**A Third Way for Security Council Reform: The Creation of Semi-Permanent Members
SHINYO Takahiro / Special Advisor to the President of Kwansei Gakuin University and Former UN Ambassador**

June 4, 2024

The world has entered a new era of conflict and war with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Israel's assault on Gaza. However, the Security Council has fallen into serious dysfunction due to the abuse of veto power by its permanent members, Russia and the United States.

Japan and other nations have advocated Security Council reform, and discussions have been ongoing in the General Assembly since 1994. In 2009, intergovernmental negotiations began. However, these negotiations have been no more than discussions without concrete draft resolutions for 15 years. This approach will not lead to reform. We must swiftly transition to negotiations for drafting a General Assembly resolution.

Many UN member states believe that Security Council reform is necessary to strengthen the UN's conflict resolution capabilities. They do not want to increase the number of privileged permanent members and believe that the veto should be abolished or restricted. Regarding the expansion of permanent members, Russia and China oppose making Japan and Germany permanent members and would not ratify a charter amendment enabling it.

Japan should reconsider whether the expansion of permanent members, which it has pursued so far, remains a desirable and feasible form of reform. The proposal pursued by the G4 (Japan, Germany, India, and Brazil) to expand the permanent membership does not have the support of two-thirds of the member states. Clinging to the G4 proposal alone offers no prospect of progress. It is only natural to have an alternative plan.

If the expansion of permanent members is the first path, and the expansion of only non-permanent members is the second path, the third path would be the creation of "semi-permanent members" with longer terms than non-permanent members (who serve two-year terms). We should aim to create "semi-permanent members" (or longer-term members) with terms of 4 to 8 years, allowing for consecutive re-election.

Currently, non-permanent members are prohibited from immediate re-election, meaning they must leave the Security Council for several years after their term ends. However, semi-permanent members could be re-elected consecutively, and if repeatedly elected, they would effectively be permanent members. The number could be 6 to 8 countries or more, and joint seats for two countries could also be considered. To counter the G4, there is a "Uniting for Consensus Group" (UFC) including Italy, South Korea, and Pakistan, which demands only the expansion of non-permanent members. This proposal to create “semi-permanent members” might work as a compromise with the UFC and permanent members.

Reform should proceed in two stages. In the first stage, by around 2030, we aim to create semi-permanent members. Middle powers such as Japan, Germany, India, Brazil, South Africa, Türkiye, and South Korea would be eligible and work to restore the credibility and functionality of the Security Council through their contributions to international peace and security.

In the second stage, by 2045, the centennial of the UN, we aim to carry out the reform of the permanent members. Additionally, Japan and like-minded countries should work on veto reform by submitting a General Assembly resolution, calling for the restraint of the veto, such as not exercising it in cases of genocide.

If the permanent membership is like the first class of an airplane, and the non-permanent membership is the economy class, then semi-permanent membership should be the premium economy rather than business class. A reform benefiting only a handful of countries will not be accepted by the UN. The creation of semi-permanent members would mean countries like Japan would no longer run for non-permanent membership, increasing the chances for small and medium-sized countries to become non-permanent members. Without win-win reform, support will not be forthcoming in multilateral negotiations.

In 2024, Japan fell to fourth place in GDP, overtaken by Germany. It is projected to be overtaken by India in 2026, dropping to fifth place. Japan is already on its path as a middle power. As a global middle power with significant influence, Japan must cooperate with Global South countries to pursue a new multilateralism. It must help shape the Security Council to effectively manage this era of conflict and war, making the UN a fortress of peace for over 100 years since its inception.

Takahiro Shinyo is Special Advisor to the President of Kwansei Gakuin University and Former UN Ambassador.

The English-Speaking Union of Japan