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Assessing the UN Security Council: A Concert Perspective



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This article distinguishes between the UN Security Council's "governance" and "concert" functions and argues that the latter is important in assessing the body's diplomatic value. It presents data suggesting that serving together on the Council deepens diplomatic linkages between permanent members. It also argues that Council membership may offer several benefits for managing relations between the permanent members. Specifically, the Council provides a mechanism through which permanent members have slowed the pace of crises that might threaten their relations, used ambiguity to produce exits from potentially dangerous situations, and mitigated diplomatic humiliation. The article contends that many proposals for Council reform pay little attention to this concert function and, if adopted, may unwittingly diminish a key benefit of the institution. KEYWORDS: United Nations, diplomacy, Security Council.

THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL HAS BEEN MORE ACTIVE IN THE PAST TWENTY years than during any other phase of its existence. The Council has met more frequently, authorized more peacekeeping and observation missions, and enacted more sanctions regimes and arms embargos than in its first four decades. The Council's move toward the center of international politics has intensified efforts to assess its role. Yet the metrics for doing so are not always clear, and a central challenge in analyzing the performance of international organizations is clarity about what is being evaluated.¹

Most scholarly attempts to assess the Council have focused on its broad external impact or judged the effectiveness of certain Council "products," including peacekeeping operations and sanctions regimes.² In this article, I seek to shift the focus to intra-Council dynamics and, in particular, to comity between the Council's Permanent Five (P5) members. Specifically, I distinguish between two methods of assessing the Council. I briefly define *governance* and *concert* approaches, with the former focused on the maintenance of international peace and security and the latter on fostering major-power comity. I argue that the P5 in key respects represents a concert of major powers and that assessing its impact accordingly is appropriate. I then present data suggesting that serving together on the Council deepens high-level diplomatic contacts between P5 members. Through illustrative historical examples, I outline some benefits that the Council structure offers to its per-



manent members in managing their own relations. By providing an alternative approach to assessing the impact of the Security Council, this article offers a new perspective on how the Council should be used and reformed.

The Governance Vision

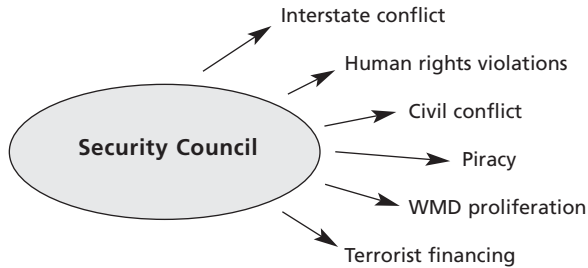
The UN Charter provides a straightforward metric for measuring the Council's effectiveness: the "maintenance of international peace and security."³ The Charter outlines a collective security structure in which the Council should respond promptly to threats or breaches of the peace and acts of aggression anywhere in the world. In so doing, the Council can meet immediately and draw on the resources of all UN members, with the permanent members coordinating any UN military operations. The Charter makes no geographic or qualitative distinction between potential disruptions to the peace and makes clear that the Council can investigate any dispute it deems dangerous to peace and security. As Inis Claude argues, collective security in its ideal form "purports to provide security *for* all states, by the action of all states, *against* all states which might challenge the existing order by the arbitrary unleashing of their power."⁴ The Charter therefore tasks the Council with a critical, if rudimentary, governance function: providing the international community with security and order.

The content of this governance role has varied considerably over time. The UN's founders and many early commentators focused almost exclusively on the threat of renewed interstate aggression.⁵ For this reason, the Council's response to North Korea's aggression in 1950 and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait forty years later are often cited as notable successes. Yet repelling cross-border aggression is only one possible element in maintaining international peace and security. Particularly in the post-Cold War era, the Council has sought to address a broader array of challenges, including intrastate conflict, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, mass atrocities and genocide, and democratization. Health and environmental issues, including HIV/AIDS and climate change, have also appeared on the Council's agenda. Whatever the precise contours of the Council's mission, a governance perspective essentially judges the Council by its success in confronting external challenges. (See Figure 1.)

An alternative approach to assessing Security Council effectiveness presents itself if the body is thought of less as an instrument for providing global security and more as a grouping of the major powers with the purpose of facilitating harmony within that elite group, or concert of nations.⁶ Without denying the Council's formal governance function, a concert perspective shifts the focus from the body's ability to resolve external challenges to its impact on relations between permanent members.

