



“The World Is Bigger than Five”: A Salutory Manifesto of Turkey’s New International Outlook

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ABSTRACT *President Erdoğan has expressed his objection to the current structure of the UN with the motto “the world is bigger than five.” The international systemic root of this objection is the failure of the UN to make adequate contribution to peace and prosperity. Among other reasons behind this call for change are the AK Party’s ideological orientation, Erdoğan’s charisma and his powerful sense of mission to carry the ‘periphery’ into the center as well as Turkey’s ascendancy to a rising power that has prompted it to advocate multipolarity in the international system. This article argues that the motto “the world is bigger than five” has a number of connotations: a strong support for a just and peaceful international order; a plea against permanent membership and the accompanying veto mechanism; a call for reforming the UN to render the UNSC more representative, transparent and accountable; and an outcry against imperialistic interventions.*

“The World Is Bigger than Five”: Substance and Context

The world is bigger than five (in Turkish *dünya beşten büyüktür*) is now a well-known motto, which has been consistently used and popularized by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan since 2013, when he was prime minister. It could possibly be viewed as a follow-up to Turkey’s overall critique of the United Nations (UN) system in the course of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) rule since 2002. Erdoğan has coined this motto and used it on various domestic and international platforms as a manifestation of his frustration with the UN system and his vision of a more functional and representative UN. For example, during his speech at the UN General Assembly on September 24, 2014, he used this motto to draw on the tragic consequences of the privileged presence of the five permanent members (P-5), namely the United States (U.S.), United Kingdom (UK), France, China, and Russia, within the UN Security Council (UNSC). These states all have the right to veto any draft resolutions, even if the required nine votes out of fifteen have been obtained.¹ Erdoğan thus highlighted the failure of the UNSC in bringing about an effective solution to the conflicts in Palestine, Syria and

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many other places that have led to the loss of countless innocent lives. He also decried the disappointing silence of the Council in the course of the overthrow of Egypt's first elected president Mohamed Morsi by a coup d'état in 2013 which, in his view, put the main *raison d'être* of the UN into question.² In his address to the UN General Assembly on September 20, 2016, Erdoğan repeated the motto and said "The United Nations Security Council should be reformed in order to render peacekeeping and

peace-making activities more effective... A Security Council that does not represent the entire world can never serve to re-establish peace and justice around the world."³

Erdoğan has consistently maintained that a major source of deficiency about the UNSC is its failure to manifest a fair representation of world community. Most of the permanent members within the Council are from the West, whereas Asian and African representation is significantly weak. Although the combined population of Asia (4.6 billion) and Africa (1.3 billion), makes up well over three quarters of the world population, excepting China as a permanent member, states from these two continents have been allocated only one third of the entire membership in the Council. This lack of representation is, of course, *a fortiori* valid for the Muslim world, which consists of 1.7 billion people, simply because there is an absence of a Muslim-majority state as a permanent member. Although these are some of the ills which Erdoğan associates with the Council as an indication of this body's 'crisis of representation,' his suggested solution appears somewhat different from most of the advocates of UN reform. Erdoğan does not, as has been by Germany and Japan, advocate an increase in the number of permanent members with the accompanying right of veto like other members of the P-5. Rather, he demands that the veto mechanism be completely abolished.⁴ This is how he expresses his vision of a reformed UNSC as regards its composition: "I continue to urge the community of nations to abolish the practice of permanent membership in the UN Security Council, increase the number of its members to 20, and adopt new rules under which all nations will take turns sitting on the committee."⁵

The tone and substance of Erdoğan's critique of the UN system indicates that, in comparison to the moderate and measured criticisms raised by other leading advocates of reform such as India, Germany, and Japan, Turkey has been more vocal about the depth and scope of the problems associated with the

UNSC.⁶ Erdoğan's high-pitched objections target not only the UN system, but also other international mechanisms and institutions injuring global justice.⁷

The main themes that have come out of Erdoğan's series of critical remarks and proposed changes to the UN system could be summed up as follows: Since the conditions that existed after the Second World War have fundamentally changed, the preferences and expectations of the humanity should no longer be held captive to the will of the five permanent members in the UNSC. There is a frustrating absence of fair representation of the world community in the Council, a key factor behind the paucity of resolutions in serving "the cause of justice." With this term Erdoğan expresses his longing for a Council that confronts and takes effective action vis-à-vis aggression and massive human rights violations wherever they occur, irrespective of the identity of the culprit. In order to render the Council more democratic, effective, transparent and just, the number of its members should be increased on the basis of non-discriminatory geographical representation. In an age in which the term 'democracy' has become a catchphrase, existing structures and modes of decision-making within the UN are incompatible with democratic principles. Therefore reforming the UN system has become an urgent necessity.

A number of international developments must have motivated Erdoğan to make such an extensive critique of the UN and, in particular, the Security Council. The Bosnian tragedy of 1992-1995 was possibly one of the first major issues in the post-Cold War era that alerted Turkey, along with numerous other states, to the problematic structure of international institutions. The arbitrary occupation of Iraq by the U.S. and the UK in 2003 raised Turkey's concerns given the failure of the UN to prevent this tragic occupation, which resulted in the huge devastation of life and physical infrastructure in Iraq.⁸ The double standards, which featured in the way in which the UNSC treated the Arab revolutions that began in 2010, also intensified Turkey's discontent with the UN system.⁹ While the UNSC took robust action against the Libyan regime, authorizing sanctions and the use of force, for crimes committed against humanity due to the killing of protestors demanding greater freedom (Resolutions 1970 and 1973 of February and March 2011 respectively), it remained either silent or adopted 'soft' resolutions in other settings of the Arab revolutions, although mass killings, disappearances and widespread torture were also prevalent in Syria, Yemen, Egypt, and Bahrain. It was in particular the Syrian tragedy which brought Turkey into the picture on account of its proximity and the devastating scale of killing with the consequent refugee crisis. As in other cases, this huge humanitarian tragedy was caused by the killing and torture overseen by the security forces of the Assad regime against the people that took to the streets, in 2011, demanding political freedom. The disappointing performance of the UN with regard to these crises with strong international ramifications has been perceived by Turkey as a symptom of the deficiency of

