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**Breaking the deadlock? –  
United Nations Security Council reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

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## **Abstract**

The United Nations Security Council plays a pivotal role in maintaining international peace and security. The role of the Security Council in the international system is unique, since its decisions are legally binding on all 193 member states, and it has such important powers as authorizing the use of force. Due to the important role of the Security Council, its composition has been under scrutiny since the 1960s. Ever since the United Nations was established in 1945, it was only reformed once, in 1965. The main criticism towards the Security Council is that it keeps representing the power relations of 1945 and thus it is not representative of the current world. Since reform has not been achieved in the last sixty years, the paper discovers the previously failed proposals and their relevance to the current reform attempts. Therefore, the research question examines what factors influence the likelihood of reforming the composition of the UNSC in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While providing an answer to this question, the research pays special attention to analysing how the rising tensions and revisionism in the international system affect the feasibility of reforms. Regarding the methodology, the paper uses qualitative research methods. The descriptive analytical method is used to provide a comprehensive understanding of Security Council reforms based on analysing the available literature. Furthermore, the research also uses the case study method to analyse particular reform attempts. As the result of the research, the four most important factors which affect the likelihood of reforms of the Security Council are identified: the difficulties of amending the UN Charter; the nature of the reform proposal; a united front of countries supporting the proposal; and the current rising tensions and revisionism. While the first three factors were also present in previous reform proposals, the last factor gives a unique layer of analysis in the research for the likelihood of implementing reforms in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **I. Introduction**

Maintaining international peace and security has been a widely accepted and promoted goal among states of the international system ever since the end of the Second World War. The United Nations (UN) was established primarily for this purpose as outlined in Article 1 of the UN Charter. At the heart of the organization lies the Security Council (SC) which has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has a unique role since it is the only UN organ able to pass resolutions which are legally binding, since under the Charter of the United Nations all member states are obligated to comply with Council decisions (United Nations, 1945). Furthermore, the SC has exclusive authority over certain critical issues, such as the authorization of military interventions and the use of force, the establishment of peacekeeping missions, and the imposition of sanctions (United Nations, n.d.-b). Consequently, the UNSC serves as a key decision-making body of the world's biggest international organization. No wonder, that its legitimacy and efficiency is under constant scrutiny by the international community.

Even though the UN has been continuously praised or criticized about how successful it is in achieving its goals since its foundation nearly eighty years ago, it is undoubtedly one of the most important international organizations. The UN, and within it the Security Council especially, provides a platform for multilateralism, discussion, and debate between member states about the most pressing issues of our world. Due to this important role of the Security Council in the international system, several reform proposals have been introduced in the last fifty years, however with little success to date. Most proposals wish to reform the composition of the Security Council, since it has the same five permanent members as in 1945, and it has not been subject to enlargement since 1965. Currently we live in a world of rising tensions where new wars threaten the maintenance of peace and security. Therefore, it is quite relevant to examine the potential reforms of such a paramount organization as the UNSC. This paper focuses on answering the following research question: What factors influence the likelihood of reforming the composition of the UNSC in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? While providing an answer to this question, the research pays special attention to analysing how the rising tensions and revisionism in the international system affect the feasibility of reforms.

The structure of the paper provides a clear framework for answering the research question. After introducing the methodology and the relevance of the research, the paper gives a brief overview of the history and importance of the Security Council. The next chapter follows by examining three previous reform proposals, after which the current most important proposals are

introduced. The paper then analyses the phenomenon of rising revisionism in the international system and its effects on the UNSC. The last two chapters introduce the most important findings of the research as well as the main conclusions.

## **II. Methodology**

This paper uses qualitative research methods as it relies on an extensive amount of literature while analysing the likelihood of UNSC reforms. The bibliography contains official UN documents as primary sources as well as articles from scientific journals and publications of research institutes. The primary research method of this paper is the descriptive analytical method, through which it aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors and the current dynamics of world politics shaping the likelihood of UNSC reforms. The paper also relies on the case study method when it analyses three previous UNSC reform proposals, as well as when it introduces the standpoints of certain UN member states. It is important to note that this research does not aim to give a normative framework of why reforms of the UNSC are needed or not, but the main aim is to give an analytical framework of the challenges and opportunities affecting the likelihood of reform.

The used methodologies strengthen the relevance of the paper which comes from three key factors. First, the UN will celebrate the 80-year anniversary of its foundation next year, thus examining how the composition of the UNSC was until now and how it might change is a pressing question. Secondly, the UN will hold its “Summit of the Future” in September 2024, where reforming the UNSC is among the priorities (United Nations, n.d.-f). Thirdly, considering the rising tensions and conflicts in our world, the task of maintaining international peace and security for the SC is more and more challenging. Consequently, by examining how rising tensions and increasing revisionist tendencies affect the likelihood of UNSC reforms, this paper wishes to fill in a missing gap in the currently existing literature.

The research also faces some limitations due to the complex structure of the UN and the high number of actors and stakeholders included. The research only deals with the reform proposals concerning the composition and structure of the UNSC proposed by member states and it does not analyse its decision-making procedures in detail or the current proposals of non-state actors. Furthermore, both in case of previous reform attempts and the standpoints of member states only a selected number of cases are analysed. These limitations are needed to be able present concise conclusions in this paper; therefore, they also leave space for future research.

### **III. The significance of the Security Council**

This chapter provides a brief overview on the history of the foundation of the United Nations, as well as on the special role of the Security Council within the organization. Furthermore, the unique position of the SC in the international system is introduced by examining why states might or might not choose to conduct their coercive foreign policies through the Security Council.

#### **III.1. The brief history of the foundation of the United Nations**

The role and importance of international organizations (IO) have been changing over time with the tides of history. The first international organizations were established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to ease cooperation between states in practical matters such as regulating river navigations in case of the Central Commission for the Navigation on the Rhine (1815) and the Danube Commission (1856) (Iriye, 2002:11). However, the idea of establishing an IO for the purposes of maintaining peace only emerged after the atrocities and devastation of World War I. Thus, when the League of Nations was established, there had been no precedent of an international organization for preserving peace before. The idea of such an organization managed to gain support from leaders of different states, thus the Covenant of the League of Nations was adopted during the Paris Peace Conference. The organization started functioning officially on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1920, however since the US Senate never ratified the Treaty of Versailles, the US never joined the organization (The United Nations Office at Geneva, n.d.).

With the outbreak of World War II, it became clear that the League of Nations could not fulfil its aim of maintaining peace as the organization was unable to contain the deterioration of the international system in the 1930s. Following the devastation of the war, attempts to develop international cooperation between states rose to heights never seen before. To prevent the outbreak of another world war the United Nations was established. The Charter was signed by the representatives of 50 countries on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1945, at the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on International Organization and came into force on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 1945. Since then, the UN grew into the largest international organization with currently 193 member states (United Nations, n.d.-c). Apart from the UN, organizations such as the European Union or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization were also established in the years after the Second World War.

The establishment of several intergovernmental organizations ever since the 1940s shows the increasing role of multilateralism in the last eighty years. These international organizations

serve several purposes in world politics: they can foster economic, political or security cooperation among states, as well as providing a platform for solving international problems. What seems to be common in these organizations is the aim to promote cooperation between different states and thus minimize the potential threat of conflicts (Iriye, 2002:158). However, intergovernmental organizations also need to adapt to the changes and new challenges in the world, thus examining the potential for reforms should always be relevant.

