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# UNSC

## United Nations Security Council




STUDYGUIDE

# United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

**Topic: Reforming the United Nations Security Council in Accordance with Articles 23 and 27 of the UN Charter**


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# 1. Introduction to the United Nations Security Council

Among its other responsibilities, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) must address threats to international peace and security. The UNSC can impose sanctions, authorise peacekeeping missions, and adopt resolutions that become international law. Nevertheless, the UNSC is still functioning using a structure that reflects a geopolitical environment from the mid-20th century.

The key question delegates need to address is whether the UNSC, as it is, is a relic of the past, and if yes, what reforms can be instituted to enhance the UNSC's ability to address international peace and security threats without causing major disruptions in the global geopolitical environment.

## 1.1 Mandate of the UNSC

The Council is tasked with the following under the UN Charter: [17]

a. Recognizing peace threats

b. Suggest a peaceful resolution of conflicts

c. Implement economic and military sanctions

d. Approve peacekeeping operations

e. The UNSC is the only UN body whose decisions are legally binding on all Member States.

## 1.2 Composition and Voting Procedures

**Membership:**

1. Five Permanent (P5)

2. Ten Non-Permanent Members (2-year elected terms)

Voting mechanisms are distinguished by procedural and substantive issues.

For procedural votes, a consensus of 9 votes is required.

For substantive votes, a consensus of 9 votes is required, and no veto is allowed from the Permanent 5.

The aim is to ensure major powers do not become the target of a decision they are adamantly against. Even when commentators study the same phenomena holistically, they note numerous factors that may invoke monopolistic characteristics, even as other commentators study and invoke other characteristics that align with the complicated, highly contextual, and multifaceted challenges of modernity.

## 1.3 Significance of Articles 23 & 27

According to the UN Charter, these articles determine:

a. Composition (Art. 23): The legal difference between Permanent (P5) and Elected (E10) membership.

b. The Veto Mechanism (Art. 27): The Veto Mechanism refers to the need for "concurring votes" from permanent members for substantive issues.

c. Operational Procedure: The Operational Procedure is significantly different between procedural (simple majority) and substantive (veto-prone) votes.

d. Great Power Unanimity: The legal basis which places with P5 Great Power Unanimity is over a simple majority rule.

## 1.4 Why is There a Need for Reform Now?

The UNSC mirrors 1945 (not 2025):

a. There are significant power discrepancies.

b. There are new regions with a focus on global security.

c. Developing countries are seeking representation.

d. Even status quo supporters agree that the Council is rapidly losing credibility.

# Glossary

a. **UNSC:** The principal UN body for maintaining international peace and security.

b. **P5:** Permanent members (US, UK, France, Russia, China) holding veto power.

c. **Veto:** The legal ability of any P5 member to block substantive resolutions.

d. **Article 23:** Deals with UNSC composition and election of non-permanent members.

e. **Article 27:** Deals with voting procedures and veto rules.

f. **Emerging Powers:** States gaining geopolitical, economic, and demographic influence (India, Brazil, Nigeria, South Africa, Indonesia).

g. **Global South:** Broad term for developing/underrepresented regions (Africa, Asia, Latin America).

h. **Legitimacy Gap:** The widening disconnect between global power realities and the UNSC's 1945-era design.

# 2. Understanding Articles 23 & 27

## 2.1 Article 23: Membership Criteria and Regional Representation

Article 23 describes how the Council is constituted. When the UN was created in 1945, the primary criteria for permanent membership were Military capacity, Industrial capacity, and the part they would play in the maintenance of post-war security.

Hence, the other five members of the Council and the rest of the seats were distributed on a rotating, regional basis.

The main critique in 2023 is that this membership framework does not represent or capture the modern world in terms of power and/or representation. Much of the world, especially Africa and Latin America (which have been the world's largest peacekeeping bases and offices), remains without permanent representation.

