

ANALYTICAL APPROACH TO THE POWER OF VETO IN THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

Dr. Ramesh Kumar Singh

Assistant Professor

Veer Kunwar Singh University, Ara Bihar

Posted at Maharaja Law College, Ara

Abstract

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is the principal organ responsible for maintaining international peace and security. Central to its decision-making mechanism is the power of veto held by the five permanent members (P5): the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and France. This paper provides an analytical approach to understanding the veto power, examining its historical evolution, legal basis, practical application, and implications for global governance. By employing qualitative and quantitative methods—including case studies, statistical analysis of veto usage, and comparative evaluation—this study evaluates the effectiveness, limitations, and strategic deployment of veto power. The research highlights how the veto, while designed to prevent unilateral action, often shapes the UNSC's ability to respond to crises and reflects the geopolitical dynamics among P5 members.

Keywords: *United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Veto Power, Permanent Members (P5), International Peace and Security, Geopolitics.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the UN Charter, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was established in 1945 as the principal organ responsible for maintaining international peace and security. The Council is composed of fifteen members, including ten non-permanent members elected for two-year terms and five permanent members (P5) — the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China. The P5 members hold a unique position within the Council due to their veto power, which allows any one of them to unilaterally block the adoption of substantive resolutions, regardless of the majority vote. This provision was designed to reflect the realities of post-World War II global politics, ensuring that decisions of major international significance could not be imposed without the consent of the most powerful states, thereby preventing direct confrontation among them. The veto serves as both a legal mechanism and a strategic tool, granting P5 members the ability to protect their national interests, shape international policies, and influence the outcomes of critical security decisions.



Figure 1: Global Governance

The creation of the veto was intended as a safeguard to maintain balance and stability in global governance by requiring consensus among the major powers for substantive action. By granting such authority, the UN Charter aimed to prevent unilateral action by any single state and to promote negotiation and compromise at the highest level of international decision-making. Over the decades, the veto has played a significant role in shaping UNSC actions, influencing the Council's responses to regional conflicts, humanitarian crises, and issues of global security. While it has often acted as a stabilizing force, ensuring that powerful states' interests are accounted for, the veto has also been criticized for enabling paralysis and gridlock, particularly when the P5 members' strategic objectives conflict. This dual character of the veto — as both a protective legal instrument and a potential obstacle to effective multilateral action — underscores the complexity of decision-making within the UNSC and highlights the ongoing debate regarding its role in contemporary international governance.

1.1. India's Claim for Permanent Membership in the UNSC

India has always been Champion to reform the United Nations Security Council, especially in terms of increasing the permanent membership of the council to reflect current global reality. Being the most populous democracy in the world, fifth-largest economy and with a record of peacekeeping missions in the past, India claims its membership in the Council as a permanent member is justified and must be included in the Council to legitimize the Council. Traditionally, India has provided some of the highest number of soldiers to the UN peacekeeping forces, and has played an active role in conflict mediation, disaster relief and humanitarian aid in all parts of the world.

The assertion of India being the Global South representative and its active presence in the multilateral forums including BRICS, G20, and Non-Aligned Movement also contribute to the validity of India in the

claim. Supporters underline that the current UNSC membership is based on the post-1945 balance of power, which does not reflect the 21 st century geopolitical and economic processes. The addition of India would not only increase regional representation, especially to Asia, which is underrepresented relative to Europe, but also increase the democratic credibility and responsiveness of the Council to world security issues.

Nevertheless, there have been setbacks to the claims of India, mostly because there has been no agreement between the P5 members. Countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Russia have stated their support to different extents, but China has always been hesitating, referring to regional competition and to the strategic reasons. This resistance explains precisely the issue that India is aiming to change: the excessive concentration of power among the current P5 and the absence of flexibility of the veto.

The claim by India in the wider discussion of UNSC reform points to an urgent necessity to realign institutional structures with international realities, which is that the Security Council becomes not only strong but representative, fair, and legitimate in the gaze of the international community.