The utility of a concert perspective rests largely on the distinction between great-power comity and international security more broadly. It is not

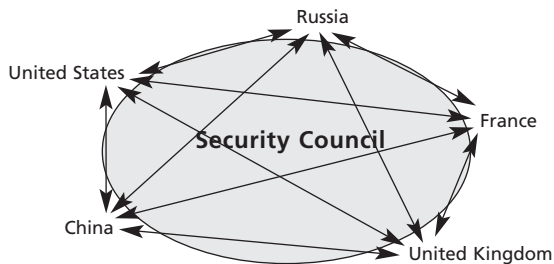
Figure 1 Governance Perspective



obvious that these should be considered distinct. As was evident during the Cold War, great-power tension often fosters conflict around the world. Conversely, insecurity outside the great-power community can lead to tension, and perhaps even conflict, within this group.⁷ Yet various local conflicts have begun and ended without major powers being drawn into the conflict directly. Moreover, relative comity between the major powers, as has existed for most of the post-Cold War period, has not led ineluctably to stability elsewhere. The end of bipolar tension helped reduce the occurrence of some types of civil conflict, but may have also increased the vulnerability of certain states to internal challenge.⁸ It is possible to make a meaningful, if not airtight, distinction between global security and great-power comity. (See Figure 2.)

While several scholars have discussed the conflict mitigation effects of concert-style diplomacy, that insight has not been deployed to explore the Council's impact.⁹ The major-power peace that has prevailed since the end of World War II between permanent Council members suggests that it may be illuminating; in the more than sixty years that the Council has been operating, there has never been a sustained military clash between permanent members.¹⁰ There are multiple possible explanations for this, not least the fact that all of the P5 are nuclear powers. Yet the possibility that the Council structure

Figure 2 A Concert Perspective



has helped to maintain peace between its permanent members merits examination. Before considering the evidence, however, it is essential to expand on the notion of a concert and to demonstrate that the Council's permanent membership should be evaluated as such.

Characteristics of a Concert

The concept of a great-power concert is familiar in diplomatic history, with the Concert of Europe as the paradigmatic example. That loose arrangement of the major European powers has often been credited with stabilizing great-power relations in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars and avoiding major conflict for at least several decades.¹¹ The notion of a great-power concert has received less systematic attention in the international relations literature, but several scholars have identified key attributes of a concert structure. I argue below that Council's permanent membership can be considered a great-power concert nested within the broader framework of the Council.

The first attribute of a concert is that its membership is limited to the major powers. Richard Elrod argues that an underlying feature of concert diplomacy during the nineteenth century was the creation of a privileged place for great powers that limited lesser powers to a peripheral role: "Lesser states were occasionally consulted when their interests were involved, but they possessed few rights and certainly not that of equality."¹² The UN Charter offers a similar privileged status to key powers. As the dominant Allied powers, the United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom secured permanent seats for themselves. They in turn offered seats to France and China in the expectation that these countries would assume, or reassume, great-power status. There was significant debate between the three Allied powers about whether this expectation was reasonable, but almost none about whether it was appropriate to give great powers, however defined, a unique place and special privileges.¹³ In practice, the Council's permanent members have usually operated as a distinct community within the Council. Particularly in recent years, they have often met separately from the rest of the Council and negotiated many draft resolutions among themselves before presenting them to the rest of the membership. Permanence and possession of the veto power create a critical status difference with the elected members, even those (e.g., Germany, India, and Japan) who are major powers in their own right.¹⁴

Second, a concert operates by consensus rather than by majority or supermajority voting. No major decision can be made without the agreement of all concert members. In the Concert of Europe, according to Elrod, "unanimity rather than majority rule prevailed."¹⁵ Charles A. Kupchan and Clifford A. Kupchan argue that decisions in a concert "are taken through informal negotiations, through the emergence of a consensus."¹⁶ As a whole, the Council operates by supermajority; nine of fifteen votes are necessary to pass a

resolution. But among the permanent members, the veto ensures that the Council is consensus based. The Charter allows for permanent members to be outvoted only on procedural issues, and the Council cannot make substantive decisions without P5 acquiescence. In analyzing the Council as an “elite pact”—a concept similar to a concert—Erik Voeten emphasizes this nonmajoritarian quality of the Council’s operations.¹⁷

