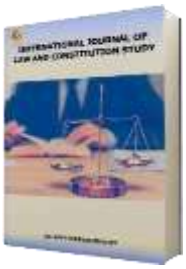
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REFORMING THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL IN AN ERA OF CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS

Muhammad Hidayat[1] , Tasya Afrianti Rambe[2], , M. Yusuf Alamsyah Hrp[3], Fitri Amanda Hsb[4]
[1234] State Islamic University Of North Sumatra

[1]muhammadhidayat131105@gmail.com [2]tasyaafrianti24@gmail.com
[3]yusufharahap59@gmail.com [4]fitriamanda289@gamail.com

A B S T R A C T

The increasing complexity of contemporary geopolitical tensions has intensified debates regarding the effectiveness and legitimacy of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). This study aims to examine the necessity of UNSC reform in response to changing global political dynamics and to analyze potential reform options that could enhance its institutional performance. The research employs a normative legal method using conceptual and institutional approaches, relying on a comprehensive review of the United Nations Charter, official UN documents, and relevant academic literature. The findings indicate that the current structure of the UNSC, established in the aftermath of World War II, no longer adequately reflects present-day global realities. The redistribution of international power, the emergence of influential non-traditional actors, and the growing complexity of transnational security challenges have exposed limitations within the existing decision-making framework. In particular, the veto power exercised by the five permanent members frequently impedes collective action and undermines the Council's ability to respond effectively to international crises. As a result, concerns regarding the Council's representativeness, accountability, and operational efficiency have become increasingly prominent. This study concludes that reforming the UNSC is essential for preserving the legitimacy and relevance of the international collective security system. A more representative, transparent, and responsive Security Council would be better positioned to address contemporary global challenges. However, the realization of meaningful reform ultimately depends on the willingness of member states, especially the permanent members, to reach a political consensus on the future structure and functioning of the Council.

KEYWORDS
Existing
Decision-Making
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INTRODUCTION

The creation of the United Nations after the conclusion of the Second World War represented one of the most ambitious efforts in modern history to establish a durable system of collective security. The devastation caused by two global wars convinced political leaders that a permanent international organization was necessary to prevent future conflicts and promote cooperation among states. Within this institutional framework, the Security Council was entrusted with primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. Unlike other organs of the United Nations, the Security Council was granted extensive authority to adopt binding decisions, authorize enforcement measures, and coordinate international responses to threats against global stability (United Nations, 1945).

The institutional design of the Security Council reflected the geopolitical realities that existed at the end of the Second World War. The five victorious powers the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France, and China were granted permanent seats and special voting privileges through the veto mechanism. This arrangement was intended to ensure the participation of major powers in maintaining international peace and to prevent the emergence of another large-scale global conflict. At the time, many policymakers believed that international stability depended upon cooperation among these dominant states (Hurd, 2020).

Although the Security Council played an important role in managing international security challenges during the Cold War and the post-Cold War era, increasing criticism has emerged regarding its institutional effectiveness and democratic legitimacy. The international system has undergone profound transformations since 1945. Decolonization dramatically increased the number of sovereign states, globalization reshaped economic relationships, and emerging powers gained substantial influence in regional and global affairs. Consequently, many scholars argue that the Council's structure no longer accurately reflects the distribution of political and economic power in the contemporary world (Weiss & Daws, 2018).

One of the most significant criticisms concerns representation. The current composition of the Security Council continues to reflect the geopolitical conditions that existed more than seven decades ago. Regions such as Africa and Latin America remain without permanent representation despite their substantial populations and growing influence in international affairs.

Similarly, countries such as India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan have become major contributors to international peacekeeping operations, economic development, and global governance but remain excluded from permanent membership. Critics contend that this imbalance undermines the legitimacy of the Council and weakens confidence in its decision-making processes (Luck, 2019).

The issue of veto power has also become a central focus of reform debates. Under Article 27 of the United Nations Charter, each permanent member possesses the authority to block substantive resolutions regardless of the level of support among other member states. While the veto mechanism was originally intended to prevent direct confrontation among major powers, its use has frequently resulted in institutional paralysis during major international crises. Numerous resolutions addressing conflicts in Syria, Ukraine, and other regions have been blocked because of disagreements among permanent members. As a result, the Security Council has often struggled to adopt effective responses to urgent humanitarian emergencies and security threats (Trahan, 2020).

