



## ABOLISHING VETO POWER IN THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL; FOR BETTER OR WORSE?

*Sami Ur Rahman*  
Associate Professor of Law,  
The University of Faisalabad  
Faisalabad – Pakistan  
[hod.law@tuf.edu.pk](mailto:hod.law@tuf.edu.pk)

*Syeda Nosheen Bukhari*  
Principal  
Peace International School  
Multan – Pakistan  
[peaceinternationalschool@gmail.com](mailto:peaceinternationalschool@gmail.com)

*Nasir Zaman*  
Freelancer/Academic Writer  
(Law Graduate from Bahria University Islamabad)  
[nasirzamanfezan97@gmail.com](mailto:nasirzamanfezan97@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*After successive world wars during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, countries around the world tried to take prudent steps to minimize such catastrophic wars from happening again. The United Nations Organization was also formed as part of these efforts after the Second World War. However, due to the permanent veto power of the USA, UK, China, France, and Russia, key issues related to world peace remain unsolved, a sorry predicament that continues to this day. This situation can be seen under different facets surrounding the veto power, as done in the following pages. In the following lines, it has been evaluated whether this veto power should remain present, or should it be abolished for the good.*

### Introduction

The veto power finds its origins in Article 27 of the United Nations Charter which allows every one of the fifteen members of the Security Council to have one vote. Moreover, the affirmative vote of at least nine of fifteen member countries is important for procedural matters. On other matters, nine votes are required, including those of the permanent members, i.e. USA, UK, France, China, and Russia (UN Charter, 1945). When a permanent UNSC member country vetoes any resolution, it cannot be passed. However, if such a country's member is absent, or abstains from voting, it will not amount to the use of veto power.

The fifteen members UNSC has five permanent members (as stated above) and ten non-permanent



members, five of which are elected for a two-year term every year. The five permanent members of the UNSC can veto or set aside any resolution presented before the council with or without the consent of the majority (United Nations Security Council, n.d.).

Many experts believe that this unilateral power exacerbates world peace in many main territorial and regional disputes in which the permanent member countries have ulterior motives to serve. On the other hand, it is also believed that veto power can help the UN create a fragile equilibrium in its decision by getting in line with the interests of present world powers. Consequently, many global and individual stakeholders in world peace wonder that is this veto power a blessing, or is it an impediment in the way of peace and stability in the world? For answering this question, we need to examine and analyze its multifarious facets in considerable length.

### **Veto Power in the UNSC**

As in most cases, the issues of upholding international peace and security are also tilted toward the interests and foreign policy agendas of great world powers. Article 27(3) of the UN charter says that the affirmative votes of all five permanent member states are required for the Security Council to make any substantial decisions. If this is not the case then any resolution regarding a presented before the UNSC can be dismissed by any permanent member. This power thus allows selected world powers to dictate world order in favor of their collective and separate motives.

Until now, the veto power has been used by various countries to serve their implicit and explicit foreign interests. Russia has used this power on at least 120 occasions. The USA has used veto power repeatedly to provide cover for Israel's illegal activities against the Palestinians and its neighboring Arab countries. China has used this power scarcely. During the past three decades, new trends have emerged regarding veto power usage. For example, Russia has persistently used its veto power during the past decade to avoid cessation of hostilities in Syria. Similarly, India and Israel have also continued their human rights violations in Kashmir and Palestine respectively by using their allies that are P5 members of the UNSC (The Veto : UN Security Council Working Methods, n.d.).

### **How has Veto Power shaped the World during the Past Decades?**

The veto power holders' repeated interferences and impacts in the international system have resulted in dictatorships, hegemony, and other similar power structures in the majority of emerging nations in Africa, the Middle East, and some areas of Asia. For example, in 2006, Russia and China had refused all UNSC attempts to stop Iran from obtaining atomic weapons due to financial concerns, despite the dire consequences that included the acquisition of nuclear power. In the same manner, Russia and China have been the two prominent powers behind President Mugabe's administration in Zimbabwe to the degree that regardless of the political barbarities carried out by President Mugabe, the two world powers have, starting around 2006, rejected all moves made by



the UNSC, to censure the brutality the Mugabe Government had released on the regular folks and the resistances after the June 29th races in 2008. Furthermore, because to the persistent blockages of veto holders, Kim Jong Un, the president of North Korea, has focused more on acquiring nuclear weapons to deter threats and hostilities from abroad and has consequently become a dictator, eliminating everyone who felt it. The worldwide framework for never-ending conflicts and wars that result from a lack of mutual trust and regard for each other's ideals, convictions, and regional influence has been exposed by the world powers' concealment of nuclear weapons.

