# The Changing Power Configuration in World Politics and the United Nations Security Council: Implication for Africa

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## ABSTRACT

This work examined the changing power configuration in World Politics and the United Nations Security Council: Implication for Africa. The aim of the study was to see how the evolution of power politics that played out with the injection of overriding powers to the United Nations Security Council is impacting, if at all, on the evolving trend in international politics. Our theoretical framework is multilateralism on which contemporary international relations is premised upon because it has with it practical dimensions of the increasing dynamics of global politics of the twenty-first century where non-state actors are playing prominent roles in total contrasts to the politics that created the UNSC. Our study applied descriptive methodology through secondary sources that were subjected to critical analysis. We discovered that the unfolding trend of events in international politics shows that the world has become more complex, more integrated and more interdependent than it was when the United Nations was set up. The historical and environmental forces that led to the formation of the United Nations are entirely different from the prevailing politics of the twenty-first century where the concept of power has become so multilaterized above the powers vested in the UNSC, especially with the globalizing processes. We recommend an entirely new global cooperation system that will capitalize on the new technological wave to tackle the emerging threats to international peace. State including African States should conserve efforts and resources mobilized towards permanent membership of the UNSC and veer them into strong consolidation of State Power that will be translated into formation of strong regional military, political and economic units to meet up the evolving challenges of world politics.

**Keywords:** *Power, World Politics, UNSC, Multilateralism, Regional blocs, 21$^{st}$ century.*

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**Background to the Study**

The question on how to gasp world politics can only be answered from a focus on power because power is a prevailing force in international politics. Politics is all about what is done and who get what. One of the fundamental truths about politics is the pursuit of interests which can only be actualized by the force of power. At heart, power is best understood in terms of control and command. It is the capacity to make others do as you wish. Power explains influence, and influence measures power. In international relations for a state to have overriding influence translated in terms of power, such a state must possess some tangible and intangible potential. According to Mac Ogonor (2000), it is the possession of these potentials that can make the state have the ability to push others around and also withstand push, pull and shove threats from other states in the world community.

World Politics has usually been transformed by an outbreak of a major or general war. Major wars provide punctuation marks in history because they force drastic realignments in the relationship, among states. It is usually after such total transformation that the international arena becomes sufficiently prepared to induce leaders and supporting publics of dominant nations to join in the task of re-organising the international community to avoid a repetition of the terrible tales just experienced. The emergence of the League of Nations and United Nations (UN) after World War 1 (WW1) and World War II (WW2) respectively can be seen as response to these transformational processes of history.

The League of Nations and the United Nation were created to act as global checks on the rising powers of states then and to promote international co-operation, peace and security. The League had three principal organs; The Council, The Assembly and The Secretariat. The prevalence of wars and unrest in Europe with the League and its organs and the rising military aggressions of states prepared the stage for World War II that ended with the creation of the United Nations. According to Patil, (1992) "The horrors of the two World Wars within thirty years produced an anxious post war climate, centered around deep-rooted differences in political, economic and social structures". The UN came up as the international organization to pilot this world setting. The formation of definite plans for the UN grew out of series of war time declarations and conferences from Teheran in 1943, Dumbarton Oaks in 1944, Yelta in 1945 and finally San Francisco in October 1945 where fifty –one Government finally drafted and adopted the UN charter, that was approved by a five permanent member that initiated the objective.

The Five Permanent Members including the United Kingdom, the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republic, the United States of America, France and China became known as the "Big Five" as well as the leading voice in the Security Council alongside other ten non-permanent members, elected by the General Assembly for a two –year term. Besides the General Assembly and the Security Council, the UN also has the Economic and Social Council, the Secretariat, the Trusteeship Council (now inactive since 1994) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The United Nation is a huge and imposing theatre of conflict of interests, of competition, values and co-operation in search of solution to common problems (Bowett 1975: 20-22).

