



VETO POWER AND ITS MISUSE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

Huzefa F Indonesiawala*

ABSTRACT

This research critically examines how the veto power held by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (P5) has been repeatedly used to serve national interests at the expense of global peace and security. While initially intended to ensure cooperation among major powers and prevent global conflict, the veto has frequently led to deadlock, selective intervention, and inaction in the face of humanitarian crises. By examining the structure and responsibilities of the Security Council alongside case studies including the Israel-Palestine dispute, the Rwandan Genocide, and Russia's annexation of Crimea, this paper underscores how the misuse of veto power has harmed the effectiveness of global governance. The study further explores global calls for reform, assessing proposed models aimed at enhancing the Council's legitimacy, inclusivity, and responsiveness. The research draws from a wide range of credible sources, including academic publications, official UN documents, news media, legal commentaries, and journal articles. Ultimately, it argues that without meaningful changes to the veto system, the Security Council risks losing its authority and relevance in addressing today's complex global challenges.

Keywords: Veto Power, UN Security Council, Humanitarian Crises, Global Governance Reform

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Statement of the Problem: While the UN Security Council is intended to maintain international peace through great-power cooperation, the veto power has often led to deadlock and selective intervention, allowing powerful states to pursue national interests while blocking

*BBA LLB, FOURTH YEAR, BHARATI VIDYAPEETH NEW LAW COLLEGE, ERANDWADE, KOTHRUD, PUNE.

global consensus. This undermines the UN's legitimacy and hampers timely responses to humanitarian crises.

Scope of the Study: This research critically examines the use and misuse of veto power by the five permanent members (P5) of the United Nations Security Council. It focuses on how the veto has been employed to protect national interests at the expense of international peace and security, using case studies such as the Rwandan Genocide, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and the Israel-Palestine conflict. The study also evaluates ongoing reform efforts and proposed models for restructuring the Security Council.

Hypothesis: The misuse of the veto power by the permanent members of the UN Security Council significantly undermines the Council's ability to respond effectively to global crises and violates the principles of sovereign equality and collective security.

Research Objectives:

- To analyse the origin, purpose, and legal basis of the veto power under the UN Charter.
- To assess the misuse of veto power through major historical case studies.
- To evaluate the impact of veto power on the credibility and functioning of the UN Security Council.
- To explore reform proposals aimed at making the UNSC more democratic, inclusive, and effective.
- To recommend policy-level changes for the responsible use or restructuring of the veto mechanism.

Research Questions:

- What is the historical and legal foundation of the veto power in the UN Security Council?
- How has veto power been misused in key global crises?
- What are the consequences of such misuse for global governance and humanitarian protection?
- What reform models have been proposed, and how viable are they?
- How can the Security Council evolve to better reflect current geopolitical realities?

Research Methodology: The research adopts a qualitative doctrinal approach, relying on:

- **Primary sources:** UN Charter provisions, official UN documents, and Security Council resolutions.
- **Secondary sources:** Academic journals, legal commentaries, reports by think tanks (e.g., Carnegie Endowment, Atlantic Council), and credible media outlets (e.g., BBC, Reuters).
- Case study analysis of real-world incidents where veto power influenced UNSC decisions.

Data Analysis: Data from case studies were analysed qualitatively to identify patterns of veto misuse. Comparative analysis was used to evaluate the frequency and context of vetoes across different crises. The impact of vetoes on international response, legal obligations, and humanitarian outcomes was critically assessed using official records, UN reports, and scholarly analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Security Council: The UN Security Council (UNSC) acts as the organisation's main body for handling global crises and peacekeeping. It holds the unique power to make decisions binding on all 193 UN member states, including interventions related to civil conflict, weapons control, natural disasters, and terrorism.¹

Initially comprising 11 members, the council expanded to 15 in 1965. Among these, five are permanent members: the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia (formerly the USSR), and China (formerly the Republic of China). The rest are non-permanent members elected for two-year terms, with five seats rotating each year to ensure continuity.