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the structure and decision-making apparatus in the UN. In the Syrian case, the UNSC has either remained silent or contented itself with the adoption of resolutions on minor aspects of the conflict, instead of imposing sanctions or authorizing military enforcement action, on the basis of the right of humanitarian intervention vis-à-vis the Syrian regime, which has persistently committed crimes against humanity. These crimes eventually led to a terri-

ble civil war in the course of which hundreds of thousands of people have lost their lives.

As observed by Hurd, the Syrian tragedy is yet another reminder of the bitter truth regarding the crude reality of power politics which was ingrained in the UNSC right from the beginning:

The reaction to Syria helps show some truths about the Security Council that liberal internationalists sometimes forget: the Council was created to help the Great Powers impose their vision of global order on the rest of the world. The veto was added to ensure that when they do not agree on what should be done, the Council would do nothing. The Council therefore oscillates between complete irrelevance and imperial domination, with Great-Power consensus providing the switch that determines which condition obtains on an issue. Neither result offers much help to regular people who are suffering as a result of global forces...when the Great Powers do agree with each other, the Council becomes a mechanism for them to impose their views on the world.¹⁰

During the AK Party era, Turkey has consistently called for an overhaul of major institutions of global governance such as the UN, IMF and World Bank. This is a reflection of Turkey's search for global justice, a world order that recognizes the existence of a multipolar world, more proper decision-making and peace-enforcement mechanisms that are responsive to international crises.¹¹ Turkey's vibrant rhetoric is a consequence of its recently gained status as a rising power. This is the suitable context in which to understand Erdoğan's "the world is bigger than five" motto as an apt expression of Turkey's predilection for a more just, more egalitarian and more peaceful international order. The UNSC's problematical structure, composition, decision-making mechanism and possession of excessive powers with hardly any legal restraints; combined with its pathetic performance in most situations of military aggression and other situations of human tragedy that have transpired, particularly after the Cold War, constitute the backbone of the motto - "the world is bigger than five."



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan emphasizes his signature statement that the “world is bigger than five” at the UN General Assembly in New York. President Erdoğan has shared 10 of his photographs addressing the UNGA over the past 15 years highlighting on an Instagram post that he has expressed the truth and stayed consistent on his beliefs in regards to the veto mechanism at the Security Council. Instagram / AA Photo

Historically speaking, all of the five permanent members of the UNSC, emboldened by their self-appointed privilege and aware of their immunity to impeachment, have, both during and after the Cold War, acted upon their own whims rather than endeavoring to observe international law and justice. The P-5 countries have been in a position to incarcerate the free will of the global community in opposition to the ‘sovereign equality of states’ and ‘the right of peoples to self-determination.’ According to White, “in liberal democratic theory, the failure to separate these powers in different organs (executive, judicial and legislative) is seen as a recipe for abuse of power, given that this may lead to one organ making law, applying the law and enforcing the law.”¹² Indeed, the concentration of nearly unlimited power and authority at the hands of the UNSC and the privileges of the select few above all others in the Council, can be considered as an enticement to abuse. The Council occasionally acts like a court; yet, it is immune from judicial review by, for instance, the International Court of Justice. In the light of what has been said, one could argue that the Council system almost ‘invites’ the P-5 to use this forum as a means to work for their own interests as opposed to the ‘collective will’ of international society. The history of the UN has demonstrated that the P-5 most often than not have ‘accepted’ this invitation. Turkey today is raising its objection to this unfair mechanism. This is the *international* root of “the world is bigger than five.”

The reasons behind Erdoğan’s opposition to existing global institutions and mechanisms are also rooted in factors specific to Turkey. This is an area in which history, politics, religion, and ideology play themselves out. To be more

specific, the motto “the world is bigger than five” is also a result of a number of *domestic* factors: i) the AK Party’s political orientation that is strongly aligned with the principle of justice, ii) the AK Party governments’ success in carrying the economically deprived and politically disadvantaged Turkish periphery into the center, iii) Turkey’s espousal of law, ethics and justice as a major component of its ‘new’ foreign policy and international outlook, iv) Erdoğan’s personal charisma, powerful sense of mission and self-confidence which have given the courage and conviction to articulate his opposition to the existing global status quo privileging the West, v) and Turkey’s economic growth, technological advances and multilateral and dynamic foreign policy under the AK Party government, all of which have come to feature Turkey as a rising power.