### **III.2. The role of the Security Council**

International organizations would not be able to function without a well-established structure of distinct organs and bodies. Within the UN, the biggest international organization, the Security Council is one of the principal organs. Established in 1945, the UN Charter clearly indicates the primary function of the Security Council: *“In order to ensure prompt and effective action by the United Nations, its Members confer on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security”* (United Nations, 1945). Consequently, with its fifteen members the SC is the most important UN organ, in terms of decision making, since member states are obliged to comply with Council decisions (United Nations, n.d.-b).

The main functions and powers of the Security Council are outlined in Chapter V of the UN Charter, but according to Article 30, the Security Council shall adopt its own rules of procedure. Therefore, in 1946 the Council adopted its Provisional Rules of Procedure (S/96), on which the last revision was made in 1982 (S/96/Rev.7) (United Nations, n.d.-d). According to these documents the Security Council takes the lead in determining the existence of a threat to peace or an act of aggression (United Nations, n.d.-e). Furthermore, it calls upon the parties to a dispute to settle it by peaceful means and recommends methods of adjustment or terms of settlement. In certain cases, the Security Council can resort to imposing sanctions or even to authorizing the use of force (United Nations, n.d.-b). Consequently, the role of the Security Council is unique, as states should turn to this body when they identify a threat to international peace and security.

### **III.3. Reasons for and against cooperation with the Security Council**

The establishment of the United Nations and especially the powers granted to the Security Council served the aim to avoid a large-scale war and to work towards achieving international peace following the devastations of two World Wars. However, even almost eighty years after its establishment the Security Council is still a functioning organization, and states decide to

cooperate with it frequently. The question however arises why states so often channel coercive foreign policies through international organizations, and particularly through the Security Council. Examining the reasons for and against cooperation with the SC for member states is crucial for understanding why the SC remains an important organization in world politics.

### **III.3.1. Why states cooperate with the Security Council**

Why states decide to cooperate with the Security Council is a puzzling question. Alexander Thompson in his book “*Channels of Power*” thus examines the question why powerful states so often channel coercive foreign policies through international organizations. According to his view, for examining why states cooperate with the Security Council instead of making all their foreign policy decisions unilaterally, we can identify four main reasons: legitimacy; domestic policy; burden-sharing and information transmission (Thompson, 2009:41).

Before analysing these factors in details, it is important to emphasize that the focus should be on powerful states instead of weak ones. This differentiation is needed as in case of weak states it seems more intuitive to turn to an international organization, because getting support from the international community can be vital for their survival. They often rely on IOs for material or technical assistance, and they aim to increase their political relevance and bargaining power through these organizations (Thompson, 2009:1). However, in case of powerful states, unilateralism or ad hoc coalitions could be viable options, thus it is needed to analyse why it might be worth for them to opt for multilateralism, especially through the Security Council.

In case of powerful states, it is often mentioned that they turn to international organizations in order to get their potential foreign policy plans and actions legitimized. Leaders of states are aware of both the possible gains and losses of their statecraft, thus in most cases it is better to get the approval of at least a part of the international community than to face complete opposition. Furthermore, the Security Council is a special organ regarding its legitimization power. The unique role of the SC comes from the fact, that this body can authorize the use of force in the international community. Consequently, in a lot of cases even the most powerful states channel their policies through the SC, as it gives them potential for finding more allies and it also reduces potential reputation costs.

The second explanatory factor can be the importance of domestic policy. It should not be neglected that decision-makers in a democratic state are constrained by the public opinion, which is also true for three permanent members of the Security Council (France, Great Britain, USA). This means that the main aim of most politicians is to stay in power and to get re-elected

for which they need wide public support. Foreign policy, especially if coercive is always a controversial issue in any population. However, if the domestic crowd sees that the UN legitimizes the use of force of the coercive state it can also make the domestic public more likely to accept a policy. In other words, leaders seek IO approval in order to appease their domestic public who tend to prefer multilateralism over unilateralism either for normative or burden-sharing reasons in general (Thompson, 2009:41).

The third point focuses on burden-sharing. This means that in case of maintaining international peace it should not be the responsibility of one state to solve all problems by themselves. Consequently, when turning to an IO, especially to the SC, there is a high likelihood for finding cooperation or allies for a given issue. An example for such cooperation can be convincing other members to send troops into a peacekeeping mission which reduces the burdens of one particular state.

The fourth point, the idea of information transmission is very well analysed in the book of Thompson, but for the purposes of this research only a part of his theory is introduced. The main idea is that powerful states use international organizations to transmit information to both the leaders of other states and their public (Thompson, 2009:27). In case of foreign policy, signalling to other states can be a crucial point. If a policy gets the approval of at least some of the member states of an organization that can result in political benefits and potential support. However, as previously mentioned leaders are often constrained by the opinion of their domestic public. Thus, if a state wants to convince another one, it also has to send a message which is appealing to the foreign public so that the leaders will have more space to support them with the help of domestic approval.

All factors discussed above could be true for almost any international organizations. However, Thompson also argues that the Security Council is the most important IO when states want to channel coercive policies, since it is the most independent international organization and it has the potential for transmitting the most information through its huge membership (Thompson, 2009:36). Consequently, the positive effects of working through an international organization could even be amplified in case of the Security Council.

### **III.3.2. Why states bypass the Security Council**

Even if there are multiple reasons proving the benefits of working through an IO and the SC, cases when states decide to bypass the Security Council are still famous and they tend to hold particular importance. All the aforementioned benefits are true, however IOs also impose costs

on a state. According to Thompson the costs can be divided into four categories: freedom-of-action costs; transaction and influence costs; delay costs; and scrutiny costs (Thompson, 2009:5).

Freedom of action costs mean that IOs make policy-making more complicated and that states also lose a part of their autonomy. If states acted without working through an IO, they would not have to subject themselves to all the limitations given by the structure and functioning of an organization. Transaction and influence costs means that working through an IO increases the costs of decision-making and of implementing the policy. This means that the influence of a state over a given policy is reduced.

Delay costs are the most self-explanatory, since taking a decision in international organizations can take a lot more time than making a domestic decision. In case of the Security Council, a lot of time is spent by submitting and amending resolutions before a vote is conducted. Lastly, scrutiny costs mean that since international organizations usually work with transparency, the coerced states are going to be under constant observation, meaning that other member states will be able to get information about their behaviour (Thompson, 2009:30).

### **III.3.3. Cooperation or bypassing?**

Cooperation and working through the Security Council has both its benefits and drawbacks. There is no obvious answer, however to why sometimes powerful states decide to work through the SC and while at other times they decide to bypass it and act unilaterally or in an ad hoc coalition. Consequently, it is key that states always have an option whether they choose cooperation or bypassing. This optionality makes the functioning of the SC so special, since it always depends on the intentions and the calculation of possible gains and losses of a state whether the SC will be included in any foreign policy plan. If states act unilaterally, that means that they can keep their full autonomy, however they then lose all the benefits of working with an IO, and they also get more likely to suffer political costs and a deteriorating reputation in the international system as a country who refuses multilateral cooperation.

Why multilateralism works is a question that is mainly rooted in the norm created in the aftermath of the Second World War. According to constructivist theorists a norm has been built after WW2 lasting even today, which encourages states to turn to multilateral cooperations instead of acting unilaterally based on their own interests to reduce the probability for war (Thompson, 2009:10). The existence of this norm and the benefits provided by IOs make states more likely to opt for cooperation instead of bypassing. However, cases of bypassing are not

unknown since the US bypassed the SC in Iraq in 2003, just as Russia did with Georgia in 2008 and with Ukraine in 2022. Therefore, why states choose one option over the other is always dependent on the given case and the interests of the state in question, thus no overarching theory can explain the behaviour of all states in case of the existence of optionality.