Third, a concert is political rather than legal in nature and “entails no binding or codified commitments to collective action.”¹⁸ The issues that a concert considers are resolved by political negotiation rather than legal obligation. If, in the face of some external crisis, the concert members decide not to act, they are not necessarily violating the purpose of the arrangement. In this respect too, the Council’s permanent membership fits the criteria for a concert. For all its admonitions about the necessity of preserving the peace, the UN Charter creates no commitments for Council members to act. While the Council is tasked with maintaining peace and security, it alone has the power to determine whether a crisis constitutes a “threat to international peace.”¹⁹ Even when the Council decides that this threshold has been reached, the Charter gives its members complete discretion as to the appropriate course of action. Moreover, the existence of the veto power implicitly acknowledges that the Council should not act when the permanent members are unable to reach consensus. While the Charter’s drafters hoped that the Council would respond in the face of a security crisis, they did nothing to compel the body to act.

Finally, a leading goal of a concert is preservation of the group’s internal harmony. Members of the Concert of Europe “focused on regulating relations among each other” and had limited ambitions to preserve peace more comprehensively.²⁰ A concert does not seek to eliminate competition among the powers included in the group, but it does aim to manage the competition and prevent it from reaching outright conflict. This internal focus is the one respect in which the Council’s permanent membership does not clearly match the criteria for a concert. The UN Charter gives the P5 the same global security responsibilities that the Council as a whole has, and nothing in the Charter suggests that the body should serve an intra-P5 conflict resolution function. The historical record is not clear on whether key diplomats expected the shared Council membership to serve that purpose. Inis L. Claude concludes that “it was assumed that the harnessing of the Big Five into a team responsible for the successful operation of the new organization might help to promote the maintenance of their indispensable unity.”²¹ Yet that assumption was rarely made explicit. More often, the Charter’s drafters suggested that comity between the permanent members would be a prerequisite to—rather than a product of—the Council’s operations. “The only hope for the world is the agreement of the Great Powers,” said Winston Churchill, and that sentiment was widespread among observers of the new organization.²² Because I seek to

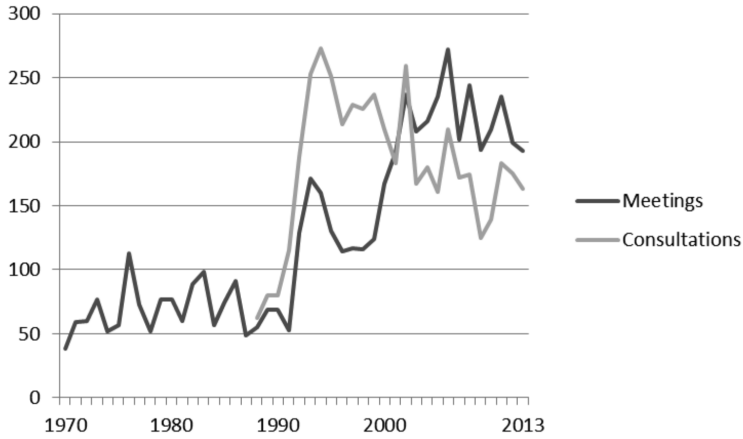
demonstrate that the Council has in practice had an internal impact, however, I do not consider the absence of an explicit internal focus as disqualifying.

Conceiving of the Council's permanent membership as a political concert rather than as part of a governance body generates a different set of potential tests for effectiveness. Instead of asking whether the Council has maintained peace and security by resolving external conflicts and challenges, one might focus on whether it has deepened diplomatic relations between the permanent members, increased harmony between them, and provided these states with exits from crises that threaten relations with other P5 members. I now turn to quantitative and historical evidence suggesting that serving together on the Council has in fact deepened diplomatic relations between P5 members and, in several important cases at least, helped to manage tensions between them.

Denser Diplomatic Relations

As a forum for regular meetings, the Council by its very nature increases diplomatic density between the permanent members. During the Cold War the Council normally met several times a month, and during certain crises much more frequently. In the past two decades, the intensity of contact has increased dramatically. The Council now consults informally on a nearly daily basis and produces a steady stream of resolutions, presidential statements, and press releases. While it has declined somewhat recently, the Council's activity level has been high since the end of the Cold War. Every year since 1992, the Council has met formally or consulted informally more than 200 times. The P5 also consult periodically separate from the other Council members, usually in one of the P5 missions, although data on how often these meetings occur is not available.²³ (See Figure 3.)