Domestic Roots of the Motto

To make sense of Erdoğan’s strong objections to the UNSC, one ought to look as well into the domestic roots of the motto. The signs of the longing for domestic as well as global justice can be traced in some formal documents associated with the AK Party. To begin with, ‘justice’ was inscribed into the AK Party’s constitution as a major referent of the party’s code of ethics and political goals. In the document, it is said:

AK Party believes that a vigorous posture [for Turkey] inside and outside is only possible through justice. The conviction that power emanates from law rather than law emanating from power takes as its goal the abolition of all the obstacles that prevent the honest and righteous to prevail in all sorts of works and activities.¹³

It is also stated in the constitution that the AK Party considers morality as its guiding principle in matters of political governance.¹⁴ The text also expresses that the party considers it important that moral values should be internalized among Turkish citizens.¹⁵

In Turkey, Islamic morality and values lie at the very heart of the overall political culture of conservatism. This observation is *a fortiori* valid for the AK Party. The observance of justice, both by the individual and the state, is a major command of Islam. In the language of the AK Party and Erdoğan, inspired and guided in particular by Islamic precepts and the politics of conservatism, as is manifest in the discussions that follow, the term ‘justice’ has a number of connotations. First, a privileged minority of powerful actors should not monopolize power at the expense of the majority, as this is bound to lead to the latter’s mistreatment, exploitation and exclusion. Second, rulers or other holders of power should treat those whom they govern with fairness and compassion, while avoiding arbitrary discrimination, oppression, and exclusion against any

segments of society. Third, rulings of courts and other arbiters should decide in favor of the party that has a rightful claim in a lawsuit or case. Finally, justice requires that within a given society, economic wealth be distributed properly.

As a 'conservative democratic' party, the AK Party has all along emphasized religious (Islamic) and cultural values and traditions as Turkey's invaluable cultural assets worthy of conservation. The holy book of Islam (the Quran) contains strong references to justice such as "Allah commands that when you judge between people that you judge with justice" (an-Nisa, 58) and "O you who have believed, ... be witness to justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness" (al-Maidah, 8). In his book, which was published soon after the AK Party took office, Yalçın Akdoğan, one of the party's main ideologues, holds that in Islam justice ought to be the supreme goal in an assembly of consultation, which should endeavor to establish just economic, social, political and legal international order.¹⁶

During his address to the International Symposium on Conservatism and Democracy, which was convened in İstanbul in 2004, the then Prime Minister Erdoğan asserted that "the AK Party has reshaped the political center thanks to the power it derived from the societal center."¹⁷ Yet, in its initial years in power, the AK Party constantly endeavored to consolidate its power base *within* Turkey. It was not until the government came to muster considerable support from the grassroots in Turkey and surpassed the initial 35 percent electoral support that the government embarked on comprehensive reforms to democratize the Turkish political system. The AK Party's first term in office (2002-2007) was also a period when the fledgling government and Prime Minister Erdoğan appeared quite cautious and moderate about their objections to the shortcomings of the international order, first and foremost the UN system. Therefore, perhaps not surprisingly, in the aforementioned speech in 2004, Erdoğan was only mildly critical about the increasing gap between rich and poor countries and the undesirability of the cultural domination of one civilization over all others, without mentioning the 'West' specifically.

This 'gradualism' should be borne in mind when evaluating Erdoğan's ascension to the international scene as a key international figure with a critical agenda particularly after his party's landslide victory in 2007. Erdoğan thus became the leading figure in Turkish politics at a time when the barriers between domestic and international politics were gradually eroding on account of globalization. As elsewhere in the world, it has since become commonplace

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for political leaders in Turkey to use foreign policy issues in order to shore up their support inside or to use domestic political agenda as an ingredient of foreign policy.¹⁸

Erdoğan's political roadmap features a very interesting similarity with his will and determination to change the constellation of power between the 'center' and the 'periphery' both at the

domestic and global level. At the domestic level, Erdoğan and his government pursued liberal economic policies with a strong social face, endeavoring to uplift, both economically and socially, Anatolia and the Anatolian capital, as well as the lower classes at the 'periphery.' The economic success of the AK Party governments is noted in a document published by the World Bank: "Turkey has recorded rapid progress in poverty reduction over the past decade, and economic growth in Turkey has benefited all groups, including those at the bottom of the distribution."¹⁹ Between 2002 and 2011, the percentage of the Turkish population that fell into the category of the middle class increased from 21 percent to 41 percent.²⁰ In the meantime, the wave of democratic reforms, the occasional references to Islamic values by public authorities in the public sphere, and the gradual lifting of public restrictions on issues that are essential to the life of the Muslim faithful in Turkey, such as scarf ban, relieved the Anatolian 'periphery' from secularist political and cultural dictates of the 'center.'

Parallel to its uplifting of the Turkish periphery, successive AK Party governments deepened ties with African and Asian countries, while critiquing global poverty, economic exploitation of poor countries, foremost in Africa, by foreign economic interests, imperialistic wars and interventions, and nuclear proliferation. Turkey's gradual becoming of one of the leading donors of humanitarian aid in the world has also strengthened the persuasive potential of its discourse challenging the 'unjust' international system.²¹ The major themes of the Turkish critique against this hegemonic system, also emphasized during Erdoğan's latest address to the UN General Assembly on September 24th, 2019, have been indicative of his support for the 'periphery' against the 'center' at the global level.²²

In his influential book, *Stratejik Derinlik* (Strategic Depth), which was published in 2001, shortly before the AK Party's election to power, Ahmet Davutoğlu described Turkey as a 'central country.'²³ This book immediately became the key text affecting the theoretical underpinnings of 'new' foreign policy which the AK Party espoused. *Stratejik Derinlik* was meant to draw on Turkey's profound historical experience and on its breadth of foreign policy. These

factors, in Davutoğlu's view, underlined Turkey's potential to play a stronger role in the international system. Davutoğlu argued that as a 'central country' Turkey possessed the necessary skills and experience to take a major part in establishing order, peace and stability in its neighboring regions. As anticipated in Davutoğlu's book and largely implemented during AK Party governments, Turkey has become an active member of international organizations and a peace-maker among a host of disputing states and non-state actors.²⁴