Since optionality exists in case of working with IOs, and the SC too, it depends on the leaders of states how they pursue their foreign policy decisions. Anthony Lake explains well how this optionality is seen by one of the most powerful states: *"only one overriding factor can determine whether the U.S. should act multilaterally or unilaterally, and that is America's interests. We should act multilaterally where doing so advances our interests, and we should act unilaterally when that will serve our purpose. The simple question in each case is this: What works best?"* (Lake, 1993).

### **III.4. Conclusions**

The Security Council undoubtedly plays an immense and unique role in maintaining international peace. After examining the factors why powerful states might or might not channel their policies through the SC it's important to emphasize the optionality states face. It seems that powerful states have the incentives to work through IOs and accept its limitations because this can mitigate the political drawbacks of exercising power and it can make international support more likely. This explains why in a lot of cases the SC is used as a platform for multilateral cooperation. However, it is also true that if the interests of a state demand bypassing the SC, countries are also willing to follow that path.

This chapter showed, why the UNSC matters and why it is still a relevant organ nowadays. For maintaining peace and security it is best if the most possible coercive policies are channelled through the Security Council. Consequently, when examining the potential for reforms this aim and the efficiency of the SC should not be neglected.

## **IV. UNSC reform proposals in the past – literature review**

Since the foundation of the UN in 1945 there have been several attempts to reform the composition of the Security Council. This chapter provides an overview of the three most relevant reform initiatives: the reform of 1965, the Razali Plan, and the plans of Kofi Annan. This historic overview is necessary to identify the most important conclusions which are of relevance to current-day reform attempts.

## **IV.1. Security Council in the UN Charter**

The current composition of the Security Council is determined in Chapter V Article 23 of the UN Charter. According to the Charter currently the Security Council consists of fifteen members of the United Nations. The five permanent members (P5) include China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The General Assembly elects ten non-permanent members of the Security Council for a term of two years (United Nations, 1945).

Since the composition of the UNSC is determined by the UN Charter, if there is an aim to enlarge or modify the membership of the Council or to introduce any reforms it is only possible with an amendment to the Charter. Article 108 determines that amendments to the Charter shall come into force when they have been adopted by a vote of two thirds of the members of the General Assembly and ratified by two thirds of the members of the United Nations, including all the permanent members of the Security Council (United Nations, 1945). Consequently, reform proposals face several obstacles, partially already providing an explanation for why no amendment has been adopted regarding the reform of the Security Council since 1965.

## **IV.2. The amendment to the UN Charter of 1963/1965**

When the UNSC was established in 1945 it had only eleven members originally, which included the P5 countries and six non-permanent members. This division between five permanent and six non-permanent members meant to give a slight preponderance for the countries elected for two-year terms (Blum, 2005:635). However, an amendment to Article 23 which enlarged the membership of the Security Council from eleven to fifteen was adopted by the General Assembly on the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 1963 and came into force on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 1965 (McDonald & Patrick, 2010:34). With this amendment the SC received its current composition, and no reforms were implemented in the last nearly sixty years, even though several proposals were suggested.

Since reform proposals seem to fail ever since 1965, it is crucial to examine the circumstances under which this reform was accepted. First, it is important to acknowledge the historical background of the reform. The expansion of the Security Council occurred in the wake of decolonization and during the Cold War. This reform proposal was first presented by Latin American, Asian, and African countries which showed the strengthening power of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) (McDonald & Patrick, 2010:34). With the waves of decolonization new states were established which soon became member states of the UN and by working

together they managed to put pressure on developed countries to consider the enlargement. This did not mean however, that all P5 members initially supported the proposal. During the vote in the General Assembly only the Republic of China (Taiwan) voted in favour of the resolution, while the Soviet Union and France opposed the proposal and the United States and Great Britain abstained (McDonald & Patrick, 2010:34). However, the GA could still adopt the resolution, since the two-thirds majority was achieved. Following the vote the permanent members were also aware of the need for their ratification, and eventually they all accepted the proposal, thus it could enter into force in 1965.

Apart from the historical background the nature of the reform also significantly contributed to its success. The main aim of the reform was to provide a solution for the underrepresentation of Asia and Africa following the process of decolonization. The original 51 members of the UN from 1945 increased to 113 by 1963, thus introducing four more representatives to the SC seemed reasonable (Gordon & Rowan, 2014:8). Most importantly, the reform did not aim to alter the permanent membership or the veto power in the Security Council, which have always seemed to be the most controversial proposals regarding the Council reforms. Factors such as the reluctance of P5 countries to cast a veto alone, and the easier domestic ratification processes compared to the prospects of today could also contribute to the success of the reform proposal (McDonald & Patrick, 2010:35).

Not only was this enlargement important for the better representation of the newly independent countries, but by having five permanent and ten non-permanent members, it also became virtually possible to adopt a decision even if all P5 members abstain. Even though such a situation is unlikely to happen, the possibility is there for the ten non-permanent members to adopt a decision by nine votes. Apart from the enlargement of the members of the UNSC, the distribution of the non-permanent members also changed according to the formalization of the “Regional Groups”. Prior to enlargement, the six elected UNSC seats were distributed by informal agreement, while with the establishment of Regional Groups the equitable geographical distribution of the ten non-permanent seats became possible (McDonald & Patrick, 2010:34). Table 1 and Table 2 thus compare the regional distribution of non-permanent members before and after the amendment:

| Name of the region   | Number of seats |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| Latin America        | 2               |
| British Commonwealth | 1               |
| Eastern Europe       | 1               |
| Middle East          | 1               |
| Western Europe       | 1               |

**Table 1: Distribution of non-permanent seats before 1965**

Source: Own table based on McDonald & Patrick, 2010  
(<https://www.cfr.org/report/un-security-council-enlargement-and-us-interests>)

| Name of the region                          | Number of seats |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| African Group                               | 3               |
| Asia-Pacific Group                          | 2               |
| Eastern European Group                      | 1               |
| Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) | 2               |
| Western European and Other Group            | 2               |

**Table 2: Distribution of non-permanent seats after 1965**

Source: Own table based on McDonald & Patrick, 2010  
(<https://www.cfr.org/report/un-security-council-enlargement-and-us-interests>)

### IV.3. The Razali Plan

Following the success of 1965 soon other proposals surfaced emphasizing the need for better and more equal representation in the Security Council. Proponents of reforms ever since the 1960s keep arguing that the composition of the SC reflects the power relations of 1945, thus it is outdated and archaic, failing to represent the present geopolitical reality or the majority of the world population (Patrick & et al, 2023). One such example was the three-stage reform plan of Razali in 1997.

Ismail Razali was the President of the General Assembly between 1996-1997 and then Chair of the Open-Ended Working Group who aimed to reform the composition of the SC (Gordon & Gowan, 2014:8). He advocated a three-stage plan for achieving meaningful reform. The first stage called the General Assembly to pass a framework resolution for the enlargement of the Security Council by adding five permanent members and four non-permanent members without naming any particular countries. The second stage would have been to pass the next framework resolution in the GA identifying the specific candidates (Razali, 1997). According to Razali the resolution would have also provided that the five new permanent members would not have been granted veto power, while the P5 would have been encouraged to limit its use to actions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (Bourantonis & Magliveras, 2002:25). The third stage required the implementation of both framework resolutions through a Charter amendment. This required favourable votes from two thirds of the entire membership followed by domestic ratification. The third stage thus required a more significant vote, but the groundwork for the resolution would have already been laid in the first two stages (Gordon & Gowan, 2014:8). The interesting point in this reform plan is that by the first and second stages Razali would have bypassed the

hardships of accumulating enough votes for a Charter amendment as for the first two resolutions, a two-thirds majority of GA members present and voting would have sufficed according to Article 18 of the Charter.

