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*Establishing Frameworks that Allow
Developing Countries to Practice
Autonomy*

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RESEARCH
REPORT



Forum: Political Committee (GA5)

Issue: Establishing Frameworks that Allow Developing Countries to Practice Autonomy

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Introduction

It is true that recent years have witnessed rapid opening up of developing countries. Besides, the economic and political partnerships between developing and developed states also saw an increase (Akyüz). However, the issue of allowing developing countries to practice autonomy is still a pressing problem that needs to be urgently addressed.

The reason why the issue of self-autonomy is a neglected urgency is that independence, sovereignty and autonomy are usually confused. Most countries and Member States are fully recognized for their independence and sovereignty. In fact, international law and the UN principles make it mandatory for the Member States to respect the sovereignty of one another. However, this is mainly an illusion. The real issue—the ability to practice autonomy—reflects reality, which is usually much different than the aforementioned case.

More wealthy, powerful and developed nations have a stronger authority over international relations and politics. That's why the smaller, less developed, countries usually become influenced by the larger players. Consequently, the self-autonomy of developing nations diminish while they try to harmonize themselves and their politics with their larger counterparts. Only because these developing countries are still considered *fully* sovereign and independent, the real and urgent issue of self-autonomy is, unfortunately, rarely addressed.

Definition of Key Terms

Developing countries: States that relatively have low-income economies are called developing countries. “A developing country—also called a less developed country or emerging market—has a lower gross domestic product (GDP) than developed countries, with a less mature and sophisticated economy” (Developing). These nations tend to have a considerable reliance on agriculture. Moreover, developing countries can reach developed status by increasing their human development index (HDI), economic success and GDP per capita—the amount of money that the state holds for each of its citizens. That said, the examples of developing countries include Bulgaria, Pakistan, Russia and Turkey. In fact, over 100 states are considered as developing countries by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (World).

Autonomy: Autonomy, in Western ethics and political philosophy, is “the state or condition of self-governance, or leading one’s life according to reasons, values, or desires that are authentically one’s

own” (Taylor). Therefore, for an independent country, practicing full autonomy means to be able to self-govern without a significant influence from other states. Furthermore, the term autonomy was also elaborated in great detail by the famous philosopher Immanuel Kant, who believed that states are autonomous only if their choices and actions are unaffected by factors that are external, or inessential, to themselves (Taylor).

Sovereignty: The terms autonomy and sovereignty are usually used interchangeably, but this is wrong. Autonomy refers to the reality or the ability of a state to self-govern. Comparably, sovereignty is the ultimate authority of the state in decision making and order maintenance processes. To better portray this, if the legislation in a state is created fully by a national parliament and the order is regulated by national authorities, this state is thought to be sovereign. However, it is still a question whether this state is under the shadow of a larger, more powerful state. If so, that same “national” parliament may pass laws under the influence of other actors. If that is the case, it becomes not an issue of sovereignty but autonomy (Sovereignty).

“The Hague Conventions, the Geneva Conventions, and the United Nations all have restricted the actions of sovereign countries in the international arena, as has international law” (Sovereignty). So, although the international law cannot guarantee a nation’s autonomy, it prohibits actions against a particular nation’s sovereignty.

General Overview

Since ancient times, the question of self-autonomy has been a problem. For example, during the ancient and medieval times when Ancient China, Mesopotamia, Aztec and Ottoman Empires existed, there used to be vassal states with *officially* limited powers. These vassal states such as Hungary of the Ottoman Empire or Korea of China would pay tribute (like money, service, crops etc.) to the monarch or dynasty of the country that they were connected to. Centuries later, the Western powers began to establish mandate governments or colonies, where the ethnic populations would have little to no autonomy over their states.

Nowadays, international law prohibits a country’s sovereignty to be limited. Therefore, even wars do not result in the dissolution of states’ governments. In Afghanistan, for instance, the government has been present at times of its recent civil war. While the country had foreign troops from dozens of foreign nations present, there was still a parliament. Consequently, when the Taliban—a terrorist organization—won the war and took control of the parliament, there were no extreme objections based on the international law just because that same terrorist organization, Taliban, was of Afghan origin. So, the Afghan people were still thought to rule themselves. Considering this, it would be a much different case in terms of politics and international law in case it was *clearly or officially* a foreign player like the USA taking the lead of the nation’s parliament.

That said, mandates, colonies, vassal states were all present in the past. The types of current states or territories with limited powers are called *puppet states*. In theory, these countries are thought to be fully sovereign, but the real case makes them have little to no self-authority. For example, the Afghan

government was never able to make decisions with full freedom when its country's sake was up to the foreign troops present in its territory. So, the *sovereign* Afghan government was under constant pressure from the war and foreign players. Similarly, other states, including the countries receiving limited recognition from other Member States, like Northern Cyprus or Belarus are also acting as puppet states. In reality, the Northern Cyprus regime aligns itself almost fully with the Ankara government, functioning almost as Turkey's puppet state. Similarly, the politics of Belarus—another developing country—is much dependent on Russia. Unfortunately, due to unequal political and economic power distribution among Member States, more countries/territories join Belarus and Northern Cyprus in aligning themselves with other large players, to which they feel relatively close to. Examples include micro-island states like Tuvalu or Nauru that have aligned their politics with their close neighbors—New Zealand or Australia. Similarly, it is unlikely for Vietnam to be a puppet state of the USA—the state that it recently fought against. Therefore, for countries like Vietnam, partnering with other states like China is more likely.

