

The United Nations Security Council and Its Agencies: Role, Challenges, and Effectiveness in Maintaining Global Peace

Dr. Neena Jain*

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science Government College, Dudu, Jaipur.

*Corresponding Author: drneenajain28@gmail.com

Abstract

The maintenance of international peace and security remains one of the most pressing challenges of the contemporary global order. The United Nations was established in the aftermath of the Second World War with the primary objective of preventing armed conflict, promoting collective security, and fostering international cooperation among sovereign states. At the center of this mandate lies the United Nations Security Council, which is entrusted with the responsibility of identifying threats to peace, responding to breaches of peace, and addressing acts of aggression through diplomatic, economic, and, when necessary, military measures. Alongside the Security Council, various United Nations agencies and peacekeeping mechanisms perform a complementary role in conflict prevention, humanitarian assistance, peace building, and post-conflict reconstruction. These agencies contribute by addressing the root causes of conflict, such as poverty, displacement, human rights violations, and underdevelopment, thereby reinforcing the broader objectives of global peace and stability. This research paper critically examines the role, challenges, and effectiveness of the United Nations Security Council and its associated agencies in maintaining international peace. It analyzes the institutional framework and legal authority of the Security Council, while also highlighting key political constraints that limit its effectiveness, particularly the use of veto power by permanent members. The study further evaluates the Council's performance in responding to contemporary security challenges, including civil wars, terrorism, humanitarian crises, and emerging non-traditional threats. The paper concludes that while the Security Council and UN agencies have made significant contributions to global peace, structural limitations and geopolitical rivalries continue to undermine their overall effectiveness, emphasizing the need for meaningful reforms and stronger multilateral cooperation.

Keywords: United Nations, Security Council, Global Peace, Veto Power, UN Agencies, Peacekeeping.

Introduction

The conclusion of the Second World War marked a turning point in international relations, as the world witnessed unprecedented levels of human suffering, economic devastation, and political instability. In response to the failure of earlier mechanisms such as the League of Nations, the international community established the United Nations in 1945 with the fundamental objective of preventing future wars and promoting a stable and cooperative global order. The United Nations was founded on the principles of collective security, peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for sovereignty, and international cooperation, as enshrined in its Charter.

Among the six principal organs of the United Nations, the United Nations Security Council occupies a central and authoritative position. It is entrusted with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Unlike other UN organs, the Security Council possesses binding decision-making powers, including the authority to impose economic and diplomatic

*Copyright © 2026 by Author's and Licensed by Inspira. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work properly cited.

*A Special Issue for the papers accepted for publication in the International Multidisciplinary Conference on India's Foreign Policy and International Relations: A Future Roadmap (IFPIR-2026) (Hybrid Mode)(22-24 January 2026) Organized by Geo-Politics & Defence Study Research Cell, Faculty of Arts, Education and Social Sciences, Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

sanctions, authorize the use of force under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, and establish peacekeeping missions in conflict-affected regions.

These powers make the Security Council the most influential body within the UN system.

In the contemporary international environment, global security threats have become increasingly complex and multidimensional. Issues such as international terrorism, prolonged civil wars, nuclear proliferation, cyber threats, climate-induced conflicts, and large-scale humanitarian crises have expanded the scope of security beyond traditional interstate wars. In this context, the relevance of the Security Council and its associated agencies has grown significantly, as they are expected to respond not only to armed conflicts but also to emerging non-traditional threats.

However, despite its enhanced relevance, the effectiveness of the Security Council has frequently been questioned. Political rivalries among major powers, particularly the use of veto power by permanent members, often lead to decision-making paralysis. Additionally, structural limitations and outdated power configurations have constrained the Council's ability to act impartially and decisively, raising critical debates about its legitimacy and the urgent need for reform.

Structure and Functions of the United Nations Security Council

The United Nations Security Council is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and is entrusted with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Its structure and functions are designed to enable swift and effective decision-making in matters that threaten global stability.