The plan of Razali however was not implemented mainly due to the opposition of the Non-Aligned Movement and Italy. The non-aligned states saw the plan as a potential threat to their cohesion since they were divided on who should represent them as a permanent member. Furthermore, Italy wanted to block Germany and Japan from getting a permanent seat in the Security Council, thus they also kept criticizing that new permanent members would enter the SC under Article 18 in the first two stages instead of immediately starting with the Charter amendment under Article 108 (Bourantonis & Magliveras, 2002:27). Even though Razali tried to find a way around the strict regulation of amending the UN Charter, in the end his three-stage was not successful, but it set the stage for later proposals.

#### **IV.4. Reform proposals of Secretary-General Kofi Annan**

Twenty years ago, the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change published its report with the title *“A more secure world: Our shared responsibility”*. The report generated a long-lasting discussion about UNSC composition reform since it provided two potential models for enlargement.

The background of the reform proposals of 2004-2005 can be connected to Kofi Annan, who served as the Secretary General of the United Nations between 1997 and 2006 (United Nations, n.d.-a). With the start of the new Millennium, Annan announced the creation of the 16-member High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change in September 2003, to examine the main threats to international peace and security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Yale Center for the Study of Globalization, 2005:1). His main priority was to introduce a comprehensive reform programme to revitalize the UN and to ensure that the organization remains effective. The extensive report of the Panel was released in December 2004 and the list of 101 recommendations dealt with a range of problems faced by the international community (High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2004). For the purposes of this research, only the relevant section about the potential reform of the SC is examined.

Even though the report contained recommendations in several crucial areas, the most attention was paid to the two recommendations on the enlargement of the Security Council. The writers of the report set out the goal of the SC reform as the following: *“Thus, the challenge for any reform is to increase both the effectiveness and the credibility of the Security Council and, most*

*importantly, to enhance its capacity and willingness to act in the face of threats.*” (High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2004:79). The report highlights how the founders of the UN gave the primary responsibility to the SC to maintain international peace and security. However, they also emphasize the importance of the efficiency of this particular organ, since it should not be seen just as a representative body, but also as one that is capable for decisive action. With these considerations in mind, the sixteen experts set out four main principles any SC reform should meet. The first two principles provide the basis for consideration of the potential new countries which could be added to the SC. The first point states that those should be involved in the decision-making who contribute the most to the United Nations financially, militarily and diplomatically. The second point focuses on representativeness, especially mentioning the need to include developing countries in the membership. The third principle is a reminder that reform should not deteriorate the effectiveness of the Council, while the fourth principle advocates increasing the democratic nature and the accountability of the SC (High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2004:80).

Based on these considerations, the Panel presented two alternatives for reform named Model A (Table 3) and Model B (Table 4). Both models aimed to increase the total number of seats from 15 to 24 in the SC, just as the Razali Plan did (High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2004:81). Furthermore, both models involve a distribution of seats between four major regional areas, which are defined as “Africa”, “Asia and Pacific”, “Europe” and “Americas”.

Model A proposed the addition of six new permanent seats, but without veto power, thus increasing the number of permanent members to 11. The model also proposed the addition of three new non-permanent seats to increase their number to 13. While the proposal never specified which countries would have received the new permanent seats, based on the regional distribution and the countries who had been lobbying for such an enlargement it can be evaluated which states would have been likely to get these seats. The new European seat would have gone to Germany, the two Asia-Pacific seats to Japan and India, the seat of the Americas to Brazil while the two seats of Africa to Nigeria and either South Africa or Egypt (Blum, 2005:641). It is also important in the model that all regional areas would be represented by a total of six seats, with only their distribution differing between permanent and non-permanent members.

| <i>Regional area</i>  | <i>No. of States</i> | <i>Permanent seats (continuing)</i> | <i>Proposed new permanent seats</i> | <i>Proposed two-year seats (non-renewable)</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Africa                | 53                   | 0                                   | 2                                   | 4                                              | 6            |
| Asia and Pacific      | 56                   | 1                                   | 2                                   | 3                                              | 6            |
| Europe                | 47                   | 3                                   | 1                                   | 2                                              | 6            |
| Americas              | 35                   | 1                                   | 1                                   | 4                                              | 6            |
| <b>Totals model A</b> | <b>191</b>           | <b>5</b>                            | <b>6</b>                            | <b>13</b>                                      | <b>24</b>    |

**Table 3: Model A of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change**

Source: High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2004, page 81

Model B would have left the permanent membership unchanged, however it would have introduced a new category, eight four-year renewable seats, which would be distributed equally among the regional areas. This would have also meant the addition of one extra non-permanent term, so similarly to Model A all regions could have an equal amount of six seats.

| <i>Regional area</i>  | <i>No. of States</i> | <i>Permanent seats (continuing)</i> | <i>Proposed four-year renewable seats</i> | <i>Proposed two-year seats (non-renewable)</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Africa                | 53                   | 0                                   | 2                                         | 4                                              | 6            |
| Asia and Pacific      | 56                   | 1                                   | 2                                         | 3                                              | 6            |
| Europe                | 47                   | 3                                   | 2                                         | 1                                              | 6            |
| Americas              | 35                   | 1                                   | 2                                         | 3                                              | 6            |
| <b>Totals model B</b> | <b>191</b>           | <b>5</b>                            | <b>8</b>                                  | <b>11</b>                                      | <b>24</b>    |

**Table 4: Model B of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change**

Source: High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2004, page 81

In March 2005, the Secretary General also released a report with the title “*In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all*” which expressed its support for the reforms proposed by the High-Level Panel. In this report Kofi Annan reinforced his view that a reform of the UN would not be complete without a meaningful reform of the Security Council. Consequently, he urged member states to consider the two options proposed in the report or any other viable proposals and take a decision before the summit in September 2005 (United Nations Secretary-General, 2005:43).

However, no matter how much Kofi Annan contributed to achieving the long-awaited UNSC reform by setting up the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change and by emphasizing the need for reform in his report, it did not become reality in the last twenty years. There were multiple layers of reasons why change was never achieved following the release of the reports, among which the reluctance of P5 nations towards change, and general divisions among member states in finding an exact framework for the reform are recurring themes (Gordan & Gowan, 2014). An extensive report by various experts was released by the Center for the Study of Globalization at Yale University after a Workshop on United Nations Reform was organized at the Center in February 2005. Various experts point out that even the Panel itself was unable to present one single model for the reform proposal, and rather they presented two alternatives, which made it quite unlikely that member states would be able to agree on one of the models up to the point where they have the necessary majority for Charter amendments (Yale Center for the Study of Globalization, 2005:6). The majority of participants in the workshop viewed Model B more preferable to Model A as they saw it more representative of the world's population and deemed it more likely to pass at the General Assembly. However, they also raised concerns regarding whether model B would impede the efficiency of the Council by increasing the number of members but keeping the veto right intact (Yale Center for the Study of Globalization, 2005:7).

