

DRAFT

How to Negotiate for Reform of the UN Security Council

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Introduction

Since 1992 there has been a consensus in the United Nations that the Security Council should be enlarged. Since then a group open to all members has worked to develop a specific proposal. Unfortunately, this “Open-Ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation and Increase in Membership of the Security Council” (known as the OEWG) has not succeeded. This memo proposes a new process.

Proposal for a New Process

What is needed is a small committee with sufficient legitimacy to develop a specific proposal that can become the focus of discussion. In a separate memo I offer suggestions about the content of such a proposal. But regardless of the content, there will be many competing proposals by individual members. So what is needed is a mechanism that can generate a specific proposal that can gain widespread support.

My suggestion is for a committee composed of the members who have served on the Security Council most recently, say those who have departed in the last two or three years. This committee could be informally known as the “Veterans’ Committee.” If it started this year it would include those who departed the Council in 2000 (Argentina, Canada, Malaysia, Namibia and the Netherlands) and those who departed in 1999 (Bahrain, Brazil, Gabon, Gambia and Slovenia), and perhaps those departed in 1998 (Costa Rica, Japan, Kenya, Portugal and Sweden). If it didn’t start until next year, it would include those who will depart in 2001 (Bangladesh, Jamaica, Mali, Tunisia and Ukraine), but not those who departed in 1998 and perhaps not those who departed in 1999.

Appointing a Veterans’ Committee based on recent service on the Security Council has several advantages. First, it would be a small enough group (10 or 15) to have a chance to consult widely and reach internal consensus to break the logjam. Second, its membership would have some legitimacy since the regional groups would already have selected them (I believe the sole exception is Mali which was elected over the regions’ nomination of Sudan). Third, its members would be experienced in the working of the Security Council. In fact, a Veterans’ Committee has some of the flavor of

a “group of elders” that is used and respected in many nations and societies. The appointment should be of countries, not of individuals. This would help assure that the result is realistic and legitimate, rather than just the private view of retired diplomats. Fourth, since the rule of membership in this Committee is so clear, it would be hard for any other country to assert a right to be on the Committee. The only plausible claim to extend the membership would be to add the five members who departed the next most recently.

Of course it matters who authorizes the Committee. It could be authorized by the Secretary General, the Security Council or the General Assembly, or perhaps by all three working together.

Needless to say, the recently eligible members would have to agree to serve, but presumably they would consider it an honor.

The Chair could be determined when the Committee is authorized, or the question could be left to the Committee itself.

Each member state on the Veteran’s Committee could select its own representative. A member state may wish to select someone other than its Permanent Representative for service on the Committee.

Since the Committee would be small and the issues have been addressed at great length by the OEWG already, a one-year deadline would be appropriate.

The Committee would be charged to develop a single proposal for the enlargement and reform of the Security Council that could gain the necessary support to win approval (i.e., two-thirds of the General Assembly including the five Permanent members of the Security Council). The charge could specify the same goals as the OEWG has pursued. In addition, the Committee would be charged to consult widely. Since the permanent members of the Security Council would not be represented on the Veterans’ Committee, the charge to the Committee should include an assurance that the reform proposal should not affect the rights of any members (and thus implicitly guarantee that the existing veto would not be affected).

A proposal from the Veterans’ Committee could serve an extremely valuable function. By being the single proposal approved by an official committee, it would immediately become the focus of serious debate. Many members who have previously pursued plans of their own would be able to gracefully defer to this new proposal without loss of face. Once most of competing plans were dropped, the Veterans’ Committee proposal would become even stronger, and ultimately could serve to break the logjam.

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