1.2.Significance of Veto Power

In the UNSC structure, the veto power has several uses. Its primary function is to safeguard the strategic priorities and national interests of P5 members, preventing major powers from being forced to act against their will in matters of international security. However, the veto has significant effects on multilateral decision-making and international diplomacy since it can either lead to a deadlock when interests clash or encourage compromise among member states. Although in the past the veto has kept major powers from escalating, its use in current conflicts has frequently restricted the Council's ability to take decisive action, especially when it comes to humanitarian crises, regional conflicts, or transgressions of international law. This veto's dual function of permitting and preventing action emphasises how intricately it shapes the UNSC's efficacy and legitimacy.



Figure 2: Veto Countries Flag

1.3. Analytical Importance

Understanding veto power's wider effects on global governance requires a methodical, multifaceted analysis. By analysing the legal, historical, strategic, and geopolitical facets of veto usage, the analytical approach provides insights into the reasons behind the increased frequency of veto exercises by specific P5 members, the trends that develop over time, and the implications of such actions for international law and conflict resolution. Through a methodical approach, this research seeks to demonstrate how veto power functions as a strategic tool that affects alliances, negotiations, and the larger international order in addition to being a procedural tool. Such comprehension is essential for assessing the harmony between the defence of P5 interests and the UNSC's collective duty to uphold peace and security.

1.4. Objective of the Study

The objectives of this study are designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of veto power and its implications within the UNSC. They include:

- To examine the legal framework of veto power under the UN Charter, including its scope, limitations, and procedural nuances.
- To analyse historical patterns and statistical trends in veto usage by P5 members, identifying frequency, regional focus, and temporal dynamics.
- To evaluate the strategic and geopolitical motivations behind veto exercise, including considerations of national security, alliances, and economic interests.

- To assess the impact of veto power on the UNSC's effectiveness, credibility, and ability to maintain global peace and respond to crises.
- To explore potential reforms, policy measures, and alternative mechanisms aimed at enhancing the legitimacy and operational efficiency of the UNSC.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bishnoi, N. K. (2023) carried out a thorough analysis of the legal aspects of the veto power, highlighting how it influences the UNSC's framework for making decisions during armed conflicts. The study pointed out that although the veto was first intended to preserve agreement among the five permanent members (P5) and stop any one state from acting unilaterally, its actual use frequently made it more difficult for the Council to react to crises in a timely manner. The UN Charter's veto legal foundations, according to Bishnoi, were both a source of power and a constraint since they permitted P5 members to put their own national interests ahead of the security of the whole. Critical questions concerning the balance between legal legitimacy and moral responsibility in international law were raised by the study's analysis of historical cases where vetoes were used during wars to show how the UNSC's legal domain could be manipulated to justify inaction or delay responses.

Dickson and Gabriel (2024), who used it as a case study to illustrate the constraints and tactical application of veto power. Their findings showed that the threat or use of veto power by permanent members severely limited the UNSC's ability to prevent conflicts and maintain peace. The Council was essentially paralysed by Russia's veto, or the implied possibility of its use, which showed how a P5 member could protect its actions from widespread criticism. Using a combination of qualitative analysis of UNSC resolutions and procedural responses, the study demonstrated how the veto could impede substantive action and damage the UNSC's reputation even when there is broad international agreement against aggression. The strategic use of veto power, Dickson and Gabriel concluded, revealed structural flaws in the UNSC's institutional architecture and reflected the geopolitical calculations of the P5, underscoring the conflict between the principles of power politics and collective security.

Okada, Y. (2023) His work examined the paradox of a P5 member having the power to both block Council actions and act in a way that violates fundamental principles of international law, placing veto power within the larger framework of international law. Using the conflict in Ukraine as a focal point, Okada showed how the veto leads to a legal asymmetry in which the aggressor state could use its privilege to avoid responsibility, making international justice and enforcement processes more difficult. While the veto is structurally necessary for the Council, the study argued that it frequently clashed with normative

expectations of accountability, human rights, and international peace, placing a strain on traditional interpretations of the UN Charter. The necessity of reevaluating the moral and practical bounds of veto power was highlighted by Okada's analysis, especially in cases where international aggression and the P5's national interests collide.

