

## HISTORY OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

The year was 1945 and the second war enveloping much of the globe in the last 30 years was coming to an end. In this environment representatives from China, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States met at the Dumbarton Oaks mansion in Washington D.C. for the initial discussions that would lead to the creation of the United Nations. The representatives were well aware of the guiding principles of the League of Nations, but also of its multiple failures. Though many felt that the League of Nations had the capacity to discuss significant international affairs, the body was not constructed in a manner which was able to produce successful measures to deter aggression and prevent conflict. Firstly, the United States, by now a prominent global power, did not join the organization. This handicapped the League from the beginning by preventing it from achieving maximal financial backing and international political support. Secondly, there was no clear division of duties between the League's Assembly and Council committees. Thus, tasks were often mismanaged. Additionally, all resolutions required a unanimous vote to pass, a rarity in the arena of international politics. Since there was no clear sense of collective security, individual Member States of the League continued the policy of pursuing narrowly defined interests of their own country's foreign policy.<sup>1</sup> In 1945, the nations represented at Dumbarton Oaks were mindful of these failings of the League of Nations. The representatives acknowledged the consensus that the newly proposed international organization should contain a principle organ tasked specifically with promoting international peace and security. After careful consideration at the San Francisco Conference later in 1945, delegates from countries that would become the first member states of the United Nations came to the conclusion that a smaller body acting as the United Nations' defense advisor and operations executioner, specifically charged with "the maintenance of international peace and security," should be commissioned.<sup>2</sup>

The Security Council is comprised of fifteen member states, with five nations holding permanent seats and ten holding rotating elected seats. The permanent five members are China, France, Great Britain, the Russian Federation (in place of the former Soviet Union) and the United States and are often referred to as the "P-5" Members. The five permanent members retain veto power over any resolution discussed in the Security Council. These permanent members were given veto powers primarily to ensure that no P-5 member would attack another P-5 Member as well as to ensure that the leading nations were in unanimity before taking action on a particular issue, establishing a unanimous coalition of the powerful.<sup>3</sup> The ten nonpermanent member states are elected for a period of two year terms with five rotating out each December. These states are represented geographically, whereby there are three African, two Latin American, one Arab, one Asian, one Eastern European and two Western European states on the Security Council at any given time.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Member States on the Council are mandated by the United Nations Charter to have a representative from each of their states present at the organization's headquarters in New York City so that the Council may operate "continuously" without delay or hesitation.<sup>5</sup> Current members of the Security Council include: Permanent Seats: China, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom and the United States; Non-permanent Elected Seats:

---

<sup>1</sup> Linda Fasulo, *An Insider's Guide to the United Nations*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, "Article 24," *United Nations Charter*, United Nations, June 26, 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Fasulo, *An Insider's Guide to the United Nations*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, *United Nations Security Council*, United Nations, [http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc\\_background.html](http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc_background.html) (accessed June 10, 2006).

Belgium, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Croatia, Indonesia, Italy, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Panama, South Africa, and Viet Nam.

Security Council members must be ready to deliberate at any given time to decide on “the fate of governments, establish peacekeeping missions, create tribunals to try persons accused of war crimes, and in extreme cases declare a nation to be fare game for corrective action by other member state.”<sup>6</sup> This legislative right was granted to the Security Council through the UN Charter and is apparent in the associations between Articles 37 and 39, which allow the Council to settle a particular dispute and make its accords compulsory on any parties involved or on the international community as a whole, hence, becoming international binding documents. Therefore, it is in this regard that the Security Council has the capability and authority to exercise powers from existing international law or by creating binding resolutions.<sup>7</sup>