The Security Council becomes the most powerful organ of the UN with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international Peace and Security. According to Bosco (2009) "the Security Council is a creation of great Power Politics…". Each member of the Security Council has one vote. Decisions on matters of procedures are made by an affirmative

vote of at least 7 of the 15 members. Decisions on substantive matters also require 7 votes, including the concurring votes of the five (5) permanent members provided that in decisions under chapter VI and paragraph 3 of Article 52, a Party to a dispute shall abstain from voting. Thus the dramatically changing international environment that produced the UN with the emerging great powers and other security threats have impinged on the responsibilities of the Security Council in carrying out its primary objectives.

In defense of our ascertain on war, the end of the Cold war which was ideological also reinvigorated power politics in international relations with the emergence of the United States as a dominating Powers, but with serious limitations in the face of the emerging challenges on world politics.

## Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to see how the evolution of Power Politics that played out in the UNSC is impacting if at all in the evolving trend in international politics. Specific objectives include;

(a)    Analyze the flow of power Politics in International Politics
(b)    Examine the role of the UNSC in maintaining World Peace and Security
(c)    Determine if the powers entrusted on the UNSC is still relevant in the face of the emerging trend in international politics.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is Multilateralism

Ruggie, J.(1993) defined Multilateralism as "an institutional form that coordinates relations among three (3) or more states on the basis of generalized principles of conduct".

Multilateralism encompasses wide arrays of global issues, actors and processes that make up the International system. It embodies various approaches to organizing and managing the complex relationships and interactions in the international arena. Contemporary International relation is premised on multilateralism, because it has with it practical dimensions of the increasing dynamics of global Politics of the 21$^{st}$ century where non-state actors and other evolving trends in total contrasts to the Politics that created the UN and the UNSC. Multilateralism according to Cot, R (1996) "is an active force shaping world order". It is an interrelated norm of diplomacy that aims to reduce conflict and promote co-operation. Multilateralism is a primary interrelated norm of diplomatic culture and a core feature of the new diplomacy.

## Elements of Multilateralism

1. Use of force only as a last resort and in self defense.
2. Continuous bilateral dialiogue between officially recognized representatives
3. Dialogue that is as open and transparence as possible.
4. Civility and tact as the essence of diplomatic discourse. The international order has become less bilateral and more multilateral.

The International order has become less bilateral more multilateral and also more regional. Materialism has become a core feature of diplomacy and a defining aspect of an emerging global order. With the UN, Multilateralism diplomacy has been effective in Peace and Security

as well as international economic development markets. The dynamics of multilateral diplomacy at the regional level and the role of non-state actors in international politics have raised questions on the effectiveness and efficiency of the UNSC on global Peace and Security.

According to Keohame and Nye (2001). International Interdependence has intensified as a result of expanding exchange and transactions among individuals & collective actors. Individual states can no longer handle problems arising from interdependence independently. This has led Nation States to pursue an internationalization of governance through the creation and strengthening of multilateral institutions that in most cases are infringing on their Sovereignty. Increasing demand for international co-operation has contributed to the establishment of international institutions. Multilateral institutions that constrain and guide their member states' behavior and relationships in accordance with generalized principles of conduct have become part and parcel of the international system.

**The United Nations and the Security Council**
The UN arose as an attempt to remedy the defects of the League of Nations. The formation of definite plans for the UN grew out of series of war time Declaration and Conference from Teheran in 1943, Dumbarton Oaks in 1944, Yelta in 1945 and finally San Francisco in October 1945 where fifty-one Governments finally drafted and adopted the UN charter. The establishment of the Un marked a significant milestone in the history of international relations. The Charter was approved by the five permanent member that Kingdom, Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (now Russia since the end of the cold war), United State of America, France and China, became known as the "Big Five" as well as the leading voice in the Security Council alongside other ten non-permanent members, elected by the General Assembly for a two –year term.