Yet how far beyond the UN diplomatic community does this increased contact extend? Frequent contact between the UN diplomats of P5 members may be of little relevance if it does not produce greater contact at higher levels. There is anecdotal evidence that the practice of Council consultations produces contact at different levels of P5 governments. Issues considered by the Council often draw in officials and experts outside of UN missions and create diplomatic contacts and linkages that might not otherwise exist. One longtime French ambassador recalled that "we often discuss from capital to capital issues on the council agenda, trying to reach agreement or at least narrow the gap."²⁴ Non-P5 ambassadors have noted that the P5 interact distinctly. According to a former German ambassador, the P5 "have to make constant deals, whether it's the election of the new Secretary-General or a Chapter VII Resolution. [They] need each other all the time and I think it affects also the way [they] behave in bilateral relations."²⁵ Council matters also sometimes produce increased contact at the highest levels of government. In certain cases, P5 foreign ministers have met directly to discuss

Figure 3 Council Meetings and Consultations, 1970–2013

Source: Author's correspondence with the United Nations Security Council Affairs Division.

Council strategy and vote on resolutions. During the deliberations that preceded the Iraq War, for example, the Council met at the foreign-minister level multiple times in the space of a few months.

A more systematic test for whether the Council increases high-level diplomatic contacts between permanent members is to assess whether P5 foreign ministers interact with each other bilaterally more than they do with the foreign ministers of other major powers. Visits at the foreign-minister level require substantial investments of time and diplomatic resources and can plausibly be seen as a signal of the importance of the relationship between the countries in question. My examination of travel patterns by US secretaries of state over the past two decades suggests that there is in fact a “P5 preference.” For the purposes of this analysis, I excluded personal travel and official travel primarily for multilateral conferences, as neither of these categories would necessarily speak to the bilateral relationship. I included a control group of major powers without permanent Council seats for comparison purposes. (See Table 1.)

I also conducted a probability probe that compiled the travels of the British foreign minister from January 1990 through September 2013. Consistent with the findings for the United States, British foreign ministers also made approximately twice the number of bilateral visits to P5 countries than they did to the non-P5 major powers.²⁶

These patterns suggest that there is a significant diplomatic premium accorded to other permanent Council members. It is notable that both Britain

Table 1 Bilateral Visits by US Secretaries of State, 1990–2013

	Number of Visits
Other P5 members	
China	27.0
Russia	42.0
France	30.0
United Kingdom	26.0
Average	31.5
Non-P5 major powers	
Brazil	12.0
Japan	19.0
Germany	22.0
India	14.0
Average	16.75

Source: Records of the travels by the US secretary of state are recorded by the US Department of State, Office of the Historian. The current secretary's travels can be accessed at www.state.gov/secretary/travel while the travels of former secretaries are archived at <http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/secretary>.

and France received more US visits than the much larger and more economically powerful Germany. That China led Japan is also striking, given the closeness of the US-Japan strategic relationship. China received more visits even between 1990 and 2000, before the country's economic rise became as obvious and as urgent a priority for the United States. The P5 preference endured—and sometimes became more pronounced—when economic strength (as measured by share of world gross domestic product [GDP]) and military spending (as measured by share of world military spending) were included in the analysis. France and Britain retained their edge over similarly situated Germany when GDP and military spending were taken into account. China's advantage over Japan also endured. (See Table 2.)

Evidence that the P5 members interact more intensively with each other at high levels than with other major powers is notable. In other areas, scholars have suggested a relationship between high-level contacts and peaceful outcomes. In the context of regional organizations, for example, Yoram Haf-tel has found evidence that “regular meetings among top-level policymakers . . . appear to promote a peaceful resolution of political tensions.”²⁷ Jennifer Mitzen argues that face-to-face conference diplomacy produces what she terms “forum effects” that in turn help avoid violence.²⁸ These lines of research suggest that Council encouragement of more frequent high-level meetings may itself be an important contribution to P5 comity.