The AK Party fashioned a new international role for Turkey partly through a reinterpretation of the Turkish history and the country's geopolitical location from a civilizational perspective. This new geopolitical imagination was premised on the idea of Turkey as an 'active agent/subject' in international politics and an architect of deepening integration with its neighbors. This was in a way a reminder of the period when the Ottoman Empire was a figurehead of the Islamic civilization and the founder of an international order known as *pax-Ottomana*. During the AK Party rule, Turkey has continuously voiced its objections to imperialistic interventions in the Middle East. While continuing its close relations with Western institutions such as NATO and the European Union, Turkey has opposed hegemonic features of the international order. Erdoğan and other Turkish officials have accordingly drawn on the lack of justice and fairness in the current international order, which has especially victimized the developing countries and the Muslim world. Turkey, especially in Erdoğan's person, became a leading advocate of a new international order.²⁵

Erdoğan's various critical remarks about the UN system before 2013 could be interpreted as a prelude to his famous motto: "the world is bigger than five." According to him, deep injustices within the international system could eventually lead to its downfall. In 2010, during a speech in the Third Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilization, Erdoğan argued that when justice, freedom, sense of equality and conscience were left out of international politics, the system on which it rests would sooner or later crumble. He continued, "The fact that some people enjoy security and prosperity does not necessarily imply that others do not suffer from poverty, starvation and deprivation. Justice is a universal principle and should be practiced globally and consistently in order to be meaningful."²⁶ In the İstanbul Global Forum, held in 2012, with its central theme being 'Justice,' Erdoğan drew on various historic figures who, he said, heroically resisted oppression and injustice, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela, Alija Izetbegović and Rachel Corrie. He noted that those who sided with justice were remembered with great respect and appreciation by the entire humanity, whereas the oppressors were remembered with revulsion and hatred. He also said that, alongside the UNSC, a host of other international organizations were structurally built on injustice and functioned with little care for justice. Erdoğan went on to complain about the privileged presence of five permanent members in the UNSC: "All of us have left

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our fate at the hands of five states. But isn't there any ethnic identity, faith and thought other than these five members?... Does this global structure embrace the whole of humanity? The answer is no. Therefore, the UN ought to be reformed.”²⁷

Turkey's becoming of a rising power also explains a great deal about Erdoğan's adoption of a challenging rhetoric in the international arena.

Under Erdoğan, Turkey's greater engagement with issues of global governance and increasing socialization within international organizations contributed to its international status.²⁸ Turkey's election as a member to the UNSC in 2009-2010 was an important milestone in its quest for the reform of the UN system. During its tenure in the Council, Turkey became more familiar with the agenda and functioning of the Council. It was able to witness the lack of transparency in the inner workings of the Council, as well as the existence of the strong impact of national interests in voting preferences, particularly those of the permanent members. Thus, Turkish membership in the Council increased the range of issues that its diplomacy had to grapple with. In the meantime, Turkey also became more familiar with the functioning of the UN General Assembly and its potential as an alternative forum of decision-making within the UN. During its term of office in the Council, Turkey, alongside Brazil, which also held a seat in the Council then, was able to offer a solution to Iran and P5+Germany, known as the swap deal, with respect to Iran's nuclear program. Eventually, acting as mediators, Turkey and Brazil managed to come to an understanding with Iran in May 2010 in an attempt to defuse the nuclear crisis, which could lead to a dangerous confrontation between various international actors. According to the agreement, Iran agreed to ship 1,200 kilograms of low-enriched uranium to Turkey in return for the fuel rods.²⁹ This precious initiative, accepted by Iran but rejected by the U.S., the UK and France, against protests from parts of international society, could be viewed as a mark of Turkey's rising status to a global agenda-setter.³⁰

As mentioned before, Turkey's comprehensive critique of the UNSC has been a part of its overall reformist agenda also covering other leading international organizations such as the IMF and World Bank. Turkey has accordingly emphasized the need for a greater say from developing countries in the IMF, made critical remarks about the preponderance of the U.S. dollar in the IMF system, and called for the gold standard as an alternative monetary system.³¹ This was meant to draw attention to the unfairness of the world monetary and financial systems. The rationale and power structure of these systems and structures largely represent the interests and priorities of a group of Western states and corporations. According to the Turkish view, the UN is similarly a 'Western' organization because of the large overlap between Western preferences and the



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan makes a speech during his party's parliamentary group meeting at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in Ankara, on November 19, 2019.

GÜVEN YILMAZ /
AA Photo

policies of the UN. In this regard, it should not be surprising to note that, if certain UN policy choices are contrary to Western interests, they “tend not to be financed and consequently do not get executed”³² within the UN.

Departing from Erdoğan's motto “the world is bigger than five,” the sections below will elaborate on the problematical structure of the UN, particularly the UNSC, and its relations with the institutions, structures and processes of global hegemony, which have mostly undermined humanity's aspirations for a just and peaceful world. These issues will be discussed at times by reference to Erdoğan's (and overall, Turkey's) position regarding the problems with the structure and performance of the UNSC.

