

Relevance Of The United Nations Security Council

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I. Introduction

In an age defined by global crises—from wars and climate emergencies to humanitarian catastrophes—the question of who governs the world order is no longer abstract. It is urgent, real, and deeply political. At the center of this global architecture stands the United Nations Security Council: a body created to safeguard peace, but often paralyzed by power. I am writing this not as a passive observer, but as a concerned global citizen seeking to question, understand, and challenge the very structures that claim to protect international security. The UNSC, with its immense authority and equally immense contradictions, is both the hope and the hypocrisy of multilateral diplomacy. This work is an attempt to decode its power, expose its failures, celebrate its rare successes, and advocate for meaningful reform—because global peace cannot remain hostage to a frozen power structure born in 1945. If the world has changed, so must the Council that claims to govern it.

What Is The United Nations?

The United Nations (UN) is a global intergovernmental organisation founded in 1945 to maintain international peace and Security, promote human rights, foster development, uphold international law, and coordinate humanitarian efforts. It comprises 193 member states and functions through key bodies like the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the International Court of Justice.

Un Bodies

The United Nations is structured around six principal organs, each serving a distinct purpose in upholding the organisation's goals. At the core is the **General Assembly**, a universal forum where all 193 member states have equal representation. It functions as the main deliberative body, discussing international issues, passing resolutions, and approving the UN budget.

The **Security Council** holds the primary responsibility for maintaining global peace and security. It consists of fifteen members—five permanent (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) with veto power, and ten non-permanent members elected for two-year terms. It has the authority to impose sanctions, authorise peacekeeping missions, and in extreme cases, approve military intervention.

Supporting global development and coordination is the **Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**, which connects the UN with numerous specialised agencies. ECOSOC addresses issues such as poverty, education, and climate, and works with institutions like the World Health Organisation (WHO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and UNESCO.

The **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** serves as the UN's principal judicial organ. Based in The Hague, it adjudicates disputes between states and offers advisory opinions on legal questions referred by the General Assembly or the Security Council. Its judges are elected by both of these bodies.

The **UN Secretariat**, led by the Secretary-General, is the administrative arm of the UN. It carries out the daily work of the organisation, ranging from diplomacy and peacebuilding to managing global crises and humanitarian operations.

Lastly, the **Trusteeship Council**, originally created to oversee trust territories transitioning to self-governance, has been inactive since 1994, following the independence of Palau.

Together, these organs form the institutional framework of the United Nations, supported by a wide network of programs, funds, and specialised agencies that extend its reach into every aspect of global governance.

The Security Council

The **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** stands as the most authoritative and consequential body within the UN system, vested with the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. Its structure is both hierarchical and exclusive, reflecting the geopolitical realities of the post-World War II era. The Council consists of fifteen members, five of whom are permanent: the **United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China**. These five possess the controversial yet decisive power of the

veto, meaning that any one of them can unilaterally block the adoption of a substantive resolution, regardless of the global majority's will. The remaining ten members are non-permanent, elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms, with attention to regional balance. However, these elected members have no veto and thus wield significantly less influence.

What makes the Security Council extraordinary is not merely its structure, but its reach and authority beyond the boundaries of individual nation-states. Unlike any other UN body, the UNSC can pass resolutions that are **legally binding on all member states**, particularly when acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

This includes the power to **impose sanctions, authorise military interventions, and even create international tribunals**. For instance, the Council's decisions led to the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, as well as the authorisation of NATO intervention in Libya in 2011. These are not mere diplomatic gestures—they are actions with real-world, sovereign consequences.

Yet, beneath its formal authority lies a deeply contested legitimacy. The veto system has often paralysed the Council, especially when permanent members prioritise national interest over collective security. The Cold War era saw repeated stalemates, and even today, the Council is frequently deadlocked—most recently on issues like Syria, Ukraine, and Gaza. Critics argue that the UNSC no longer reflects the geopolitical landscape of the 21st century, where rising powers such as India, Brazil, and South Africa remain outside its permanent ranks. Moreover, the Council's selective activism—intervening militarily in some crises while remaining silent on others—raises questions about fairness, neutrality, and accountability.