Contemporary geopolitical tensions have further intensified calls for reform. The emergence of a more competitive international environment has increased divisions among major powers. Strategic rivalry between the United States and China, deteriorating relations between Russia and Western countries, disputes in the Indo-Pacific region, and ongoing conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Middle East have complicated efforts to achieve consensus within the Security Council. These developments have demonstrated the limitations of institutional arrangements that were designed for a different historical context (Mearsheimer, 2014).

The Russia–Ukraine conflict illustrates many of these challenges. As a permanent member of the Security Council, Russia possesses veto authority over resolutions related to the conflict. This situation has generated substantial criticism because it allows a state directly involved in an international dispute to influence decisions regarding that dispute. Similar concerns emerged during the Syrian civil war, where repeated vetoes prevented the adoption of measures intended to address humanitarian suffering and promote accountability for violations of international law (Malone, 2017).

Beyond traditional interstate conflicts, the international community now faces a range of emerging security challenges that were not anticipated when the United

Nations Charter was drafted. Cybersecurity threats, transnational terrorism, climate-related security risks, pandemics, and technological disruptions increasingly affect international peace and stability. These challenges require coordinated responses that transcend national borders and involve multiple stakeholders. However, many observers argue that the current Security Council structure is insufficiently adaptable to address such complex and multidimensional threats effectively (Booth & Dunne, 2018).

In addition to concerns regarding representation and effectiveness, questions have been raised about transparency and accountability within the Security Council. Critics argue that informal negotiations among permanent members often play a decisive role in shaping outcomes before formal discussions take place. This practice may limit the participation of non-permanent members and reduce the transparency of decision-making processes. Consequently, some states perceive the Council as an institution that primarily serves the interests of powerful countries rather than the broader international community (Cronin & Hurd, 2018).

Efforts to reform the Security Council have been discussed for several decades. Various proposals have been advanced by governments, regional organizations, and academic institutions. Some reform initiatives focus on expanding permanent membership to include emerging powers and underrepresented regions. Others advocate increasing the number of non-permanent seats to enhance geographical representation. Additional proposals seek to modify or restrict the use of veto power, particularly in situations involving genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other mass atrocity situations (Trahan, 2020).

Despite widespread recognition of the need for reform, progress has been limited. Amending the United Nations Charter requires approval from two-thirds of the General Assembly and ratification by all permanent members of the Security Council. This legal requirement creates significant political obstacles because any permanent member can effectively block reforms that may reduce its influence. Consequently, debates regarding Security Council reform often involve complex negotiations among states with competing interests and priorities (United Nations, 1945).

The urgency of reform has become increasingly evident as geopolitical tensions continue to reshape international relations. Many scholars argue that the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Security Council depend upon its ability to adapt to changing

global realities. Without meaningful reforms, the institution risks losing credibility and relevance in the eyes of member states and international audiences. Conversely, successful reform could strengthen the Council's capacity to address contemporary security challenges and enhance its role as the primary institution responsible for maintaining international peace and security (Weiss, 2016).

This article seeks to analyze the necessity of reforming the United Nations Security Council in an era characterized by contemporary geopolitical tensions. It explores the historical foundations of the Council, examines the principal criticisms directed at its institutional structure, evaluates major reform proposals, and assesses the challenges associated with implementing meaningful changes. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature, the study aims to contribute to ongoing discussions concerning the future of global governance and the evolution of international security institutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a normative legal research approach based exclusively on library research. The research relies on secondary sources obtained from academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, official United Nations publications, international legal instruments, policy reports, and scholarly analyses related to the United Nations Security Council and international institutional reform.

The primary objective of this research is to examine the legal, political, and institutional dimensions of Security Council reform within the context of contemporary geopolitical developments. Rather than collecting empirical field data, the study focuses on analyzing existing literature and evaluating arguments presented by scholars, international organizations, and policymakers. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the historical evolution of the Security Council, the challenges facing the institution, and the potential implications of various reform proposals.

The research adopts both conceptual and institutional approaches. The conceptual approach is used to examine theoretical discussions concerning legitimacy, representation, effectiveness, and global governance. The institutional approach focuses on the legal framework governing the Security Council, including relevant provisions of the United Nations Charter and subsequent reform initiatives.

