

Should the UN Security Council Be Reformed to Better Promote International Peace and Security

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Abstract. The effectiveness of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has declined significantly in recent decades, weakening its ability to address contemporary security challenges. This paper examines the underlying causes of this decline, with a particular emphasis on the Council's structural inflexibility and the escalation of geopolitical competition among the P5 member states. It explores the ways in which these factors have impeded timely and effective decision-making, resulting in impasse and protracted humanitarian crises, through a comparative analysis of the Kosovo crisis, the Syrian civil war, and the Ukrainian conflict. The study underscores the challenges presented by the evolving multipolar world, the detrimental consequences of the frequent and strategic use of the veto, and the UNSC's failure to reform its decision-making mechanisms and membership structure. Lastly, the study demonstrates the pressing necessity of targeted reforms to fortify the Council's adaptive capacity and re-establish its role in the preservation of global peace and security in an international system that is becoming increasingly fragmented.

Keywords: United Nations Security Council, geopolitical competition, veto power, UNSC reform.

1. Introduction

The UN Security Council has been crucial in maintaining international peace and security for a long time. Nevertheless, the Council's efficacy has experienced a substantial decline in the past two decades, raising concerns regarding its capacity to address contemporary global conflicts. The Council's decline in effectiveness is due to a variety of factors, with the most significant being the intensifying geopolitical competition among its permanent members, which include the United States, China, Russia, France, and the United Kingdom. These rivalries have increasingly deployed the Security Council veto in critical situations like the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine, leading to stalemate and inaction. Furthermore, the gradual shift toward a multipolar world order and the rise of new global powers have intensified the difficulty in reaching consensus within the Security Council. The Security Council's current structure, particularly the composition of its permanent members, can be said to be increasingly out of alignment with contemporary global realities and is a reflection of the power dynamics that emerged after World War II. There is an increasing demand for the Security Council to be more representative and adaptable in order to confront contemporary challenges, including climate change, terrorism, and cyber threats. This paper explores the United

Nations Security Council's decrease in effectiveness over the past two decades and predominantly attributes it to the intensification of geopolitical rivalries among the P5 members, with a particular emphasis on the United States, China, and Russia. These tensions have led to a deterioration of multilateral cooperation, an increased exploitation of the veto, and an exposure of the UNSC's inability to adapt to the changing global political landscape. This research is structured as follows: Initially, a literature review is conducted to investigate the efficacy of the UNSC. Subsequently, a hypothesis statement presents a variety of potential explanations for the UNSC's loss of efficacy, such as the influence of the veto and modifications in global power dynamics. A comparative case study analyses the UNSC's response to the Kosovo crisis, the Syrian civil war, and the Ukrainian crisis, highlighting the influence of geopolitical competition on the Council's decisions. Ultimately, the conclusion summarises the results and recommends potential reforms to re-establish the UNSC's efficacy.

2. Overview of existing literature

The debate over the effectiveness of the UNSC has been extensively explored in various international relations theories, with realism, liberalism, and constructivism providing distinct viewpoints. According to realist scholars, the UNSC's effectiveness is fundamentally dependent on the power dynamics of its permanent members (P5), who are frequently restricted by national interests and geopolitical competition [1]. In contrast, liberal theorists underscore the UNSC's potential as a platform for international cooperation. However, they also observe that the UNSC's efficacy has been weakened by the deterioration of multilateralism in response to the rise of nationalism and bilateral agreements [2]. Constructivist scholars highlight the UNSC's impact on international norms, arguing that its effectiveness is based on the legitimacy and shared values of its member states, which have declined over time [3]. Throughout history, the UNSC has experienced varying degrees of effectiveness. It achieved substantial success during the bipolar Cold War era; however, its capacity to address post-Cold War crises, particularly after 2000, has been increasingly questioned as a result of the emergence of multipolarity and P5 discord [4]. This literature underscores the fact that the UNSC's diminishing effectiveness is associated with the internal dynamics of the P5 and structural changes in global politics.