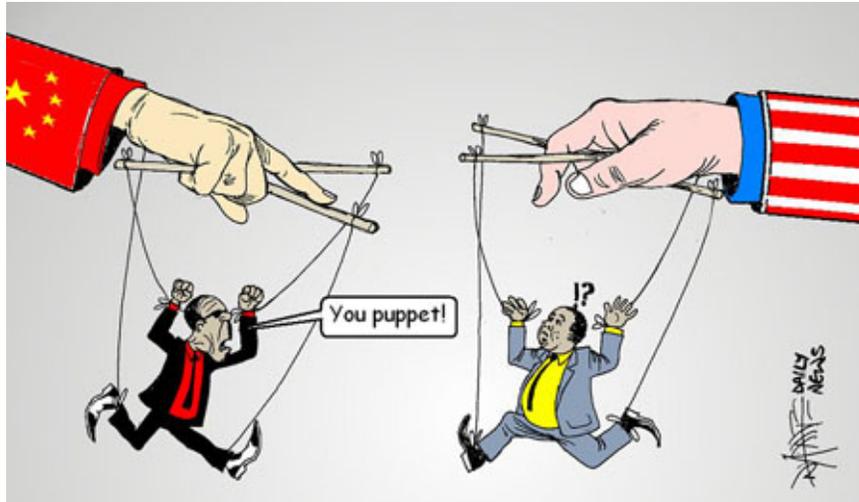
Because the current puppet states are still considered fully sovereign due to international law, the current issue of autonomy is mostly neglected. In theory, all these developing countries have governments that can serve them directly. However, the ignored reality is that these governments or self-governance institutions cannot make their decisions independently. Therefore, the world urgently needs platforms or legal changes that will allow all states, including developing countries, to fully decide for themselves. This even means a substantial amount of restrictions for larger players for the use of unnecessary political or economic influence like wars, military drills or sanctions that aim to threaten developing countries, aiming to indirectly absorb their self-governance.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

The United States of America: The USA is one of the five P5 nations that have the right to veto resolutions in the Security Council. However, this is not the biggest method through which the USA influences developing countries.

The USA is an economic superpower and the world's only uni-polar superpower (the only nation with immense influence on international politics). However, it should be remembered that the USA's hegemony and influence are diminishing. The problem is that these do not contribute to developing nations' autonomy. In fact, the USA just loses its authority to other multi-polar states (the rest of the top powerful states in the World). As a result, the developing states cannot benefit from the changes in the USA's changing hegemony in international politics (Cooley and Nexon).

China: China is the second largest superpower, which aims to benefit from the USA's decreased soft power. It is a funder of various megaprojects that especially developing/least developed countries are conducting. Therefore, China uses its economically strong position to dominate other developing countries in politics.



Puppet States (Way)

Developing Countries: Developing countries are where the economy tends to grow quickly. Therefore, as they build their place in the international economy, these countries need a large flow of money. This is why the economic power of other nations like China, Russia or the USA can mean reduced autonomy for the developing countries. Moreover, these countries are also younger by age, some of their political systems might possibly be too young to be able to achieve full autonomy.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The United Nations (including UN agencies like UNDP), IMF, World Bank are all institutions that aim to recognize/give autonomy to the Member States, who are especially less developed. For example, when a developing country in Africa borrows money from the World Bank, it is not the same as receiving it from a country like China, who might abuse their power in case of a non-payment. So, international organizations like the UN have worked to bring these issues to the international level. Agencies like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have directly funded projects just like other Member States who see these projects as a tool to influence developing countries.

Moreover, the issue of the practice of autonomy was partially addressed in many UN-related resolutions or documents that were initially prepared for other reasons. For example, the UN Charter states that its aim is “to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace” (Self-determination). As a different example, “Article 1 in both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) reads: ‘All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development’” (Self-determination).

Regardless of the past attempts by the UN and international organizations, the issue of practicing autonomy is still present for developing countries. The main reason is that the USA and now other countries like China, Russia, France or the UK are global superpowers. The USA used its hegemony that it gained during the Cold War very effectively. European countries and China quickly developed their power as the USA began to lose some of its power in the 21st under especially controversial leaders like Donald Trump. As a result, the world now has not just one, but many superpowers that can dominate over the autonomy of developing countries.

Possible Solutions

A main tool that other states use to control developing countries' autonomy is money. We see China taking part in various megaprojects in Africa just because it wants to increase its influence in the region. As an alternative to this, UN agencies like UNDP can provide more funding and support for such projects and states. Alternatively, a council of many wealthy states might be created. This way, the funding of such megaprojects like infrastructure constructions will be covered by no single country. So, a single country like China cannot solely dominate over the autonomy of an African nation who, for example, cannot pay its debt.

Institutions like the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) can provide more direct support for developing countries so that they need less outside help to keep their vibrant economies growing.

A research organization can also be formed so that the UN will conduct research about the influence of Member States on each other's politics. Having a clear report may help with the solution mechanisms, which might include increased assistance towards most affected countries.

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