That is why, in order to maintain respect and discouragement, smaller powers are forced to channel their limited resources and enormous expenditure into acquiring contemporary weapons of catastrophic destruction. In this sense, any remaining ideas that would have added monetarily, tactically, and socially to worldwide strategic progress are ignored. (Iyase, 2017)

The international framework's veto mechanism has been a significant failure, with far-reaching political, social, and economic ramifications. This paper highlights how it has been a significant tool that has disabled all goals intended to determine clashes, even when the events leading up to its construction are not morally or ethically justified, since we have limited its worldwide ramifications. It has eliminated competitions with deadly consequences and reduced the global framework to a state of exemption. (Iyase, 2017).

To confront this pattern, affected governments, people, and gatherings have relied on weaponry competitions to implement equity, to check the uneven global influence and acknowledgments, public opinion, the war for agreement, and political liberations. They attempt for responding to all political and armed humiliations as well as conditions that endanger their stability and national security. For example, the weak states in the global framework are minimized from that perspective and made irrelevant in the global undertaking of affairs, as the p5 is given the power to determine how global approvals are distributed to states that violate the United Nations agreements and contracts established as core values to guide a state's behavior. (Iyase, 2017).

Additionally, only three non-permanent representatives from African countries are allowed: two for TAG, The Asian Group; two against; one representative and the Western European Group (TWEG); one for the Group of the Americas and the Caribbean (LACG); and one for Western Europe and Other Group (WEOG). The interests of these regional nations are marginalized in the current situation and seldom adequately addressed. Paradoxically, these regions continue to be underrepresented despite providing the majority of the economic resources needed for global economic expansion and sustainability. (Iyase, 2017).

Veto power cannot be strategically used without alliances. In that role, tyranny, authority, and oppression had been experienced at some point by the majority of agricultural nations in Africa, Asia, the Center East, and the Pacific. The Arab Spring began in Tunisia and eventually spread to Syria and the rest of the Middle East, following a common model. As a result, Syria, Libya, and a



few other developing countries in Africa have become safe havens for psychological oppressors operating with impunity in an attempt to avenge the betrayals inflicted upon them by the international system. (Iyase, 2017).

### **Why Reformation of Veto Power is required?**

Even though it may seem obvious that the veto system needs to be changed, it's helpful to explain the main reasons why, as these will help determine whether or not the change will be successful. From a legal standpoint, three of the many reasons why the veto system should be changed stand out that have been produced herein below:

#### **a. Veto Power Contravenes International Rules and Equality**

For a number of reasons, the idea of an international order based on rules is irreconcilable with the veto power in the UN Security Council. "We might not tolerate a criminal law that openly provides the most powerful members of society with an immunity card," as Samuel Moyn recently noted. However, certain governments have an endless supply of "get-out-of-jail-free" cards thanks to their veto power in the Security Council; this idea is incompatible with the core tenets of an international order based on norms. (Nollkaemper, 2022). In this context, Moyn's observation highlights the problem of unequal power dynamics within the Security Council, where certain states have an unchecked ability to veto decisions that could otherwise promote global peace and security. This undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of the UN system as a whole, and perpetuates a cycle of impunity that can only be broken through more equitable decision-making processes."

#### **b. Hegemony and Monopoly of World Powers**

We have come to recognize that states may sometimes fail to fulfill their international obligations, yet this does not necessarily undermine the functioning of the international legal system. However, the concept of a rule-based international order is called into question when the most powerful states are able to flout the most basic laws and norms of the international legal framework with impunity, and can protect themselves from legal consequences through a legal process. (Nollkaemper, 2022)

#### **c. Need for Collective Security System**

The enhancement of the collective security system is another motivation for reform. The veto power has time and again permitted military activities that conflicted with the primary reason for the allied countries: the support of global harmony and security. Similarly, the veto power has made it incomprehensible for the Security Council to satisfy its essential obligation to keep up with global harmony and safety. (Nollkaemper, 2022).