Data analysis is conducted qualitatively through the systematic examination of academic and legal sources. Information obtained from various references is categorized according to major themes, including geopolitical tensions, veto power, representation, institutional legitimacy, and reform proposals. The collected materials are then interpreted and synthesized to identify patterns, challenges, and opportunities related to Security Council reform.

Through this literature-based methodology, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive and objective assessment of the necessity and feasibility of reforming the United Nations Security Council in response to contemporary geopolitical tensions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The findings of this study indicate that the current structure of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) faces significant challenges in responding effectively to contemporary geopolitical realities. Based on an extensive review of academic literature, official United Nations documents, and scholarly analyses, it is evident that concerns regarding the Security Council are primarily centered on issues of representation, legitimacy, effectiveness, and the continued use of veto power. These concerns have intensified as the international system has undergone substantial political, economic, and security transformations since the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 (Weiss & Daws, 2018).

The first major finding reveals that the composition of the Security Council no longer adequately reflects the distribution of power in the contemporary international system. While the number of United Nations member states has increased significantly over the past several decades, the permanent membership of the Council has remained unchanged. Emerging powers such as India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan have acquired considerable influence in global economic and political affairs, yet they remain excluded from permanent representation. At the same time, Africa, which constitutes the largest regional bloc within the United Nations, continues to lack permanent representation despite its substantial demographic and political significance. This imbalance has contributed to growing criticism regarding the representativeness of the institution and has encouraged calls for structural reform aimed at creating a more inclusive decision-making framework (Luck, 2019).

The second finding concerns the operation of the veto mechanism. The literature demonstrates that veto power remains one of the most controversial features of the Security Council. Although originally intended to preserve cooperation among major powers and maintain international stability, the veto has frequently prevented collective action during major international crises. Numerous studies highlight that disagreements among permanent members have often resulted in institutional paralysis, particularly in situations involving armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies, and violations of international law. Cases such as the Syrian civil war and the Russia–Ukraine conflict illustrate how veto use can obstruct the adoption of resolutions even when a substantial majority of the international community supports collective action. Consequently, many scholars view the veto system as a major obstacle to the effectiveness of the Security Council in fulfilling its responsibilities under the United Nations Charter (Trahan, 2020).

The third finding indicates the existence of a growing legitimacy challenge within the Security Council. Legitimacy is essential for ensuring that international institutions maintain the confidence and cooperation of member states. However, many governments and scholars argue that the current structure of the Council grants disproportionate influence to a small group of countries while limiting broader participation in decision-making processes. This perception has contributed to concerns that the institution no longer reflects contemporary principles of inclusiveness and equitable representation. As demands for greater participation in global governance continue to increase, questions regarding the legitimacy of the Security Council have become increasingly prominent in international political discourse (Hurd, 2020).

Another important finding relates to the influence of contemporary geopolitical tensions on the effectiveness of the Security Council. The study reveals that strategic competition among major powers has significantly affected the Council's capacity to respond to emerging security challenges. Rivalries involving the United States, China, and Russia increasingly shape diplomatic negotiations and voting behavior within the institution. As geopolitical divisions deepen, achieving consensus becomes more difficult, reducing the Council's ability to adopt timely and effective responses to international crises. This trend suggests that the effectiveness of the Security Council is closely linked to broader developments within the international political system and

highlights the challenges of maintaining collective security in an increasingly competitive global environment (Mearsheimer, 2014).

The findings further demonstrate that there is substantial support for institutional reform among scholars, policymakers, and many member states. Although opinions differ regarding the specific reforms that should be adopted, there is widespread agreement that the current structure requires adaptation to remain relevant in the twenty-first century. Various reform proposals have been advanced, including the expansion of permanent membership, the enlargement of non-permanent seats, the creation of semi-permanent membership arrangements, restrictions on the use of veto power, and measures designed to enhance transparency and accountability. These proposals seek to address concerns regarding representation, legitimacy, and effectiveness while preserving the Council's ability to maintain international peace and security (Thakur, 2017).