The Security Council acts as the principle decision making organ of the organization. Each member of the Security Council has one vote. Decisions on matters of procedure are made by an affirmative vote of at least 7 or the 15 members. Decisions on substantive maters also require 7 votes, including the concurring votes of all 5 permanent members, provided that in decisions under Chapter vi and paragraph 3 of Article 52, a party to a dispute shall abstain from voting. The concurring votes of all 5 permanent members are the veto power accorded them. The veto power and its exercise by the permanent members remains a central characteristic of the mechanism of the Security Council. Though the word does not occur in the UN charter, it is the common usage term for the power of any of the five permanent members of defeat a draft resolution to voting "No". These five permanent members agreed to the use of veto among themselves as a means of each exerting its influence in reconstructing the post-war world and safeguarding each power from being dragged into an armed conflict against its will (Patil 1992:13-14).

The veto is a frequently cited problem in the UN Security Council. By wielding the veto power, any of the UN Security Council's five Permanent Members could prevent the passage of a resolution not to their liking and the mere threat of a veto may lead to changes in the text of a resolution. As a consequence, an actual or threatened veto often prevents the Council from acting swiftly to address pressing international issues and grant the permanent five, great influence within the UN as a whole.

All these played out at the Dumbarton Oaks meeting, where the representative of France reiterated the atmosphere of crisis and warned that agreement was necessary to stop its escalation. The representative of China on his part insisted that the rule of unanimity was essential for strength and effectiveness of the Security Council to work. In the same vein, the representative of the Soviet Union expressed hope that agreement on joint interpretation would facilitate the creation of a truly effective and efficient international organization for the maintenance of peace. The representative of the United Kingdom insisted that peace must rest on the unanimity of the Great Powers, for without it, whatever was built would be on shifting sands, and hence the unanimity of the Great Powers was an inescapable one. According to him, the veto power was far from being a menace to the small powers but rather, their essential safeguard as compromise is a general law of political life and essential to political progress.

The United State representative on his part also maintained that the "Great Powers could preserve the peace of the world if United" and warned that they could not do so if dissension was sowed amongst them. According to him, it is only the unanimity of the Great Powers that could spare them the expended millions in wealth and lives so far experienced. The United State's Under-Secretary of State, Stettinius, in a world-radio broadcast on May, 29, 1945 defended the veto as not just a question power in the world for the maintenance of peace. However this event of history that gave then this power is now threatened by the changing power configuration in World Politics.

**The Concept of Power**
Power is the ability to influence one to do what he would not otherwise want to do or not do what he would have done. Power explains influence and influence measures power. Power and influence go together. Power is very vital and is a central concept in international relations. In Latin, the word for power is *imperium* which is identified with the state. Actors are powerful to the extent that they affect others more than others affect them. For a Nation to have such overriding influence translated in terms of power, such a nation must be seen to possess some tangible and intangible potential. It is the possession of these capabilities that can make the nation not only have the ability to push others around according to Mac-Ogonor ( 2000), but have the ability to withstand push, pull and shove threats from others within the international community. The tangible and intangible potentials can be measured by the following factors:
1. Geography and geopolitics
2. Technological advancement and know how
3. Industry (Productivity)
4. Population (Skill)
5. Economy ( Economic Stability )
6. Natural Resources (Endowment)
7. Government Forms (Political stability)
8. Political leaderships
9. Ideas-ideology (ideological orientation)
10. Moral (Human rights, rule of law, observance of International law)
11. Food Production
12. Military strength

All these can be measured by a State's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, the extent to which a State can influence others with all these instruments also depends on the extent that political leaders can mobilize and deploy them effectively and strategically around the world. The logic of power suggest that in war, the more powerful State will generally prevail. Estimate of the relative power of the two antagonists should help explain the outcome of each war. (Goldstein and Pevehouse 2008:45-48) . This logic of power is facing a twist in the evolving trend in world politics, especially in connection to State.

**Power and World Politics**
World Politics just as earlier said on power, has usually been transformed by an outbreak of a major or general war. Major wars often provide punctuation marks in history because they force drastic realignments in the relationship among states. It is usually after such total breakdown has the international situation been sufficiently prepared to induce leaders and supporting publics of dominant nations to join in the task of re-organizing the international community to avoid a repetition of the terrible tales just experienced. Most great powers rise and fall may be in response to the law of gravity. The evolutionary processes of the concept of power in world history have been undergoing changes as the world is being ordered in so many ways. Table 9 gives a picture of the evolution fo Great Power contest for world leadership from 1495-2025 by forecast.