The diplomatic history of the Council suggests that the institution's work has had other more specific benefits to P5 relations. At several important moments, the P5 have employed Council procedures and mechanisms to help

Table 2 US Secretary of State Visits, Controlling for Share of World Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Share of World Military Spending

	Number of Visits	Average Share of World GDP, 1990–2013	Average Share of World Military Expenditure, 1990–2013	Visits Divided by Share of World GDP	Visits Divided by Share of World Military Expenditure
Other P5 members					
China	27.0	4.98%	4.71%	5.42	5.73
Russia	42.0	1.72%	4.24%	24.42	9.91
France	30.0	4.59%	4.98%	6.54	6.02
United Kingdom	26.0	4.34%	4.14%	5.99	6.28
Average	31.25	3.91%	4.52%	10.59	6.99
Non-P5 major powers					
Brazil	12.0	2.28%	2.06%	5.26	5.83
Japan	19.0	11.99%	4.47%	1.58	4.25
Germany	22.0	6.46%	3.96%	3.41	5.56
India	14.0	1.71%	2.3%	8.19	6.09
Average	16.75	5.61%	3.20%	4.61	5.43

Sources: Records of the travels by the US secretary of state are recorded by the US Department of State, Office of the Historian, <http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/secretary>. GDP data for this analysis was drawn from the World Bank World Development Indicators, <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators>, in current US dollars. Military expenditure figures were calculated using the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Dataset, www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database.

manage their relations. Methods have included using the Council to facilitate quiet deliberations, to slow the pace of crises, as a vehicle for “constructive ambiguity,” and to avoid the humiliation of a P5 member. None of these diplomatic methods is uniquely a product of the Council, and it is conceivable in each case discussed below that the key players could have achieved similar results through other means. That is far from certain, however, and the Council’s processes appear at least to have facilitated major-power accommodation.

It is important to acknowledge several important limitations to this historical evidence of Council’s internal conflict mitigation benefits. At a methodological level, isolating the Council’s impact on the course of events—and on P5 relations in particular—is difficult and ultimately relies on counterfactual analysis. Moreover, the examples outlined below must be set against broader patterns of Council activity on issues important to relations among P5 members. Many of these issues never reach the Council because no P5 member sees value in employing the body. Even when the Council is engaged, it has in many cases (particularly during the Cold War) done little beyond providing an opportunity for P5 members to exchange well-rehearsed rhetoric. Recent Council diplomacy on Syria and Ukraine has provided a reminder of that tendency. I do not claim here that the P5 routinely use the

Council to manage their own differences or that the body can only have that effect; I do seek to identify several ways in which it has served that function and to highlight this mostly ignored facet of the Council's performance.

The Value of Proximity: The Berlin Blockade

One of the Council's key attributes is that it places senior major-power diplomats in close proximity to each other. In some cases, that proximity has generated diplomatic breakthroughs on issues that threatened relations between the permanent members. Perhaps the clearest example of that dynamic occurred early in the Council's history. In 1948, as the crisis over the status of Berlin threatened conflict between the superpowers, diplomacy between them appeared to be nonexistent. After considerable debate, the Western powers chose to hold formal Council debates on the crisis. Over strenuous Soviet objections, they placed the Berlin blockade on the body's agenda. The formal sessions that followed produced vituperative speeches, but little diplomatic headway. A Western-backed resolution met a predictable Soviet veto.²⁹

Several months later, however, the mechanism of the Council did provide valuable diplomatic space. After a quiet opening from the Soviets, US and Soviet diplomats met on the margins of a Council meeting to explore a solution. Deputy US ambassador Philip Jessup and Soviet ambassador Yakov Malik emerged as key interlocutors on the crisis. US secretary of state Dean Acheson (no fan of the UN overall) saw the informal contact that the Council meetings allowed as particularly valuable. "We concluded that a highly secret, casual approach to the Russians could better be made by Jessup at the United Nations than through the embassy in Moscow or by the [State] Department to the Russian Embassy."³⁰ During the ensuing months, that diplomacy continued in New York and was critical to a resolution of the crisis.

The Soviet Union and the United States each had reasons to seek an exit from the Berlin crisis and they might well have found another mechanism for achieving it. However, there were formidable obstacles to arranging a high-level meeting. One attempt by President Harry Truman to do so foundered when Secretary of State George Marshall and several other senior officials objected.³¹ As Acheson acknowledged, the easy proximity of senior diplomats at the Council facilitated quiet bilateral deliberations. As UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie wrote later, "The electric tension that the Berlin Blockade generated between two non-negotiating worlds was very great. Had there been no United Nations, it might have been so great that the electricity would have shot across the gap, setting both sides afire."³²

The Value of Delay: The Cuban Missile Crisis

The Council's inability to respond quickly and unambiguously in the face of developing crises is often cited as an institutional defect. From a governance perspective, these attributes of Council diplomacy may be pernicious. But in the context of an evolving crisis in which the permanent members desire to

limit their own involvement, delay and ambiguity can become virtues. Prolonged deliberations allow the body to give the appearance of action. This appearance can be helpful to the permanent members when one or more of them is being pressured by non-Council members, activist groups, or domestic actors to take more assertive steps. The Council has served the interests of great-power comity on several occasions by simply filling time and slowing the diplomatic pace of international crises.