## 2.2 Article 27: Voting Mechanism and Veto Power

Article 27 of the UN Charter contains the most controversial element of the UNSC, which is the veto. Any of the P5 can veto any substantive resolution, regardless of the support the resolution has from the majority of the Council. Scenarios involving the Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen conflicts, as well as the ongoing Israel and Palestine conflicts, demonstrate how the veto has regulated the UNSC's potential outputs.

Proponents of this veto policy say that not allowing the veto would lead to UN inaction by the global superpowers. Opponents argue that the policy is primarily responsible for the inaction and paralysis of the Council.

## 2.3 Historical Intent behind the Articles

At least 3 of the 5 P5 (except China) must approve the change in advance. UN Charter amendments require a two-thirds majority of the UN General Assembly, and the ratification of all the UN's permanent members. This gives the P5 the ability to stop reforms that would limit this power in order to stop any potential changes.

## 2.4 Interpretational Debates and Legal Controversies

Common interrogations in legal and diplomatic circles include, but are not limited to, the following queries:

a. Should there be restrictions on the exercise of the veto during humanitarian crises?

b. Is it possible for regional powers to replace national powers?

c. Is it reasonable to have permanent membership in the first place?

d. The variety of these questions has different answers depending on the respondent.

### 2.5 Why These Articles Prove Challenging to Reform

Negotiating Amendments to Articles 23 and 27 of the UN Charter requires a complex and laborious process with tangential complications. As a result, any adjustments call for a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly. Furthermore, each of the five permanent members of the Security Council (P5) must approve of any modifications. Consequently, the states in question must consent to a reduction of their power. Furthermore, there is no incentive for any of the P5 to approve modifications to the present system, as each of the P5 is fortified by the present system.

Furthermore, there is no uniformity in the reform advocacy camp around the parameters of the new structure (i.e. additional permanent members, new regional seats, new modifications to the veto). Amendments to such Articles would do more than reform the workings of the world's power system. It would change the world's power system entirely, and consequently, the amendment process is encumbered with excessive regulations, both politically and legally.

## 3. Evolution of UNSC Membership and Power Distribution

### 3.1 Original Five Permanent Members: Rationale and Legacy

The original five permanent members of the UNSC were the most economically and militarily powerful countries of the world. In the 21st century, this justification has slowly held less and less value, and powerful emerging actors in the global market have emerged.

#### 3.2 Expansion of Non-Permanent Seats (1965 Reform)

In 1965, the UNSC increased its membership from 11 to 15 by expanding the number of elected members of the council. This is the one and only major change to the structure of the council for the last 80 years. This did not involve changing the number of members who have veto power or changing the permanent members of the council.

### 3.3 The Post–Cold War Landscape

In the period following the Cold War, there were a number of changes.

a. Power became more diffused among different areas of the world.

b. The scope of peacekeeping became wider.

c. Conflicts became more complicated and were more likely to be internal rather than involving other countries.

However, the UNSC still shows a greater alignment with the geopolitical realities of the Cold War than the present world.

### 3.4 Emerging Powers and Shifts in Global Influence

There have been demands for greater representation of certain countries and regional entities. Some of the more popular proposals are: **India, Japan and Germany, Brazil, and an African Union seat.**

There has been little to no progress made on any of the proposals due to the competing interests and lack of consensus.

## 4. Geopolitical Pressures Driving Reform

### 4.1 Decline of Unipolarity and Rise of Multipolarity

There is no longer a single dominant country that has the ability to control and influence the direction of global security policy. There are now regional powers, economic blocs, and coalitions that have a greater influence, and this has made the UNSC more in need of change.

### 4.2 Africa, Asia, and Latin America as Critical Peace and Security Arena

Africa and Latin America make up large portions of the world's conflict zones, the UN's membership, and peacekeeping missions. Yet, they are not assigned a permanent member of the council, and this raises questions about the fairness and credibility of the council.

