examples of a movement, global in scope—did developing states began to emerge. Therefore, the agenda for the Security Council is no longer superpower games determined by the Cold

War, but it is the kind of issues the Security Council was not designed to meet—issues between developing countries and within developing countries, situations of political decay and deterioration which threaten peace and stability, and thus the security of the world.

At the inception of the Security Council in 1948, there were approximately fifty members of the United Nations, but since then there has been nearly a four-fold increase. Should you take a look at the agenda of the Security Council, you'll find that almost ninety percent of the issues pertain to the developing world; however there is not a single developing country with permanent membership on the Council. In response, seven years ago there was a movement to expand the Security Council. The expansion was supposed to take into account the major financiers of the United Nations—Germany and Japan—as well as one developing country apiece from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, in order to achieve a geographic balance. These members were not intended as designated representatives of their particular regions; rather, by virtue of their mere presence on the council, the dynamic of the council will be changed. The inclusion of developing countries on the council will facilitate the ability of the charter to respond to

the mandate of the charter, which is to be representative of the General Assembly membership as a whole.

There is a working group that was created and it has been looking at various aspects. Expansion of the council is part of the reform of the council. Others

have complained that the council is too secretive in the way it conducts its business.

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Ambassador Sergei Lavrov on the substance of reform

Russia, as a permanent member of the Security Council, understands the General Assembly's desire to make the Security Council more representative of the world. At the same time, we are concerned about safeguarding the efficiency of the council given the trend for members on the Security Council to convey formal positions even in informal settings, even if they have nothing new to add. If one country takes the floor and repeats their formal position for five minutes and all others do the same, an expanded council will simply lead to more squandered time. If we are to expand the council—an initiative supported by Russia—steps must be taken to increase its efficiency and make the council's activity more focused, with the understanding that the council, under the UN charter, is to maintain international peace and security. Engaging in broad debates on the fate of women, children or international personnel safety are very important things to be sure, but ought to be the province of the General Assembly. The Security Council needs transparency to openly discuss the specific threats to peace and security, be it the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Balkans, or other security related issues.

We are on record as recognizing

the claims that countries such as Japan, India, and Germany are legitimate. This is also a delicate issue with many countries wanting to be on the council. There probably won't be one hundred percent agreement, but the General Assembly resolution calling for the Security Council's expansion says that general agreement should be the basis for dealing with this issue. Some have called on the Permanent Five (permanent members of the Security Council: United States, Russia, United Kingdom, China, France) to take a lead and break the deadlock in the reform. Indeed this process has gone on for seven years without visible result in sight. Some have called on the Permanent Five to act by example and voluntarily agree to restrict their use of the veto. That is shifting the debate in the wrong direction. I can tell you that the basic reason why there has been no progress is that, while the majority of countries believe that there must be new permanent seats, a minority—particularly mid-sized countries—are absolutely against such an expansion. For example, Mexico says that an injustice was done in 1945 when five countries were given this discriminatory privilege and that it should not be expanded. They say that only the expansion of non-permanent seats—to be filled by mid-size countries—is necessary. So, this has been the current gridlock on the council debate. Russia is in favor of consensus, and we accept expansion of both permanent and non-permanent seats. We cannot impose this view on others, who believe that, should a few permanent seats and a few non-permanent seats be created, they would not gain anything at all.

We want to achieve better representation, but at this stage I don't see how this could be achieved with a majority of members agreeing and without creating friction that would undermine

the council. That doesn't suggest the discussion shouldn't continue, as we must continue to discuss as we look to the future of this important organ.

Ambassador Yukio Sato of Japan describes a blueprint to reform

I would like to move ahead with the issue of Security Council Expansion. Among many aspirants, Japan is perhaps the best positioned to take leadership of this initiative. Germany's bid faces Italian opposition, India's has Pakistani resistance. All other countries have some other country trying to prevent them from becoming permanent members. As for Japan, of course, North Korea is openly opposed. China is ambiguous and quiet. I believe that if the majority of countries come to support Japan's bid for the permanent membership, then China would not try to stand against it alone. As compared to other aspirants, we are freer and have fewer adversaries. I would like to take a leading role in the UN to move things forward.

During my two years as the UN ambassador, I've been planning to move the issue step by step, a catchphrase for our strategy. We have four different kinds of countries involved in the expansion

process. We have the Permanent Five, whose consent is needed to amend the UN charter, which would enable the expansion of the Security Council. We also need two thirds of the ordinary members in the General Assembly to approve the reforms. In between, there are, perhaps, a dozen countries like Japan and India who want to be Security Council members and another group of countries, including Italy and Pakistan, whose preoccupation is to prevent others from gaining permanent membership. So, our strategy has to be at least four-fold. The step by step approach is the only way we can build an agreement at each individual phase. First, the question is how big

the Security Council should be? Currently, the Security Council has fifteen members. For the longest time, the American position was no more than twenty one. To many others, this number is a non-starter. I made a secret negotiation with Richard Holbrooke and my friends in Canada. Last April, Holbrooke announced that the United States would

be open to more than twenty-one members, giving some impetus to the campaign. Second, focus on the expansion. Should the expansion apply to both permanent and non-permanent membership, or just non-permanent? Countries like Italy want to just expand the non-permanent but we want to expand both. We conducted a survey and found that about one hundred and fifty-five members, in one way or another, wanted the expansion of both categories. The third step is the question of the

veto. I know countries like the United States, China, or Russia will never give up the veto. But one hundred and eighty-four UN members want to restrict the use of the veto. We should talk about this and debate this matter. I cannot promise UN reform. Finally, the most difficult issue is how to select the new members. In Africa, there are at least three aspirants, like Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt. In Latin America, there is Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico. They have not found a way to decide amongst themselves who would have access to permanent membership. Going alone, it would take a long time.

It is my personal idea to regenerate debate and infuse

some political will in the capitals of the countries involved. Maybe we need to set a goal by 2003 or 2004. Of course, we can't do anything alone. In January when Kofi Annan came to Japan, I talked with him and discovered he shared my sense of concern. I was very encouraged on March 22, when he announced that he is standing for a second term. In answering questions, he hoped UN members would organize themselves to deal with this matter definitively within the next two years.

The United States has a crucial role in this debate. The United States is not a popular country in the UN. At the same time, we all know that the UN needs the United States. How much support I can get from the United States is key. I am waiting for the confirmation of the new ambassador and the new line up in the State Department. I would like to get the Bush administration to agree to expand Security Council membership to twenty four. Now, I've talked about my own strategy. Whether or not I succeed, we'll have to wait and see. ■

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