

The Brazilian Endeavor for the Reform of the United Nations Security Council: Diplomatic Perspectives on Strategic Approaches

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Executive Summary

This Policy Brief aims to present evidence to support the formulation of possible recommendations to Brazilian diplomacy regarding the defense of the reform of the United Nations Security Council and Brazil's pursuit of a permanent seat. Brazil has a historical prominence in advocating for the transformation of the UNSC, striving to ensure that the body reflects the new global distribution of power by giving voice to countries of the Global South.

It is emphasized that the Security Council has an outdated structure that does not, in a representative and democratic manner, reflect the new voices of the international arena. Thus, the lack of legitimacy and decision-making effectiveness within the body, especially in light of international transformations, underscores the urgency of a broad reform that reflects contemporary political dynamics and responds effectively to threats to international peace and security.

In this context, the study proposes recommendations to strengthen Brazil's diplomatic action, aiming to expand international support for Brazil's bid for a permanent seat and contributing to the advancement of the reform debate. Among the main suggestions are: intensifying dialogue with Latin American countries; energizing the work of the G4; strengthening strategic

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partnerships with the Global South; and maintaining UNSC reform as a constant item on the agenda of multilateral forums.

To implement these measures, a Working Group within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty) is proposed, specifically tasked with addressing Security Council reform and guiding diplomatic efforts and strategies. The implementation of these measures may enhance the legitimacy of the Brazilian proposal, consolidate consensus, regionalize and stimulate debates, and promote a more democratic and inclusive Security Council.

Introduction

The United Nations Security Council is one of the most relevant bodies in the international arena, as it constitutes the core of the UN's political power and has as its main function the maintenance of international peace and security (Rosas 2005). Its structure was developed following the Yalta Conference (1945), at which the great powers, in the aftermath of the Second World War, met to discuss control over decision-making in the international system (Seitenfus 2016).

From this perspective, the UNSC currently comprises 15 member states: 5 permanent and 10 non-permanent. The five nations holding permanent seats on the Council, known as the P5 (Permanent Five), are China, the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and Russia. In addition to holding permanent seats, these countries also have the exclusive power of veto, as provided for in Article 27 of the United Nations Charter. This mechanism requires unanimity among the P5 for the adoption of substantive resolutions, thereby creating an institutionalized imbalance of power (Rosas, 2005).

The other ten seats on the Security Council are the result of a 1963 reform, which expanded the number of temporary seats from six to ten. The rotation of these seats is carried out through a general election in the UN General Assembly and follows terms of regional distribution: three countries from Africa; two from Asia; two from Latin America; two from Western Europe and other states, such as those from Oceania and Canada; and one from Eastern Europe (Rosas 2005 p. 33). However, this reform was not sufficient to resolve the problem of representation, as it maintained a structure of global governance that continues to exclude the permanent participation of Global South countries from the decision-making center (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022).

In this sense, Brazil has explicitly expressed its commitment to reforming this body since 1989, presenting its official candidacy for a permanent seat in 1994 (Mendes 2015). This stance highlights Brazil's intention to promote a more democratic and inclusive reform that can represent developing countries and strengthen the legitimacy and effectiveness of the UNSC.

Analysis

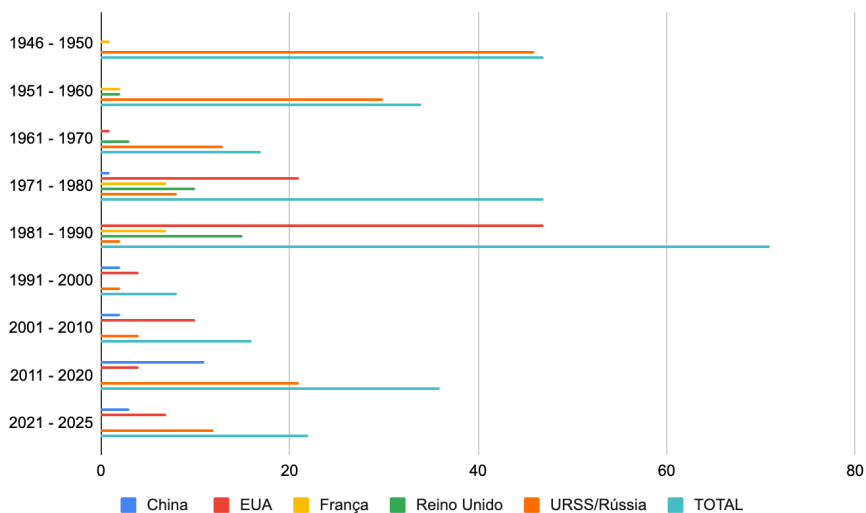
The new configurations and international phenomena that emerged, particularly after the end of the Cold War, were responsible for significantly transforming the international system (Fernandez, Pagliari & Pizzolatti, 2024). Accordingly, the current landscape is marked by intensified political polarization, humanitarian crises, and destabilizing geopolitical tensions, making the reform of the United Nations and its Security Council an urgent issue so as to ensure greater efficiency, legitimacy, and representativeness in decision-making.

In this context, it can be observed that the UN's institutional arrangement remains frozen, reflecting an outdated 1945 structure incapable of accommodating contemporary transformations. This institutional rigidity has limited the United Nations' capacity to respond to new global challenges and perpetuates an international governance model centered on the power of major powers, to the detriment of developing and emerging countries of the Global South.

As a result, persistent problems can be observed within the UNSC, such as inefficiency in responding effectively to global conflicts, a lack of transparency in decision-making processes, and low levels of information disclosure of its activities (Rosas 2005). Moreover, the veto power constitutes one of the main obstacles to the approval of resolutions. The frequent use of this mechanism by permanent members promotes decision-making paralysis and prevents the adoption of coordinated, timely resolutions in the face of threats to international peace and security.