3. Gaps in the literature

Significant gaps persist, particularly in relation to the Security Council's recent decline in effectiveness, despite the extensive body of research on the challenges it faces. A significant portion of the current literature does not conduct exhaustive longitudinal analyses that compare various historical periods, which could reveal patterns in the UN Security Council's performance across a variety of geopolitical contexts [5]. It further complicates the comprehension of the Council's effectiveness in the context of evolving global dynamics. In addition, there is a substantial scarcity of research that systematically examines the cumulative impact of P5 rivalry on the UNSC's decision-making process in a variety of high-stakes case studies, such as Kosovo, Syria, and Ukraine [6]. The majority of studies tend to concentrate on individual cases without connecting them to broader trends, which limits the ability to draw generalised conclusions about the UNSC's overall efficacy. Furthermore, there has been inadequate consideration of the Security Council's structural ossification and its inability to adjust to the current global security challenges. The literature frequently neglects to recognise the degree to which the Security Council's diminished ability to resolve international conflicts is a result of its failure to reform its structure. The importance of this

gap is that it is essential to understand the connection between the increasing use of the veto by permanent members and structural stagnation in order to formulate effective reform proposals. This research aims to address these deficiencies by providing a thorough analysis of the UNSC's most recent deficiencies, with a particular focus on the ways in which the Security Council's structural deficiencies and geopolitical rivalry have exacerbated its diminished effectiveness. This paper not only addresses these deficiencies but also emphasises the urgent need for reform to improve the UNSC's adaptability to the changing global security landscape.

4. Statement of hypotheses

Next, this section of the paper will examine three interconnected factors that have contributed to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)'s decreasing efficacy over the past two decades. Initially, the Security Council has been rendered incapable of resolving international conflicts as a result of the increasing geopolitical competition among the five permanent members, particularly the United States, China, and Russia, which has resulted in the more frequent use of the veto. Secondly, the Security Council's ability to achieve consensus has been exacerbated by the emergence of new global powers and the transition to a multipolar world order, resulting in increased inefficiency and inaction. Third, the Security Council's inability to address the current global security challenges has been intensified by the absence of structural reform and the inflexible decision-making process. These factors have collectively significantly diminished the Security Council's ability to preserve international peace and security, underscoring the pressing necessity for reform to re-establish its efficacy.

4.1. Case study 1: the Kosovo crisis (1999)

The UN Security Council's challenges in managing international conflicts were especially evident during the 1999 Kosovo crisis, predominantly due to the veto power of its permanent members, which was driven by geopolitical interests. The crisis, which was initiated by ethnic tensions and the dissolution of Yugoslavia, escalated swiftly and required international intervention. The deployment of a peacekeeping force in Kosovo was authorised by UN Security Council Resolution 1244; however, the adoption was delayed by extensive negotiations, primarily due to the conflicting interests of the United States and Russia. To prevent further humanitarian disasters, the United States advocated for decisive action; however, Russia rejected this request. Russia, which has a historical relationship with Serbia, has consistently threatened to exercise its veto in order to prevent NATO involvement. The resolution's language was meticulously designed to underscore Serbia's sovereignty while still permitting intervention in order to secure Russian support. This compromise emphasises the effect of the veto power on the UN Security Council's efficacy, resulting in resolutions that are frequently protracted and less forceful [7]. Consequently, the Kosovo crisis serves as an illustration of the Security Council's vulnerability to paralysis and its inability to effectively address urgent global security concerns as a result of geopolitical competition among permanent members [8,9].

4.2. Case study 2: the Syrian civil war (2011-present)

The paper then delineates the primary motivations behind UN Security Council resolutions regarding the Syrian civil war, which commenced in 2011. These resolutions were primarily motivated by humanitarian concerns and the international community's duty to respond to mass

atrocities. The conflict has been characterised by the use of chemical weapons, pervasive violence, and significant civilian suffering, which prompted a UN Security Council resolution that prioritised the facilitation of humanitarian access, the investigation of chemical weapons use, and the establishment of a ceasefire agreement to safeguard civilians. These resolutions are driven by the urgent need to reduce the tragic effects of the conflict on the Syrian populace and to maintain international standards prohibiting the use of chemical weapons. Nevertheless, in order to protect their ally, the Assad regime, Russia and China have consistently impeded the Security Council's ability to implement more severe measures, such as authorising military intervention or instituting sanctions. This is indicative of the UN Security Council's efforts to reconcile its humanitarian responsibilities with the geopolitical interests of its five permanent members. Despite the fact that geopolitical gridlock undermines the Council's broader efficacy, scholars such as Sellström [10], Eminue, and Dickson [11] have emphasised the critical role that these humanitarian imperatives play in influencing Security Council resolutions.

