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## **UNSC reformation: Leveraging the Summit of the Future outcomes**

### **Introduction**

In 2024, close to 49 per cent of the world's population will head to the polls in over 60 countries (and the EU), the results of which will be consequential for years to come (Ewe 2023). These votes come amidst global economic strife, geopolitical contestation, increased cost of living and global defence expenditure, and rising tensions in international security, all of which threaten to upend the post-1945 liberal international order.

While elections across all 64 countries are vital to the international community, the elections in the US can be touted as being "first among equals" as far as multilateralism, global politics and international security are concerned. The 2024 US presidential election, which will elect the 48th President of the US, has captured much of the imagination of policymakers across the world, ranging from the Indo-Pacific to the Med-Atlantic.

### **Setting the stage**

Policymakers across the world have deliberated about what a second Trump presidency might bring to the global high table or what an administration led by Kamala Harris may look like (Subramanian and Debusmann 2024).

For most countries around the globe, the possible Republican and Democratic administrations bring distinct futures. The Democratic Party believes in the US-led international order and the US's continued role in preserving and upholding the post-1945 liberal world order (Pike et al. 2024). Biden's internationalism in the past four years shifted American foreign policy from international military interventions to active diplomacy backed by American strength. Kamala Harris intends to continue the US's leadership role by "standing with allies, standing up to dictators, and leading on the world stage" in a "New Way Forward" for American foreign policy in a multipolar world (The New York Times 2024).

On the other hand, the Republican agenda leans heavily towards American isolationism, pragmatic realism and a reductionist version of erstwhile Republican president Ronald Reagan's "peace through strength" doctrine. In their election bid this year, the Republican ticket championed more realist foreign policy principles through espousing protectionist trade policies, negligence of the US's transatlantic security partnership and open criticism of the UN's functionality in the international community and the alleged benefits of globalism and globalisation (Walt 2021; O'Brien 2024; Nagy and Nagao 2024).

### **The US, the UN and the Summit of the Future**

The US has been the mainstay of the UN ever since its establishment in 1945 (Whineray 2020). Consequently, policy toward the UN has also been a cornerstone of American foreign policy. The US has greatly benefitted from exercising soft power diplomacy at the UN in building international consensus for its many international interventions—military and economic. Ratified UNSC resolutions command the respect of governments and citizens worldwide. UNSC resolutions are legally enforceable on all member states under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. As the preeminent institution of multilateralism, there is also legitimacy that the UN confers on any UNSC decree passed or resolution adopted because of its wide membership and inclusivity. For instance, the US pursued the First Gulf War with UN support, rallying nations to its cause in the UN General Assembly and the UNSC. A more recent instance is the

adoption of Resolution 2702 in 2023, which extended the UNSMIL by a year in Libya (United Nations Security Council 2023).

However, four fundamental factors are driving changes in this partnership—the Russia-Ukraine war, the Israel-Hamas war, the US presidential elections and the Russia-China axis in the UN. As the US Ambassador to the UN rallies nations to alienate Russia for its war on Ukraine, she stands almost alone in defending Israel against condemnations of its onslaught on civilians and destruction of social infrastructure in the Gaza Strip. In the UNSC, the Russia-China axis has ossified the UN's power centre for maintaining international security. The US-UN relationship also faces uncertainty stemming from the US's upcoming presidential election.

In the case of a Republican victory, were the US to turn into a great power that is isolationist and protectionist, it would serve the UN and the global multilateral architecture disastrously, for the US has been the mainstay of the modern global multilateral architecture.

In this pivotal moment, the UN held its Summit of the Future between 21-23 September 2024. The overarching agenda of the Summit was to reform multilateralism and global governance architecture, as well as reaffirm the international community's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals. The Pact for the Future, adopted by the UN General Assembly in its 79th session during the Summit, was passed by a record vote of 143 in favour to 7 against (Belarus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Iran, Nicaragua, Russian Federation, Sudan, Syria), with 15 abstentions (Wintour 2024). Actions 39 and 40 therein cover UNSC reforms, which, while ambitious, fall short of actionable steps on UNSC reforms. The Pact does little more than lip service to expanding regional and sub-regional representation, the UNSC's permanent and non-permanent seats and the Global South's role in multilateral decision-making. Lack of clarity on text-based negotiations, timeframes for UNSC reforms and disagreement among member states over the desired degree of reforms to the current system were major hurdles. Yet it was a step in the right direction because the Pact recognised the historical injustices against Africa, the need for veto reform (a first) and the inclusion of a "review" clause on UNSC decisions.