### 4.3 Demographic, Economic, and Strategic Arguments for Reform

The veto has prevented the resolution of key conflicts and humanitarian crises:

1. Countries shift to regional coalitions,
2. Resolutions face stalling or dilution,
3. The Council seems to pick and choose when to intervene.

These consequences have sparked concern about the council's effectiveness.

### 4.4 Failures of the Current Structure: Legitimacy, Bias, Inefficiency

Council's failure to act in the biggest world crises is testament to the deadlock structure of veto power and political interests. By examining the Syria, Palestine, Ukraine and Yemen crises, one can see how the Council can, and is even expected to, stay its hand even when most of the world is in favor of doing something. The absence of Africa and Latin America in permanent positions has made many countries question the validity of the Council. Because of these reasons, UNSC is assumed to have a selective approach to breaches of international law and has a concerning pace in humanitarian response. Furthermore leading to the operational efficacy of the UNSC to

experience an erosion of confidence in regards to its role as a neutral arbiter in multilateral mediation.

### 4.5 Uniting for Peace (Resolution 377-A)

The resolution outlines a process where the General Assembly can act if the Security Council is immobilized by a veto. The resolution speaks to general measures, including the use of force, to restore international peace. This Assembly is able to convene general measures, including force, to restore international peace. As opposed to Security Council Assembly mandates, however, they are non-binding and rely de facto upon the compliance of the members.

## 5. Major Proposals for UNSC Reform

### 5.1 G4 Proposal (India, Germany, Japan, Brazil)

The G4 countries, based on geopolitical factors, are currently seeking additional permanent seats for each member. The claim this particular change will foster geographic balance by bringing major regional powers into long-term responsibility.

### 5.2 African Union's Ezulwini Consensus

To address persistent African exclusion, the African Union demands two permanent seats with veto for Africa. AU rationalises this demand as a way to correct historic under-representation. [3]

### 5.3 Uniting for Consensus (UfC) / Coffee Club

Uniting for Consensus, also known as "Coffee Club", is proposing a counter solution for after acknowledging the demands of fellow blocs demanding permanent seats in the form of increasing non-permanent seats. This will not only prevent the entrenchment of privilege but also promote regional fairness.[4]

### 5.4 Permanent vs. Semi-Permanent Membership Models

The debate focuses on whether new seats should be fully permanent or semi-permanent elected. Permanent seats offer continuity but risk reinforcing privilege, while semi-permanent seats provide extended influence without lifetime status, making representation more flexible and regionally balanced.[1][4]

### 5.5 Veto Reform Approaches

Veto reform proposals aim to reduce deadlock while preserving the institutional balance created by Articles 23 and 27. Many discussions focus on the five permanent members (P5): China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States, as they are the only states that currently hold the veto. Reform ideas include limiting the veto in situations involving mass atrocities, requiring detailed public explanations for its use and encouraging voluntary restraint through initiatives such as the ACT Code of Conduct or the French–Mexican proposal. Some proposals also suggest that any newly added permanent members in a reformed Council should not receive an unrestricted veto.[1][5]

### 5.6 Critiques of Expansion

Critics argue that enlarging the Council can either through new permanent seats or expanded elected seats could slow decision-making and intensify political rivalries. Concerns are often raised regarding the aspirations of states such as India, Brazil, Germany and Japan, as well as regional contenders from Africa and the Middle East, with opponents cautioning that adding these states may create new centres of influence rather than resolving existing disparities. Some P5 members, including China and Russia, have expressed reservations about specific candidates, highlighting how geopolitical interests shape expansion debates.[1]

## 6. Regional Perspectives

### 6.1 African Group – Historical Exclusion, Strategic Priorities

The African Group emphasises its consistent historical exclusion from permanent membership and argues that its regions' conflicts ensure direct representation. Its priority remains securing guaranteed seats that reflect Africa's central role in global peace and security discussions.[3]

### 6.2 Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) – Equal Representation Demands

GRULAC stresses the need for equal regional treatment in any expansion model. While Brazil seeks a permanent seat, many states in the group focus on ensuring fair representation overall rather than supporting any single national bid.