At the same time, the study identifies significant obstacles to the implementation of meaningful reform. The amendment procedures established by the United Nations Charter require the approval of all five permanent members, making institutional change particularly difficult to achieve. Because any reform affecting the interests of permanent members can be blocked through the ratification process, political considerations often impede progress. Furthermore, competing regional interests and disagreements regarding the allocation of additional seats create further challenges for reform negotiations. These factors explain why discussions concerning Security Council reform have persisted for decades without producing substantial structural changes (United Nations, 1945).

Overall, the findings suggest that the United Nations Security Council faces a growing mismatch between its institutional structure and contemporary geopolitical realities. While the Council continues to play a central role in maintaining international peace and security, concerns regarding representation, legitimacy, veto power, and effectiveness increasingly undermine confidence in its ability to fulfill its mandate. Consequently, the literature reviewed in this study strongly indicates that reform is necessary to ensure that the Security Council remains capable of addressing the complex challenges of the modern international system. A more representative, transparent, and responsive institution would be better equipped to maintain

international peace and security while strengthening the legitimacy of global governance in an era characterized by profound geopolitical change (Weiss, 2016).

DISCUSSION

1. Historical Development of the United Nations Security Council

The Security Council emerged from the broader effort to establish an international organization capable of preventing another catastrophic global war. The failure of the League of Nations to maintain peace during the interwar period convinced political leaders that a stronger and more effective institutional framework was necessary. Consequently, the architects of the United Nations sought to create an organization that could combine universal membership with effective enforcement mechanisms (Hurd, 2020).

The foundations of the Security Council were developed through a series of wartime conferences, including the Dumbarton Oaks Conference of 1944 and the San Francisco Conference of 1945. During these negotiations, the major Allied powers insisted that their continued participation in international security arrangements required special institutional privileges. This position ultimately led to the creation of permanent membership and the veto system, which became defining characteristics of the Security Council (Luck, 2019).

At the time of its establishment, the Security Council consisted of eleven members, including five permanent members and six non-permanent members. The permanent members included the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France, and China. These states were considered the principal guarantors of international peace and security due to their military capabilities and political influence following the Second World War (United Nations, 1945).

During the Cold War, the effectiveness of the Security Council was frequently constrained by ideological competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. The veto power was used extensively by both superpowers to block initiatives perceived as contrary to their strategic interests. As a result, the Council often struggled to respond effectively to international crises. Nevertheless, the institution continued to provide an important forum for diplomatic dialogue and crisis management (Malone, 2017).

The end of the Cold War generated renewed optimism regarding the role of the Security Council. Improved relations among major powers enabled the Council to

adopt a greater number of resolutions and authorize numerous peacekeeping operations. During the 1990s, the Security Council became increasingly active in addressing conflicts in the Balkans, Africa, and the Middle East. This period led some observers to describe the Council as entering a phase of institutional revitalization (Weiss & Daws, 2018).

However, the optimism of the post-Cold War era gradually diminished as new geopolitical rivalries emerged. The interventions in Kosovo, Iraq, Libya, and Syria revealed persistent disagreements among major powers concerning the interpretation of international law and the appropriate use of force. These disputes highlighted structural weaknesses within the Council and reignited debates regarding institutional reform (White, 2017).

The expansion of United Nations membership further contributed to reform discussions. When the organization was founded in 1945, it consisted of only fifty-one member states. Today, the United Nations includes 193 member states representing diverse political, economic, and cultural backgrounds. Despite this dramatic increase in membership, the structure of the Security Council has undergone only limited changes. The most significant reform occurred in 1965 when the number of non-permanent members increased from six to ten. Nevertheless, the composition of permanent membership has remained unchanged since 1945 (United Nations, 1945).

As global power has become more dispersed, many states have questioned whether the Council's current structure remains appropriate. Emerging economies such as India and Brazil, along with regional powers in Africa and Asia, have argued that the institution should better reflect contemporary geopolitical realities. These demands have become increasingly prominent in discussions concerning the future of global governance (Thakur, 2017).

The historical evolution of the Security Council demonstrates that its institutional design was shaped by specific historical circumstances rather than universal principles of representation. While the Council has contributed significantly to maintaining international peace and security, its legitimacy increasingly depends on its ability to adapt to changing global conditions. Understanding this historical context is essential for evaluating contemporary reform proposals and assessing their potential impact on international stability.