Underlying Goals of the UN System

It is universally agreed that the League of Nations, founded immediately after the First World War, failed on account of its shortcomings in decision making and the inadequate commitment of its founding treaty to prohibit the use of force. What is more, the League was unable to establish a collective security arrangement, which could allay the fears of states against possible acts of aggression by authoritarian states with strong military power. The League also failed to resolve the major disputes between great European powers like Britain, France, and Germany. Furthermore, the absence of the U.S. in the League diminished the organization's effectiveness. Finally, it was unable to bring

about global disarmament. Due to the fragility of its apparatus and its inability to make a tangible change in the behavior of states, the League failed to act in the face of, *inter alia*, German, Japanese and Italian military aggressions, which eventually led to the outbreak of the Second World War.³³ Following this negative experience, the main idea behind the founding of the UN was to avoid a repeat of the catastrophe that discredited the League, testified by the devastating Second World War. Therefore, the UN was armed with a collective security system, while its founding treaty, the UN Charter, imposed a general obligation on states not to use force, save in case of exceptional situations.³⁴

The U.S. led the idea of establishing an international organization enjoying universal membership and a system of competences on matters, which were a concern to the entire world. The founders of the new world order were also of the opinion that within the UN, a particular organ, in which a small group of great powers, namely the ‘victors’ of the Second World War, would enjoy certain privileges, had to be bestowed with strong authority. In the American view, the U.S. would rank first among those great powers in assuming collective leadership in pursuit of security and stability in the world. The fashioning of a multilateral structure within the UN seemed appealing to the U.S. as the new hegemon of the Western world “since it would enable the U.S. to share the burdens of leadership while preventing the rise of a revisionist challenger.”³⁵

Western Global Hegemony and the UN System

‘Hegemony’ in the context of international politics could be defined as the domination of the weak by the powerful. Those that dominate tend to be few, while the dominated are many. In a hegemonic system, the privilege of the few is institutionalized so that inequality and injustice are inherent features of the system. Hegemony thus becomes a major characteristic of leading international institutions. All this necessitates an understanding of the UN, which is the leading global institution with its wide-ranging issue-areas and universal membership profile, in a broader context. As Puchala puts it, “to postulate that the United Nations and most of the rest of today’s global institutions are elements of a prevailing hegemony is to call for deeper understanding of this state of affairs.”³⁶

Apart from other actual or potential imperialist actors, the U.S. has become the very embodiment of malaise in the hegemonic international system. The uniqueness of the U.S. is not confined to its overpowering presence in the UN. Beyond that, it could be considered as an ‘empire,’ albeit a declining one, on account of its power, influence and capacity of intervention. International organizations and non-state actors are important elements of a world order serving the interests of this empire. States and these other actors together constitute global governance, which sets the framework and apparatus for the imperial

authority. The constitutive parts of global governance propagate the norms, principles, and ideas of the hegemonic order as 'universal values' and provide justification for its further reinforcement.³⁷ U.S. hegemony is not only confined to the management of the founding principles and structures of world economy,

but also extends to include rule making and management in the areas of international development, international security, peacekeeping, state-building, nation-building, democratic transition, and human rights.³⁸ Moreover, "principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures that are unacceptable to Washington rarely see the light of diplomatic day."³⁹

Since the inauguration of the UN, hardly any decision that went against the interests of a member of the Western power bloc has ever been authorized by the UNSC

The U.S. and the rest of the principal members of the Western bloc have largely monopolized the legitimate use of force within the existing international system. The more the Western actors came to integrate themselves into the structures of the UN, the stronger they exerted control upon decisions on the use of violence by means of the UN. Since the inauguration of the UN, hardly any decision that went against the interests of a member of the Western power bloc has ever been authorized by the UNSC.⁴⁰ The Council was usually silent towards the cases of military aggression by a Western power, which were not infrequent when considering, say, British and French military campaigns and interventions during and after the Cold War in Africa and Asia. Even if the Western bloc acted outside of the UN framework to commit military aggression against another state, it often turned later to the UN in order to gain legitimacy. This was the case in the U.S. occupation of Iraq in 2003. Barely two months after the military campaign, in spite of the initial opposition by some Western countries such as France and Germany, to the impending occupation, the UNSC did not hesitate to 'formalize' this illegal act by adopting Resolution 1483 on 22 May 2003.⁴¹ Perhaps not surprisingly, the U.S. view of the UNSC has differed significantly from many other countries, because it wants to maintain the regime of collective security as it exists in this organ today.⁴² Many states regard this attitude of the U.S. rather problematical and consider it as a major source of frustration with the UN system. The negative image of the U.S. is very salient also in Turkey, where the U.S. is considered as the epitome of Western imperialism.⁴³

The UNSC as a 'Modern Leviathan'

It is disheartening to note that there is nothing in the UN system to compel the members of the UNSC to observe international law and justice as their guiding

Since there is no legal, political, or moral imperative which may serve as a restraint on the actors in the UNSC, it is difficult to regard it as a genuine 'guarantor' of world peace

principle. The history of the Council is largely a practical affirmation of the malaise within the system. Due to the lack of any restrictions in the UN Charter on the Council's authority and its discretionary powers, as well as the enjoyment of the privileges of permanent membership and the right of veto by the

P-5, there are no strong incentives for the Council to accept fair and sensible resolutions. Since there is no legal, political, or moral imperative which may serve as a restraint on the actors in the UNSC, it is difficult to regard it as a genuine 'guarantor' of world peace. On the contrary, because of the arbitrariness of many of its decisions and the abuse by the P-5 of their privileges for the sake of geopolitical and economic gains, the Council has become a major source of insecurity for many states. To give a few examples, the UNSC failed to adopt any resolutions regarding the American invasions of Vietnam (1965) and various countries in Latin America during the Cold War, the Soviet invasions of Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), and Afghanistan (1979), and Israel's illegal seizure of Arab territories in 1967. By contrast, as Cannizzaro notes, at times, after the Cold War in particular, the UNSC has interpreted the notion of 'threat to peace' so broadly that it conferred the willing states the right of military intervention even in crises "of minor gravity."⁴⁴ On the other hand, the UNSC failed to adopt a resolution against acts of military aggression when its members, especially the permanent ones, were opposed, often out of self-interest, to effective action. This was the case when, for instance, India launched a military intervention into East Pakistan in 1971 and Iraq invaded Iran in 1980.