### 6.3 Asia-Pacific – Rising Powers, Strategic Rivalries

The Asia-Pacific region is marked by both rising powers and internal rivalries. While states like Japan push for greater roles, others remain cautious due to political tensions, making regional consensus difficult despite the region's growing global influence.

### 6.4 P5 Positions – Preservation of Privilege vs. Selective Flexibility

The P5 generally support only limited reform, prioritising retention of their veto, hence their dominant status. Although some P5 members show openness to modest expansion, they remain cautious about changes that could reduce their influence in passing resolutions.[4]

### 6.5 Middle Powers' Balancing Interests

Middle powers such as Germany, Brazil, Japan and Canada actively advocate for models that increase their participation without creating new permanent elites. Their proposals generally focus on enhanced elected representation rather than creating new permanent members.[4]

## 7. Legal and Institutional Constraints

### 7.1 Amending the UN Charter – Procedure and Challenges

Reforming the Council requires a formal Charter amendment, needing two-thirds approval in the General Assembly and ratification by all P5 members. This makes structural change legally possible but politically unlikely. A key critical point is that the system gives P5 full control over whether reforms succeed, raising questions about whether meaningful change can ever occur without their self-restraint.[6]

### 7.2 The Veto Problem in Reform

Any reform that reaches the veto faces direct P5 resistance. Even reasonable suggestions, such as limiting the veto in humanitarian crises, risk being blocked by those who benefit from its existence. The major dilemma is whether the Council can become more accountable while its most powerful members control the very tool that causes crises.[6]

### 7.3 Precedents for Institutional Overhaul in International Law

There are examples of major institutional adjustments in international bodies, but they have only succeeded when political will was exceptionally strong. This raises a critical issue: is global

momentum for UNSC reform strong enough to mirror these precedents, or does today's geopolitical environment make such consensus increasingly unrealistic and unattainable?[6]

### 7.4 Risk of Fragmentation and Parallel Structures

If UNSC reform remains held back, states and regions may increasingly turn to alternative security frameworks, from regional defence alliances to ad-hoc coalitions. While these can fill gaps, they also risk weakening the Council's authority and producing inconsistent responses to crises.The continued delay in reform may not only be inconvenient but could also gradually weaken the Security Council's central role in global security governance, moving it away from its original purpose.[6]

## 8. Impacts of Reform on International Peace and Security

### 8.1 Legitimacy and Global Trust

A more representative Council is expected to strengthen global trust, especially among regions that felt historically neglected; however, this raises a key question: Does legitimacy truly increase just by adding seats, or does it depend more on how those seats use their power? The challenge lies in ensuring that expansion translates into actual fairer decisions, not just symbolic inclusivity.[2]

### 8.2 Conflict Prevention and Response Capabilities

While supporters reasonably argue that reform would enhance the Council's ability to understand and react to crises by bringing in new perspectives. Yet a critical dilemma remains: could too many voices slow urgent decision-making during fast-moving conflicts? In practice, the answer is mixed. A larger Council may take longer to reach consensus, but broader representation can also lead to decisions that are better informed and more widely accepted. Reform must therefore balance wider input with the practical need for timely action.[1][7]

### 8.3 Regional Conflict Representation

Greater regional representation may allow conflicts in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America to be addressed with deeper regional insight. However, an important question emerges: will new members act as neutral representatives of their regions, or will they bring national agendas that complicate consensus? Effective representation requires independence as well as presence.[7]

### 8.4 Balance of Power, Deterrence, and Stability

Changing the Council's composition could reshape global power dynamics, potentially increasing stability by spreading responsibility. At the same time, one must ask: does expanding the circle of power reduce dominance or simply create new centres of rivalry? How new members interact with the P5 will determine whether reform enhances or disrupts balance.[7]