Structure of the Security Council

The Security Council consists of 15 member states, divided into two categories. The first category comprises five Permanent Members (P5)—the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China. These states were recognized as major powers at the end of the Second World War and were granted permanent membership along with the special privilege of veto power. The veto enables any one of the permanent members to block substantive resolutions, significantly influencing the Council's decision-making process.

The second category includes ten Non-Permanent Members, elected by the UN General Assembly for two-year terms. These members are chosen on the basis of equitable geographical representation, ensuring the participation of different regions of the world. Although non-permanent members do not possess veto power, they actively participate in deliberations, contribute to agenda-setting, and play an important role in consensus-building within the Council.

Functions of the Security Council

The primary function of the Security Council is the maintenance of international peace and security. To fulfill this mandate, the Council investigates international disputes and situations that may lead to conflict. It may recommend peaceful means of settlement such as negotiation, mediation, or arbitration. When peaceful measures prove inadequate, the Council has the authority to impose economic and diplomatic sanctions to compel compliance with international law.

In extreme situations, the Security Council may authorize the use of military force to restore peace and security. It also establishes and oversees United Nations peacekeeping operations, which play a crucial role in conflict management and post-conflict stabilization.

The legal authority of the Security Council is derived primarily from Chapter V and Chapter VII of the UN Charter, making its resolutions legally binding on all UN member states and underscoring its central role in the global security architecture.

Role of UN Agencies in Supporting the Security Council

Although the United Nations Security Council serves as the primary decision-making body for matters related to international peace and security, its effectiveness largely depends on the coordinated support of various United Nations agencies and mechanisms. These agencies translate the Council's resolutions into action on the ground and address the humanitarian, social, and developmental dimensions of conflict, thereby strengthening the overall peace architecture of the United Nations.

One of the most significant mechanisms supporting the Security Council is United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Peacekeeping missions are deployed with mandates authorized by the Security Council to monitor ceasefires, protect civilians, support political processes, and assist in

disarmament and reintegration of former combatants. These operations play a crucial role in stabilizing post-conflict societies and preventing the recurrence of violence.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) contributes by addressing the structural and socio-economic root causes of conflict, such as poverty, inequality, weak governance, and lack of institutional capacity. Through development initiatives and capacity-building programs, UNDP promotes long-term peace and resilience in fragile and conflict-affected regions.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) plays a vital role in managing refugee and displacement crises arising from armed conflicts. By providing protection, humanitarian assistance, and durable solutions for displaced populations, UNHCR helps mitigate regional instability and human suffering.

Similarly, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) focuses on safeguarding the rights and welfare of children in conflict zones, particularly in areas of health, education, and protection from violence and exploitation.

Together, these agencies complement the Security Council's political and security mandate by emphasizing humanitarian assistance, development, and peacebuilding, thereby ensuring a comprehensive and sustainable approach to maintaining global peace.

Challenges Faced by the United Nations Security Council

Despite being vested with extensive legal and political authority, the United Nations Security Council faces several structural, political, and operational challenges that limit its effectiveness in maintaining international peace and security. These challenges have become more pronounced in the context of evolving global power dynamics and emerging security threats.

Veto Power and Political Deadlock

One of the most significant challenges confronting the Security Council is the veto power held by its five permanent members. While the veto was originally intended to ensure consensus among major powers and prevent unilateral action, in practice it has often resulted in political deadlock. In conflicts where the strategic or national interests of permanent members are involved, the use or threat of veto has prevented timely and decisive action. This paralysis has been particularly evident in prolonged crises such as those in Syria and Ukraine, where repeated vetoes have undermined the Council's credibility and capacity to respond effectively.

Lack of Representation

The composition of the Security Council reflects the global power structure of 1945 rather than contemporary geopolitical realities. Regions such as Africa and Latin America remain under-represented, despite being directly affected by many UN peacekeeping and conflict-resolution efforts. Moreover, emerging powers like India, Brazil, and South Africa have limited influence within the Council's permanent decision-making framework. This imbalance raises concerns about legitimacy, equity, and democratic representation within the global security system.