Despite these flaws, the UNSC wields power that transcends borders. When it speaks with unity, its voice carries unmatched weight in global affairs. A resolution passed unanimously by the Council signals international consensus and compels compliance. Even its silence or failure to act can be profoundly symbolic, often interpreted as a tacit acceptance of unfolding events. In essence, the Security Council is not merely a guardian of peace but a barometer of global power dynamics—a place where law, politics, and diplomacy collide on a world stage.

UNSC as Success:

While the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has faced criticism for inaction or political deadlock, it has also overseen several important and successful missions that demonstrate its potential when global powers align. These successes reflect the Council's capacity to act decisively when consensus is achieved.

One of the earliest and most cited successes is the **UN intervention in Korea (1950)**. Following North Korea's invasion of the South, the Security Council—taking advantage of the

Soviet Union's temporary boycott—authorized a U.S.-led coalition under the UN flag to repel the aggression. It was a rare case where military force was sanctioned under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, successfully defending South Korea's sovereignty, though the conflict ended in a stalemate.

Another widely acknowledged achievement is the **Namibia independence process**. For decades, Namibia remained under illegal South African occupation despite international condemnation. In 1989, the Security Council mandated the **United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG)** to oversee Namibia's peaceful transition to independence. The mission supervised elections, monitored South African troop withdrawal, and facilitated the birth of the Republic of Namibia in 1990—one of the UN's most celebrated peacebuilding successes.

The **Sierra Leone conflict** also marks a turning point in UNSC operations. In the late 1990s, Sierra Leone was devastated by a brutal civil war. The Council established **UNAMSIL (United**

Nations Mission in Sierra Leone), which, in cooperation with regional and international forces, disarmed rebels, supported elections, and helped restore democratic governance. The mission is often cited as a textbook example of effective post-conflict peacekeeping.

Similarly, the **East Timor crisis** in 1999 prompted a swift response from the UNSC. Following a violent backlash against the Timorese independence vote from Indonesian militias, the Council authorized a multinational force, **INTERFET**, followed by a full-fledged UN transitional administration. The mission stabilized the region and facilitated East Timor's emergence as a sovereign state in 2002.

The **Liberia mission** is another notable success. After years of civil war, the UNSC established **UNMIL (United Nations Mission in Liberia)** in 2003. It helped demobilize combatants, rebuild institutions, and organize credible elections. The mission concluded in 2018, widely praised for having helped one of the world's most fragile states achieve relative stability.

These examples show that, when not hindered by veto politics, the UNSC can mobilize global resources, enforce peace, and support nation-building. Though limited in frequency, these successes prove the Council's relevance and potential as a force for international stability when political will converges.

UNSC As Failure

The United Nations Security Council, despite its foundational mandate to maintain international peace and security, has repeatedly failed in moments of grave global crisis—largely due to the geopolitical interests of its permanent members and the misuse of veto power. These failures expose structural flaws that question both the legitimacy and the effectiveness of the UNSC in today's multipolar world.

One of the most glaring failures is the Council's inaction during the **Rwandan Genocide in 1994**. As nearly **800,000 people were massacred** in just 100 days, the UNSC not only failed to intervene but also **withdrew most of its peacekeepers** from the country. Bureaucratic hesitation and a lack of political will, especially from the P5, led to one of the worst genocides in modern history occurring virtually unchecked—while the Council debated terminology instead of action.

Similarly, the **ongoing conflict in Syria**, which began in 2011, represents another profound failure. Multiple draft resolutions seeking to impose sanctions or refer the Assad regime to the

International Criminal Court were **vetoed by Russia and China**, paralyzing any decisive action. As a result, over **500,000 people have died**, millions have been displaced, and chemical weapons have been used—all while the Security Council stood divided and largely impotent.

The **Russia-Ukraine war** has exposed the most dangerous flaw of the UNSC: the contradiction of having aggressor states among its permanent members. Despite Russia's blatant violation of international law and the UN Charter through its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the Council has been unable to act meaningfully because Russia wields veto power. Resolutions condemning the invasion or proposing sanctions have been instantly blocked. The UNSC thus becomes a platform for rhetorical battles, not meaningful enforcement, when one of its own core members is the aggressor.