Despite major changes in global power dynamics, such as the People's Republic of China taking over China's seat in 1971 and the Russian Federation replacing the USSR in 1991, Article 23 of the UN Charter has never been formally amended to reflect these transitions. The rationale is that such modifications are considered too substantial for simple charter amendments.²

Functions of the Security Council: The UN Charter outlines the Security Council's core responsibilities as follows:

¹ Council on Foreign Relations, 'The UN Security Council' (CFR.org) <https://www.cfr.org/background/un-security-council>

² H O Agarwal, *International Law and Human Rights* (n.d.) ch 27

- Maintaining international peace and security
- Investigating disputes that may endanger peace
- Recommending conflict resolution methods
- Regulating armaments
- Identifying risks to international stability or instances of hostile behaviour
- Imposing sanctions or authorising force
- Admitting new UN members
- Appointing the Secretary-General (with the General Assembly)
- Overseeing strategic trust territories
- Participating in selecting International Court of Justice judges ³

As per Article 24(1) of the Charter⁴, member states have entrusted the Security Council with the chief responsibility of ensuring international peace. Article 25⁵ further stipulates that all members agree to abide by its decisions. In contrast to resolutions passed by the General Assembly, decisions made by the Security Council carry legal obligations.⁶

VETO POWER OF THE UN

Although the term "veto" is not explicitly mentioned in the United Nations Charter, its concept arises from the voting procedures described therein. According to Article 27⁷:

- Procedural matters within the Security Council require the support of at least nine out of fifteen members.
- However, for all substantive decisions, a minimum of nine affirmative votes is also needed, provided that none of the five permanent members exercises a veto.

This arrangement essentially allows any permanent member of the P5 to veto a resolution, even if it has broad backing from other Council members. Additionally, the so-called "double veto"

³ United Nations, 'Functions and Powers of the Security Council'
<https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/functions-and-powers>

⁴ Charter of the United Nations (adopted 26 June 1945, entered into force 24 October 1945) art. 24(1)

⁵ Charter of the United Nations (adopted 26 June 1945, entered into force 24 October 1945) art. 25

⁶ H O Agarwal, *International Law and Human Rights* (n.d.) ch 27

⁷ Charter of the United Nations (adopted 26 June 1945, entered into force 24 October 1945) art. 27

allows these states to first determine whether an issue is substantive or procedural, thus giving them further control over Council proceedings.⁸

Historical Basis of Granting the Veto Power to the P5 Members: During the formation of the United Nations, the veto mechanism was among the most divisive topics under negotiation. Disputes arose not over whether the veto should exist, but over the scope of its use. The Soviet Union pushed for broad veto authority, while the UK and the US proposed limiting it, particularly in situations involving a permanent member directly involved in a conflict. In the early years of the UN, intense rivalry among the global superpowers, particularly between the US and USSR, resulted in frequent use of the veto. Although veto usage declined after the Cold War, it continues to shape diplomatic negotiations in less visible ways. One such example is the "hidden veto," the behind-the-scenes threat to block a resolution, which can prevent it from even reaching a formal vote.⁹ The veto was originally granted to the major Allied powers of World War II, such as the US, UK, USSR, China, and France, based on the belief that global peace would be possible only with their unanimous cooperation. These countries were seen as essential to preventing another world conflict. However, this assumption proved optimistic, as divisions between these powers surfaced soon after the UN's founding.¹⁰

The privileged status of the P5 is rooted in wartime alliances. The US and USSR emerged as dominant forces, while the UK played a key role in shaping the post-war order. President Franklin D. Roosevelt also advocated for the inclusion of China, which he envisioned as one of the key enforcers of world peace. To maintain stability and balance within Europe, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill supported France's admission as a permanent member. Over the years, these five countries entrenched their dominance within the UN by securing permanent seats and exclusive veto power on the Security Council. The frequency with which each has exercised this power, however, has varied. Russia (including the Soviet Union era) leads in usage, with 158 vetoes. The United States follows with 92, often employing the veto to shield Israel from criticism. China, historically more restrained, has increased its use

⁸ Fakiha Mahmood, 'Power Versus the Sovereign Equality of States: The Veto, the P-5, and United Nations Security Council Reforms' (2013) 18(4) *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 117.