The Cuban missile crisis is a notable example of this function. The Council debates on that crisis lasted for more than a week. They occurred while President John F. Kennedy's advisers were considering courses of action, and when several influential voices inside and outside government were urging immediate military strikes. At certain moments during these debates, the president appeared to use the fact of the ongoing Council debate to fend off calls for prompt military action. As he considered whether to order the forcible boarding of a Soviet ship on 25 October, for example, President Kennedy pointed explicitly to the Council process under way as a rationale for delaying the decision to do so.³³ The chances of substantive Council action were vanishingly small throughout the crisis. Yet the process of extended debate may have been important; key participants such as Secretary of State Dean Rusk later argued that the Council served a critical delaying function. "Although the Cuban Missile Crisis was directly resolved between Washington and Moscow, it was very important that the Security Council [took] it up," Rusk wrote. "Prolonged discussion lessened the chance that one side would lash out in a spasm and do something foolish. The UN earned its pay for a long time to come just by being there for the missile crisis."³⁴ Rusk was a strong backer of the UN throughout his career, and his views should be judged accordingly. Still, the broader record of the crisis suggests that the Council process served as one of several factors that helped prevent quick US military action.

The Value of Ambiguity: The 1967 and 1973 Middle East Wars

If delay can be a potent virtue from a concert perspective, so too can ambiguity. Council resolutions are intricately worded documents that are usually the product of lengthy deliberation. The resulting documents are often difficult to interpret, and this lack of clarity is in some cases intentional. From a governance perspective, this ambiguity can be devastating. Peacekeeping commanders, for example, need clear guidance on how to pursue their mandates and often have been frustrated by confused Council instructions. At the broader political level, however, the lack of clarity in Council resolutions can have positive effects. As Michael Byers argues, ambiguity in Council resolutions "is a legal safety valve that helps to buy time."³⁵

The Council's most famous resolutions on the Israel-Palestine crisis, Resolutions 242 of 1967 and 338 of 1973, offer an important illustration of how Council ambiguity can serve the interests of comity between the perma-

ment members. Both resolutions emerged in response to fighting that threatened to draw in the superpowers and, in both cases, the superpowers were deeply involved in the drafting process. Resolution 242's key provision—that Israel exchange occupied land for Arab recognition—included one central ambiguity: the resolution was not clear about whether Israel should withdraw from all the Occupied Territories. The English and French versions of the resolution led to different interpretations. The uncertainty was intentional, and it allowed the United States to argue that it had defended the interests of Israel while giving the Soviet Union room to interpret it as requiring a full Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, which its Arab allies demanded. As Henry Kissinger wrote of the Council's phrasing, "What it lacked in precision, it made up for in flexibility. It was well suited for beginning a negotiation in which reconnecting the different interpretations of the parties would be one of the objectives."³⁶

US and Soviet diplomats drew on that fragile and ambiguous consensus during the 1973 war, which was in some respects even more dangerous for the superpowers. At one point during the crisis generated by that conflict, the United States changed the Defense Readiness Condition (DEFCON) level for the first time since the Cuban missile crisis.³⁷ As fighting continued, the United States and the Soviet Union drafted a joint Council resolution reiterating the formulation in Resolution 242 and insisting on a cease-fire. After several anxious days, the Council's demand had the desired effect. In both cases, the superpowers effectively used Council ambiguity as a tool for managing their bilateral relations. As subsequent events have demonstrated, the Council's formulation did little to resolve the underlying conflict, but it did help limit the chances that the superpowers themselves would be drawn into the fighting.