2. Institutional Structure and Decision-Making Mechanisms of the Security Council

The institutional structure of the Security Council distinguishes it from all other organs of the United Nations. Unlike the General Assembly, where resolutions are generally recommendatory in nature, Security Council decisions adopted under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter are legally binding upon member states. This unique authority makes the Council one of the most powerful international institutions in the world (United Nations, 1945).

The Council currently consists of fifteen members. Five of these members hold permanent seats, while the remaining ten are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms. Elections are conducted according to principles of equitable geographical representation, ensuring participation from different regions of the world. Despite this arrangement, permanent members continue to exercise significantly greater influence over Council decisions due to their veto authority (White, 2017).

Decision-making within the Security Council is governed primarily by Article 27 of the United Nations Charter. Procedural matters require the affirmative votes of at least nine members. Substantive matters, however, require not only nine affirmative votes but also the concurrence of all permanent members. This means that any permanent member can prevent the adoption of a resolution by casting a negative vote (United Nations, 1945).

Supporters of the veto system argue that it reflects political realities and helps preserve cooperation among major powers. According to this perspective, decisions affecting international peace and security are unlikely to be implemented effectively if opposed by one of the world's most powerful states. Therefore, the veto mechanism serves as a safeguard against direct confrontation among major powers and contributes to international stability (Hurd, 2020).

Critics, however, contend that the veto system undermines the principles of sovereign equality and democratic decision-making. They argue that the ability of a single state to block collective action often prevents the international community from responding effectively to humanitarian crises and security threats. In practice, the veto has frequently been used to protect national interests rather than advance collective security objectives (Trahan, 2020).

Another important aspect of Security Council decision-making involves informal consultations. Many significant negotiations occur behind closed doors before formal meetings take place. Although informal diplomacy may facilitate compromise among states, it has also generated concerns regarding transparency and accountability. Smaller states often have limited opportunities to influence decisions during these informal processes, reinforcing perceptions that the Council primarily serves the interests of major powers (Cronin & Hurd, 2018).

The Security Council possesses a wide range of responsibilities under the United Nations Charter. These include investigating disputes, recommending peaceful settlement mechanisms, authorizing sanctions, establishing peacekeeping operations, and approving military interventions when necessary to maintain international peace and security. Over time, the Council's activities have expanded to include issues such as terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and the protection of civilians in armed conflict (Malone, 2017).

The growing complexity of international security challenges has increased demands for institutional adaptation. Many contemporary threats, including cyberattacks, climate-related instability, and transnational criminal networks, do not fit neatly within traditional conceptions of interstate conflict. Consequently, scholars and policymakers have debated whether the existing institutional framework remains capable of addressing the full spectrum of modern security challenges (Booth & Dunne, 2018).

The effectiveness of the Security Council ultimately depends upon its ability to balance efficiency, legitimacy, and representation. While the current structure provides a mechanism for involving major powers in collective security efforts, it also generates significant challenges related to inclusiveness and accountability. These tensions lie at the heart of contemporary debates concerning Security Council reform and continue to shape discussions regarding the future of global governance.

3. Contemporary Geopolitical Tensions and Their Impact on the Security Council

The contemporary international system is increasingly characterized by geopolitical competition among major powers. Unlike the immediate post-Cold War period, which was marked by expectations of greater international cooperation, the twenty-first century has witnessed the reemergence of strategic rivalry involving major

states. This transformation has had profound implications for the functioning of international institutions, particularly the United Nations Security Council. As geopolitical tensions intensify, achieving consensus among permanent members has become increasingly difficult, thereby affecting the Council's ability to respond effectively to global security challenges (Mearsheimer, 2014).

One of the most significant developments in contemporary international relations is the growing strategic competition between the United States and China. As China has emerged as a major economic and military power, competition between the two states has expanded into areas such as trade, technology, regional influence, and security. Disputes concerning the South China Sea, Taiwan, technological development, and economic policies have contributed to increasing tensions between these two powers. These rivalries frequently influence discussions within the Security Council, where geopolitical considerations often shape voting behavior and diplomatic negotiations (Allison, 2017).

The deterioration of relations between Russia and Western countries has further complicated Security Council decision-making. Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the escalation of the Russia–Ukraine conflict in 2022, divisions between Russia and Western permanent members have become increasingly pronounced. These disagreements have affected discussions on sanctions, humanitarian assistance, ceasefire arrangements, and accountability mechanisms. Consequently, the Security Council has often struggled to adopt unified responses to one of the most significant security crises of the contemporary era (Bellamy, 2023).