#### **IV.5. The question of veto power in the reforms**

Apart from the exact number of seats in the Security Council, the other often-contested issue regarding the UNSC is the veto right of the permanent members. According to the UN Charter *“decisions of the Security Council on all other matters shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members including the concurring votes of the permanent members”* (United Nations, 1945). In practice this means that a non-procedural decision can only be accepted if the P5 states vote in favour of the decision or abstain.

In case of the amendment of 1965, the reform aimed to increase the number of non-permanent members, thus the veto right stayed out of question. In case of the Razali plan five new permanent seats would have been present in the Council, however without a veto right. Furthermore, the resolution would have urged the P5 states to limit their use of the veto to actions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (Bourantonis & Magliveras, 2002:25). This proposal seemed reasonable, since suggesting the veto power to the new members would have made it almost impossible to pass the enlargement itself, due to the opposition of the P5.

In case of the proposals of the High-Level Panel the question of the veto right is more nuanced. In the report the Panel expresses their view that the P5 were given veto rights, because they were also expected to have a higher burden in promoting international peace (High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2004:79). Thus, in Model A the Panel proposes the introduction of six new permanent seats without the veto right, which is similar to the Razali Plan. However, Model B wishes to avoid this contradiction of being a permanent member without a right to veto, by introducing the new category of “semi-permanent” members.

Consequently, neither model of the Panel involves an expansion of the veto, as they acknowledge that they do not see any practical way of changing the existing veto powers without violating the interests of the most powerful members. However, even more importantly, they make recommendations about the use of veto. According to the experts, veto can be seen as an *“anachronistic institution in an increasingly democratic age”*, consequently its use should be limited only when vital interests are at stake (High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2004:82). Furthermore, the Panel urges countries to refrain from using the veto right in case of genocides and large-scale human rights abuses. The Panel also aimed to introduce the system of “indicative voting” where states should have indicated their positions publicly before taking a second formal vote (High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2004:82). They aimed to increase the accountability of the P5 veto right, however it would not have had any significant impact on the actual right to veto.

It is common in all three reform proposals that none of them aimed to expand the veto right to potential new permanent members in the SC. It is common in the Razali plan and the proposals of the Panel that both aimed to express their standpoint against the overuse of veto by the permanent members. It is without doubt that the veto right is increasingly present in the discussions about UNSC reforms as the need for changing the composition of the Council also comes with considering what it means to be a permanent member.

#### **IV.6. Lessons learnt from previous reform proposals**

This chapter of literature review was of utmost importance for the analysis of three previous reform proposals as examining their success or failure can provide valuable insight about the likelihood of achieving SC reforms nowadays. Based on the outcome of the three proposals I identified three important lessons learnt: 1) historical background and the foreign relations at the time of the reform proposals are crucial; 2) reform is not possible without a significant group

of member states supporting it; and 3) reforms are more likely to pass if they do not wish to alter the present veto rights.

#### **IV.6.1. Historical background and foreign relations**

The first lesson identifies the importance of looking at reform proposals from a broad perspective. Analysing historical circumstances is easier from a perspective of looking back to decades ago, but when one wishes to identify a current-day proposal rather looking at the distribution of power and foreign relations in the international system makes finding crucial factors possible. It is without question, that history and power relations can influence the UNSC reform attempts both in favourable and unfavourable ways.

In case of the proposal of 1963 historical circumstances contributed to the success of the reform. The process of decolonization and the ongoing Cold War pushed countries into the direction of accepting the introduction of four more seats into the SC, mainly because of the exponentially growing number of member states of the UN (McDonald & Patrick, 2010:35). The Razali plan came at a historic point when for more than eight years member states in the General Assembly and within the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council have been debating about the details of the reforms needed (Bourantonis & Magliveras, 2002:24). Even though the plan aimed to break the deadlock situation, it could not achieve actual reform due to fierce opposition.

The reform package supported by Kofi Annan came after a historic point when in 2003 the United States of America bypassed the Security Council and started a war on Iraq without a Security Council resolution authorizing the use of force. Consequently, the legitimacy, efficiency and credibility of the UN could have been at a low point in the eyes of the public, thus urging reforms to present positive change was understandable. However, it is clear, that institutional reforms would not have solved the option for member states to bypass the SC, and tense political relations did not provide a chance for reform (Luck, 2005:412).

In the current age of rising revisionism in the international system, paying attention to the distribution of power and foreign relations between states is especially crucial when analysing the likelihood for UNSC reforms since the prospects lend to a higher-than-usual degree of probability to reform proposals being challenged on the basis of balance-of-power calculations.

#### **IV.6.2. Need for cooperation**

Since the amendment of the UN Charter requires the support of two-thirds of member states, including the ratification by the permanent members, having a strong coalition of member states

behind a reform proposal is vital. The second lesson thus is the need for cooperation between states, as without their constant activity pushing a reform proposal forward achieving change seems virtually impossible.

The amendment of 1965 is a perfect example of how states of the Non-Aligned Movement could form a majority in the General Assembly and achieve the resolution on enlarging the SC pass. Even though the resolution was not supported by all P5 members, eventually they all ratified it (McDonald & Patrick, 2010:35). This shows us the lesson that if developing countries, such as from Africa aim to have a better representation, they must find a platform for cooperation to be able to achieve their goals.

In case of the two other reforms the initiative did not come directly from the member states themselves, but it was rather advocated by institutional figures such as the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General. Eventually, both proposals lacked the essential support of a coalition of member states and rather the proposals were subject to rivalries between states trying to impede one another from getting a permanent seat in the Council. The main takeaway for current-day reforms is that as long as we do not see a united front of member states advocating for a particular reform proposal, the likelihood of achieving reform remains low.

#### **IV.6.3. The issue of veto powers**

The question of veto power is a delicate and sensitive issue for both the current permanent members and member states aspiring to get a permanent seat in the Council. Consequently, the third lesson is that reform is more likely to happen if it leaves the veto right in its current form.

The P5 members have never been willing to give up their privilege of veto right, thus eliminating it is already out of the question. However, they are also unlikely to accept new potential permanent members receiving this right. On the other hand, new states getting a permanent seat without a veto right, would feel that they are “second-class” permanent members compared to the original P5. Consequently, the question of adding new permanent members with or without veto rights also became a delicate issue.

Looking at the previous proposals, in 1965 with the addition of only non-permanent members the question of veto was not considered. Meanwhile, in the latter two attempts it was emphasized that new permanent members would not receive a veto power. Notably, Model B of the High-Level Panel aimed to avoid the question of permanent membership by introducing

semi-permanent seats, which might have been the best attempt to go around the issue of veto (High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, 2004:80).

Overall, it should be seen that reform proposals aiming to modify the current system of veto rights seem less likely to be passed by the member states. Consequently, aiming at a minimal reform and building it up step by step might be a better approach than trying to introduce large-scale reforms in the composition of the Security Council.

## **V. Reform of the UNSC today**

The report published by the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change in 2004 proposed that after a reform of the composition of the UNSC is implemented, it should be reviewed in 2020 to examine the effectiveness of the Security Council (High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change 2004:82). However, no reforms were implemented until 2020 or even today since 1965 and the discussion about the need for reform continues. In this chapter, the main reform proposals present today are examined, and the current tendencies in the international system and their effects on the UNSC are also analysed.

### **V.1. Three main reform proposals**

The special role and status of the UNSC in the international system encourages states to act in cooperation with it in most cases. Consequently, how the composition of the SC is built up is of particular interest for all member states. As it was discussed, both the Razali Plan and the plans advocated by Kofi Annan failed to achieve the implementation of reforms. Since then, there has been one significance change, meaning that instead of working in the Open-ended Working Group established in 1992, since 2009 discussions are held in the framework of intergovernmental negotiations (United Nations, 2022.07.12.). However, discussions remained fruitless partly because member states have never agreed to negotiate on the basis of a single rolling text.