This issue is shown in Figure 1, which presents the number of times each permanent member has exercised veto power, by decade, since the beginning of the UNSC's activities in 1946.

Chart 1 - United Nations Security Council Vetoes (1946–2015)



Source: Created by the author (2025); Data: United Nations (2025).

The data reveals that the veto power has been used to block nearly 300 resolutions throughout the history of the UNSC, with the Cold War period representing the highest incidence. This phase, marked by bipolarity in the international system and by the power struggle between the United States and the then Soviet Union, both permanent members of the Council, led, between 1946 and 1990, to the vetoing of more than 360 draft resolutions.

Even after this period, the veto mechanism continues to be used frequently. Between 2021 and 2025 alone, 22 proposals were blocked, 12 by Russia, 7 by the United States, and 3 by China. It can thus be observed that the UNSC's deliberative capacity is significantly affected by the recurrent use of the veto.

It is within this context of persistent decision-making asymmetry that Brazil has intensified its efforts to promote a reform that combines greater effectiveness and representation, in line with the new configuration of global governance (Viana 2024). Brazilian engagement in support of the Council's expansion and the pursuit of a permanent seat gained momentum after the end of the Cold War, a period in which the bipolar international order gave way to a more multipolar international dynamic. In this direction, in 1989 Brazil began advocating for a broad reform of the UNSC, including the expansion

of the category of permanent members, and in 1994 it officially submitted its candidacy for a permanent seat (Mendes 2015).

Historically, the country has adopted various diplomatic strategies to advance the debate and broaden international support for institutional reform and for its bid for a permanent seat. Among these initiatives, Brazil's participation in the G4, comprising Brazil, Germany, Japan, and India, stands out as an alliance of mutual support for their respective permanent-seat candidacies on the UNSC.

Moreover, Brazil is one of the countries that has most frequently served as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, in addition to participating in UN Peacekeeping Operations, such as the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) (Viana 2024).

Since the beginning of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's third presidential term, the issue of UNSC reform has been brought to the forefront of Brazil's foreign policy agenda. Brazil's actions have been aimed at strengthening multilateralism and advocating a more democratic system of international governance. As such, the issue has been highlighted in official speeches, bilateral meetings, and during Brazil's presidencies of the G20 (2024) and BRICS (2025), injecting renewed momentum into the debate on Security Council reform.

This longstanding national engagement in favor of transforming the UNSC, combined with Brazil's pacifist tradition, participation in multilateral organizations, and its extensive diplomatic trajectory within the UN, including service on the Security Council and in peacekeeping missions, underscores Brazil's potential to lead and articulate efforts toward reforming the United Nations' decision-making structures.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis presented, this section outlines possible recommendations to strengthen Brazil's position in advocating for reform of the United Nations Security Council and pursuing a permanent seat. In this regard, the following are suggested:

1. Intensify dialogue and relations with Latin American countries, especially Argentina and Mexico, which have expressed reservations regarding Brazil's bid for a permanent seat. This recommendation is grounded in the importance of building a cohesive regional consensus

capable of legitimizing and sustaining Brazil's claim, under the argument of continental representativeness.

2. Revitalize the work of the G4. The group's efforts could be reinforced through greater political and diplomatic coordination. It would also be possible to promote stronger articulation to garner support from emerging and developing countries for its reform proposal, with a particular focus on nations in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The purpose of this recommendation is to enhance the group's legitimacy and increase the political weight of its alliance in pursuit of its transformational objectives.
3. Strengthen strategic partnerships with the Global South. It is also suggested that Brazil continues to build strategic alliances with Global South countries to consolidate a joint claim in favor of a single reform proposal. Such coordination would reinforce the argument for democratic reform.
4. Keep the issue of UNSC transformation consistently on the multilateral agenda, using forums such as BRICS and the G20 to reinforce it. These groups include permanent members of the Security Council and are therefore decisive in advancing a joint resolution proposal and in supporting Brazil's candidacy.

Proposals for Policy Implementation

To implement the proposed recommendations, an initial step would be to establish a Working Group for the Transformation of the Security Council under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty). This group would be responsible for developing studies, strategies, and its own guidelines to strengthen Brazil's position in advocating for Security Council reform and advancing debates on the reform proposal.

Furthermore, Itamaraty could promote itinerant diplomatic missions to strengthen dialogue with Latin American governments, as highlighted in the recommendations. These meetings would seek to build a common understanding that incorporates the positions of those countries that do not support Brazil's bid. Such targeted action would help consolidate a more cohesive regional base for Security Council reform, reinforcing the legitimacy of Brazil's candidacy and expanding the country's capacity to articulate its position in multilateral forums.

To strengthen the G4's joint action, it is recommended that an annual work plan is developed to guide the group's activities. In addition, Brazil should reinforce its dialogue within regional blocs and multilateral organizations of the Global South, amplifying its role as an emerging country that consistently seeks political dialogue and advocates for democratic and equitable reform.

Conclusion

The issue of Security Council reform remains a complex matter, as it involves multiple political, diplomatic, and historical nuances that require a cohesive long-term strategy grounded in activism and balance.

The proposed guidelines, regarding the intensification of regional dialogue, the revitalization of the G4, and the strengthening of alliances with the Global South, seek to underscore the importance of a Brazilian political and diplomatic strategy focused specifically on UNSC reform. Through such coordination, grounded in cohesion and multilateralism, it will be possible to broaden international support and intensify debates to promote a consensus capable of leading to a representative and democratic transformation of the Security Council.

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