



CHINA'S STANCE ON UNSC REFORM THE DEVELOPING WORLD FACTOR

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Pursuing smart diplomacy, building global alliance and pushing the cause of the developing world has been the hallmark of Chinese global diplomacy in recent times. Beijing's advocacy for greater partaking in African and developing world for UNSC representation is a testimony of that. While China's stance on the UN Security Council reform is closely linked to its broader dialogue of reforming the UN, the immediate policy priority that Beijing holds with regard to the reform is how to reduce the impact and pre-eminence of the United States and its allies, and use the UN as a forum for its global presence and objectives.

The issue about reforming the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is not new. While the G-4 countries (Germany, India, Japan and Brazil) are being considered as the natural frontrunners for permanent seats in the UNSC, African countries seem to be opposing such an expansion and pushing their candidature, supported by China. China argues that the issue should be dealt with in a “rational” and “consensus” mode with greater representation from the “developing world,” particularly Africa.

Beijing's Official Stance

In 1992, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution, which intensified debate on UNSC reform. The key issues are: membership categories, veto powers, regional representation, size of the expanded body, and working methods and modules of the UNSC. The P-5 countries have different views. For the Chinese, the expansion of UNSC membership is at the core of UN reform. China holds that the UN needs to enhance its authority and advocates representation of Africa and the developing world, without advocating or proposing for them the veto power. Beijing seems to be indisposed to dilute power and space to the proposed new members parallel to the power and space the P-5 nations enjoy.

For example, in a 2005 position paper on UN reform, China outlined five fundamentals concerning the UNSC reform: (a) the UNSC reform should enhance the “authority and efficiency of the council”; (b) representation of the developing countries should be given priority; (c) rotating basis partaking in the decision-making process for small and medium-sized

countries; (d) geographic representation symbolizing cultures and civilizations; (e) regional groups should build a consensus on reform proposal with respect to their region and rotation method. In a new position paper in 2010, three fundamentals are discernible: (a) China does not see UNSC reform in isolation but links it with UN reform as a whole; (b) it calls for reform of the working methods of UNSC along with greater representation of the African and developing world; (c) it opposes placing any specific time limit in reforming the UNSC. These declared positions are directly or indirectly linked to Beijing's broader global agenda and diplomacy.

In fact, the debate needs to be seen in the light of how Beijing plans to reshape the global order. Chinese strategists see the dialogue of UNSC permanent membership expansion as a “political game,” having ramifications over the “redistribution of power.” The UNSC reform is both dense and exciting for the Chinese. While the UN as an organization remains undemocratic and hierarchical in the existing P-5 setup, entailing U.S. supremacy, Beijing endorses the privileged status of being a permanent member and holding the exclusive veto. In the Chinese perception, a “rational” and “reasonable” UNSC reform would improve not only the “authority” and “efficiency” of the council, but also China's clout as a global power.

China is aware that the U.S. does not believe in the principle of democratic accountability for its global actions. An interaction with Chinese scholars like Ye Hailin and Yang Xi-aoping at the Chinese think-tank SASS explains this perception where they openly state that China does not trust Barack Obama's rhetorical support to India's UNSC candidature. This perception and strategy suits China not having to air an



open opinion on the issue. Similarly, an influential Shanghai expert says that “the course of P-5 in UNSC should not be diluted, because if UNSC expands to the level of P-10, the influence of China and the U.S. will diminish slowly.”

The fundamental slogan that Beijing promotes is associated with its dialogue of establishing a “just and democratic international order on the basis of international law and multilateral cooperation and negotiations.” The strategy is to accentuate the U.S. behaviour of predominance, which Beijing believes should be exposed to a maximum. In that context, among multilateral institutions, the UNSC offers a useful weapon to China, the veto, for restricting U.S. prominence. Historical examples suggest this strategy. In 1999, China teamed up with Russia over the Kosovo crisis to thwart the U.S.-led intervention, and during the Iraq war, China worked together with France and other non-permanent members calling for prolonged scrutiny against the U.S. idea of using force outright.

There is certain conviction among the Chinese that the UNSC reform will not take place unless the U.S. takes a formal stance on the issue and gives up its leadership position. At the same time, Beijing along with other P-5 members ultimately has to take a flexible position through “consensus” and play a constructive role individually. From the Chinese perspective, the U.S. diplomatic circles would be indisposed to expend their energies and prestige on such a high-risk proposition, conceiving a bargaining position that might estrange the leading countries which are supposed to be mainly U.S. allies. Chinese dialogue on candidates like India and South Africa is interesting, as it permits a greater role for these two ‘developing world’ countries, without any permanency at the UNSC. Therefore, an interesting point is the Chinese pursuance of BRICS. Perceiving the emergence of the BRICS countries as an opportunity to reduce the impact of U.S. hegemony at the global level, China welcomes the inclusion of India and South Africa in the UNSC as non-permanent members.

Beijing’s Specific Position

Beijing objects to the proposal on the collective inclusion issue of the G-4 candidates to the UNSC as “faulted,” and in 2005 stated that it would veto the G-4 proposal. A former counselor with the Chinese Permanent Mission to the UN, Wu Miaofa, stated that “the process should be made with democratic consultations. If they want to force their way in, then it will probably end in a failure.” Beijing’s primary objections are that G-4 does not have representation from Africa and that Japan and Germany are not developing countries. Moreover, both Japan and Germany are U.S. allies and India is increasingly be-

coming one.