**Table 1: The Evaluation of Great Power Rivalry for World Leadership 1495-2025**

| Date | Preponderant State(s) Seeking Hegemony | Other Powers Resisting Domination | Global War | New Order after Global War |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1495-15400 | Portugal | Spain, Valois, France, Burgundy, England Venice | Wars of Italy and the Indian Ocean 1494-1517 | Treaty of Tordesillas, 1517 |
| 1560-1609 | Spain | The Netherlands, France, England | Spanish – Dutch Wars, 1580-1608 | Truce of 1609, Evangelical Union and the Catholic League formed. |
| 1610-1648 | Holy Roman Empire(Hapsburg dynasty in Spain and Austria-Hungary) | Shifting and adhoc coalitions of mostly protestant states (Swoden, Holland) and German Principalities as well as Catholic France against remnants of papal rule. | Thirty Years War, 1618-1648 | Peace of Westphalia 1648 |
| 1650-1713 | France (Louis XIV) | The United Provinces, England, the Hapsburg Empire, Spain, major German States, Russia | Wars of the Grand Alliance 1688-1713 | Treat, of Urecht 1713 |
| 1792-1815 | France (Napoleon) | Great Britain, Prussia, Austria, Russia. | Napoleonic War 17192-1815 | Congress of Vienna and Concert of Europe 1815. |

| 1871-1914 | Germany, Turkey, Austria-Hungary | Great Britian, France, Russia, United States | World War I 1914-1918 | Treaty of Versailles creating the League of Nationa, 1919 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1933-1945 | Germany, Japan, Italy | Great Britain, France, Soviet Union, United State | Cold War, 1949-1991 | NATO Partnerships for Peace. 1995. World Trade Organization 1995 |
| 2001-2025 | United States | China, Janpan, Rusia, India Regional Blocs | A cold peace or hegemonic war 2010-2025? | A new security regime to preserve world order- multilateralism |

**Kegle, 2007:95**

From the table above, Portugal and Spain wielded so much power in the 15th and 16th centuries until the overriding influence of the Holy Roman Empire reigned that led to the 30 years war that ended the papal rule of the Holy Roman Empire. The growth of the modern nation states from the Peace Westphalia introduced the autonomy of States whose efforts at securing their sovereignty led to different alliances both secret and open. This became the major characteristic of the European system that was interest-based. This situation prevailed in European until Napoleon Bonaparte's nearly successful attempt in the 19th century to conquer Europe. It also heralded the rise of modern nationalism. France's bid for hegemony ultimately failed but it however introduced the idea of national self-determination and universal rights. The industrial revolution in the 19th century also ushered in economic and technological changes that transformed world politics.

Towards the end of the 19th century, conciliation were becoming fixed and hardened. While nations were steadily accumulating military power, Europe found itself divided into two opposing alliance that set the stage for World War I, which brought to an end the classical balance of power system in Europe. World War II also produced new configuration that continued to shape world politics. The European system was replaced by a global system dominated by two controlling powers that gave world politics a bipolar order. The end of World War II brought to light the growing realization of the military and economic potentials of the United States and the defunct Soviet Union. Both countries emerged as superpowers combining global political objectives with military capabilities that included Weapons of Mass Destruction and the means to deliver them over intercontinental distances. World War II also provided a heavy burden for succeeding generation with the traumatic legacy of the atomic bomb.

After 1945, nuclear weapons presented unprecedented changes to world politics. Since 1945, the transformation of World Politics has been manifested in political, economic, technological and ideological developments. The collapse of colonialism in the twentieth century was a fundamental change in world politics. The emergence of national self –determination as the guiding principle in international politics marked a transformation of attitudes and values especially with its injection into the UN charter. This aided the processes of decolonization that was influenced by the exigencies of the time. The rise of the United State as a world power after 1945 was of paramount importance in international politics. Its conflict with the former Soviet Union that became entrenched in the cold war provided one of the crucial dynamics in world affairs as both powers became the leading voice in world politics.