⁹ Fakiha Mahmood, 'Power Versus the Sovereign Equality of States: The Veto, the P-5, and United Nations Security Council Reforms' (2013) 18(4) *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 117.

¹⁰ H O Agarwal, *International Law and Human Rights* (n.d.) ch 27

recently, frequently aligning with Russia. France and the UK, by contrast, have not exercised the veto since 1989 and have advocated for more limited use by other permanent members.¹¹

Criticism of the Veto Power: The veto power exercised by the Security Council's five permanent members has faced extensive criticism for various reasons:

- It institutionalises inequality within the United Nations, creating a hierarchy between permanent and non-permanent members, as well as between P5 members and the rest of the UN.
- The core UN Charter principle of sovereign equality is compromised, as the P5 have the unilateral power to obstruct decisions, even when there is widespread international agreement.
- The interests of the P5 do not always align with global humanitarian concerns. As a result, the veto is often used to protect national or strategic interests rather than promote global well-being.
- The power has shielded permanent members from accountability. For example, the United States was not held responsible for its controversial invasion of Iraq in 2003, despite widespread international condemnation.

The justification for granting veto rights to the so-called "Great Powers" is increasingly questioned. The global power dynamics that existed when the UN was established in 1945 have significantly changed. Countries such as Germany and Japan are now more economically and politically influential than some current permanent members, like France and the UK. Similarly, Russia, the legal successor of the now-defunct USSR, faces economic and geopolitical challenges that weaken its status as a dominant global force.¹²

Understanding the use of the veto is complicated by the fact that member states often provide vague or politically driven justifications for their decisions. Even official statements may not reveal their true intentions. Moreover, the so-called "hidden veto," where a permanent member quietly threatens to block a resolution, often occurs in private consultations, leaving no official record. This lack of transparency makes it difficult to assess the true impact of the veto system. Many states also oppose the veto because it allows the P5 to shield their allies from sanctions

¹¹ Council on Foreign Relations, 'The UN Security Council' (CFR.org) <https://www.cfr.org/background/un-security-council>

¹² H O Agarwal, *International Law and Human Rights* (n.d.) ch 27

or investigations. This creates an impression that nations under the protection of a permanent member can act with impunity, even committing human rights abuses or launching illegal military operations. For example, in 1964, when Malaysia reported a violation of its sovereignty by Indonesia, a resolution condemning the incident was blocked by the Soviet Union.

The veto has also hindered peacekeeping operations. For example, China has halted certain missions as a means of punishing countries that uphold diplomatic relations with Taiwan. The mere threat of a veto, the hidden veto, has contributed to some of the UN's most catastrophic failures. A tragic example is the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Despite clear warnings and signs of an unfolding atrocity, powerful nations, particularly France and the United States, resisted meaningful intervention. Their reluctance stemmed in part from prior failed missions, such as the 1993 operation in Somalia, which resulted in American casualties. These nations reportedly used their influence to avoid designating the Rwandan crisis as a genocide, thereby sidestepping the legal and moral obligations of the Genocide Convention.¹³

CASE STUDIES ON THE MISUSE OF VETO POWER

Rwandan Genocide (1994): The Rwandan Genocide of 1994 stands as one of the most tragic and glaring failures of the international community, where inaction by the UN Security Council, partly driven by the political interests of permanent members, contributed to the deaths of nearly one million people.