Progress of the Security Council has been rather varied. During the late 1940s, the Security Council was quite effective in dealing with many issues that arose.<sup>8</sup> Most affairs the Council encountered dealt typically centered on decolonization.<sup>9</sup> However, as time progressed, relations between the Soviet Union and the United States deteriorated, and the Council faced setbacks.<sup>10</sup> This stalemate period was particularly characterized by the frequent use of the veto by the Soviet Union, which blocked many efforts.<sup>11</sup> The other P-5 Members also utilized the veto as well. For example, both France and Great Britain vetoed resolutions during the Suez crisis of 1956.<sup>12</sup> Despite the frequent use of the veto during this period, the Security Council was able to take action and settle conflicts in South Asia, the crisis in the Congo and the successful execution of the ceasefire agreement in Cyprus. As the Cold War dissolved in the late 1980s, significant changes were incorporated within the Security Council’s working methods.<sup>13</sup> It had become apparent that every conflict was beginning to present new and “unique set[s] of circumstances.”<sup>14</sup> Specifically, the growth in the prevalence of civil wars addressed by the Security Council posed unique challenges for a body designed to intervene in and prevent inter-state, not intra-state conflicts.

One of the main reasons for its creation, size and power was to enable the Security Council to rapidly respond to international crises as they arise. The Security Council is tasked with “transforming disaster into constructive development [which] requires a conceptual model different from the traditional, linear model of economic development which assumes a stable administrative system.”<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, the Security Council must devise a strategy that is specifically aimed at the conflict. Before the Security Council can deal with a crisis, the Council must have a clear concept of the underlying problems causing the conflict and those

---

<sup>6</sup> Linda Fasulo, *An Insider’s Guide to the United Nations*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Karen Mingst, *Essentials of International Relations*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Cameron R. Hume, “The Security Council in the Twenty-First Century,” *The U.N. Security Council: From the Cold War to the Twenty-First Century*, edited by David M. Malone, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Karen Mingst, *Essentials of International Relations*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Brian Urquhart, *A Life in Peace and War*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987.

<sup>13</sup> David M. Malone, “Conclusion,” *The U.N. Security Council: From the Cold War to the Twenty-First Century*, edited by David M. Malone, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, “Briefing of Post Conflict Peace-building,” United Nations Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, February 17, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations, *United Nations Secretariat*, United Nations. <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan000751.pdf> (accessed June 10, 2006).

who are affected by it.<sup>16</sup> Another way the Security Council may prepare for a crisis is to be proactive in their planning, whereby “the parties carefully think about everything that could happen and then develop detailed plans.”<sup>17</sup> However, the Security Council often finds that at too many times there is insufficient international will to provide the funds, troops and resources necessary to handle the crisis, and it must make do with limited resources.<sup>18</sup>

The Security Council primarily operates under the mandate of Chapter VI of the United Nations Charter. Chapter VI is titled “Pacific Settlement of Disputes” and mandates actions which may include peace talks, summit meetings, mediations and negotiations.<sup>19</sup> For instance, sovereignty over the Kashmir region in South Asia has been disputed by Pakistan and India. While mediation efforts have yet to find resolution to the issue, the Security Council has been involved and monitoring the situation, particularly now that the conflict could produce a conflict that leads to nuclear war. Nevertheless, when measures of this stature fall short to be effective, the Security Council has the capacity to incorporate the use of sanctions.<sup>20</sup> Sanctions have long been used throughout history to correct or punish nations for actions considered contrary to the established norms of international behavior. Sanctions represent a step short of armed intervention, and the Security Council may attempt to isolate an aggressor by severing some or all relations with a nation in view of trying to alter offensive behavior. These actions consist of the “complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations.” Nevertheless, when the Security Council chooses to implement sanctions as a form of non-forcible enforcement, it is often combined with incentives, such as humanitarian aid, as part of a bargaining process to resolve conflict and encourage compliance.<sup>21</sup>