The Cold War was a major historical turning –point as measured by changes in the international system, the nation –state and international organization. (Baylis and Smith 1998:72-84). The end of the Cold war brought an end to the contest for world dominance and threat, but has not resulted in the abolition of nuclear weapons. The collapse of the former Soviet Union reversed the super-power relations and marked the end of the post world War II balance of power. Countries consequently had to redefine relationships with one another. A New World Order had emerged giving the international system, according to Ojo (1990) "a new toga of unipolarity rather than bi-polarity, dominated by the United State" and its allies.

With the end of Cold War, the international system also witnessed the unification of Germany, marking the end of the politics of the Iron Curtain, the democratization of Eastern Europe, the increasing tempo of economic ascendancy of Japan, the independence of Namibia, the changes in Middle East, the collapse of apartheid in South Africa and a stage set for a multi-polar world system with America standing as the most powerful country in the global system (Ojo 1998). The changing power configuration in the international system since the end of the Cold War has seen the United States as dominating, but with other contending powers like China, Japan, India, and Brazil, Russian after gaining and loosing the rest of the former Soviet Union has remained a power to contend with. In the multi-polar configuration of world politics today, the United States, Japan, China, France, British, Russia and Germany can be seen as power-welding State. These states together account for more than half of the world's total GDP and two-thirds of its military spending.

This can be seen in Figure1
**Figure 1: Great power shares of world GDP and Military Expenditures 2005.**
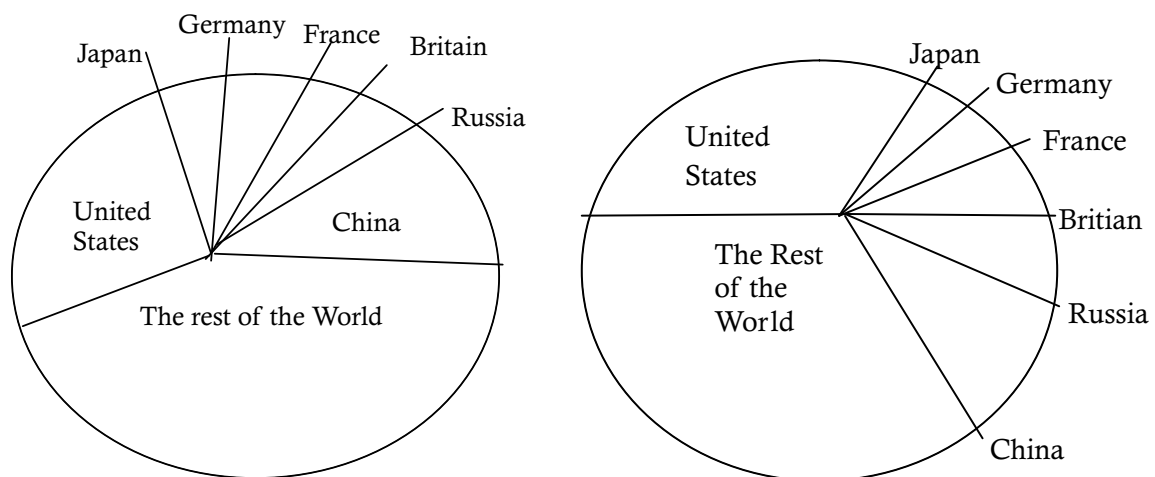


**(Goldstein and Pevehouse 2006:54)**

The United State is considered the world's only super power because of its historical role of world leadership from World War II and its pre-dominant military might. China has the world's largest population, rapid economic growth for over 15 years and a large, though not modern military, including a credible nuclear arsenal. China is actually playing a central role in

the emerging world politics. Japan and Germany are economically great powers but have played constrained roles in international affairs since World War II. Notwithstanding, both have large and capable military forces which they have begun to deploy abroad. Britain and France as winners in World War II have maintained their military powers since 500 years though at a reduced level, while Russia and Germany have maintained theirs for 250 years. The United States and Japan have theirs for 100 years and China for 50 years. Italy, Austria, (Austria-Hungary), Spain Turkey (the Ottoman Empire), Sweden and the Netherlands were once great powers (Goldstein and Pevehouse 2008:54-62). India and Brazil are also joining the league of great powers. Brazil, Russia, India and China are seen as serious contenders in the great power politics. These countries together are the BRICS.