Rwanda's social hierarchy developed over centuries, with Tutsi elites maintaining dominance over the monarchy, even though the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa communities shared common cultural and linguistic traits. Belgian colonial rule, beginning in 1916, deepened these divisions by introducing identity cards and privileging the Tutsi minority in education and administration. Over time, resentment among the Hutu majority grew, culminating in the 1959 revolution, which led to massacres of Tutsis and the abolition of the monarchy. After independence in 1962, successive Hutu-led governments systematically marginalised Tutsis politically and socially.

Under President Juvénal Habyarimana (1973–1994), ethnic tensions remained high. The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi-dominated group made up mostly of exiles, initiated

¹³ Tom Ruys and Jan Wouters, 'Use and Abuse of the Veto Power' (2005) *Egmont Institute*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06699.5>

cross-border assaults to reclaim their homeland. Amid growing political and economic unrest, Habyarimana's government exploited these ethnic divisions, with extremist media outlets like *Kangura* and *RTLM* inciting hatred and preparing the population for mass violence.

In 1993, the government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) reached a peace agreement known as the Arusha Accords. However, hardline Hutu factions opposed power-sharing and began organising militias and stockpiling weapons. On April 6, 1994, President Habyarimana's plane was shot down, and the event was used by extremists as the pretext to initiate a pre-planned mass killing of Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

Over the following 100 days, between 800,000 and 1,000,000 people were brutally murdered in one of the fastest genocides in modern history. Despite early warning signs, including clear evidence of escalating violence and hate speech, the international community failed to intervene in time.¹⁴

Much of the Security Council's inaction is attributed to the quiet opposition or hidden vetoes of key permanent members like the United States and France. Rather than endorsing intervention, these nations minimised the severity of the crisis, deliberately refrained from labelling it as 'genocide,' and opposed strong UN measures. An independent UN inquiry later concluded that the Security Council's failure directly contributed to the genocide's scale. Even a resolution invoking the 1951 Genocide Convention was blocked due to political hesitation.

Only after the most intense period of violence did the Security Council approve a limited French-led military mission, known as Opération Turquoise, under a humanitarian mandate. By then, the genocide had already claimed hundreds of thousands of lives.

According to Human Rights Watch, the actions of key powers were driven more by self-interest than concern for human life: the U.S. sought to avoid financial costs, Belgium was focused on protecting its reputation, and France aimed to shield the Hutu regime, which was its political ally.¹⁵

Jan Eliasson, then UN Deputy Secretary-General, later described Rwanda as one of the darkest chapters in UN history and a collective failure of the international system. He emphasised that genocide is not spontaneous; it requires planning and resources, implying that it can be

¹⁴ Alison Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda* (Human Rights Watch 1999), ch. 3

¹⁵ <https://archive.globalpolicy.org/security-council/42656-the-hidden-veto.html>

prevented through vigilance and political will. Rwanda's UN representative, Eugène-Richard Gasana, echoed this sentiment, stating that global inaction resulted not from a lack of information but from a lack of resolve.¹⁶

The hidden veto in Rwanda is a stark example of how strategic interests and political alliances can render the Security Council powerless even when formal vetoes are not exercised. The failure to act in Rwanda emphasises the urgent need for mechanisms to override the misuse or abuse of veto power in situations of mass atrocity.

Russia's Annexation of Crimea (2014): The 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia demonstrates how a permanent member of the UN Security Council can employ its veto power to protect itself from global condemnation, effectively disabling the Council's ability to respond to obvious breaches of international law.

Crimea's significance lies in both its geographical position and its ethnic composition. Although it became part of Ukraine in 1954, the region has a large ethnic Russian population and deep historical ties to Moscow. When pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich was ousted during Ukraine's 2014 Euromaidan revolution, unrest escalated, particularly in Crimea, where pro-Russian sentiment remained strong.

Shortly after Yanukovich fled Kyiv in February 2014, masked troops later identified as Russian military forces took over government buildings in Crimea. The regional parliament, under pressure and without full transparency, voted to install a pro-Russian leader and scheduled a referendum on joining the Russian Federation. On March 16, 2014, the vote reportedly resulted in a 97% approval for annexation. However, the referendum was widely criticised as illegitimate, with reports of voter intimidation, lack of international oversight, and boycotts by Crimean Tatars and other groups.