Japan’s case is strongly opposed by Beijing because of historical hostility between the two. Japan’s candidature was supported by various developed and developing countries on the basis that Japan has provided a substantial amount to the UN budget. The Chinese objection is that global responsibility and prominence should not be defined in terms of how rich a country is, but on its contribution to peace and developmental objectives of the UN. Japan’s historical wartime baggage of atrocities also raises questions on its credentials.

The cases of Germany, Brazil and India are checked by other influential neighboring regional countries. For example, Brazil is opposed by Mexico, while Pakistan and Italy strongly oppose India’s case. This suits Beijing’s formulation that regional groupings should have their own consensus through closed-door meetings. However, the Chinese formulation regarding India’s case is ambiguous. All other P-5 countries have time and again supported India’s candidature. Beijing has diplomatically played safe so far and stated that “it understood and supported India’s aspirations”, without advocating openly its support for India. This has to be understood in the broader China-India context. Beijing’s stance on India’s candidature is a mixture of its historical rivalry and plans to deny India the opportunity of becoming a global power.

Broadly, China’s stance on India’s prospect for permanent membership is based on five premises. *First*, Chinese diplomats and officials realize that India possesses the strength to become a global power that could eventually challenge the Chinese pre-eminence in Asia. *Second*, China sees India’s global profile as a “U.S. supporter” and counter to its global interests. *Third*, if China supports India’s case, the UNSC is likely to be expanded and Africa has to be represented in the “developing countries” category. *Fourth*, China mixes India’s membership issue with the debate of UN reform. Although experts play it safe by stating that “if India manages to get two-thirds of the UN General Assembly support, China will support India’s case,” they do see UNSC expansion linked with many other issues and there is a lack of “consensus in the international community.” *Fifth*, China does not want to grant any leverage to India in the UN as it is aware of India’s influence as a “peace-loving nation.” In April 2011 India is planning to host a large group of foreign ministers and UN envoys from the least developed countries (LDCs) which are a powerful bloc in the UN. These developments are noticed in the Chinese diplomatic circles, and it does not want to take an early call easily on India’s membership of UNSC.



UN as a Path to Power

China is likely to play the most important role in shaping the future direction of the UN. The country has moved a long way with the UN since it replaced Taiwan in 1971. With the introduction of Deng Xiaoping's economic reform and "open door foreign policy" in 1978, the country has socialized itself greatly, particularly through the UN. Gradually, the matter of the UN has become special in the Chinese foreign policy stratagem.

Hu Jintao introduced the "Harmonious World" slogan that was quite parallel to the UN goals of lasting peace and common prosperity. Developing countries appreciated this Chinese strategy which reflected the concerns of the people of the developing world. In between, China has showed considerable ability to learn and adapt to international conditions and has arrived at a stage of massive international engagement and promotion of multilateral "active diplomacy." China's current institutional diplomacy is clearly visible in the UN system.

Since "9/11," China has stressed that the UN has a unique position in global politics. Discussion has focused on the "consolidation of the authority of UNSC" while managing global crises and consolidating China's position. While previous records suggest that China used to be reactive to UN multilateral diplomacy, it is more proactive to UN affairs today, playing a lead role on various fronts. For example, China proposed the first ever UNSC permanent-five summit in September.

Classical studies explain that the UN has always been a "constant factor" in China's foreign policy. While the UN has responded positively to China on various issues, it has equally accommodated Chinese interests and its rising weight in multilateral diplomacy. For example, in 2005 the UN established the China-African Business Partnership and the China-Africa Business Council. Similarly, in 2006 the UN Development Programme (UNDP) established the International Poverty Reduction Centre in Beijing. Its main aim has been to transmit the Chinese success pattern of development to other developing countries. China has taken special interest in contributing in terms of donations to the UNDP's Voluntary Trust Fund for the support of South-South Cooperation, which facilitates the

promotion of dialogue among the Southern countries. Politically, Beijing has also been active in debating and taking a stance on various global issues like the Darfur crisis, Somalia, Congo (Kinshasa), Iraq, Afghanistan, and the recent Libyan case etc.

China views the presence and alignment with the UN as an opportunity to showcase its greater presence in global politics and as a "responsible power." The Chinese role in UN peacekeeping operations has grown over time, and has been quite impressive in comparison to the other P-5 countries. Beijing is today the fourteenth-largest troop contributor to UN peacekeeping with nearly 2140 soldiers and police officers in various missions like Haiti, Lebanon, Liberia and Sudan. China has also brought domestic legal reforms to match the UN conventions and improve its human rights record. Enforcement has often trailed behind enactment, but the number of legal initiatives of which China is signatory today is imposing. China has signed and ratified the international Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights (2001) and is considering ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1998).

In sum, China's stance on UNSC reform is linked to the reduction of the impact and eminence of the United States; the reformation of the UN; and greater democratization of the decision-making process, with the voice of the developing world having the edge. China's formulation of putting the African and developing world in front for UNSC reform is a plan of its global planning, and should be seen in the context of restraining U.S. unilateralism.

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