Regional blocks have also become contending force in the changing power configuration in World Politics. Most Middle Powers have taken advantage of the regional blocs to assume dominance in world politics through the considerable influence they wield. Cooperation among Western European nations in the economic realm led to the formation of the European Union that is striving in a single economy with a single currency (excluding Britain) and genuine free trade within its borders. Asia is also strengthening its regional cooperation just as those of the American continents African region is strengthening its co-operation by transforming from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU). The African Union is strengthening Unity among African States. Sub regional efforts are also steering up unity that are yielding fruitfulness like the recent intervention of the ECOWAS in the Political Crisis in the Gambia. All these are indications of new security regime in contrast to the power of the United Nations Security Council in intervening in matter that stands as threat to international peace and security. All these efforts are aimed at maintaining Peace and security in the world that was strictly in the hands of the UNSC

**Conclusion**

It is not in doubt that the power structure of world politics especially since the end of the Cold War has been greatly transformed as many States are now contending with the United States and the other Permanent Members of the Security Council for a share of global influence and power. Regional Groups, Japan, India, Brazil are contending powers to the US hegemony, France and the United Kingdom as Permanent Members of the Security Council appears to be losing out in the emerging power contest. The emergence of these powers resisting the U,S hegemony is geared towards a cold peace era, ushering a Medium Security regime to preserve world order. The Cold war era witnessed huge military expenditure but the prevailing era of Cold Peace is faced with economic power. China's economic strides have remained a serious threat to the United State. This prevailing international economic politics is also a contributing factor to the reduction in the exercise of veto power in the Security Council.

Reduced use of veto power in the Security Council tends towards a Cold Peace ear, ushering in a new security regime to preserve world order. World order is no longer based on military might of the Cold War era but on economic might in an era of Cold Peace. The changing power configuration in the emerging world politics is now driven by economic force against the military might of the five Permanent Members of the United Nations Security Council that were the then leading powers of world Politics. The expansion of the UNSC to increase the permanent members has become a dominant and prevailing one in International Politics. Nations have continued to give it priority in their relations especially with the "Big Five" living out other developmental issues threatening them. States have left off more important issues for

sustainable developments and are now occupying themselves with politics of equitable representation in the UNSC. The UNSC's primary aim is addressing issues that threaten world peace and security. It is a nation that is at peace with itself that can stand to address international peace and security.  The regional efforts no doubt are yielding fruits. A state that is faced with internal strife, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, etc cannot be in a position to address International Peace and Security.

## Recommendations

The UN was created with the aim to preserve and maintain World Peace and Security which it entrusted to the Security Council. Based on the evolving trends in World Politics, we make the following recommendations:

1. Africa States should improve and consolidate their political, economic and military strength to make real impact on world Politics.
2. In the light of the interconnected and interdependent world we live in now, strong consolidation of state power should be translated into formation of Strong Regional Military, Political and Economic Units that will meet up evolving challenges.
3. State should reduce emphasis on national interests as the world has become more complex, more integrated and interdependent than it was when the United Nations was set up as a post World War II institution. This means the old ways of muti-lateral negotiation which was based on defending national interest are no longer adequate for addressing the problems of the rapidly changing World. The challenges of the era have no single national origin or national solution. Multilateralism is the only realistic way out.
4. There must be a shift to detailed and sustained consultations and negotiations. History has shown that national interest can be balanced not by acrimonious debate and voting as done in the United Nations Security Council, but by negotiations. This has encouraged the machinery of consultation both at the bilateral and multilateral levels.
5. In view of the above, African States should conserve efforts and resources mobilized towards permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council.

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