### **Significance of Veto Power**

First of all, Russia and China are not the most lackluster veto users, unlike depicted in popular



belief. This distinction has been held by the United States since the 1970s, typically on resolution proposals that criticize Israel. Second, in general utilization of the veto power has declined notably since the finish of the Cold War. Naturally, the threat of the veto has significant indirect effects on Council deliberations; however, the historical trend is toward greater Council consensus and against the veto's casual use (Bosco, 2012).

Maybe the most basic point about the veto power is that you could never have a Security Council without it. Significant powers will not award a worldwide body restricting legitimate experts on issues of harmony and security except if they are sure that it won't bias their inclinations. As a result, the real alternative to the Security Council's veto does not have to go once at all, or at least not in a recognizable form. As chafing as the possible Russian no will be, that is a tradeoff that a group of countries might want to make. Even though it's frustrating, the Security Council is still a very useful body because it makes great-power security considerations a thing of the past (Bosco, 2012).

The legitimization of the veto power is normally situated in light of a legitimate concern for the powerful countries and their individual leaders and the possibility that harmony and security are just conceivable assuming the extraordinary powers that are cooperating for their motives (Schindlmayr, 2001).

The permanent members contended during the San Francisco conference that their privilege came with an obligation to uphold world peace and security. They said that the UN would be undermined if it tried to impose sanctions against a permanent member and that the veto power was a reflection of the political climate of the day. They further said that the Security Council's veto power barred it from making actions that would be detrimental to ties amongst its permanent members. (Schindlmayr, 2001).

As per one author in the San Francisco meeting, there were four reasons apparent at the gathering:

- 1) Unanimity was thought of as essential for harmony;
- 2) Extremely close and understanding countries are expected to safeguard their public advantages;
- 3) The need to shield minority countries from the excessive dominance of coalition of powerful countries; and
- 4) The need to avoid hasty UNSC decisions.

In 1993, Australian unfamiliar writer Gareth Evans wrote that the veto power was laid out to guarantee that the powerful assembled countries didn't focus on things it would not be able to finish because of extraordinary power resistance (Schindlmayr, 2001).

The fact that the veto power has kept the Security Council from approving the use of force against a permanent member is another argument in favor of the current arrangement. Since all of the permanent members have access to WMDs and a battle between them may have disastrous effects,



this has helped to avert a war between them. (Nollkaemper, 2022).

### **Why Veto Power should be abolished in the UNSC?**

The abovementioned averments manifest that veto power in the UNSC does more harm than benefit vis-à-vis world security and peace. It should be abolished for the following reasons:

**a. Damage to the Main Goal of the United Nations**

The UN and the UNSC were made to ascertain world peace and security. If the main issues about world peace and security cannot be solved due to veto power in the UNSC, then what else is left to discuss therein? (Narvaez, 2023).

**b. Rights of non-permanent Members**

Both the first and second world wars were held because weaker countries were cornered and later antagonized by powerful nations. If the same attitude will be shown from permanent UNSC member countries towards weaker countries today, chances are that these countries will feel resentment towards international organs that claim to solve their issues (Narvaez, 2023).

**c. Lack of Transparency**

The permanent member countries of the UNSC know that by using veto power, they can get away with any violation of international law by killing millions. In the end, they can also evade justice by vetoing any UNSC demanding inquiry regarding their role in destroying world peace.

**d. Undemocratic Nature of Veto Power**

The veto power's undemocratic nature has drawn a lot of criticism. The bulk of the Security Council's decisions can be blocked by one country, undermining the international community's will. For instance, the US has routinely used its veto authority to defend Israel against censure and penalties. Comparably, strong nations like Russia have vetoed resolutions that criticize their conduct, including the 2014 annexation of Crimea. Amnesty International has highlighted the shortcomings in the veto mechanism by arguing that the five permanent members have put their political and geographical interests ahead of the protection of people. (Amnesty International, 2014)."

**e. The Unfairness and Moral Ambiguity**

Some critics claim that the veto power, which is restricted to the permanent five, is antiquated, unfair, or ineffective. "The veto is an anachronism" is a quote from Peter Nadin. "In the twenty-first century, the veto has come to be almost universally seen as a disproportionate power and an impediment to credible international action on crises," he stated. One reason given for the UN's incapacity to stop and address acts of genocide,



violence, and breaches of human rights is the "enormous influence of the veto power." Several countries outside the purview of major states, such as pertinent African nations, have put forth obstacles to the veto power. The veto power shift is frequently recalled in relation to suggestions for reforming the UN Security Council.

