



Kwame Nkrumah
"The independence of Ghana is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of Africa."

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Is it Time for an African State on the United Nations Security Council?

by Dr. Kwasi Sarpong Afrifa

The notion of a permanent seat for Africa on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) with all its trappings including the veto power is back on the international political and policy agenda. The new and now growing momentum for Africa is probably a reflection of the renewed importance of Africa in the global political economy, even though Africa's share of the global economy is still small and its exports are predominantly raw materials.

Since the end of the Cold War, there have been discussions of reforming the Security Council, expanding its size, its structure and its practices. However, the discussions always suffer a slow death before they even start.. During this period, the 192-country (depending on how you count) General Assembly has been grappling with ways to make the UNSC adapt to the New World Order. Recent attempts to launch formal negotiations on reforming the UNSC failed. Critics of the UNSC assert that the 15-country member Council lack

representativeness and transparency and do not reflect the post-Cold War era. They state that in 1945 when the United Nations was formed, there were fewer independent countries with democratic structures on the continent which justified the structure and practices that were adopted at that time. Today, at least 192 countries are independent with so-called "democratic" structures which justify the reform of the UNSC. Among the top candidates for permanent seats on the UNSC are Germany, Japan, India, Brazil, and an undetermined number of African states, Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt and Ghana should be serious contenders. There are serious regional challenges in choosing any of these countries. In Africa, would Nigeria allow South Africa to occupy the permanent seat on the UNSC and vice versa? Would regional leader Nigeria, support Ghana, which has been active in sending large numbers of soldiers in UN peacekeeping missions since the 1970s, to be a permanent member? Also, would China take issue with an invitation to Japan?

On March 17, 2009, the Finnish Institute of International Affairs hosted a conference: "The Role of Small States in the United Nations Security Council." The conference was organized around the following questions: i) Do small non-permanent members in the UNSC have any say in global politics? ii) How should the UNSC be reformed in order to get even the small voices heard? It is quite curious that an instrument or body that aims to level global disparities is itself riddled with inequalities and the politics of the strongest.

Permanent members on the Security Council are the United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France and China; each country with veto power and each country critically powerful with enormous influence on the decisions of the Council. While the distribution of power and capabilities in the international system is changing rapidly with new powers making demands for their rightful place in global politics, reforms to the UNSC to accommodate the global political shifts have remained constrained. The permanent members are reluctant to let the potential newcomers such as Brazil, India, Japan, Germany and any of the African candidates enter into the exclusive club. The veto power of the UNSC is a fundamental and seemingly permanent problem facing reform of the UNSC as not only do those who have it want to protect it, they also are reluctant to extend that power to newcomers. In the post-World War II era, the UN was not only the linchpin between institutions but also between the United States and the Soviet Union, in a bipolar world. While the US is the triumphant and remaining superpower; it confronts a loose multi-polar world run by international institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The issue of the "marginalization of Africa" is unquestionable. There is no question that Africa's voice as a collective entity is virtually non-existent in a diffused global world order where we see an almost frenetic "G-activity," including G2 (China and US), G7, and G-20, etc. If the membership of the UNSC is based on economic factors, such as GDP, individual African countries might be excluded. However, the campaign for membership follows the rules of diplomacy, which is making deals with other countries. Additionally, Africa's collective contribution of resources to the world economy makes it an indisputable international partner.

How can African countries use the enormous natural resources that the global economy needs as leverage for global political influence? Africa trade and African resources is fuelling the growth of China, India, Europe, the United States and Japan, virtually the world. What is Africa getting in return as a player in global politics? Yours truly may be wrong but African's absence on the global scene has given way to "celebrity advocacy" on its behalf by Bono of the Irish band U2, Madonna, etc. Part of the reason may be that Africans in key positions on the global scene seem unconcerned about the turn of events likely due to the excessive corruption, weak leadership, and poor infrastructure pervasive on the Continent. What is the role of the so-called progressive, Western-educated African leaders who behave as if they know better but are not responding to this challenge? This vacuum to a greater extent speaks to the need for the formation of the "United States of Africa." Scholars of global political economy and regime politics can tell you the importance of regional entities and development. If a "United States of Africa" seems farfetched, why not start with strengthening the weak regional institutions such as the African Union, ECOWAS, SADC, etc enabling them to respond to regional issues? If nothing at all, the recent Ebola outbreak in West Africa (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) points to the fact that not only do these countries have poor infrastructure, as they were destroyed during civil wars in the case of Liberia and Sierra Leone to respond effectively, ECOWAS and the African Union were woefully absent.

Classical realists and neorealists such as Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz state that every country's foreign policy is based on its "national interest." It is a fact that unless African countries unite to advance a collective agenda, we should kiss peace, stability, development and growth goodbye. When will African leaders become more active in responding to serious, evolving development challenges such as security, HIV/AIDS, energy supply, environmental degradation, migration, youth unemployment, economic development, inadequate water supply, etc? How has a region of 53 sovereign states allowed itself to be so marginalized in world affairs when they feed the global economy with its wealth and resources at the expense of its 'one billion" people? As stated by the Zambian economist Dambisa Moyo in her book Dead Aid, "there is a negativism about Africa in global politics and affairs". We should not allow ourselves to be fooled by the recent uptick in growth in certain countries. Africa is seen by many global leaders and institutions as a "nuisance" and that aid can serve as a floor below which Africa would not be allowed to fall. This negativity is not a new phenomenon. Celebrities shuttle between Africa and developed countries under the pretense of saving Africa from itself.

The world needs Africa and Africa needs the world. African "transformational" leadership should reflect 21st century policies and create a renewed development agenda with the sole objective of framing the debate on African development. Maybe it's time to revisit previous development agendas such as "The Lagos Plan of Action" and NEPAD. While each of these plans may have had its own flaws; the broad tenets had indigenous African solutions to indigenous African development challenges.

The bottom line is this – compelling international evidence indicates that Africa cannot generate sustainable economic development without investment in its human resources. At the heart of such development is the production of critical intellectual capabilities and well trained graduates with a range of competencies and skills. If Africa wants to become a global power player it must:

- stop being only a consumer of knowledge;
- contribute to the societal well-being of its one billion people;
- harness the extraordinary talent that exists within the region;
- reverse the brain drain; and
- produce and elect leaders who, while they think globally, are rooted in the ethos and values of the region.

These, among others, are the building blocks that may put an African country on the United Nations Security Council.

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