The Russia–Ukraine conflict illustrates the limitations of the current Security Council framework. Because Russia holds permanent membership and possesses veto authority, resolutions critical of Russian actions have frequently been blocked. This situation has generated widespread criticism from governments, scholars, and civil society organizations. Critics argue that allowing a state directly involved in a conflict to veto resolutions related to that conflict undermines the credibility and effectiveness of the Council. Furthermore, the inability of the institution to adopt decisive measures has raised questions regarding its capacity to fulfill its mandate under the United Nations Charter (Malone, 2017).

The Syrian civil war provides another important example of Security Council paralysis. Since the outbreak of the conflict in 2011, the Council has struggled to

achieve consensus regarding appropriate responses to humanitarian crises, allegations of chemical weapons use, and accountability for violations of international humanitarian law. Multiple resolutions were blocked by vetoes, preventing the adoption of stronger measures to address the conflict. As a result, many observers concluded that geopolitical rivalries among permanent members significantly limited the Council's effectiveness during one of the most devastating humanitarian crises of the modern era (Trahan, 2020).

Geopolitical tensions have also affected Security Council responses to conflicts in other regions. Disagreements concerning the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, tensions on the Korean Peninsula, and instability in various parts of Africa have frequently reflected broader strategic competition among major powers. In many instances, states have evaluated proposed resolutions not solely on their substantive merits but also according to their geopolitical implications. This tendency has contributed to the perception that the Security Council increasingly functions as an arena for power politics rather than a mechanism for collective security (Thakur, 2017).

The emergence of a multipolar international system has further complicated efforts to maintain consensus within the Council. During the early post-Cold War period, the United States enjoyed a dominant position within the international system. However, the rise of China, the resurgence of Russia, and the growing influence of regional powers have contributed to a more complex distribution of power. Multipolarity may create opportunities for greater representation and diversity within global governance institutions, but it can also increase the likelihood of diplomatic deadlock when major powers pursue competing strategic objectives (Acharya, 2018).

Beyond traditional interstate rivalries, contemporary geopolitical tensions increasingly involve economic competition, technological innovation, and resource security. Issues such as access to critical minerals, energy security, digital infrastructure, and artificial intelligence have become central components of international competition. These developments blur the distinction between traditional security concerns and broader economic and technological issues. Consequently, the Security Council faces growing pressure to address challenges that extend beyond its original mandate (Booth & Dunne, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the difficulties associated with geopolitical divisions. Despite the global nature of the crisis, disagreements among

major powers initially delayed Security Council action. Debates regarding the origins of the virus, international responsibilities, and appropriate policy responses demonstrated how geopolitical considerations could hinder cooperation even during a worldwide public health emergency. This experience reinforced concerns regarding the ability of existing institutions to respond effectively to transnational threats requiring coordinated international action (Patrick, 2021).

Climate change represents another area where geopolitical tensions intersect with international security concerns. Increasingly severe environmental disruptions, resource scarcity, and population displacement have prompted discussions regarding the security implications of climate change. While many states advocate a greater role for the Security Council in addressing climate-related security risks, others remain concerned about expanding the Council's mandate. These disagreements reflect broader debates regarding sovereignty, development, and the appropriate scope of international intervention (Barnett, 2021).

The cumulative impact of these geopolitical tensions has contributed to growing skepticism regarding the effectiveness of the Security Council. Although the institution remains central to the international security architecture, its ability to act decisively often depends upon the willingness of permanent members to cooperate. When geopolitical rivalries intensify, the likelihood of consensus decreases, thereby limiting the Council's capacity to address urgent security challenges. Consequently, many reform advocates argue that institutional changes are necessary to ensure that the Security Council can continue to fulfill its responsibilities in an increasingly complex international environment.

4. **The Veto Power Dilemma and Institutional Paralysis**

Among all aspects of Security Council reform, the issue of veto power remains the most controversial and politically sensitive. The veto system is deeply embedded within the institutional structure of the United Nations and has played a central role in Security Council decision-making since 1945. While supporters view the veto as an essential mechanism for maintaining cooperation among major powers, critics argue that it represents one of the principal obstacles to effective collective security in the contemporary international system (Trahan, 2020).