Nowadays, countries wishing to change the composition of the SC continue to use the same arguments for supporting their case as in the 1960s: a need for better representation in the SC and that it should reflect the current distribution of power, not the power relations from 1945. Currently three major groups can be identified which are advocating for the reform of the composition of the UNSC: the G4 coalition, the Uniting for Consensus coalition, and the African Union. Virtually all UN member states are aware of the need for reforms and they express their support through rhetoric, but there is no common reform proposal endorsed by all countries, instead there are smaller coalitions (Binder& Heupel, 2020:94).

### **V.1.1. The G4 proposal**

The first group is the so-called G4 coalition, which includes those four countries who have been aspiring for a permanent membership for the longest time: Brazil, Germany, India and Japan. Germany and Japan clearly see themselves as great powers, who are long rehabilitated after the Second World War. Brazil and India meanwhile are quickly developing countries with huge population (Patrick & et al, 2023:4). Consequently, these four countries aim to have the same status as the current P5 countries, however, importantly they tend to show flexibility on the question of receiving veto rights. Not only do they advocate for their own places, but they also support giving two additional permanent seats for Africa. In March 2024 India again presented a detailed model for SC reform on behalf of the G4 states (The Economic Times, 2024). India's permanent representative to the UN emphasized the need to increase the membership of the Council from the current 15 to 25 or 26 by adding six permanent members and four or five non-permanent seats. Furthermore, the ambassador stressed, that the G4 proposal does not specify which member states would get the permanent seats, as the decision should be made by a democratic election in the General Assembly. Even more importantly, the representative of India showed flexibility on the issue of veto rights in the following statement: *"While the new permanent members would, as a principle, have the same responsibilities and obligations as current permanent members, they shall not exercise the veto until a decision on the matter have been taken during a review"* (The Economic Times, 2024).

### **V.1.2. The Uniting for Consensus proposal**

The second group is the so-called Uniting for Consensus (UFC) coalition which is led by the regional rivals of the G4 countries and has twelve members currently. Countries of the UFC include aspiring regional powers, such as Argentina, Canada, Italy, Pakistan, South Korea, and Türkiye (Patrick & et al, 2023:4). The UFC does not support reforming the SC in a way that only the G4 countries receive permanent seats, since they would consider that as reinforcing great power hierarchy in the international system. They rather advocate for increasing the number of non-permanent members from ten to twenty-one to have a globally more representative council. They propose the introduction of 9 long-term seats with immediate re-election possibility, thus creating "semi-permanent seats". Additionally, they propose two additional two-year seats, one to be allocated to Eastern Europe and one rotating seat reserved for small states (Pirozzi, 2023:8).

### **V.1.3. The proposal of the African Union**

The third major group of countries is the African Union (AU). Africa has long emphasized its under-representativeness in the Security Council, and African states accepted a common position on reforms of the UNSC in 2005 called the Ezulwini Consensus (Patrick & et al, 2023:4). They aim to ensure that the countries of the continent of Africa are fairly and equally represented. Therefore, with a membership of fifty-four countries, the African Union insists on getting two permanent seats for Africa with full veto rights, as well as five additional non-permanent seats as outlined in the Ezulwini consensus (Ezulwini Consensus, 2005). They emphasize that as long as veto powers exist in the Council all permanent members should hold this right equally. The Consensus also states that the African Union should be responsible for the selection of the two permanent representatives of Africa, however the Union could not agree so far on the exact two candidates (Alene & et al, 2023).

## **V.2. Rising tensions and revisionism**

Nowadays we live in a world where tensions and the number of conflicts continuously grow. Since 2022 with the war in Ukraine there is once again a military conflict in the territory of Europe. Since 2023 tensions in the Middle East keep growing due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the war in Gaza. As tension in the international system rises and the potential for conflicts grow the UNSC also faces more challenges in maintaining international peace and security. As it can be seen from previous reform attempts, the historical background, and the distribution of power in the international system as well as the relative power relations are circumstances which can influence the outcome and likelihood of UNSC reforms. Therefore, analysing the current dynamics in world politics is of utmost importance. Currently we live in a world of rising revisionism where various states conduct their foreign policies based on realist principles (Kustermans, 2023:2). Since revisionism is connected even to certain P5 members of the Security Council, analysing their standpoint is needed to understand the likelihood of reform.

### **V.2.1. Revisionism and realism**

Revisionism, in the discipline of international relations, means that certain states wish to challenge the status quo in the international order and alter the existing power structures and relative power relations to maximize their own interests (DiCicco & Sanchez, 2021). Closely connected to revisionism, the principles of realism should also be briefly examined.

Even though realism is not a single theory, since it consists of several sub-schools there are some features which are universal to them. First, realism views international relations as a

constant struggle for power, where power is the most important concept (Donnelly, 2000). Secondly, in realism states are seen as the most influential actors in world politics, which pursue their national interests in terms of maximizing their relative power positions. Thirdly, the anarchy of the international system encourages states to rely on self-help when maximizing their interests. States thus aim to maintain a balance of power in the system, which ensures that they can keep their power positions. States satisfied with the distribution of power in the international system thus are going to be status-quo powers, while those dissatisfied are going to be revisionist states (Donnelly, 2000).

Since revisionist states aim to alter the current distribution of power in the international system, they are likely to act in a way which serves their own self-interests the best. This means that rising revisionism poses a threat to the idea of multilateralism, the UN was built on, since states become more likely to act unilaterally (International Crisis Group, n.d.). If the importance of multilateralism in the international system shrinks, then the role of international organizations could also diminish (Goddard, 2018). Since the behaviour of member states influences how effective and legitimate the Security Council is, the implications of revisionism also affect the likelihood for UNSC reforms to be challenged on the basis of relative power relations. If states continue to primarily maximize their own interests, it becomes less likely that revisionist countries will accept UNSC reforms which might limit their power positions. This is particularly relevant in case of the P5 countries as without their approval no UNSC reform can be introduced. Therefore, the standpoints on UNSC reforms of three potentially revisionist states (China, Russia and the USA) are analysed.

### **V.2.2. Standpoints of China, Russia, and the USA**

The standpoints of P5 members about potential UNSC reforms are of particular interest since their approval is needed for a reform to pass. Since France and Great Britain are not considered to be revisionist powers currently, and they show a general support towards reform attempts, their opinions are not analysed in detail.

#### **V.2.2.1. China**

Whether China is a revisionist power is debated by different scholars, but since China pays thorough attention to maintaining its power position in the international system, it is worth to analyse its standpoint (Huiyun, 2009:2).

China articulated its main position on Security Council reform in 2005 and there has been no substantive change to this standpoint since (Zhenqiang, 2005). The position includes five key

points focusing on representing more developing countries adhering to the principle of geographic balance, which should have better opportunities to participate in decision-making. Consequently, China supports adding new seats to the Security Council for developing countries, especially from Africa, but it does not support any country becoming a new permanent member, since that would threaten its privileged position in the P5 with the veto right (Patrick & et al, 2023:18).