In the early 1990s, when the Cold War came to an end, the U.S. became the spearhead of the narrative about the emergence of a new world order. This new international order, the U.S. claimed, would prioritize the protection of human rights, peaceful resolution of international disputes, collective solidarity and cooperation against aggression, and the limitation and control of armaments.⁴⁵ Perhaps the most promising ingredient of the 'dawn of a new era' would have been introducing a better management for the UN system, in particular the UNSC, which would render it more functional than it had ever been. Indeed when the Cold War came to a close, the deadlock that had debilitated the ability of the Council to fully use its powers disappeared. Since the early 1990s, the Council has not only come to exercise powers which were explicitly granted by the UN Charter, but also dressed itself with new competences such as the 'right of humanitarian intervention,' power of 'peace building,' 'third-generation peacekeeping,' 'state-construction' by dint of humanitarian intervention, as well as the inauguration of *ad hoc* international criminal courts.

From the 1990s onwards, the UNSC began to emphasize *human* security alongside *state* security, which was surely a welcome development in line with the rising status of human rights in international law and politics. The problem was, however, that the Council opted for a broad definition of human security, which meant that its members could easily put forward an expansive interpretation of 'threats to peace.' This, in turn, could serve as a pretext for even greater arbitrariness in the Council's decisions in matters of peace and security. The problem with this excessive subjectivity is fittingly articulated by Aznar-Gómez:

Such a broad assessment of what can be understood as 'threat to peace' allows the Council to approach each particular case with differing levels of formal and material 'intensity,' leaving room for an *ad hoc* approach in each particular case. Issues of double standards, different involvement depending on the case, and secrecy in prior consultations before action (or inaction) in the Security Council threaten the legitimacy of the UN executive organ, undermining its authority in public opinion.⁴⁶

Today, the UNSC has at its disposal almost unlimited power and authority. Any 'crisis' occurring within a state that the Council could link to 'international peace and security' can become a matter to be dealt with by the Council itself. The possibility of the Council to simultaneously act as a judge, lawyer, and prosecutor blurs the distinction between 'law' and 'politics' and virtually grants to its members a license to abuse their privileges.

The excessive power of the UNSC also precludes the rightful role that the UN General Assembly can, and should, play, as it diminishes the impact of non-Western states within the decision-making apparatus of the UN. While the numerical majority of Third World countries in the General Assembly has lost its earlier weight as a result, *inter alia*, of the Council's assumption of new powers, these countries have also been marginalized further in the UNSC. After the Cold War, Third World countries have been deprived of the ability to play one superpower off against another in the UNSC. Besides, as the solidarity within the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) declined because of diverging interests and worldviews of its members, the NAM caucus within the UNSC has become almost powerless against a united P-5.⁴⁷

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the hopes for a more peaceful and just world order did not last long in the aftermath of the Cold War. After the Soviet Union had left the scene, the U.S. became the sole superpower to seize the agenda of the UNSC, fashioned new roles for it, exerted greatest influence in the substance of resolutions, and established its monopoly over the execution, especially, of effective resolutions which, *inter alia*, involved military enforcement and sanctions. The U.S. has almost always been given full support by the UK and France as the two other permanent members from the West, whereas China and Rus-



Representatives attend the UN Security Council, which has been under increased criticism by global leaders for the veto power of five permanent members, meeting at the United Nations headquarters in New York, on November 20, 2019.

MA DELIN / China News Service / VCG via Getty Images

sia, as the other members of P-5, could, in most cases, easily be persuaded to ‘abstain’ rather than veto draft resolutions in return for certain concessions. It could therefore be assumed that the permanent members can easily abuse their privileged status in the Council as an instrument of foreign policy in line with their own economic, political, and geopolitical interests. Their privileges in the UNSC can be a useful bargaining chip to condemn their peripheral partners to a state of perpetual dependence, especially when the latter are threatened by a Council action.

The leading actors within the UNSC have often acted out of self-interest and the calculations of *realpolitik* instead of basing their decisions on the norms of law and justice. Immediately after the Cold War, the U.S. and its cohorts began to use UN sanctions as a tool to expand the West’s imperial reach in the non-Western world. As observed by Köchler, “Sanctions are used increasingly by the Security Council as a means to discipline ‘unruly’ regimes.”⁴⁸ What is more, there have been cases when military actions and sanctions taken against various countries by certain states such as the U.S. have sought justification in a particular UNSC resolution, although the connection has been at best a tenuous one. As a well-known case, the U.S. and its allies justified their continued military aggression on Iraq after the Gulf War of 1991 on the grounds of previous UNSC resolutions that were in fact irrelevant to the new situation.

Nor have China and Russia refrained from politically-motivated voting in the UNSC. Both have occasionally vetoed draft resolutions stipulating condem-

The possibility of the Council to simultaneously act as a judge, lawyer, and prosecutor blurs the distinction between 'law' and 'politics' and virtually grants to its members a license to abuse their privileges

nations or sanctions targeting their peripheral partners simply because their high interests had been at stake. Both these permanent members cast their veto on a draft resolution in 2007 demanding that Myanmar should cease its military attacks on civilians and improve the human rights situation in the country.⁴⁹ A similar scenario was played out in 2008 when both Russia and China vetoed a motion that would have imposed sanctions against Zimbabwe for its suppression of human rights and attacks on the supporters of the opposition.⁵⁰ Both states were opposed to the said drafts on the pretext that the human rights problems in Myanmar and Zimbabwe had no connection with international peace and security and were matters of domestic jurisdiction. Yet considering their close relations with those governments in question, there are enough grounds to claim that both China and Russia were motivated by national interests.