*The Value of Face-saving:
Russia's Decline and the Kosovo Conflict*

In several situations, the Council has been used to smooth over diplomatic tension arising when a member of the P5 has suffered a diplomatic or geopolitical reverse. Elrod argues that the Concert of Europe had the avoidance of great-power humiliation as a central goal: "Excessive weakness as well as superabundant strength of an essential member posed a serious menace to the system."³⁸ A similar recognition has been evident in Council behavior at several points, and particularly in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. In late 1991, the Council members faced the question of how to respond institutionally to the Soviet Union's dissolution and the emergence of the Russian Federation. The UN Charter accords a permanent seat to the USSR, not to the Russian Federation. That reality might have prompted a full debate on how to adjust the Council's membership to new realities. Instead, the other P5 members endorsed simply transferring the Soviet permanent seat to the Russian

Federation. Several factors militated in favor of a substitution. The P5 had a joint interest in avoiding a broader debate on Council reform that likely would have brought scrutiny to their own privileges. Yet it is evident that another motive for the quick substitution was softening Moscow's geopolitical fall and boosting its new government. "Russia will remain a great power," said the Soviet foreign minister as it became clear that Russia would retain the USSR's permanent Council seat. "It may not be a superpower, but it will still be a great military power and part of the global strategic balance."³⁹

Almost a decade later, the Council mechanism helped to mitigate some of the consequences of Russia's geopolitical decline. In 1999 Russia endured a diplomatic defeat when the NATO alliance initiated military action to compel Serbia, a Russian ally, to cede control of the restive province of Kosovo. In so doing, the Western powers circumvented the Council and launched strikes without its authorization. The bombing campaign, which lasted for more than two months, produced a significant deterioration in relations between the West and Russia. In the wake of the NATO campaign, however, a divided Council managed to assemble a resolution authorizing a postconflict stabilization force. Russia, publicly bruised by its inability to protect its ally, was intent on returning the Council to the center of the diplomatic process. During the process of drafting a new resolution, it managed to extract several concessions from the Western powers. Russia's Council veto therefore had the effect of restoring a formal equality between the great powers that the NATO air campaign had demonstrated did not exist in military or diplomatic terms. "Formulated as a resolution of the UN Security Council," Russian president Boris Yeltsin wrote later, "the [Serbian] surrender ceased to be humiliating."⁴⁰ Even as Russia recovered from a diplomatic setback, the Council process provided space for its diplomats to secure minor diplomatic victories and to reassert, at least in a symbolic sense, its prerogatives as a major power.

Implications of a Concert Vision

In this article, I have presented evidence that the Council may deepen high-level diplomatic contacts between its permanent members and that Council processes can help the P5 manage their own relations in several ways. I have shown that a concert approach produces a different perspective on the body and its utility. It encourages seeing the P5 itself as a distinct institution embedded within the broader framework of the Council. With this perspective, it emphasizes the Council's political rather than its legal role. It encourages an understanding of the body as a politically driven consensus body, the value of which extends beyond its ability (or inability) to consistently enforce international law or even respond promptly to many security crises. A concert view emphasizes that increased contact and comity among the permanent

members is itself a key product—perhaps the most important product—of the Council's work.

It may be asked whether these concert benefits could not be obtained through a mechanism other than the Council, with all its formal responsibilities and legal power for maintaining peace and security. The diplomatic landscape is littered with consultative groups that allow for informal consensus building between different groups of states. The dilemma is that there appears to be a symbiotic relationship between the Council's governance and concert functions. The council meets regularly and consults intensively because of its responsibility to manage the dozens of active UN operations in the field, supervise the work of subsidiary bodies it has authorized, and monitor sanctions it has enacted. If those burdens were formally or informally shifted elsewhere, its concert benefits would likely be diminished.

Barring some kind of catastrophic international event, the Council will remain often at the center of international security efforts. Its conspicuous failures notwithstanding, states and international public opinion will continue to ask the Council to fulfill its mandate for preserving peace and security. Discussion will continue about how to make this core institution more effective. In this environment, the governance view will dominate, but the Council's concert benefits should not be forgotten.

The Council's working methods have come under intense scrutiny during the past several decades. A number of voices have argued that the Council needs to increase its transparency.⁴¹ The body's informal consultations—where most major decisions are made—have been a particular focus of criticism. These meetings, which became standard practice in the late 1970s, occur without any record of discussion and often without a formal agenda. In response to persistent criticism, the Council has agreed to provide regular updates on its informal meetings and to create certain avenues for civil society input. From a governance perspective, this emphasis on transparency is understandable. A legitimate governing body's methods and procedures must be clear to the public. Whether transparency is unambiguously beneficial from a concert perspective is less clear. Some of the Council's most effective moments have resulted from off-the-record informal consultations, particularly between permanent members. A relentless transparency drive that discourages, for example, regular consultations among the permanent members might sacrifice important Council benefits on the altar of good governance. As Voeten argues, "Successful reforms to make the Security Council more transparent may actually have adverse effects in that powerful states may flee the forum."⁴²