### 8.5 Risks: Deadlock, Over-Expansion, Politicisation

Reform also carries risks of a larger council that struggles to act decisively. This raises a critical question: can the Council expand without becoming so politicised that it loses operational efficiency? While there is no simple solution, careful design of working methods, voting procedures, and term limits for new members can help maintain efficiency. If managed well, expansion can increase representation without paralysing decision-making, but failure to plan properly could indeed weaken the Council's effectiveness.[1]

## 9. Case Studies in Representation Failures

The debate on reform often circles abstract principles, so grounding the discussion in concrete failures helps demonstrate why an updated power balance matters. These cases highlight how gaps in regional representation and unchecked veto power can distort the work of the Council.

### 9.1 Rwanda (1994) – African Absence in Decision-Making

The genocide in Rwanda remains one of the most painful examples of international inaction. The Council failed to appreciate early warnings of mass violence and lacked strong African voices who could contextualise local dynamics. States with strategic distance from the region tended to underestimate the speed and scale of what was unfolding. This absence of regional expertise contributed to delays in authorising stronger mandates and in mobilising rapid peacekeeping support. The episode is often cited as a reminder that representation influences the quality of threat assessment. [8]

### 9.2 Syrian Conflict – Veto Paralysis

The Syrian conflict revealed the consequences of entrenched veto power. Repeated vetoes blocked humanitarian access resolutions and investigations into chemical weapons use. The paralysis left millions without protection and weakened international norms against atrocities. Delegates studying this case often focus on how the veto can be weaponised to shield allies or geopolitical interests, even when mass suffering is widely documented. [9]

## 9.3 Haiti – Latin American Stakeholders' Marginalisation

Haiti's political and humanitarian crises have persisted for years, yet Latin American states with cultural, geographic and political ties to Haiti have struggled to gain substantial influence over UNSC decision-making. Peacekeeping missions in Haiti were largely crafted by states outside the region. This created persistent criticisms that the Council overlooked regional knowledge and the preferences of local stakeholders. A more inclusive structure could create opportunities for regional actors to shape mandates with greater contextual precision. [10]

## 9.4 Myanmar and Yemen – Power Imbalance in Council Prioritisation

Both Myanmar and Yemen demonstrate how global power politics shape which crises receive attention. Despite severe humanitarian emergencies, political sensitivities among major powers limited robust action. Draft resolutions were watered down, delayed or avoided entirely. These cases show how conflicts involving poorer regions or politically inconvenient narratives often receive limited focus. The imbalance becomes more visible when states from these regions have limited structural influence within the Council. [9]

## 9.5 The Ukraine Crisis – P5 Conflict of Interest

The Ukraine crisis brought an unusually direct conflict of interest into the chamber. When a permanent member is party to a conflict, its veto power can restrict even basic attempts to document violations or secure humanitarian corridors. This case revived arguments that the Council's design assumes a world where the P5 would always prefer stability. Contemporary geopolitics no longer supports that assumption, and many reform advocates consider this crisis a decisive moment for revisiting Articles 23 and 27. [11]

## 9.6 Gaza (2023–Present): Permanent Membership, Veto Power, and Council Paralysis

The Security Council's response to the genocide in Gaza has drawn renewed attention to the structural effects of Articles 23 and 27 of the UN Charter. Repeated failures to adopt resolutions addressing ceasefires or humanitarian access have underscored how veto authority can constrain collective action when permanent members hold strong strategic alignments with parties to a conflict. At the same time, the Council's current composition has raised questions about whose perspectives are structurally embedded in decision-making on issues that predominantly affect regions without permanent representation. Positions advanced by non-permanent members and wider regional groupings have often failed to translate into outcomes, reinforcing concerns about imbalance within the Council's architecture. [18]

# 10. Pathways Toward a More Inclusive UNSC

Reform requires creative institutional design rather than a single blueprint. Each pathway below has been debated for years, and delegates benefit from understanding the logic and trade-offs embedded in each idea.