In the **Israel-Palestine conflict**, the Council has failed for decades to enforce international law or provide lasting solutions. Repeated U.S. vetoes of resolutions critical of Israeli military actions or settlements have allowed violations to continue with impunity. In times of active conflict, such as in Gaza, ceasefire efforts are often stalled or watered down due to the strategic interests of key members, especially the U.S.

Even in cases of clear international consensus, such as **Myanmar's military coup in 2021**, the Council has struggled to impose real consequences. Draft resolutions condemning the military junta or imposing arms embargoes were blocked or diluted by China and Russia. This inaction has emboldened authoritarian regimes and signaled that geopolitical alliances outweigh human rights.

The **veto system**, intended as a post-World War II safeguard to prevent another global conflict, has now become a tool of paralysis and selective justice. It shields powerful nations and their allies from accountability while rendering the Council ineffective in responding to atrocities, invasions, or mass displacement—unless those events align with the strategic interests of the P5.

In essence, the UNSC often acts not as a neutral guardian of peace but as a battlefield for great power politics. Its structural imbalance, outdated membership, and susceptibility to veto abuse have resulted in a credibility crisis. The world watches humanitarian catastrophes unfold while the Security Council, bound by its own design, issues statements of concern but fails to act. Thus, while it has succeeded in some missions, its failures—especially in the face of genocide, war crimes, and unlawful aggression—reveal a need for urgent reform to make it truly representative, just, and effective in the 21st century.

Suggested Reforms For The Security Council

Reforming the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is widely considered essential to restore its credibility, effectiveness, and legitimacy in the 21st century. The current structure reflects the geopolitical realities of 1945, not the modern, multipolar world. Several key reforms have been proposed and debated for decades—though none have been implemented due to political resistance, particularly from the permanent five (P5) members.

One of the most demanded reforms is **expansion of the Council's membership**, both permanent and non-permanent. Many argue that the current 15-member structure is too narrow to reflect today's global diversity. Proposals suggest increasing it to 25 or more members to include emerging powers such as **India, Brazil,**

Germany, Japan, and African nations. These countries have growing economic and diplomatic influence, and their exclusion undermines the Council's global legitimacy.

A more controversial but vital reform is the **restructuring of the veto power**. Critics argue that the veto paralyzes the Council and is often used to shield allies or the permanent members themselves from accountability. Suggested reforms include limiting the use of the veto in cases of mass atrocities like genocide or war crimes, introducing a **"responsibility notto veto"** doctrine, or requiring at least **two P5 members** to exercise the veto jointly for it to be valid. However, any change to the veto system would require the consent of those who benefit from it—making this the most difficult reform to achieve.

Another proposed reform is **regional representation and equity**.

African and Latin American countries are significantly underrepresented in both permanent and non-permanent categories.

Including at least **one African permanent member** is widely supported, given that much of the UNSC's peacekeeping agenda involves Africa, yet African voices remain secondary in decision-making.

There is also a need for **greater transparency and accountability** in UNSC procedures. Currently, many negotiations take place behind closed doors, and decisions are often driven by national interests rather than objective criteria. Introducing **public** voting records, regular briefings, and civil society involvement could enhance the Council's accountability to the global community.

Some reform advocates suggest creating **permanent seats without veto**, as a middle ground. This could allow influential countries to have a long-term voice without disturbing the delicate balance of power entrenched in the veto system.

Finally, many argue that the **criteria for permanent membership** should be updated. The original five were chosen based on victory in World War II and nuclear capabilities. In contrast, modern global leadership is shaped by democratic values, economic strength, peacekeeping contributions, and commitment to international law—all of which support a stronger case for countries like **India** and **Germany**.

For Humanitarian Cases Like in Gaza , the Coucil Must have a “Humanitarian Override feature - to protect the civilian life in War Affected region”

In summary, the main reforms proposed for the UNSC include expanding membership, regulating or restricting the veto, ensuring fair regional representation, improving transparency, and updating criteria for permanent seats. While politically challenging, such reforms are essential to ensure that the Council evolves from a post-war relic into a modern institution that genuinely represents and serves the global community.

Without these changes, the UNSC risks becoming irrelevant in an increasingly interconnected and contested world.

Sources used in the Research

1. UNSC- official Webiste
2. UN- News
3. Public Media
4. Reuters
5. Aljazeera