



SECURITY COUNCIL

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Topic Guide

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SC - Security Council

Topic: Security Council Reform: Evaluating Permanent Membership and Veto Power

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Introduction to the Security Council

The Security Council was established in 1945, alongside the UN Charter, to prevent any future global conflicts after the failure of the League of Nations (Security Council). As the principal UN organ based in New York, its primary responsibility is for international peace and security, holding the authority to issue binding resolutions, impose sanctions, and authorize military actions (Security Council). It is also one of the only councils that has Veto Power: the five permanent members (USA, UK, France, Russia, China) can block, reject, and refuse any non-procedural resolutions even if they have majority votes from other non-veto members (Veto).

Introduction to the topic

Veto power has been an extremely controversial voting power, as some argue it has paralyzed the council, and prevented action on critical global crises and mass atrocities for political or economic pride from one of the 5 members (Ramadhani et al.). Many also argue that it enables geopolitical divisions, allowing the 5 members to protect their allies and interests, which widely undermines the democratic nature that the UN implies it follows, and

violates many sovereign equalities (Ramadhani et al.). The nature of the topic at hand will allow open debates on the veto power and its essentiality and place in the Security Council.

Definition of Key Terms

- Soft Power – The ability to influence other states through diplomacy, culture, values, or political ideals rather than force.
- Collective Security – A system in which states agree to jointly respond to threats against any member state to maintain international peace.
- Sovereignty – The principle that a state has supreme authority over its territory and domestic affairs without external interference.
- Multilateralism – Cooperation among multiple states within international institutions to address global issues.
- Unilateralism – When a state acts independently without coordination or approval from other states.
- Balance of Power – A distribution of power among states that prevents any one state from becoming dominant.
- Multipolarity – An international system in which power is distributed among several major states.

- Bipolarity – An international system dominated by two major powers.

Current Situation

Today, veto power is one of the main reasons the Security Council is seen as blocked on the biggest crises, and many Member States argue it is being used more openly to protect national interests rather than to protect peace. In practice, recent years have shown repeated deadlock on conflicts like Ukraine and Gaza, where draft resolutions fail despite wide support because one permanent member can stop them. For example, reporting in 2024–2025 highlights how vetoes continue to shape outcomes on both Ukraine-related action and Gaza ceasefire texts (UN Press 6 Mar. 2025; Associated Press). At the same time, there has been a small institutional improvement: since April 2022, the General Assembly has a standing rule to meet after any veto, forcing public debate and political pressure (United Nations, *A/RES/76/262*; UN Press 20 Nov. 2025). This does not remove the veto, but it makes veto use harder to “hide” and has made transparency a bigger part of the conversation (UN Geneva).

Overall, the situation has arguably gotten worse in terms of Council effectiveness, because global polarization has increased and veto use has become more frequent and more tied to rivalry. That said, the reform movement has gotten stronger: more states support voluntary restraint proposals in mass atrocity situations (France/Mexico initiative; ACT Code of Conduct), even though these are political commitments and not binding law (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect; Security Council Report). Another major trend is that when the Council is blocked, states increasingly shift to the General Assembly for debate, legitimacy, and political momentum—especially under the post-veto debate mechanism created in 2022 (United Nations, *A/RES/76/262*; UN Press 1 Oct. 2025). The biggest ongoing challenge remains structural: real veto reform requires amending the UN Charter, and amendments need ratification by all permanent members—meaning any P5 state can

effectively prevent changes that weaken its own veto (United Nations, “Chapter XVIII: Amendments (Articles 108–109)”). So the key trend today is a two-track reality: more frustration and deadlock in the Council, but more accountability tools and political pressure outside it.

Key Challenges and Issues

The veto power reform is challenged by many structural and political barriers. From a legal perspective, any kind of change must be made through an amendment to the Charter of the United Nations, Articles 108 and 109, which must be accepted by all five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (United Nations, Chapter XVIII: Amendments). This is a fundamental contradiction: the countries that benefit most from the veto power must agree to weaken themselves. This means that any proposal for reform is likely to fail even before any kind of negotiation has begun. From a political perspective, there is also a great divide between Member States. Some countries believe that the veto power prevents a confrontation between world powers and thus maintains international stability, while others see it as undemocratic and incompatible with contemporary multilateralism (Security Council Report, *The Veto*).

Geopolitical rivalry further complicates the issue. Recent Security Council stalemates over Ukraine and Gaza demonstrate how the veto can block action even when most members support a resolution (Associated Press, “US vetoes UN Security Council resolution demanding an immediate Gaza ceasefire”; UN Press, “General Assembly Delegates Demand Overhaul of Security Council”). In many cases, vetoes are linked to national alliances and strategic interests rather than purely humanitarian concerns. Although initiatives such as the France–Mexico proposal encourage voluntary restraint in cases of mass atrocities, they are

political commitments and not legally binding (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *The Veto and Mass Atrocity Prevention*). Therefore, the main difficulty today is that veto reform involves legal rigidity, power politics, and competing national interests, all within a system designed around post-World War II power structures.

Previous UN Actions and Resolutions

The United Nations has taken several procedural and political steps to address concerns surrounding veto power, although no formal reform has been adopted. The most significant recent development is General Assembly Resolution 76/262, adopted in April 2022, which requires the General Assembly to meet automatically within ten working days whenever a veto is cast in the Security Council (United Nations, *A/RES/76/262*). This measure does not limit veto authority, but it increases transparency and political accountability by creating a formal platform for Member States to question and debate the use of the veto. In addition, the General Assembly has held multiple debates on Security Council reform under the framework of the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) process, which addresses issues such as veto use, permanent membership, and regional representation (United Nations, *Intergovernmental Negotiations on Security Council Reform*).

Beyond formal resolutions, Member States have promoted voluntary initiatives aimed at responsible veto use. The France–Mexico initiative calls on permanent members to voluntarily refrain from using the veto in cases of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Similarly, the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) Group introduced a Code of Conduct encouraging states to support timely and decisive action in situations involving mass atrocities (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *The Veto and Mass Atrocity Prevention*). While these initiatives reflect growing concern among

Member States, they remain political commitments rather than legally binding obligations. Overall, the UN has demonstrated increasing engagement with the issue, but structural reform of the veto has not yet been achieved.

Possible Solutions and Policy Options

Reforming the veto power within the United Nations Security Council requires balancing global stability with democratic legitimacy. One realistic approach is to limit, rather than abolish, the veto. Permanent members could voluntarily agree to refrain from using the veto in situations involving genocide, crimes against humanity, or large-scale war crimes. This preserves the institutional structure of the Council while preventing paralysis during humanitarian crises. Additionally, introducing a requirement for permanent members to publicly justify their veto in writing before the General Assembly would increase transparency and political accountability. By raising the reputational cost of obstruction, such measures could discourage the strategic or politically motivated use of veto power without requiring a difficult amendment to the UN Charter.

A second avenue for reform involves structural adjustments that strengthen collective decision-making. For example, a supermajority of the General Assembly could be granted authority to override a veto in exceptional cases concerning international peace and security. Alternatively, requiring at least two permanent members to jointly exercise a veto before blocking a resolution would reduce unilateral obstruction and encourage negotiation among major powers. These reforms aim to maintain the balance of power that underpins the Security Council while making it more responsive, representative, and capable of addressing contemporary global challenges.

This section is fully written by OpenAI

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