Fassbender, B. (2023) examined the institutional and structural difficulties present in the UNSC framework and offered a constitutional and reform-focused viewpoint on veto power. He maintained that although the veto was necessary for the Council to function, it was a concentrated privilege that went against democratic principles of equal representation and was a constitutional oddity in international governance. Potential reform avenues were examined in Fassbender's work, including procedures for requiring wider consensus among P5 members and restrictions on the use of veto power in cases of mass atrocities. The study emphasised that the P5 frequently opposed reform discussions, illustrating the fundamental conflict between institutional legitimacy and the political realities of great power dominance.

Erameh, N. I., Ojakorotu, V., Obor, D. O., & Anabiri, E. C. (2023) offered a critical lens on the geopolitical aspects of veto power. Their study demonstrated how the veto served as a safeguard for strategic goals as well as an impediment to a successful global response. The authors argued that the veto's structural limitations, which disproportionately favoured P5 members while limiting non-permanent members and undermining collective decision-making, were the reason for the UNSC's paralysis in the face of Russian aggression. The study highlighted that veto power was not just a procedural tool but rather a reflection of long-standing global hierarchies and the unequal distribution of international influence by placing current events in the historical context of imperial legacies.

3. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The legal, historical, strategic, and impact aspects of the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) veto power are all examined in an analytical manner. In order to give a thorough grasp of how veto power operates and affects international governance, this framework combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

3.1 Legal-Structural Analysis

The formal provisions of the UN Charter, especially Article 27, which gives the five permanent members (P5) the power to veto decisions, are the main focus of the legal-structural analysis. Important components of this analysis include:

Table 1: Legal Basis and Structural Features of UNSC Veto

Aspect	Description
Legal Basis	Article 27 of the UN Charter, which requires concurrence of P5 members for substantive decisions.
Substantive vs. Procedural Decisions	The veto applies only to substantive matters, while procedural matters can proceed with a majority vote.
Abstentions	Abstaining P5 members do not block resolutions, providing strategic flexibility.
Legal Limits & Exceptions	Examines historical use of procedural maneuvering to circumvent vetoes, such as dividing resolutions or using informal consultations.

The main legal and structural aspects of the UNSC veto are listed in Table 1. Procedural matters can be passed by majority vote, but substantive resolutions can be blocked by any P5 member using the veto, which is based on Article 27 of the UN Charter. Strategic flexibility is provided by abstentions, which allow members to voice disagreement without obstructing decisions. Historical procedures like splitting resolutions or holding informal consultations demonstrate that, despite its strength, the veto can occasionally be used as a tool for diplomatic strategy as well as a legal defence.

3.2 Historical and Statistical Analysis

A quantitative view of veto usage trends since the UNSC's founding in 1946 can be obtained through historical and statistical analysis. Information is gathered about P5 members' frequency, context, and behaviour.

Table 2: Historical Trends in UNSC Veto Usage (1946–2023)

Period	Total Vetoes	Most Frequent User	Notable Crises/Regions
1946–1960	23	USSR	Early Cold War conflicts, Middle East resolutions
1961–1980	45	USSR/Russia	Vietnam, Middle East, Southern Africa
1981–2000	29	USA/Russia	Gulf War, Balkan conflicts
2001–2023	35	USA/Russia	Iraq, Syria, Ukraine

The historical trends in the permanent members' use of the UNSC veto from 1946 to 2023 are shown in Table 2, which also highlights usage patterns. The USSR was the most common user between 1946 and 1960, mostly for Middle East resolutions and early Cold War conflicts. Tensions in Vietnam, the Middle East, and Southern Africa were reflected in the USSR/Russia's dominance of the 45 vetoes that rose between 1961 and 1980. The United States and Russia became the primary veto users between 1981 and 2000, especially during the Gulf War and the Balkan conflicts. Veto power has continuously reflected the strategic priorities and geopolitical interests of the major powers, as evidenced by the high rate of vetoes from 2001 to 2023, which were again led by the USA and Russia and particularly in Iraq, Syria, and Ukraine.