## 10.1 Expansion Models

Proposals for enlargement differ widely. Some suggest adding permanent seats for Africa, Asia and Latin America. Others propose additional non-permanent seats with longer terms to give emerging powers more continuity. Hybrid plans combine regional representation with criteria-based membership. Each model raises questions about legitimacy, feasibility and state willingness to renegotiate core features of the Charter. [12]

## 10.2 Veto Use Restrictions and Accountability Mechanisms

Many reformers argue that the veto should come with obligations. Restrictions on use in cases of genocide or crimes against humanity have been proposed by several states and civil society coalitions. Other ideas involve voluntary restraint initiatives, public justification requirements or review mechanisms that scrutinise vetoes that appear to be shielding allies. [13]

## 10.3 Enhanced Regional Rotation

A regional rotation system could ensure that each region receives structured access to seats. Advocates believe this would produce decision-making that reflects a wider set of experiences. Opponents argue that strict rotation might dilute merit-based selection and could sometimes elevate states with limited capacity for diplomatic engagement. The discussion ultimately revolves around how to balance fairness with effectiveness. [12]

## 10.4 Representation Metrics: Population, Contribution, Conflict Exposure

Several proposals introduce quantifiable metrics to guide membership. Population size, financial and peacekeeping contributions, and exposure to global conflict are among the most commonly discussed indicators. Metrics aim to reduce political bargaining and create transparent criteria. Critics are concerned that rigid formulas cannot capture the political nuance required for Council membership. [14]

## 10.5 Hybrid Membership Categories

Hybrid models blend permanent and elected seats. For example, long-term renewable seats for major regional actors or issue-specialist seats for states with strong peacekeeping or mediation credentials. This approach attempts to recognise shifting global power while avoiding the permanence that traditional seats confer. [12][14]

# 11. Stakeholder Analysis

Reform is shaped by actors with competing interests and distinct visions of global order. Understanding their motivations can help delegates anticipate negotiation dynamics.

## 11.1 Member States

Member states range from strong advocates of expansion to firm defenders of the status quo. Emerging powers argue that they shoulder major global responsibilities without institutional recognition. States with limited influence seek fairer regional representation. Others worry that expansion could weaken their diplomatic leverage or burden the Council with inefficiency. [13]

## 11.2 Regional Organizations (AU, EU, ASEAN, OAS)

Regional organisations often act as collective voices. The African Union has repeatedly called for stronger African representation, while the European Union supports transparency and accountability reforms. ASEAN and the Organization of American States highlight the need for regional consultation when decisions affect their neighbourhoods. Their positions often bridge national interests and wider regional identities. [15]

## 11.3 Civil Society and Policy Think Tanks

Scholars and advocacy groups provide research, public pressure and policy innovation. They frame reform as a democratic issue and emphasise the moral responsibility borne by the Council. Their proposals often influence national positions during negotiations, even though they do not have a formal seat in the room. [16]

## 11.4 Small States and Non-Aligned Movement

Small states seek a Council that listens to those without military or economic weight. Many support limits on the veto, stronger procedural transparency and broader representation. The Non-Aligned Movement has been vocal about structural imbalances and frequently calls for reforms that reflect the diversity of the modern world. [13]

## 11.5 P5 Strategic Calculations

The permanent members approach reform through a lens of strategic advantage. Each supports certain proposals while resisting changes that threaten its national interests. Their calculations reflect power politics, long-term influence and alliance networks. The P5 possess the authority to block Charter amendments, so any viable reform must account for their incentives. [13][11]

# 12. Questions A Resolution Must Answer (QARMA)

1. Membership Criteria: What Should Replace the 1945 Formula?

2. Should the Veto be Abolished or Reformed?
3. How Should Regional Representation be Determined?
4. What Role Should Emerging Powers Play?
5. What Safeguards Prevent P5 Domination of Reform?
6. How should regional anchor states be integrated into new structures?

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