4.3. Case study 3: the Ukraine crisis

The UN Security Council was compelled to intervene in the Ukraine crisis that occurred in 2014. In response, the Council passed a resolution that condemned Russia's actions, reaffirmed Ukraine's territorial integrity, and advocated a peaceful resolution through dialogue. These resolutions are driven by the broader international community's determination to maintain the principle of national sovereignty and prevent the escalation of conflicts that could potentially destabilise Europe. However, the implementation of more severe measures, such as military intervention or sanctions, has been impeded by the veto power of Russia on the Security Council. This reflects the inherent tensions within the council when a permanent member's strategic interests are at stake. The council's endeavours to contain the conflict without explicitly confronting Russia were underscored by the milder resolution that was adopted, which emphasised the need for diplomatic talks and a ceasefire. This approach highlights the limitations of the Security Council when geopolitical stakes are high, as highlighted by Gowan [12], forcing the body to balance the implementation of international norms with the need to maintain consensus among the five permanent members.

4.4. Comparative analysis

A trend of escalating inefficiency is demonstrated by a comparative analysis of the UN Security Council's involvement in the Kosovo crisis, the Syrian civil war, and the Ukrainian crisis. Despite NATO's unilateral intervention, which circumvented the UN Security Council, the geopolitical landscape allowed for a restricted international response during the 1999 Kosovo crisis [13]. The repeated use of vetoes, particularly by Russia and China, obstructed any potential resolution, underscoring the direct correlation between the intensification of geopolitical competition and the decline in the UN Security Council's capacity to act [14]. This period starkly illustrates the first hypothesis, which posits that geopolitical tensions between the P5 members paralysed the UN Security Council in the face of a severe humanitarian crisis. The Ukrainian crisis is an even more obvious example of the Security Council's inefficiency. In this regard, the Security Council's incompetence became apparent as Russia, a permanent member with veto power, was directly involved in the conflict. This not only confirms the second hypothesis regarding the challenges of a multipolar world but also illustrates that the institution is in a state of stagnation and is unable to achieve its primary objective of preserving international peace and security [15]. In contrast to the Kosovo and Syrian crises, the Ukrainian conflict further demonstrated the structural breakdowns of

the UN Security Council, particularly its inability to reform or adapt to the changing geopolitical landscape. Specifically, the UN Security Council's diminished effectiveness has been significantly influenced by its inability to adjust the veto system or expand its membership to reflect the current global power dynamics. This trend may persist, particularly as the global order continues to fragment, as evidenced by the UN Security Council's gradual decline in efficacy during these three crises. The third hypothesis posits that the UN Security Council's ability to function as a stabilising force in international conflicts will continue to deteriorate in the absence of substantial structural reforms. This will lead to an increase in global instability. As a result, this comparative analysis not only emphasises the UN Security Council's declining effectiveness over time but also emphasises the urgent need for comprehensive reform to resolve its growing irrelevance.

5. Conclusion

The case analysis's conclusions emphasise that the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has experienced a decline in effectiveness over the past two decades, predominantly due to the intensification of geopolitical competition among its permanent members (P5). The conclusions of this paper emphasize that the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has experienced a decline in effectiveness over the past two decades, primarily due to the intensification of geopolitical competition among its permanent members (P5). This escalation has resulted in the Council's inability to effectively address contemporary security challenges and promote multilateral cooperation, significantly impeded by the more frequent and strategic use of the veto. The case studies of Kosovo, Syria, and Ukraine demonstrate how these rivalries have resulted in impasse, impeded decisive action, and exacerbated conflicts and humanitarian crises [4]. The evidence, therefore, supports the claim that these geopolitical tensions have not only paralysed the UNSC but have also impeded its capacity to adapt to a changing global order that is defined by the emergence of new powers and the escalation of complex security threats [16]. However, there are also counterarguments that the veto is a critical mechanism of the UNSC that can serve as a critical check on hasty decisions and guarantee that any actions taken are in accordance with a broad international consensus, which is crucial for the legitimacy and stability of the UNSC [17]. Despite the significance of the veto's role in preserving sovereignty, empirical evidence suggests its excessive use in recent years to obstruct necessary action instead of fostering genuine multilateral dialogue [4]. This overuse is indicative of the Security Council's declining efficacy, which is the result of its internal fractures. The Council's inability to take decisive action on critical global security issues further emphasises the necessity for reform as these geopolitical tensions continue to escalate. The proposed reforms are designed to mitigate these risks by incorporating more adaptable decision-making mechanisms, expanding the permanent membership to reflect current geopolitical realities, and restricting the use of the veto. Despite their necessity, these reforms also face significant political obstacles, particularly from the current P5 members, who may oppose changes that could potentially undermine their strategic influence [17]. Nevertheless, the need for reform is evident, and international actors must work together to enhance the UN Security Council's ability to maintain global peace and security, particularly in light of the ongoing rise in geopolitical frictions.

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