The origins of the veto can be traced to negotiations during the establishment of the United Nations. The major Allied powers insisted that their participation in the

new organization required guarantees that their fundamental national interests would not be overridden by other states. As a result, the United Nations Charter granted each permanent member the authority to block substantive resolutions. This arrangement reflected the belief that international peace could only be maintained if major powers remained actively engaged within the institutional framework (Hurd, 2020).

From a historical perspective, proponents of the veto argue that the mechanism has contributed to preventing direct military confrontation among major powers. By ensuring that permanent members cannot be compelled to accept decisions contrary to their vital interests, the veto may reduce incentives for states to withdraw from international institutions or challenge decisions through unilateral action. In this sense, the veto is often viewed as a pragmatic recognition of political realities rather than a purely democratic arrangement (Luck, 2019).

Nevertheless, the practical consequences of veto use have generated extensive criticism. Throughout the history of the United Nations, vetoes have frequently prevented collective responses to international crises. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union regularly employed vetoes to block initiatives perceived as threatening their strategic interests. Although geopolitical circumstances have changed, the pattern of veto use continues to influence Security Council operations today (Malone, 2017).

The humanitarian consequences of veto-induced paralysis have become a major source of concern. In situations involving genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, the inability of the Security Council to act decisively can have devastating consequences for civilian populations. The Syrian conflict is often cited as a prominent example. Repeated vetoes prevented the adoption of stronger measures aimed at protecting civilians and promoting accountability, contributing to widespread frustration among humanitarian organizations and member states (Trahan, 2020).

The Russia–Ukraine conflict has further intensified criticism of the veto system. Many observers argue that allowing a permanent member involved in an armed conflict to veto resolutions concerning that conflict creates a fundamental conflict of interest. This situation raises important questions regarding fairness, accountability, and the credibility of Security Council decision-making. Critics contend that the existing framework enables powerful states to shield themselves from collective scrutiny while

limiting the capacity of the international community to respond effectively to violations of international law (Bellamy, 2023).

Another criticism concerns the unequal distribution of authority within the Security Council. The veto grants extraordinary influence to five states while limiting the ability of the broader membership to shape outcomes. Although all United Nations member states are formally sovereign equals under international law, the veto creates a hierarchy within the institutional structure. Many developing countries argue that this arrangement is inconsistent with contemporary principles of inclusiveness and democratic governance (Weiss, 2016).

Various reform proposals have sought to address the challenges associated with veto power. One proposal advocates the complete abolition of the veto system. Supporters argue that removing veto authority would strengthen democratic decision-making and improve the Council's ability to respond to international crises. However, critics note that such reform is politically unrealistic because it would require the consent of the permanent members themselves, all of whom benefit from maintaining the current arrangement (Thakur, 2017).

A more moderate proposal involves restricting the use of vetoes in situations involving mass atrocities. Under this approach, permanent members would voluntarily refrain from exercising veto power when resolutions concern genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity. France and Mexico have been among the strongest supporters of this initiative, arguing that humanitarian considerations should take precedence over political interests in situations involving large-scale human suffering (Trahan, 2020).

Another proposal suggests requiring multiple permanent members to support a veto before it becomes effective. Such a system would reduce the ability of a single state to block collective action while preserving a degree of protection for major-power interests. Although this proposal has received academic attention, it has not gained significant political support among permanent members (Weiss & Daws, 2018).

Some scholars have proposed introducing procedural safeguards that increase transparency regarding veto use. For example, permanent members could be required to provide detailed public explanations when exercising veto authority. Increased transparency may not eliminate the political consequences of vetoes, but it

could enhance accountability and encourage greater scrutiny of decisions that prevent collective action (Cronin & Hurd, 2018).

Despite these reform proposals, meaningful change remains difficult to achieve. Because amendments to the United Nations Charter require ratification by all permanent members, any proposal that significantly restricts veto authority faces substantial political obstacles. Consequently, many analysts believe that incremental reforms are more feasible than comprehensive institutional transformation.

The debate surrounding veto power reflects broader tensions between political realism and normative principles within international relations. On one hand, the veto acknowledges the continuing importance of major powers in maintaining international order. On the other hand, it raises important questions regarding equality, accountability, and the effectiveness of collective security mechanisms. Balancing these competing considerations remains one of the most significant challenges facing Security Council reform efforts in the twenty-first century.