Despite global criticism, Russia quickly formalised a treaty incorporating Crimea into the Russian Federation. The Ukrainian government, along with most of the international community, including the United Nations, rejected the referendum and the annexation as illegal. Under international law, Russia is considered the occupying power in Crimea, with no legitimate sovereignty over the region.¹⁷

¹⁶ UN Press, 'Security Council: Responsibility to Protect' (16 April 2014)

<https://press.un.org/en/2014/sc11356.doc.htm>

¹⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'History of Crimea' <https://www.britannica.com/place/Crimea/History>

In response, the United States introduced a draft Security Council resolution declaring the referendum invalid and urging countries not to recognise any change in Crimea's status. Thirteen of the Council's fifteen members supported the resolution, while China abstained. Russia was the sole country to oppose the measure, exercising its veto to prevent the action.

U.S. Ambassador to the UN at the time, Samantha Power, called it a "sad and remarkable moment," while France's representative noted that the veto was a defeat not for the Council, but for Russia's credibility. The resolution emphasised that the Crimean referendum was not authorised by Ukraine and urged all member states and organisations to withhold recognition of any territorial changes resulting from it.

The case of Crimea highlights how the misuse of veto power allows powerful states to act unilaterally, disregarding international norms and weakening the legitimacy of multilateral institutions. By shielding itself from condemnation and potential sanctions, Russia demonstrated how the Security Council can be rendered ineffective when national interests override collective responsibility.¹⁸

The consequences extend beyond Ukraine. Critics argue that the UN's failure to respond robustly has emboldened other states to challenge international law. The Security Council, designed to promote peace and prevent unilateral aggression, is increasingly perceived as gridlocked by geopolitical rivalry. As long as permanent members can veto resolutions that implicate their actions, the ability of the Council to enforce international accountability remains severely compromised.¹⁹

Israel-Palestine Conflict (1948-2025): The ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine serves as a prominent example of how veto power has been used to obstruct international accountability, particularly by the United States.

Gaza, a densely populated coastal enclave bordered by Israel, Egypt, and the Mediterranean Sea, is home to over 2.3 million people. Following Egypt's control of the region after 1948, Israel occupied Gaza during the Six-Day War in 1967, establishing settlements and imposing military authority. While Israel removed its troops and settlements from Gaza in 2005, it

¹⁸ Reuters, 'Russia Vetoes UN Resolution Declaring Crimea Vote Invalid' (15 March 2014) <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-un-idUSBREA2E0I520140315/>

¹⁹ Atlantic Council, 'Russia's Veto Makes a Mockery of the United Nations Security Council' (Ukraine Alert, 8 February 2024) <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/russias-veto-makes-a-mockery-of-the-united-nations-security-council/>

continued to control the region's borders, airspace, and coastline, effectively overseeing the flow of goods and people.

Tensions escalated when Hamas won the 2006 Palestinian elections and took control of Gaza by force in 2007, after a conflict with rival political groups. In reaction, Israel and Egypt enforced a blockade on the region. This was followed by several significant outbreaks of conflict in 2008–2009, 2012, 2014, and once more in 2021. These confrontations resulted in substantial civilian casualties, primarily among Palestinians.

A significant escalation occurred on October 7, 2023, when Hamas launched a large-scale attack on Israel, killing around 1,200 people and taking over 250 hostages. In retaliation, Israel launched a massive military campaign in Gaza. According to Gaza's health authorities, over 46,000 people were killed, the majority of them being women and children.²⁰ In July 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) declared Israel's prolonged occupation and settlement activity in Palestinian territories illegal under international law, citing violations related to apartheid and racial discrimination.

