**The U.N. Security Council just got a lot more complicated for the Obama Administration**

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The U.N. General Assembly today elected Germany, India, and South Africa to two-year, rotating seats on the 15-nation Security Council. The election provides these emerging powers, all of whom aspire to become permanent members of the council, with an opportunity to show their stuff on the global stage. But it also poses a challenge to the United States. New members India and South Africa, as well as current member Brazil, differ sharply from the United States on everything from the use of economic sanctions to constrain Iran's nuclear program to the importance of human rights in international affairs. And they plan to be assertive about that opposition.

Today's election -- which also voted Colombia and Portugal into rotating seats -- comes amid an ongoing debate about whether and how to expand the Security Council to include more and more diverse permanent members. Middle powers, including such countries as India, Brazil, and South Africa, will look to make the case for such an expansion by exerting greater influence in the council's deliberations.

"We're probably going to have the strongest Security Council in history," said Colin Keating, a former New Zealand diplomat who heads the Security Council Report, a Columbia-University affiliated think thank. "It's a huge opportunity for those guys who have been arguing for 15 years that the Security Council isn't [representative of] the modern world. All of a sudden, they are all there. Now, what use do they make of their presence -- that can make a convincing case that being there makes a difference."

Evidence of this new assertiveness has already been manifest, for example in Brazil and Turkey's failed effort earlier this year to halt the imposition of U.N. sanctions on Iran. "If you are just a passive member then your presence in the Security Council is meaningless," Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, told Turtle Bay in an interview last month.

"Naturally, all of us will try and use the time that we have during this two-year tenure to also give our partners a sense of confidence and build trust so that they are comfortable with our membership of the sec council on an extended basis," India's U.N. ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri said after the vote. "We bring the voice of one-sixth of humanity. We have 63 years of experience in national building and I think that's what the UN can use."

For decades, the council's five permanent members, the United States, Britain, China, France and Russia have held a near monopoly on power, meeting among themselves to carve out the critical agreements on the world's key security challenges. More recently, however, U.N. member countries seem to have reached a broad agreement that the Security Council -- which reflects the balance of power following the Second World War -- needs to be expanded to better mimic a multi-polar world. But various attempts to reach a deal on an expanded council have failed. A campaign led by Brazil, Germany, India and Japan to enlarge the council has stalled, prompting these countries to build their case by demonstrating that they can make a contribution to the council's work as temporary members. (Japan, which is serving out its second year in the council, will step down at the end of the year.)

Earlier this year, Brazil and Turkey tried a different tack to upend the established order, challenging a deal brokered by the five big powers to impose sanctions on Iran . But the council's veto-wielding powers rallied together, pushing through a sanctions resolution despite no votes from Brazil and Turkey.

The council holds elections each year to fill five of the 10 seats for non-permanent members. The five new members will replace Austria, Japan, Mexico, Turkey and Uganda beginning on January 1. Bosnia, Brazil, Gabon, Lebanon and Nigeria, will stay on the council through the end of 2011.

Most of the victors of the rotating seats -- of which there are two for each region -- had been decided long before today's formal election. Canada, which has served on the council six times, was the only country that lost in a contested three-way race with Germany and Portugal for two seats reserved for Western countries. After the vote, Canada's foreign minister, Lawrence Cannon, blamed the defeat in part on Michael Ignatieff, the leader of the opposition Liberal Party, who had pointed out that Canada's support for U.N. causes such as U.N. peacekeeping had waned under the country's conservative government.

Keating said the shift in the council's dynamic reflects a world in which the "U.S. role isn't quite as powerful as it used to be." But he continued, "there are still huge opportunities for American leadership when they chose to use it. In the end, the US has demonstrated that it can get important things done." He cited U.S. led efforts to impose sanctions on North Korea and Iran.

Still, the dispute over Iran holds some important lessen for the United States and other key powers, Keating argues. "If Turkey and Brazil had been dealt with as serious partners in talks earlier than later, maybe they would not have been so tempted to play middle men." Perhaps, he added. "the lesson is that you need to involve them as serious partners. All of the p-5 [veto wielding members] will have to start thinking about how to relate to a more powerful new group on the Security Council -- and not just in 2011, but for a very long time to come."