### **Roadblocks in the Way of Global Peacekeeping**

The veto power has been used to stop or thwart UN peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations, as well as to defend the allies of permanent members. Even in situations when a veto is not really projected, there is still risk associated with using a veto power (sometimes known as a "pocket" or "hidden" veto). For instance, the UN was unable to launch a forceful intervention in 1994 because of threats from the US and France to veto resolutions pertaining to the genocide in Rwanda. Likewise, in 1998–1999 and again in 2004 to block UN participation in the Darfur situation, Russia and China rejected resolutions calling for an end to the ethnic genocide occurring in Kosovo. These instances illustrate how the veto power can still have an impact, even when not explicitly exercised.

### **Abuse of UNSC's Veto Power in the Past**

The major international powers have the extraordinary ability of veto authority under the UN Charter. They can oppose any resolution that is presented to the UN Security Council thanks to this capability. Despite the fact that atrocity crimes (such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, and/or genocide) are still being committed, certain permanent members have recently used their power to block resolutions from being approved. These vetoes have prevented criminals from being condemned, investigated, and prosecuted, as well as from taking other measures to prevent or lessen their frequency (The Legal Limits of Veto Power, 2019).

Despite ongoing genocide, crimes against humanity, and/or war crimes, the permanent members of the Security Council—the United States, the United Kingdom, France, China, and Russia—have frequently utilized their veto power, threats to invoke the veto, or the "silent veto" to block UNSC resolutions. Yet, global specialists say that veto power was never intended to be utilized along these lines and that there are cutoff points to this sort of purpose of veto power (The Legal Limits of Veto Power, 2019).

Generally speaking, the problem first surfaced during the period of politically sanctioned racial segregation in South Africa and during the 1994 Rwandan genocide (during which the United States and France took action to reject any goal that used the term "massacre" or sent strong messages to try to stop the injustices there). China's use of the veto power has recently been used to explain the Security Council's hesitation to denounce the worst human rights crimes, such as those in Sudan, Syria, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. (The Legal Limits of Veto Power, 2019).

### **Challenges in Removing Veto Power**



**a. The balance between Democracy and Efficiency**

Finding a balance between efficiency and democracy is the first obstacle. While amplification can upgrade the vote-based nature of the board by representation, such a large number of individuals might decrease the proficiency of its independent direction and its capacity to act urgently (Patrick, n.d.).

**b. Balancing Interests of UN Member States**

In the reform process, balancing the interests and values of various UN member states is a second obstacle. After all, the UN Security Council has a big say in what the UN will stand for when it comes to security, how it will keep order, how it will try to solve problems, and how it will keep the peace. There will unavoidably be a reorganization of power that favors some national interests over others as a result of any reform to the Security Council. It is additionally liable to include compromises among contending sets of values (Patrick, n.d.).

**c. Balancing the Slow and Fast Changes**

The third test relates to diplomatic strategy, particularly, whether to propel steady, gradual change or to seek a bundled arrangement that thinks about the interests and worries, everything being equal. In the end, member states must agree on Security Council reform. Be that as it may, after over thirty years of unbeneficial dealings, such an agreement shows up as very challenging to accomplish (Patrick, n.d.).

## **Conclusion**

Getting control over not to mention eliminating the veto power might appear to be revolutionary and hopeful. Ages have been brought up in this present reality where the veto power was guaranteed. Both the ideal of a standard-based worldwide use of veto power and the superseding significance of a working framework for the insurance of global harmony and security propose that an interaction to change the ongoing system be started as soon as possible. It is imperative to say to oppose something, we need to see the pros and cons associated with it. Under the aforementioned averments, it can be safely said that the veto power in the UNSC has more disadvantages and disadvantages for world peace. For solving this issue, the world must join hands to make sure that either this power is completely eradicated, or altered in such a way that no country can put its agendas above the human sufferings and deaths we see across the globe today.

## **Recommendations**

In the light of the above detailed discussion and the conclusion, we, hereby propose the following recommendations for a better world:

**a. Abolishing the Veto Power in the UNSC**



Although it seems clichéd, abolishing veto power will allow the UNSC member countries to decide issues about world peace and stability on equal footing and without the fear of intimidation by powerful countries.

**b. Short-term Veto Power for Non-permanent Countries**

The temptation of having veto power in the UNSC is so huge that it seems impossible that all five permanent member countries will agree to it. In such cases, the non-permanent countries elected for their two-year terms can be given veto power for their whole duration to temporarily shift the balance of power in their favor.