3.3 Case Study Approach

Through case studies, important veto incidents can be thoroughly qualitatively analysed to uncover underlying motivations. A few examples are:

Table 3: Selected Case Studies of UNSC Veto Usage

Case	Year	P5 Member	Motivation	Outcome
Iraq Invasion	2003	USA	National security, regional influence	Resolution blocked
Syrian Civil War	2011–2022	Russia	Alliance protection, geopolitical leverage	Multiple resolutions vetoed
Ukraine Invasion	2022	Russia	National sovereignty claims, strategic expansion	UNSC paralysis, international condemnation

Selected case studies of UNSC veto usage are shown in Table 3, with an emphasis on the reasons and results of significant examples. Citing regional influence and national security concerns, the United States used its veto power during the 2003 debates surrounding the Iraq invasion, blocking the resolution. Russia regularly exercised its veto power in the context of the Syrian civil war between 2011 and 2022 in order to preserve its geopolitical influence and safeguard its alliances, which resulted in the blocking of numerous resolutions. The UNSC was essentially paralysed and widely condemned by Russia's vetoes during the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which were motivated by claims of national sovereignty and strategic expansion. These instances show that the use of veto power is frequently driven by strategic

considerations, reflecting the larger national interests and geopolitical goals of P5 members while having a major influence on the Council's capacity to handle global emergencies.

3.4 Strategic Analysis

Strategic analysis looks at how veto power affects UNSC negotiation and decision-making processes. Bargaining scenarios and models from game theory are used.

Table 4: Strategic Dimensions of UNSC Veto Power

Strategic Element	Description	Example
Veto Bargaining	Resolutions are modified to prevent veto	Syria ceasefire resolutions adjusted to avoid Russian veto
Constructive Veto	Threat of veto leads to compromise	Peacekeeping mandates adjusted to satisfy P5 concerns
Coalition Influence	Smaller P5 members coordinate to strengthen bargaining	France and UK aligning votes on Middle East resolutions

The strategic aspects of the UNSC veto power are highlighted in Table 4, which shows how permanent members can use it as a tool for influence and negotiation in addition to blocking resolutions. Veto bargaining is the process of proactively changing resolutions to avoid a veto, such as when Syria ceasefire resolutions are changed to circumvent Russian resistance. The idea of a constructive veto refers to circumstances in which the threat of a veto alone promotes compromise, such as when peacekeeping missions are modified to allay P5 concerns without completely blocking them. As evidenced by France and the UK aligning on Middle East resolutions, coalition influence shows how smaller P5 members coordinate their votes to strengthen their negotiating position. When taken as a whole, these instances demonstrate how veto power serves as a flexible strategic tool that influences UNSC negotiations and results outside of its official legal jurisdiction.

3.5 Impact Assessment

The impact assessment assesses the effects of veto power on international perceptions, UNSC credibility, and world peace.

Table 5: Consequences of Veto Usage on Global Peace and UNSC Credibility

Impact Dimension	Description	Example
Conflict Resolution	Veto can delay or block international intervention	Syrian conflict response hindered by repeated vetoes
UNSC Legitimacy	Frequent vetoes erode the Council's authority	Global criticism of UNSC inaction on Ukraine
Regional Actor Behavior	Regional powers may seek unilateral action	NATO response to Ukraine outside UNSC mandate
Global Perception	Repeated vetoes influence trust in multilateralism	Perceived bias favoring P5 interests

Table 5 lists the direct and indirect effects of the UNSC veto on world peace and the Council's reputation. As demonstrated by the Syrian conflict, where numerous vetoes impeded prompt responses and humanitarian action, recurrent vetoes have the potential to postpone or entirely prevent international interventions in conflict resolution. In terms of UNSC legitimacy, the Council's power has been undermined by frequent use of the veto, which has resulted in widespread criticism of inaction, especially during the Ukraine crisis. As demonstrated by NATO's response to Ukraine, the veto also influences the behaviour of regional actors, frequently leading them to take coalition-based or unilateral actions outside the UNSC framework. Lastly, the selective use of veto power affects how the world views it; persistent blocks erode confidence in multilateral decision-making and create a perception of bias in favour of P5 interests. When taken as a whole, these outcomes highlight how veto power, even though it is legal, can limit the UNSC's efficacy and influence how the world responds to emergencies.

