

Kick Russia out

Years ago, a fraternity had unruly members. To establish discipline, the fraternity created a leadership council made of respected brothers. If the council could reach a unanimous agreement, it could levy fines and discipline the unruly members. For years, this arrangement worked well.

Joe McGarrity



Then things took a turn for the worse. A spoiled, unethical bully got elected to the council. Every time he did something outrageous, the rest of the council tried to discipline him only to have the bully veto their proposals. The bully could do what he wanted, and the fraternity had no way to stop him.

While the story about the fraternity was fictional, it is very similar to a real-life story. After World War II, the United Nations allowed all of the great powers of the time to become permanent members of its security council. Each one could veto a punitive action the United Nations wished to take against a nation that was engaged in bad behavior.

Since the end of World War II, Russia has played a part on the security council that was much like the part the bully played in the fraternity. Other nations put up with Russia's bad behavior because it was a great power. That is no longer true today. Russia only has the 11th highest gross domestic product (GDP). GDP is a measure of the value of a country's output. It is also a measure of a country's power because a country with a larger economy has the resources to build a larger military.

Today, six countries have larger GDPs than Russia's GDP even though they are not permanent members of the security council. These countries are Japan, Germany, India, Brazil, Italy, and Canada. South Korea, Australia, and Spain's GDPs are growing more rapidly than Russia's GDP; before long, their GDPs should also surpass Russia's GDP.

Due to its relative economic decline, Russia is much less important militarily than it was several decades ago. As a result, the United Nations should stop treating Russia like a great power. Or at least, the United Nations should use Russia's desire to be considered as a major power as leverage to get Russia to behave well. My proposal is that the United Nations should threaten to remove Russia as a permanent member of the security council if Russia does not halt its invasion of Ukraine.

This proposal could lead to two results. In the best-case scenario, Russia would seek to keep its privileged security council status and end its invasion. In the more likely scenario, Russia would be removed as a permanent member of the security council. It would no longer be able to veto action aimed at punishing its bad behavior. Without this veto threat, the United Nations could more easily coordinate punishments against Russia when Russia starts to act aggressively against its neighbors.

Russia is behaving like the spoiled bully on the fraternity's leadership council. Russia no longer has a top-ten economy. Given its diminished status, it should not keep its permanent position on the security council unless its bellicose behavior ends. It is time to stop making allowances for a wimpy bully.

Joe McGarrity is a professor of economics at the University of Central Arkansas.