Finally, a concert approach offers a different perspective on the perennial question of Security Council reform and enlargement. Those who argue for significant Council expansion often cast these arguments in terms of legitimacy and respect for the Council's decisions. A more representative Coun-

cil, it is asserted, will command greater respect and ultimately be more effective. Arguments in favor of Council reform therefore lean heavily on a governance conception of the Council's role and usually pay little heed to its concert utility. From a concert perspective, Council reform might be quite beneficial if it extends the benefits outlined above to other major powers. Yet membership reform might also pose a danger to the concert dynamic. Some proposals would significantly expand the number of nonpermanent seats and produce a total membership of up to thirty members. Reform of this type might alter the diplomatic balance considerably and discourage major powers from using the Council as often as they do now. If so, the push for a more representative and effective Council could inadvertently undermine one of the institution's hidden values. 🌐

Notes

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2. For examples of the former, see Edward C. Luck, *UN Security Council: Practice and Promise* (New York: Routledge, 2006); for notable examples of the latter, see Virginia Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents' Choices After Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

3. Charter of the United Nations, Article 24.

4. Inis L. Claude, *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 110 (emphasis in original).

5. Mary Ellen O'Connell, *International Law and the Use of Force: Cases and Materials*, University Casebook Series (New York: Foundation Press; Thomson West, 2005), p. 225; Anthony C. Arend and Robert J. Beck, *International Law and the Use of Force: Beyond the UN Charter Paradigm* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 33–34, 37.

6. It is not clear that the diplomats who negotiated the United Nations conceived of the Council itself as a tool for managing major-power relations. Instead, comity between the permanent members was generally seen as the predicate for the body's broader role in maintaining the peace.

7. For an examination of the role of major-power involvement in local conflict, see Benjamin Miller and Korina Kagan, "The Great Powers and Regional Conflicts: Eastern Europe and the Balkans from the Post-Napoleonic Era to the Post-Cold War Era," *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (1997): 51–85.

8. Stathis N. Kalyvas and Laia Balcells, "International System and Technologies of Rebellion: How the End of the Cold War Shaped Internal Conflict," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 3 (2010).

9. See, in particular, Jennifer Mitzen, "Reading Habermas in Anarchy: Multilateral Diplomacy and Global Public Spheres," *American Political Science Review* 99, no. 3 (2005): 401–417.

10. The direct clashes between China and the United States (in Korea) and between China and the Soviet Union (border dispute) occurred before China assumed the Council seat, which to that point was held by the government in Taiwan.

11. Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Richard B. Elrod, “The Concert of Europe: A Fresh Look at an International System,” *World Politics* 28, no. 2 (1976): 159–174; Georges-Henri Soutou, “Was There a European Order in the Twentieth Century? From the Concert of Europe to the End of the Cold War,” *Contemporary European History* 9, no. 3 (2000): 329; A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918*, Oxford History of Modern Europe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954).

12. Elrod, “The Concert of Europe,” p. 163.

13. Robert C. Hilderbrand, *Dumbarton Oaks: The Origins of the United Nations and the Search for Postwar Security* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

14. B. Urquhart, “International Peace and Security: Thoughts on the Twentieth Anniversary of Dag Hammarskjöld’s Death,” *Foreign Affairs* 60, no. 1 (1981): 14; David L. Bosco, *Five to Rule Them All: The UN Security Council and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 137–139. For an in-depth look at how permanent members of the Security Council worked informally outside of the Council to develop the resolution leading to the cease-fire in the Iran-Iraq War, see Cameron R. Hume, *The United Nations, Iran, and Iraq: How Peacemaking Changed* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 89–91, 94–97, 100–103.

15. Elrod, “The Concert of Europe,” p. 167.

16. Charles A. Kupchan and Clifford A. Kupchan, “Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe,” *International Security* 16, no. 1 (1991): 120.

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22. Prime Minister’s Personal Minute, quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Road to Victory: Winston S. Churchill, 1941–1945* (London: Heinemann, 1986), p. 1170.

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24. *Ibid.*, p. 251.

25. *Ibid.*

26. The data was compiled using major news sources. It excludes visits to Germany and France because regularized European Union meetings make these difficult to track.

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28. Mitzen, “Reading Habermas in Anarchy,” p. 411.

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