#### Future-proofing the UN in 2024

For transatlantic policymakers, the UNSC reforms have regained relevance since the war in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas conflict, especially now that the Iran-Israel rivalry threatens to destabilise a region critical for transatlantic energy security and trade. The US elections may bring an administration that will not view the US's role in the UN favourably and isolate Washington from the UN's international peace and security initiatives and reforms. Yet there is bipartisan consensus in the US pertaining to certain UNSC reforms that favour US foreign policy. European and US policymakers should be focusing on these consensus reforms while coordinating reform, as they serve the US and Europe's own interests and foreign policy goals.

1. **India's inclusion as a Permanent Member of the UNSC:** India has emerged as a pivotal partner to the US and the European Union. Historically, New Delhi has always subscribed to preventive diplomacy and the principles of peace-orientated conflict resolution. Additionally, of the G4, India is the only nuclear power. During the Summit, the US, the United Kingdom and France also backed India's permanent member bid, and Russia has historically supported India's aspirations for UNSC permanent membership (De 2024). India also shares a democratic tradition, values and common goals for a rules-based order and free and open global commons with the West, among other alignments. New Delhi is also a strong representative of the Global South, as demonstrated during its G20 Presidency and New Delhi's successful push to include the African Union in the G20 at the 2023 New Delhi Leaders' Summit (Bhomick 2023). Additionally, there is bipartisan consensus in the US about India's role in US foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific and Asia as a constructive, pivotal and increasingly important partner. For transatlantic policymakers, to back India and support New Delhi through backchannel diplomacy and further public endorsements will bode well for their pivot to

**Kommentiert [SE1]:** "onslaught" evtl. ein problematisches Wort in diesem Kontext?

Asia and restoring the Global South's trust in the Med-Atlantic's policymakers at a pivotal time when China and Russia are expanding their influence across Asia and Africa—increasingly important geographies for transatlantic policymakers. The challenge will be that China opposes a seat for India.

2. **Expanded regional representation and tenure of elected members of the UNSC:** The only true reform of the UNSC took place in 1965 when the UNSC membership was expanded to the “Elected 10” from 5 rotating non-permanent seats with expanded regional representation (Council on Foreign Relations 2024). However, the world has evolved since. Today’s complex *realpolitik* and geopolitical realities demand a more diverse and comprehensive geographical and regional representation within the UNSC. Ten elected members do not adequately represent global diversity and geography. Similarly, non-consecutive, rotating seats with 2-year terms and a 1-month presidency are not adequate timelines for debates as wide-ranging, layered, nuanced and international as those taking place in the UNSC (Council on Foreign Relations 2024). Terms, representation and tenure of members of the UNSC need urgent overhaul. Tenure should be allowed to be consecutive and expanded from two to three years; a 2-month presidency should be installed; and action should be taken to diversify and deepen geographical representation for a more inclusive security dialogue that includes those who are most adversely impacted and those middle powers whose voices can no longer be ignored at the global high table. This does not mean that any of the P5 should be removed, but expansion to include more permanent members and E10 is essential.

## Conclusion

The two reforms mentioned above have bipartisan consensus in the US, as African countries and India have become major partners of the US for different reasons. The EU and Europe’s permanent members in the UNSC have also thrown their weight behind India’s inclusion in the UNSC and Africa’s increased permanent representation in the UNSC (which was also mentioned in the Pact for the Future). Seeing these reforms through would serve many purposes for Med-Atlantic policymakers: countering the China-Russia axis in the UN and their burgeoning influence in the Global South, consolidating the transatlantic pivot to Asia (which Europe has been failing at compared with the US) and shedding the burden of colonialism which many Western countries bear and which has hindered East-West cooperation to varying degrees in the 21st century. More importantly, the expansion of the UNSC membership would maintain the relevance of the UN and restore faith globally in the UNSC and the international peace and security functions of the UN by making it more representative and adapting it to the current realities of the international community—economically and geopolitically. These reforms can be a major step in reversing the ongoing ossification of the UNSC and UN system at large which the world is currently witnessing.

*Note: The respective author is responsible for the content of the article. The contributions do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung and the Europa-Kolleg Hamburg.*

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