**c. The mechanism for removing Veto Power**

The UN charter can be amended in such a way that those permanent member countries that are creating hurdles in the way of international peace and stability should be removed promptly.

**d. Expansion of UNSC's Veto Membership**

One potential cure is to extend the Security Council and its powerful participation. The current individuals have blended sentiments. The United Kingdom and France say they support it; Russia and the United States are more reticent, indicating that a large council may not be as successful. What's more, China is against it. Furthermore, there are additionally desirous local adversaries who would rather not see their neighbors succeed. In any case, fast developing nations, for example, Brazil, India, Germany, Japan, and South Africa say there is no sensible other option (Borger, 2015).

**e. Limiting the use of Veto Force**

Limiting the use of the veto power is another possible solution. When it comes to major crises, east-west animosity has brought back international political paralysis in recent times. Throughout the course of recent years, Russia has utilized its veto power on 10 events, generally to stay away from examination over its activities in Ukraine - or to safeguard their strategic partners, like the Syrian system, from UN pressure. Six times, China has used its veto power, but it has always done so in conjunction with Russia. The US has given veto s multiple times beginning around 2005, each chance to shield Israel from rebuke (Borger, 2015).

**f. Waiver of Veto Power in Extreme Cases**

While Russia stands firm in its opposition, France and others argue that a quick fix would be for permanent members to waive their veto rights in cases of mass atrocities (Borger, 2015).

**g. Pronouncing the Veto Power unlawful**



Moving forward, it's essential to connect the veto power with its legal limitations. At present, there is a moderately well-established debate that there are legal limits to the use of a veto power by a superpower. The primary argument of such contentions, summarized by Charles Jalloh's *opinio juris*, is that a veto power similar to acts (whether actions of third states or their actions) that disregard *jus cogens* standards can be illegal (Nollkaemper, 2022).

**h. Restricting the use of Veto Power**

A second option for mitigating the negative effects of the veto power is to limit its use within the UN's current framework without amending the UN Charter (Nollkaemper, 2022).

**i. Amending the UN charter**

The more key reaction to the flaw(s) of the veto power is the UN charter's correction because of the work related to several sanctions. There would be no need to start this process over; it could expand on the political cycle that has been progressing in the UN for a long time (Nollkaemper, 2022).



## References

- Borger, J., Inzaurrealde, B., Levett, C., Newell, C., Sheehy, F., & Maynard, P. (2015, September 23). Vetoed! what's wrong with the UN Security Council – and how it could do better. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2015/sep/23/un-security-council-failing-70-years>
- Bosco, D. (2012) “In Defense of the Veto Power.” *Foreign Policy*, January 31, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/01/31/in-defense-of-the-veto-power/>
- Bosco, D. (2012, January 31). In defense of the veto power. *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/01/31/in-defense-of-the-veto-power/>
- International Center for Transitional Justice. (2019, April 16). The legal limits of UN veto power. *Medium*. <https://medium.com/@ICTJ/the-legal-limits-of-un-veto-power-f5ebc5950ac0>
- IYASE, N. B. (2017). A CRITIQUE OF VETO POWER SYSTEM IN THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL, 11–13.
- Narvaez, S. (2023, January 5). VETO power in the Security Council should be abolished. *The Stork*. <https://www.iestork.org/veto-power-in-the-security-council-should-be-abolished/>
- Nollkaemper, A. (2022, April 10). Three options for the veto power after the war in Ukraine. *EJIL*. <https://www.ejiltalk.org/three-options-for-the-veto-power-after-the-war-in-ukraine/>
- Patrick, S. (n.d.). UN Security Council Reform: What the world thinks. *carnegieendowment.org*. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/06/28/un-security-council-reform->  
<https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/06/28/un-security-council-reform-what-world-thinks-pub-90032>
- Schindlmayr. “Obstructing the Security Council: The Use of the Veto in the Twentieth Century.” *Journal of the History of International Law / Revue d’histoire du droit international* 3, no. 2 (2001): 218–34. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718050120956965>.
- The veto: UN Security Council Working Methods. *Security Council Report*. (n.d.). <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-security-council-working-methods/the-veto.php>
- United Nations. (n.d.-a). United Nations Charter (full text). United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>
- United Nations. (n.d.-b). United Nations Security Council |. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/#:~:text=The%20Security%20Council%20has%20pri mary,to%20comply%20with%20Council%20decisions>