In early 2025, the UN humanitarian agencies supported a resolution calling for an end to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.²¹ However, the United States used its veto power to halt the resolution, marking the 49th instance of such action related to Israel. The proposal was introduced by the Council's ten elected members and enjoyed near-unanimous support, except for the U.S., which stood alone in opposition.

The United States has long provided Israel with approximately \$3 billion in annual military aid and has acted as its staunchest defender on the international stage. Since 1970, it has consistently used its veto to shield Israel from critical resolutions. For example:

- In 1976, a draft resolution (S/10784) that condemned Israeli military actions along the Lebanese border was vetoed by the U.S.
- In 1982, as Israeli operations intensified in Lebanon, the U.S. blocked a resolution that demanded Israel withdraw its forces within six hours.

²⁰ BBC News, 'What is the UN Security Council?' (15 May 2018) <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-44124396>

²¹ BBC News, 'What is the UN Security Council?' (15 May 2018) <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-44124396>

- The U.S. has also repeatedly vetoed resolutions concerning the status of Jerusalem and the illegality of Israeli settlements under international law (in 1976, 1980, 1983, 1997, and 2011).
- Even resolutions aimed at ending violence in Gaza (2004 and 2006) were blocked by the U.S.²²

These patterns underscore how the U.S. has routinely used its veto to insulate Israel from international scrutiny, even in the face of significant civilian casualties and alleged human rights violations. This persistent use of veto power, especially in humanitarian crises, raises serious concerns about the credibility and impartiality of the Security Council.

REFORMING THE VETO SYSTEM

On November 17, 2023, the United Nations General Assembly concluded its yearly session on reforming the Security Council. Member states emphasised that the Council's outdated structure and decision-making processes, rooted in post-World War II dynamics, no longer reflect present-day geopolitical realities. Many argued that these archaic rules limit the Council's effectiveness in responding to current global challenges.

Perspectives from Member States

Cambodia (Tithiarun Mao) stressed that any reform of the Security Council must be driven by consensus. He noted that the five key clusters under negotiation are interconnected and cannot be addressed in isolation. Cambodia supports expanding both permanent and non-permanent membership categories, with fair and geographically balanced representation that aligns with the current global landscape. Mao cautioned against reforms that disproportionately benefit a few nations, arguing that this would contradict the core values of equity and justice.

Ukraine (Serhii Dvornyk) argued that the veto should not be used to promote conflict or shield violators of international law. He advocated for restrictions on the use of vetoes in cases involving genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, especially when a permanent member is directly involved in the crisis. Ukraine also supported broader representation, including permanent seats for underrepresented regions such as Africa and Asia, as well as countries like Germany.

²² Middle East Eye, 'US Vetoes on Israel-related UN Resolutions' <https://encr.pw/middleeasteye>

Guyana (Scarolyn Rodrigues-Birkett), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the L.69 group of developing nations from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Pacific, called for more democratic and inclusive Council structures. She highlighted the need for rotational representation for small island states, whose unique vulnerabilities can offer critical insights into global peace and security matters. She also endorsed the Ezulwini Consensus, which demands increased African representation in both permanent and non-permanent categories.²³

PROPOSED REFORM MODELS

In the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace publication “What the World Thinks,” Stewart outlines two potential but challenging paths for reform:

Textual Negotiation through a Unified Proposal: This approach involves starting negotiations based on a rolling text that incorporates various reform models. However, progress depends heavily on the G4 nations (Germany, Japan, India, and Brazil) and the African Union (AU) finding common ground. For instance, they might agree to waive veto privileges for a transitional period. If backed by nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, this compromise could potentially reduce opposition from China and Russia.