As a result, as White observes, we are "heading towards a disintegration of the system -in that it seems that law does not shape the debate, it is simply a tool in the hands of the powerful states."⁵¹ This is the foremost reason behind the inconsistent performance of the UNSC on issues of "threat to peace," "breach of peace" and "acts of aggression." This is also the root cause of the failure of the UN's collective security system to act as a deterrent against aggressive states.

All these theoretical and practical deficiencies ought to be borne in mind when evaluating the Turkish president's declaration "the world is bigger than five." The problem is, first and foremost, rooted in the unjust and inequitable composition of the UNSC, which is the main crux of Erdoğan's outcry against the UN system. When the UN was founded in 1945, the permanent members of the Council constituted ten percent of the entire membership of the UN. After the broadening of the UN membership, currently totaling 193, the five permanent members now amount to less than three percent of the entire members of the UN. Therefore, the existing setup within the UNSC concentrates an overwhelming power at the hands of a 'club of the privileged.' This indicates that it is far from being a representative body. On the other hand, with every UN member state having one seat and one vote, the UN General Assembly is an ideal platform in terms of equal representation. A UN reform in the future

thus ought to reshuffle the allocation of UN organs' competences so as to increase the power and competences of the General Assembly. As seen in his statements below, Erdoğan's conception of UN reform also involves the collective empowerment of the UN:

If the global powers will not help, the rest of the international community must take matters into its own hands and launch a comprehensive U.N. reform process. After all, we do not believe that to build a more relevant international system, we need to dismantle the current order. People from all around the world have an obligation to come together and take necessary steps to promote peace, stability, and security for all mankind. The U.N. General Assembly must be more than a venue for world leaders to make speeches and share complaints.⁵²

"The World is Bigger than Five" as an Expression of Muslim Grievances

Contrary to the high hopes in the Muslim world, like anywhere else, in the immediate aftermath of the stultifying fixities of the Cold War, a handful of mostly Western actors have strengthened their hegemonic grip on the Muslim world by, *inter alia*, using the UNSC as a platform to subdue the Muslim state and non-state actors that refused to play along to the tune of their imperial interests. The Middle East has possibly suffered more than any other region from the imperialistic assault of hegemonic powers, which have abused their privileged position in the UNSC as an instrument serving their ambitions. The interests of the U.S. and some other Western states in the Middle East included maintaining their access to oil at an affordable price and averting the possibility of any political upturn that could threaten the Western hegemony in the region. In addition, they have displayed a general determination to ensure that no harm is done to Israel even while it continues its aggressive and racist policies against Palestinians and neighboring countries. Accordingly the Western (*a fortiori* permanent) members of the UNSC have used the Council in their pursuit of hegemonic power vis-à-vis the Muslim world through four patterns:

First, some Muslim-majority states that challenged the U.S., NATO, or Israel, or even refused to cooperate with them, have been emasculated by virtue of effective UNSC resolutions on the grounds that they endangered or breached international peace and security. Suffice it to draw on the comprehensive sanctions imposed on Libya (in the 1990s), Sudan (from mid-1990s onwards) and Iran (2006-2016) since the Cold War ended. The double-standards of the UNSC is clearly observable in its decision to punish the Libyan government in 2011 for massacring its own people⁵³ while maintaining a stoic silence towards similar crimes by other Arab regimes during the Arab spring. Similarly, as the Turkish president observed, Iran has suffered from vast sanctions for its allegedly militarily-oriented nuclear program, while Israel's huge arsenal of

nuclear weapons seemed not to disturb the UNSC.⁵⁴ As noted by Mahdavi, the pathetic situation in which the Muslim Middle East finds itself is a manifestation of the "selective, arbitrary, paternalistic and punitive enforcement of the doctrine of humanitarian intervention" which "turned the Middle East into 'the underclass of the international legal order.'"⁵⁵

A UN reform in the future thus ought to reshuffle the allocation of UN organs' competences so as to increase the power and competences of the General Assembly

Secondly, while taking strong action since the 1990s against a number of Muslim countries for allegedly endangering international peace, the Council has remained silent toward other cases that also required its action. Referring to such situations, Erdoğan expressed his grievances about the failure of the UNSC to authorize humanitarian interventions to stop humanitarian tragedies transpiring particularly in the Muslim world:

The main reason for the U.N.'s current troubles is the Security Council's failure to keep its promise of promoting peace and security around the world. From Bosnia and Rwanda to Syria, Yemen, and Palestine, the U.N.'s top decision-making body has neither prevented atrocities nor brought to justice those responsible for heinous crimes. On the U.N.'s watch, authoritarian regimes around the world have used conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction against innocent civilians. Some regimes have even carried out genocide without facing consequences. The U.N. has also failed the millions of children who suffer from extreme poverty and malnutrition and, as Turkey knows all too well, has been unable to take necessary steps to ease the suffering of refugees.⁵⁶

Thirdly, the Council has failed to activate the collective security system almost in all cases where a non-Muslim state committed an act of military aggression on a Muslim state. Examples abound: the late response to the occupation of Bosnian territories during the Yugoslav Wars (1992-1995) and the imposition of an unjust peace treaty on Bosnian Muslims, who were the chief victims of aggression; the Council's failure to opt for an effective resolution for the Armenian occupation of one-fifth of Azerbaijan (1988-1993); Israel's ruthless military assaults on Lebanon (2006) and Gaza, which has been under a deadly siege since 2007 (2008-2009 and 2014); the U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003); Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia (2006).⁵⁷ Grievances of the Muslim world have also been the result of the commission of genocide against the Muslims of Bosnia during the war of 1992-95; the never-ending cycle of ethnic cleansing of Palestinians by Israel since the latter came into existence in 1948; and the untold war crimes and crimes against humanity

unrelentingly committed against the people of Afghanistan and Iraq by the invading (mostly) Western forces. The misuse of the Council as a tool to pacify the unyielding peripheral states has therefore been most conspicuous in the context of the Muslim world.