China plays an important role when it comes to potential reform of the SC, because even if they show some level of support in the rhetoric, they try to obstruct reforms in practice as they do not wish to see India and Japan in permanent seats as that could end their privileged situation in Asia. Consequently, China blocks debating the SC reform in one single document each year (Patrick & et al, 2023:20). This document could list the options for the main topics, such as total number of members of the SC, the possible addition of new permanent members and the question of veto powers. Consequently, since China blocks the so-called text-based negotiations to protect its interests, thus they block the major advancements in reaching a reform proposal to be voted about.

#### **V.2.2.2. Russia**

Russia is increasingly seen as a revisionist power, especially since its invasion of Ukraine. President Putin started the invasion unilaterally, and thus bypassing the Security Council. Since Russia grew increasingly isolated due to the war, its intentions to get involved in multilateral cooperation have significantly decreased (Patrick & et al, 2023:45). Therefore, Russia's standpoint about a potential UNSC reform is complicated, especially in the light of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Due to its veto power, Russia was able to block any response by the Security Council to the situation in Ukraine, thus Russia aims to maintain its delicate power position in the SC.

In general, still Russia has shown itself as a supporter of reforms, but they remained cautious about particular details. At the 77<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly in September 2022 the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov encouraged more representation from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Furthermore, he mentioned India and Brazil as “worthy candidates for becoming permanent Council members” (Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Union, 2022). On the other hand, in April 2023 Russia's ambassador to the UN emphasized the need for more African representation, while stating that there is no consensus on candidates for permanent membership (Patrick& et al, 2023). Other Russian officials have emphasized that the SC should not have more than twenty members overall (United Nations, 2020.11.16.).

However, one thing is sure in the standpoint of Russia: there should be no change to the current number of permanent members with veto rights.

Examining realistically the current Russian foreign policy, it remains unsure whether Russia would support any change of the composition of the SC (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023). Currently being quite isolated in the Security Council as well as in the General Assembly, Russia would never accept its veto right being taken away or giving out veto powers to new permanent members. Consequently, it seems that Russia might support the addition of non-permanent members, but in case of adding new permanent members, they would only accept reforms without giving new veto rights.

#### **V.2.2.3. United States of America**

The United States of America is going to hold its presidential elections in November 2024. So far it seems that the candidates are going to be the incumbent President, Joe Biden and the previous President, Donald Trump (CNN, 2024). The result of the election will affect the likelihood of achieving UNSC reforms at least in the next four years.

Currently the Biden administration has expressed growing support for SC reforms by expanding the membership (Ryan, 2023). Even though, no clear results are seen so far, it seems promising that with the support of the US some reforms have higher likelihood of being accepted, even if the process goes slowly. President Biden closed his 2022 General Assembly by reflecting on the foundation of the UN emphasizing that “*behaving as though multilateralism matters make multilateralism matter*” (The White House, 2022). Consequently, it seems that the US might be more open for negotiating reforms under the Biden administration than in the previous years.

However, if Donald Trump wins the elections, prospects for the US supporting UNSC reforms decrease. During his previous presidency, Trump has shown that he is not afraid to use unilateralism and realist foreign policy approaches. His main slogans of “Make America Great Again” and “America First” emphasize the unilateral nature of his foreign policy and even potential revisionist tendencies (Edwards, 2018). Trump has criticized the effectiveness of the UN several times, and he also withdrew the US from the Paris Agreement, an important multilateral tool for the fight against climate change (Patrick & et al, 2023:37). Consequently, it is unsure whether the US under a potential Trump administration would be willing to accept any reforms to the composition of the SC. However, the potential threat of reducing the importance of multilateralism would be detrimental to potential reforms and cooperation to achieve them.

## **VI. Findings**

This chapter introduces the most important findings of the research by answering the research question. Throughout the research four main factors have been identified which influence the likelihood of reforming the composition of the UNSC in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the process of amending the UN Charter; the nature of the reform proposal; the united support behind a proposal; and rising tensions and revisionism. These factors are closely interconnected and analysing them gives a holistic view of the potential for reform in the upcoming years.

### **VI.1. Factor 1 – Amending the UN Charter**

As it was identified in the beginning of the paper, any reform to the composition of the UNSC can only be achieved by an amendment to the UN Charter. Since its establishment in 1945 the UN Charter has only been amended three times, which already indicates that it is a rarely used procedure (United Nations, n.d.-c).

Even if a reform proposal is established which enjoys the support of most member states it still might face procedural obstacles of getting implemented. Article 108 of the Charter states that after a proposal has been adopted by two thirds of the members of the GA, there is still a need to get it ratified by the same majority, including all the permanent members of the SC (United Nations, 1945). Consequently, any reform proposal should aim to convince and get the approval of the P5 states, as well as overall 129 member states. Consequently, the strict procedure of amending the UN Charter makes the reform process slower and it demands wide support of member states. It is not possible to implement a reform without amending the UN Charter since as it was discussed, even the Razali plan, which tried to avoid this legislative obstacle, had to implement such a GA vote in its third stage (Razali, 1997).

### **VI.2. Factor 2 – The nature of the reform proposal**

The likelihood of a reform proposal passing and being introduced is influenced by how appealing and acceptable its content is to the member states. Analysing the previous reform attempts and the standpoints of the P5 countries shows that there are some cases which are extremely unlikely to be accepted, while other proposals might stand a chance. The likelihood of a proposal passing is closely linked to how it deals with the question of veto rights and permanent membership.

Any reform proposal which wishes to alter the current distribution of veto rights is extremely unlikely to happen. The present P5 countries would not accept their veto powers being taken away, but as other member states are also aware of this, it is rarely attempted by reform

proposals. However, what is often included is the need for changing the composition of the SC by adding new permanent members with veto rights. This idea is mostly endorsed by the African Union currently, but the G4 countries would also advocate for such a change in the long-term. However, it is quite unlikely that any extension of the veto powers to new permanent members would be accepted by all P5 countries. Even though it seems obvious, that the veto power of the P5 countries cannot be abolished, there are some positive tendencies when it comes to limiting its use. In April 2022, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 76/262, which states that permanent members who use their veto must provide justification within ten days to all UN member states. Although member states may have different interpretations of the meaning and impact of this resolution, it is undoubtedly a major step towards limiting the use of the veto right (United Nations, 2022.04.26.). Consequently, it is in the interest of advocates of reform to deal with the question of veto rights separately from reform proposals.

The second often-discussed proposal is adding new permanent members without veto rights. Being aware of the controversial nature of changing the distribution of veto powers both the Razali Plan and the report of the High-Level Panel advocated such a change. The likelihood of adding new permanent members without veto rights is clearly a lot higher than a proposal granting them veto power. However, even if the P5 countries would be willing to accept such a proposal, it is unclear how much the aspiring permanent members would support this, since it would not make them equal to P5 members but would rather make them “second-class” permanent members.

The third potential idea is introducing semi-permanent members instead of new permanent ones. This would mean that countries could be re-elected to continue their work in the Security Council after their two-year term as a non-permanent member. This proposal was first included in Model B of the report of the High-Level Panel. This reform in theory provides better representation since it contains the possibility of electing different countries for semi-permanent positions and it is also endorsed by the UFC coalition (Pirozzi, 2023). Such a reform might have the highest likelihood to pass, as it combines the need for better representation with being members of the SC for a longer period.

The fourth possible reform proposal is similar to the one introduced in 1965, by adding only non-permanent members to the Council. The likelihood of such a reform passing might be high due to enhancing the representation of more nations, but it does not solve the discrepancy of representing the power relations of 1945. Consequently, it is unlikely that most member states would be satisfied with such a proposal.