Semi-Permanent Membership: Diplomat Christoph Heusgen proposed that the G4 nations relinquish their pursuit of full permanent membership in favour of long-term, renewable seats, potentially through the creation of a new 'semi-permanent' membership category. While this idea might reduce resistance from current P5 members, it would require major concessions, especially from India, which has long sought full permanent status. As commentator Barçın Yinanç points out, this could at least create a counterbalance to the unchecked dominance of the current P5.²⁴

²³ UN Press, ‘General Assembly: Debate on Security Council Reform’ (17 November 2023) <https://press.un.org/en/2023/ga12563.doc.htm>

²⁴ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, ‘UN Security Council Reform: What the World Thinks’ (2023) <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/06/un-security-council-reform-what-the-world-thinks?lang=en>

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S ROLE AND WAY FORWARD

During its sixty-second session, the General Assembly reaffirmed its central role in pursuing Security Council reform. Heads of State and Government pledged to continue discussions aimed at making the Council more representative and accountable.

Should UN members decide, the Open-ended Working Group on Equitable Representation and Membership Expansion could reconvene during the General Assembly's session. This body would continue facilitating dialogue on how best to restructure the Council in ways that reflect today's geopolitical realities and uphold the values of fairness, legitimacy, and global cooperation.²⁵

KEY FINDINGS & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This research reveals that the veto power of the UN Security Council has often been misused by permanent members to advance national interests rather than uphold international peace and security. Through case studies such as the Rwandan Genocide, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and the Israel-Palestine conflict, it is evident that vetoes have frequently blocked timely humanitarian interventions and accountability measures. The United States has repeatedly used its veto to shield Israel from international scrutiny, while Russia has employed it to prevent action against its violations of international law. The study also highlights the phenomenon of the "hidden veto," where the threat of a veto behind closed doors deters resolutions from even reaching a vote. Furthermore, the current structure of the Security Council fails to reflect modern geopolitical realities, with under-representation of regions such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America, thereby undermining the Council's credibility and legitimacy.

To restore the effectiveness and fairness of the Security Council, several reforms are urgently needed. First, the use of veto power should be restricted in cases involving genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, particularly when the vetoing member is a party to the conflict. A mechanism should be developed to override vetoes in such humanitarian emergencies. Second, greater transparency and accountability must be introduced, requiring permanent members to provide substantive justifications for their vetoes. Third, membership reform is essential; proposals such as semi-permanent seats or rotational permanent representation should be pursued to ensure more equitable geographic representation. The

²⁵ United Nations General Assembly, 'Security Council Reform: Official Documents and Sessions' <https://www.un.org/en/ga/screform/>

Ezulwini Consensus, which calls for increased African representation, should be actively considered. Lastly, the General Assembly and broader UN membership must strengthen their collective voice in pushing for these reforms to ensure that the Security Council remains a relevant and responsive body capable of addressing today's global challenges.

CONCLUSION

The United Nations Security Council was established to serve as the world's foremost institution for safeguarding peace and security. The veto power granted to its five permanent members, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China, was originally intended to maintain global stability by ensuring the cooperation of the most powerful states. However, this mechanism has often been used not for the collective good but to protect national interests, even when doing so obstructs humanitarian efforts or perpetuates conflict.

As evidenced throughout this paper, the improper use of veto power has consistently obstructed prompt international action during times of crisis. Whether in the Rwandan genocide, the Israel-Palestine conflict, or Russia's annexation of Crimea, the veto has been a tool for inaction, often resulting in human suffering and undermining the Council's legitimacy. Instead of promoting consensus and diplomacy, the veto is frequently used to block accountability and maintain imbalances in global governance.

Such actions erode the foundational values of the UN Charter and damage global trust in the Security Council's capacity to act impartially. Given the rise of multifaceted challenges such as regional conflicts, refugee emergencies, and climate-induced instability, the urgency for a more inclusive and effective Security Council has never been greater.

Achieving reform is undoubtedly difficult. The P5 have little incentive to surrender or limit the very powers that guarantee their dominance. However, in the absence of substantial reform, the Council risks fading into irrelevance, reduced to an outdated institution incapable of fulfilling its core mandate. For the Security Council to remain effective and credible, it must evolve to reflect contemporary realities and prioritise collective responsibility over individual state interest.