Finally, the U.S.-led occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq were not only met with a deafening silence on the part of the UNSC, but were 'legalized' by the Council through the adoption of *ex post facto* resolutions intending to give a seal of approval to the forces of occupation. The Council thus served as a forum for 'cleansing' the indignity of international aggression in these two cases of occupation, which in fact constituted 'crimes against peace.'⁵⁸

Unsurprisingly, during the course of the AK Party rule in Turkey since 2002, the predominant view among the Turkish public vis-à-vis the U.S. has constantly remained quite negative. As the annual public opinion surveys conducted by Pew Research Center indicated, during the period between 2002 and 2009, the respondents expressing positive views about the U.S. always remained below 20 percent.⁵⁹ This possibly owed much to the frustration of the Turkish people about the U.S. War on Terror following the September 11 terror attacks, the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq in 2003, and the overall imperialistic impulses of U.S. foreign policy. A more recent survey conducted in 2018 also indicated that most of the Turkish citizens considered the U.S. as a 'hostile' state. 60.2 percent of those who were polled regarded the U.S. as the greatest threat to the security of Turkey, whereas Israel (54.4 percent) and the EU states (25.9) ranked second and third respectively.⁶⁰

Although the majority of the effective resolutions, which the UNSC adopted after the Cold War, were related to the Muslim world, Muslim-majority states have been perpetually consigned to a marginal status in this organ. The general neglect of Muslim states in the international system has been crystal clear in the debates for a reshuffling of the Council's composition; as none of the key states or figures involved in these discussions has entertained the idea of strengthening Muslim representation in the UNSC.

Conclusion

"The world is bigger than five" is a timely manifesto against the legal and structural constraints of the UN system and a strong plea for a comprehensive reform of the UN as a step towards a more just international order. The credibility and prestige of the Security Council has been damaged by its abusive manipulation at the hands of a few powers enjoying their privileged status within this body. As permanent membership and veto mechanism almost 'invite' these powers to commit abusive practices, the effective decisions of the Council are too often

marked by partiality and an overdose of political and imperialistic ambitions. The decisions as to whether a particular crisis should be dealt with in the Council and, after having been incorporated into the agenda, whether it is 'grave' enough to call for effective action are largely shaped by the permanent members' self-interest and considerations of power. In such an environment, the specific *legal* context of a particular crisis is less important than the identity of the aggressor and the victim. Insofar as the Muslim world is concerned, it appears that the UNSC has, let alone serving as the guarantor of peace and security, even become a major security threat to peace.⁶¹

Today, the legitimacy of the Council is linked to its "interest in promoting the rule of law and strengthening a rules-based international system."⁶² This will not be possible unless the UN system is reformed in a way that the composition of the UNSC reflects the plurality of international society. The reform should involve a reconsideration of the veto mechanism and an increase in the transparency as well as the legal⁶³ and political⁶⁴ accountability of the Council. It should also lead to the apportioning of new competences to the General Assembly, which is the truly representative and democratic body of the UN. This could include the enhancement of its legislative capacity and putting some decisions of UNSC under its political control.

"The world is bigger than five" is not only an expression of Erdoğan's vision for a more just and egalitarian international order within the specific context of the UN. At the same time, this vociferous plea comes from the president of a rising power, which has performed quite well for most of the twenty-first century by dint of its impressive economic growth, higher living standards, and its rising international political and military clout. In that regard, this motto is also intended to draw attention to the idiosyncrasy of the privileged position of certain Western countries in the most crucial institutions of global governance, such as the UN, World Bank, and IMF, at a time when the emergence of new powers such as India, Brazil, Indonesia and South Africa evinces a power shift in global politics.⁶⁵ Today, we are living in a world marked by multi-polarity, and the 'newcomers' have shown a propensity to assert pressure for change in the major institutional settings of the current international order.⁶⁶

Finally, "the world is bigger than five" is also intended to draw attention to the economic, social and humanitarian dimensions of world peace. In many of his speeches, Erdoğan has condemned imperialism, the persistence of poverty and starvation in many parts of the world, excessive economic exploitation of



The reform should involve a reconsideration of the veto mechanism and an increase in the transparency as well as the legal and political accountability of the Council

Third World countries, Western cultural hegemony, adverse consequences of globalization, and the silence of key international actors toward cases of ethnic cleansing and genocide against various peoples, mostly in the periphery. In this regard, Erdoğan's motto is in agreement with the view that the effectiveness of the UN's collective security system will be best served not through its power of deterrence, but through core values and principles such as peace, justice, human rights, and the rule of law. "The world is bigger than five," then, is an apt expression of the humanity's venerable age-old search for genuine peace, justice, and harmony in the world. ■

Endnotes

1. Permanent members enjoy the right to veto on non-procedural issues brought before the UN Security Council. This suggests that, one permanent member alone could disable a motion from getting through as a resolution even if all the rest of the Council vote in favour of the motion. Otherwise, it is sufficient that nine out of fifteen members vote in favour of a resolution.
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64. Through, for instance, the empowerment of the UN General Assembly so that it is endowed with some degree of control over the Security Council.
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