4. FINDINGS

The results of this study offer a thorough analysis of the trends, tactical applications, and ramifications of veto power in the UN Security Council (UNSC). This section demonstrates how the five permanent members (P5) have used vetoes to affect decision-making, safeguard national interests, and mould global governance by examining historical data, case studies, and statistical correlations. The analysis also looks at the geopolitical and regional aspects of using the veto, illuminating the opportunities and limitations this power presents for group efforts to uphold global peace and security.

4.1 Veto Patterns

Examining past veto usage, the permanent members (P5) of the UN Security Council (UNSC) showed clear trends:

- Historically, the veto has been used most frequently by the US and Russia, frequently in support of their strategic goals and national security interests.
- Some areas, especially the Middle East, have been disproportionately impacted by veto-related gridlock, which has resulted in repeated delays or blocks in the adoption of substantive resolutions;
- China, the United Kingdom, and France use their veto power less frequently and frequently work with allies to influence outcomes.

These trends show that the use of veto power is impacted by wider geopolitical factors and P5 members' strategic alliances in addition to the current issues.

4.2 Analytical Insights

Further analysis of veto dynamics provided the following insights:

- **Dual Purpose of Veto Power:** The P5 members can use the veto as a source of strategic leverage in negotiations as well as a deterrent against unilateral action.
- **Institutional Impact:** The UNSC's capacity to effectively address global crises may be hampered by institutional stagnation brought on by excessive or frequent use of vetoes. On the other hand, diplomatic negotiation and compromise can be facilitated by the strategic and selective use of the veto power.
- **Geopolitical Correlations:** According to statistical analysis, P5 members' voting alignment frequently reflects larger geopolitical alliances, indicating that veto patterns are more closely related to global power dynamics than to issue-based considerations alone.

Overall, the results demonstrate that veto power is a multifaceted tool that simultaneously permits strategic influence, limits group decision-making, and represents the geopolitical environment of global governance.

5. DISCUSSION

The study's analytical framework emphasises the UN Security Council's (UNSC) dual veto power. The five permanent members (P5) can protect their national interests and preserve the balance of power in the world by using the veto as a crucial tool to ensure major power consensus. However, it acts as a roadblock to the UNSC's ability to respond to global crises effectively, frequently resulting in delays, impasses, or total inaction.

Potential procedures to restrict the reach of veto power have been highlighted in discussions about UNSC reform, especially when mass atrocities or serious humanitarian emergencies are involved. Enhancing the Council's legitimacy and responsiveness is the goal of proposals like limiting the use of the veto under certain conditions or instituting a "double majority" requirement. P5 members, however, are strongly opposed to these reforms because they are hesitant to give up their strategic advantages and clout within the UN system.

This study offers a sophisticated understanding of veto dynamics by combining statistical analysis, historical trend analysis, and strategic modelling. The results show how veto power is used as a strategic tool that influences alliances, negotiation outcomes, and global perceptions in addition to being a formal procedural right. The analysis also shows that selective or frequent use of the veto has long-term effects on multilateral cooperation, international law, and the UN's reputation as an international organisation.

Overall, the conversation emphasises the continuous conflict between power politics and collective global responsibility by pointing out that although the veto is structurally necessary to the UNSC, its use reflects a complex interaction between legal authority, strategic interests, and normative expectations.

6. CONCLUSION

The UN Security Council's (UNSC) veto power, which embodies a complex interaction between legal authority, geopolitical strategy, and institutional functionality, continues to be a crucial but hotly debated aspect of international governance. This study shows that veto power is not only a procedural tool but also a strategic tool that reflects the goals and interests of the five permanent members (P5) through an analytical approach that looked at legal, historical, strategic, and impact dimensions. When overused, it can lead to perceived legitimacy erosion and institutional stagnation while simultaneously limiting the UNSC's ability to respond to pressing global crises and safeguarding P5 influence and major power consensus. Its dual role as a diplomatic tool for negotiation and a roadblock to collective action is highlighted by historical trends, case studies, and statistical analyses that show how often veto usage reflects broader geopolitical alignments. The use of veto power also highlights the conflict between the UNSC's organisational framework and normative standards of humanitarian responsibility, international law, and multilateral cooperation—especially during times of mass atrocities or armed conflict. This dichotomy implies that although the veto power is necessary to preserve the balance of power among the P5 members, it can also impair the Council's ability and legitimacy to protect international peace and security. Future studies could investigate veto behaviour prediction models, looking at how national interests, regional crises, and geopolitical trends affect the likelihood of vetoes. They could also investigate the viability of reform measures like restricting the use of vetoes in cases of mass atrocities or