In case of any reform proposal, the number to which it aims to increase membership from the current fifteen seats is also a question for debate. This is key, since there is no agreement, whether increasing the number of seats above twenty would be accepted by all P5 nations due to concerns of efficiency, thus reducing the likelihood of the reform happening (Patrick & et al, 2023:7).

Overall, it seems that convincing most member states, including the P5 nations, to support a reform proposal is so challenging that member states should not aim to propose overly ambitious and extensive reforms. It seems more reasonable to find a common ground, which is acceptable by most states especially when it comes to the question of veto powers. The likelihood of a composition reform thus heavily depends on the nature and the actual content of the proposal. Adding new semi-permanent members and additional non-permanent members seems to have a higher likelihood of being accepted than introducing new permanent members.

### **VI.3. Factor 3 – A united front**

The likelihood of a successful reform proposal being passed highly depends on the number of countries supporting it. Looking at the historical precedents, it is clear that in case of the success of the 1965 reform, the united front of the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement played an immense role (McDonald & Patrick, 2010:34). Support from a relatively big group of states is not only important for achieving the number of votes needed to pass a proposal, but also for achieving that the proposal gets to the point when it is being voted about. Even though the idea of reform proposals come and go since the 1960s, they do not tend to get in front of the General Assembly for a vote, but rather they are stuck at the level of discussions and negotiations. Consequently, a reform proposal needs the support of a group of states, so that they can exercise their bargaining and lobbying powers to convince other UN member states to keep discussing the proposal and to conduct a vote about it.

Nowadays it seems problematic that countries who aspire to achieve a change in the composition of the UNSC do not show a united front, but they are rather divided even amongst themselves about how the SC should be reformed. The most obvious division is seen between the G4 group and the UFC coalition, where due to regional rivalries the latter group wishes to impede the members of the former from gaining permanent seats in the Council. These divisions are detrimental to the cause of achieving change in the composition of the SC, since not only do these groups struggle to convince the P5 countries but they also weaken each other by having separate and contradictory proposals. The three analysed groups hold irreconcilable positions

on reforms, and they are unable to agree whether the main aim is to harness major power capabilities or to increase equitable representation (Patrick & et al, 2023:4). Consequently, until the majority of states demanding reforms are not able to find a proposal in the middle ground among themselves, reform is quite unlikely to happen.

#### **VI.4. Factor 4 – Rising revisionism**

The three aforementioned factors are of utmost importance; however, they were also true for reform proposals of the past. What is unique when analysing the likelihood of reforms in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the analysis on the current distribution of power and foreign relations in the international system. Consequently, the research points out how the rising tensions and the phenomenon of rising revisionism in the world might influence the multilateral functioning of the UN negatively, and with that it might reduce the likelihood of achieving UNSC reforms.

Currently the likelihood of UNSC reforms is constrained by political divisions more than by institutional hardships. The division of interests of different states and the rise of realist tendencies in certain P5 countries limit the chance for cooperation for reforms. It is important to emphasize that France and the United Kingdom are not analysed separately in the research since they seem more open to negotiations of reform proposals, and they have not cast a veto since the end of the Cold War in the Security Council (Patrick & et al, 2023:7). However, Russia, China and a potentially Trump-led USA would keep focusing on their national interests disproportionately, thus reducing the chance for multilateral discussion and considerations when it comes to finding a compromise for reforms. In general, it should be expected that the P5 countries will not be huge supporters of reforming the Council, especially if it comes to extending the permanent membership. However, the rising revisionist tendencies further deteriorate the chance for support. The war in Ukraine seems to signal the end to the post-Cold War period and a potential start for a new era of great power competition (Patrick & et al, 2023:55). The rising geopolitical tensions and the climate of instability and unpredictability further complicate the effective functioning of the SC and its potential reforms.

Even if it seems unsure whether P5 countries would support any change to the SC in the current years full of tension, the pressure from other member states for reforming the Council will keep growing especially in order to balance the current distribution of power. This means that the rising revisionism in the world is not only a challenge to UNSC reforms but it might also be a possibility. If states demanding change realize that in the current climate full of conflicts it is even more important to be represented in the Security Council, they might form a united front

and lobby for reform proposals. However, it is important that member states should be ready for compromise, otherwise they stand no chance of convincing the P5 countries.

Based on these considerations, it remains unlikely whether reform can be achieved in the upcoming years due to the ever-increasing division and tensions between members states of the UN fuelled by the revisionist tendencies. This analysis of the current world order gives a new perspective for analysing the likelihood of UNSC reforms, and it fills a missing gap in the literature, by not only analysing the events of the past but giving relevance for the present and the future likelihood of reforming the composition of the Security Council.

## **VII. Conclusion**

The idea of reforming the composition of Security Council has been a debated issue in the last sixty years. In the light of the current unstable and unpredictable international system, the Security Council should hold its pivotal role in maintaining international peace and security. Consequently, this paper analysed the likelihood of reforms of the composition of the SC, which has the potential to enhance its legitimacy by including more member states in the decision-making.

### **VII.1. Answering the research question**

The findings of this paper are based on analysing the past reform proposals of the composition of the Security Council and the lessons learnt from them, as well as providing an analysis on the current proposals and the international climate. Consequently, the researched identified four main factors influencing the likelihood of reforms in the 21<sup>st</sup> century while answering the research question. The first factor analysed the difficulties of amending the UN Charter which is needed for the implementation of reforms. It was discussed that this procedure reduces the likelihood of achieving reforms soon since it requires the support of a significant number of states. The second factor identified was the nature and content of a given reform proposal. Based on this analysis certain proposals, those that do not wish to alter veto rights and the number of permanent members, have a higher likelihood of being accepted. As the third factor, the need for a united front by countries wishing the alter the current composition of the SC was emphasized. Based on historical precedents as long as aspiring reformers are divided amongst themselves to such an extent, the likelihood of reform remains low. The fourth factor focused on examining the current distribution of power and the rising revisionist tendencies, and how they might affect the likelihood of reforms negatively. This last factor is of utmost importance

as it gives a unique layer of analysis for the likelihood of implementing reforms in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **VII.2. General conclusions of the paper**

Analysing the likelihood of implementing reforms about the composition of the UNSC is a complex process and it is influenced by several factors, thus no certain answer can be given whether reforms will be implemented in 5 or 10 years. However, what can be analysed are the factors influencing the likelihood of achieving reforms and while doing that identifying the negative practices or tendencies which must be changed to achieve the goal. The paper identified that currently there is general support for reforms by the member states of the UN, but the divisions about the actual content of the reforms and the revisionist tendencies influencing the behaviour of especially certain P5 members reduce the chance of implementing them.

However, the world is bigger than five, thus even if the revisionist tendencies will not change in the upcoming years, other member states have a chance to come together and set up a common reform proposal also considering the interests of the P5 countries, and thus with a united front getting closer to achieving change. Consequently, it seems that there is a lot of space for improvement, and that the current situation also provides opportunities and not just challenges. If states realize to take these opportunities and work together, slowly but steadily they might be able to achieve change, but until this does not happen, the likelihood of reforms remain marginal.

At the current moment the likelihood of achieving reforms in the composition of the UNSC remains limited, but it is possible that the upcoming year of re-evaluating the functioning of the UN at its 80-year anniversary will bring meaningful discussion and a chance to move forward. Until then, the Security Council remains a pivotal institution and an indispensable stabilizing force for the international community which also needs to adapt to the changing world order. However, it should not be forgotten that reform is a process and there are a lot of small steps on the way until achieving promising results.

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