Though sanctions may seem like ideal measures to use, this is an area of much controversy. Many international organizations and agencies feel that at too many times sanctions cause civilian populations to suffer while only meeting with limited success in coercing the government of the country in question to alter its position. One alternative is the use of “smart sanctions” which are sanctions that can be formulated in such a way as to minimize the detrimental effects on civilian population. Instead, these sanctions are designed to apply pressure directly on those regimes that pose a threat to international peace and security as well as human rights.<sup>22</sup> If these two measures prove ineffective, an alternative tool is the use of force. The Security Council may invoke Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, which calls for the Council to “determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression” and make recommendations as to how “to maintain or restore international peace and security.”<sup>23</sup> When the Security Council finds no other measures sufficient of deterring such behaviors, it is under Chapter VII that the Security Council finds the authority to use force.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Roberta Cohen and Francis M. Deng, *Masses in Flight: The Global Crisis of Internal Displacement*, Washington, DC: Brooking Institute Press, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Conflict Research Consortium, “*Crisis Management*,” Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Adam Roberts. “The Use of Force,” *From the Cold War to the Twenty-First Century*, edited by David M. Malone, Boulder: Lynne Reinner, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, “Chapter VI,” *United Nations Charter*, United Nations, June 26, 1945.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General, “Use of Sanctions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter,” Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General, [www.un.org/News/ocsg/sanction.htm](http://www.un.org/News/ocsg/sanction.htm) (accessed June 10, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> United Nations, “Chapter VI,” *United Nations Charter*, United Nations, June 26, 1945.

<sup>24</sup> United Nations, “Chapter VII,” *United Nations Charter*, United Nations, June 26, 1945.

The role of Secretary General is two-fold. While the position of Secretary General is a leadership one whereby the person who serves it acts as “chief administrator,” the position does not have any battalions of its own.<sup>25</sup> He or she that fulfills this office cannot offer any resolutions or amendments to resolutions.<sup>26</sup> Instead, the Secretary General is to remain neutral, offering only his or her counsel on global affairs. However, the Secretary General may be requested by the Security Council to show interest in a particular issue so that it may be seen by the international community as a pertinent matter that requires special attention. Typically, the issues that Secretary General follows have come to include: maintaining a developmental focus on the continent of Africa; ensuring that there are adequate financial resources, military supplies, personnel, and political motivation to effectively manage peace operations and humanitarian catastrophes; and, promoting socio-economic needs through globalization so that all “the world’s people [can] share [its] benefits.”<sup>27</sup> Likewise, the position of the Secretary General is viewed among member states and the international community as a central figure of common interests and ideals that the United Nations embodies.

In the past few years, the Security Council has become under scrutiny as to whether or not it will be able sustain its legitimacy among the growing international community.<sup>28</sup> Many of these attitudes have stemmed from a large portion of member states who wish to see the compositional arrangement of the Security Council reformed.<sup>29</sup> However, other reform attitudes have come from within the United Nations. According to the Brahimi Report of 2000, the document suggested that the United Nations was beginning to encounter a vast number of limitations in the struggle against war and violence.<sup>30</sup> The report insisted that in order for the United Nations to overcome these “shortcomings,” there must be “an ongoing effort for [its] institutional change.”<sup>31</sup> Since the inception of the United Nations, over a hundred countries have joined the organization, including Japan and Germany, which are the second and third largest financial contributors to the UN budget.<sup>32</sup> Many reform supporters agree that in order for the Security Council to remain effective and legitimate in years to come, it must grow to be more “reflective of today’s international realities.”<sup>33</sup> Any change in the composition of the Security Council would require an amendment to the United Nations Charter. Any prospective change faces a significant hurdle; the permanent members must unanimously agree on it. The primary hesitance among the P-5 Members is that even though “reform is a loaded word and its meaning is often subjective” any significant change in permanent status may disrupt or even destabilize power relationships among many of the Member States.<sup>34</sup> While reform has yet to happen, it is certain that the topic will remain prevalent for years to come.

---

<sup>25</sup> Karen Mingst and Jack Snyder, *Essential Readings in World Politics*, The Norton Series in World Politics, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001.

<sup>26</sup> United Nations, *United Nations Secretary General: The Office*, United Nations. [http://www.un.org/news/oss/sg/pages/sg\\_office.html](http://www.un.org/news/oss/sg/pages/sg_office.html) (accessed June 10, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> William Boston, et al, “Is There a Better Model for the U.N.?” *Time*, 164:24, December 13, 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Linda Fasulo, *An Insider’s Guide to the United Nations*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.