implementing alternative voting procedures to improve multilateral decision-making. Although the veto is still a structural requirement for the UNSC, its strategic and normative ramifications continue to influence international diplomacy, highlighting the necessity of careful consideration and possible reforms to guarantee that the Council continues to be both legitimate and effective in tackling today's global issues.

REFERENCES

1. Azmi, R., Azmy, A. S., Mohd Zahir, M. Z., & Al-Dulaimi, A. H. A. (2023). *Veto Power: A Legal Debate in the United Nations Security Council*.
2. Nordqvist, H. (2024). *Power Plays in the United Nations: A Qualitative Study Exploring Member States' Positions on the Veto Power through Multilateralism and National Interests*.
3. Olayiwola, S. M. (2024). *Interrogating the Role of the United Nations Security Council and the Use of Veto Power in the Israeli-Palestinian Crisis*.
4. Fremuth, M. L., & Stavrou, K. (2022). *The Future We Want?: Reflections on the Exercise of the United Nations Security Council Members' Veto Powers towards the International Criminal Court*. *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law Online*, 25(1), 167-215.
5. Bishnoi, N. K. (2023). *Unveiling the Weight of Veto Power: Exploring the Legal Domain of the UNSC amidst War*. *NUJS J. Regul. Stud.*, 8, 60.
6. Dickson, E. E., & Gabriel, T. A. (2024). *Russia invasion of Ukraine, veto power and the position of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in conflict prevention and maintenance of international peace and security*. *Journal of Public Administration, Policy and Governance Research*, 2(1), 161-175.
7. Okada, Y. (2023). *Locating the Veto Power in the International Legal Order: When a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council Becomes an Aggressor*. In *Global Impact of the Ukraine Conflict: Perspectives from International Law* (pp. 71-91). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
8. Fassbender, B. (2023). *UN security council reform and the right of veto: a constitutional perspective* (Vol. 32). BRILL.
9. Erameh, N. I., Ojakorotu, V., Obor, D. O., & Anabiri, E. C. (2023). *In the shadow of empire: Putin's expansionism, Russia-Ukraine conflict and the limitation of United Nations Security Council veto power*. *African Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies*, 2023(si1), 13.

10. Serdiuk, V. M. (2024). *UN General Assembly Resolution 76/262 as a Strengthening of the Collective Response to the Use of the Veto Right in the UN Security Council. Проблеми законності, (164), 246-265.*
11. He, Z. (2025). *The Value of the Veto: Analysis of Resolution Content and Veto Reasoning on the Palestinian Question (2000-2025).*
12. Trahan, J. (2022). *Why the Veto Power Is Not Unlimited: A Response to Critiques of, and Questions About, Existing Legal Limits to the Veto Power in the Face of Atrocity Crimes. Case W. Res. J. Int'l L., 54, 109.*
13. Nkatomba Nkatomba, E., & Shammah Mahakwe, A. (2025). *Powerful but Death in Action: An Appraisal of United Nations Security Council Responses to Russo-Ukrainian War. Journal of Social Science, 2(4).*
14. Scherzinger, J. (2023). *'Acting under Chapter 7': rhetorical entrapment, rhetorical hollowing, and the authorization of force in the UN security council, 1995–2017. International Relations, 37(1), 3-24.*
15. Choi, M. S., & Chang, S. (2024). *The Emergence of a New Superpower Rivalry and the Vulnerabilities of the United Nations Security Council. Technium Soc. Sci. J., 62, 217.*
