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### **A Bigger Security Council, with Power to Act**

The world is looking to the United Nations to find solutions for a swirling array of problems nuclear weapons in Iran, genocide in Darfur and ensuring that war does not break out again between Israel and Hezbollah. But if the United Nations is ever to live up to our hopes, world leaders should confront the single most important issue that would actually make a difference: reforming the Security Council.

We need a Security Council that is both representative and effective. That means expanding its membership to include Germany, Japan, India, Brazil, South Africa, Nigeria and at least one Muslim nation such as Egypt or Indonesia, as well as a rotating group of smaller nations.

It means making it possible to actually reach a decision with an expanded Council by abolishing the veto for all Security Council resolutions authorizing direct action in response to a crisis.

And it means creating a Concert of Democracies to lobby for effective reform and to create a possible alternative decision-making body if such reform ultimately proves impossible.

Expanding the Security Council membership has been on the UN's agenda for more than 15 years, spawning countless working groups and task forces and rounds of diplomatic wrangling. Germany, Japan, India and Brazil have been the most vocal countries in seeking a Security Council seat they pushed hard in the summer of 2005 but ran into a wall. The United States was only willing to publicly support Japan, and China promptly fomented public demonstrations against Japanese membership.

Equally important is membership for at least two African countries, to add perspective and give legitimacy to UN action in places like Darfur.

The odd thing is that Germany, Japan, India, Brazil and South Africa, one of the two African states that would join under any of the plans currently circulating for Security Council expansion, are all stable liberal democracies. Why wouldn't this appeal to the Bush administration, which has made democracy promotion its highest foreign-policy priority, and why shouldn't it appeal to America as a whole?

The standard answer is that expanding the Security Council will only make a slow and often stalemated decision-making process even worse. Fair enough. But the answer to that is not preserving the status quo, but rather getting rid of the biggest obstacle in the process the Security Council's permanent member veto.

Just imagine the difference in the UN's ability to get action on Darfur or Iran if it did not face the threat of a Russian or Chinese veto. Diplomacy would have genuine chance to work, in which all the nations on the Security Council would count.

Permanent members would retain a veto on resolutions to censure nations or declare support for or opposition to particular policies, but resolutions requiring action in the face of international crises would pass by either simple majority or weighted majority vote.

Finally, the United States should simultaneously create a new organization for liberal democracies willing to commit themselves to a stringent set of obligations toward one another. Called a Concert of Democracies, this organization would allow its members to work together on issues like UN reform and reform of other 1945 institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Such a body would not be "the West versus the rest," but would instead include countries such as India, South Africa, Turkey, Indonesia, South Korea, Mexico, Brazil and Argentina. Its creation would also signal that the world is not stuck forever with old institutions if they cannot be reformed for a new world.

Are these pie-in-the-sky ideas? Only because the United States and its allies have not succeeded in summoning the true spirit of 1945. The Bush administration has repeatedly compared the years since 9/11 to the Truman era, equating "Islamofascism" with Communism and urging Americans to gear up for the Long War. Yet the Truman administration showed imagination and leadership in creating institutions to lock in a set of shared goals and values.

The United States should show similar leadership today and make the reform of those institutions its top priority as a necessary precondition for advancing its other goals.

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