5. Representation and Legitimacy Concerns

Another important issue in discussions concerning Security Council reform relates to representation and institutional legitimacy. The current composition of the Council reflects the geopolitical realities of 1945 rather than the contemporary international system. Although the membership of the United Nations has expanded significantly, the permanent membership structure has remained unchanged. This situation has generated criticism from many states that believe the Council no longer adequately represents the diversity of the international community (Weiss & Daws, 2018).

Africa is frequently cited as the most underrepresented region within the Security Council. Despite comprising fifty-four member states and being the focus of numerous Security Council resolutions and peacekeeping missions, the continent does not possess a permanent seat. Similar concerns have been raised by countries in Latin America and Asia, particularly India and Brazil, which argue that contemporary global governance institutions should better reflect current political and demographic realities (African Union, 2005).

Questions of legitimacy are closely connected to representation. The effectiveness of international institutions often depends upon the perception that their decision-making processes are fair and inclusive. When states perceive the Security

Council as dominated by a small group of powerful countries, confidence in the institution may decline. Consequently, many scholars argue that improving representation would strengthen both the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Council (Hurd, 2020).

The challenge, however, lies in balancing greater representation with institutional efficiency. While expanding membership may enhance inclusiveness, it could also complicate decision-making processes. Therefore, reform discussions continue to focus on finding an appropriate balance between representativeness and effectiveness in order to ensure that the Security Council remains relevant in a changing international environment (White, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The United Nations Security Council remains the central institution responsible for maintaining international peace and security within the framework of the United Nations. Since its establishment in 1945, the Council has played an important role in conflict resolution, peacekeeping operations, sanctions enforcement, and collective security efforts. However, the findings of this study demonstrate that the contemporary international environment differs significantly from the geopolitical conditions that shaped the creation of the Security Council. The emergence of new global and regional powers, the increasing complexity of international conflicts, and the rise of non-traditional security threats have generated growing concerns regarding the Council's ability to effectively fulfill its mandate.

This study finds that one of the principal challenges facing the Security Council is the persistence of institutional arrangements that no longer fully reflect contemporary global realities. The composition of permanent membership continues to mirror the distribution of power that existed after the Second World War, while many influential states and regions remain underrepresented in decision-making processes. This situation has contributed to questions regarding the legitimacy and representativeness of the institution, particularly among developing countries and emerging powers that seek a greater role in global governance.

The research also demonstrates that the veto mechanism remains a significant source of controversy. Although the veto was originally intended to preserve cooperation among major powers and prevent direct confrontation, its use has frequently limited the Security Council's capacity to respond effectively to international

crises. Recent conflicts, including those in Syria and Ukraine, illustrate how geopolitical rivalries among permanent members can result in institutional deadlock and prevent the adoption of collective measures. Consequently, the effectiveness of the Security Council is often influenced not only by legal authority but also by the political interests of its most powerful members.

Furthermore, contemporary geopolitical tensions have intensified the challenges facing the Security Council. Strategic competition among major powers increasingly shapes international diplomacy and affects decision-making within the Council. As global politics becomes more multipolar, achieving consensus on issues related to peace and security has become increasingly difficult. These developments highlight the need for institutional adaptation to ensure that the Security Council remains capable of addressing both traditional and emerging security challenges.

Based on the findings of this study, reform of the United Nations Security Council should be understood as a necessary response to the changing dynamics of international relations rather than merely an institutional preference. Enhancing representation, strengthening legitimacy, and improving the effectiveness of decision-making processes are essential steps toward ensuring that the Council remains relevant in the twenty-first century. While significant political and legal obstacles continue to hinder reform efforts, the growing gap between the existing institutional structure and contemporary geopolitical realities suggests that maintaining the status quo may further weaken confidence in the institution.

In conclusion, the future effectiveness and credibility of the United Nations Security Council depend on its ability to adapt to an evolving international order. A more representative, legitimate, and responsive Security Council would be better equipped to address contemporary geopolitical tensions and fulfill its primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security. Therefore, meaningful reform remains an important objective for strengthening global governance and ensuring the continued relevance of the United Nations in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

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