Enforcement Limitations

Another critical limitation of the Security Council is the absence of a standing military force under its direct command. The implementation of its resolutions, including sanctions and peacekeeping mandates, depends entirely on the political will and cooperation of member states. As a result, enforcement is often selective, inconsistent, and influenced by national interests, reducing the effectiveness of Council decisions.

Changing Nature of Security Threats

The traditional security framework of the Security Council is increasingly challenged by non-traditional threats such as terrorism, climate change, pandemics, and cyber warfare. These complex and transnational issues require preventive, multi-sectoral, and long-term responses, which often fall beyond the Council's conventional mandate and operational capacity.

Effectiveness in Maintaining Global Peace

The effectiveness of the United Nations Security Council in maintaining global peace presents a mixed and often debated picture. While the Council has achieved notable successes in certain contexts, it has also faced significant failures that have raised questions about its overall credibility and consistency.

Positive Aspects

One of the major achievements of the Security Council has been the authorization and oversight of successful United Nations peacekeeping missions. Operations in regions such as Namibia, Liberia, and East Timor are often cited as examples where international intervention contributed to conflict resolution, political stability, and the transition to peace. These missions helped monitor ceasefires, support democratic processes, and facilitate post-conflict reconstruction.

The Security Council has also employed sanctions regimes as a non-military tool to address threats to international peace. In some cases, sanctions have played a role in limiting nuclear proliferation and pressuring states to comply with international norms. By combining diplomatic pressure with economic measures, the Council has sought to prevent the escalation of conflicts without resorting to the use of force.

Additionally, the Security Council provides international legitimacy for collective military action. When authorized by the Council, the use of force is widely regarded as lawful under international law, thereby reinforcing the principle of collective security and discouraging unilateral military interventions.

Limitations

Despite these achievements, the Security Council has failed to prevent certain genocides and prolonged civil wars, resulting in immense human suffering. Selective intervention, often shaped by the geopolitical interests of powerful member states, has undermined the principle of impartiality. Moreover, delayed or inadequate responses to humanitarian crises have further exposed the Council's operational weaknesses.

Thus, while the Security Council has made significant contributions to global peace, its overall performance remains uneven and inconsistent.

Need for Reforms

The growing complexity of global security challenges has intensified calls for comprehensive reforms of the United Nations Security Council to enhance its effectiveness, legitimacy, and representativeness. Many scholars and policymakers argue that without meaningful reforms, the Security Council risks losing credibility in addressing contemporary international crises.

One of the most widely discussed reform proposals is the expansion of both permanent and non-permanent membership. The current structure reflects the geopolitical realities of the post-1945 era and does not adequately represent today's multipolar world. Increasing representation for regions such as Africa, Latin America, and Asia, along with the inclusion of emerging powers, would improve the Council's democratic legitimacy and global acceptance of its decisions.

Another critical reform concerns the regulation or limitation of veto power, particularly in cases involving mass atrocities, genocide, and severe humanitarian crises. The frequent use of veto by permanent members has often led to inaction during urgent situations. Proposals such as voluntary veto restraint or suspension of veto use in humanitarian emergencies aim to prevent political paralysis and ensure timely intervention to protect civilian populations.

Strengthening cooperation with regional and sub-regional organizations is also essential. Organizations such as the African Union and the European Union possess regional expertise and operational capacity that can complement the Security Council's efforts in conflict prevention and resolution.

Finally, enhancing the role of preventive diplomacy and mediation can help address conflicts at an early stage. Greater emphasis on dialogue, early warning mechanisms, and diplomatic engagement would reduce reliance on coercive measures and contribute to sustainable peace.

Conclusion

The United Nations Security Council, together with the broader institutional framework of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, continues to occupy a central position in the global system of collective security. Since its establishment, the Security Council has played a decisive role in authorizing peacekeeping operations, imposing sanctions, and providing international legitimacy to collective action aimed at preventing and resolving conflicts. However, despite its significant contributions, the effectiveness of the Security Council has been constrained by enduring structural rigidities and political limitations. The concentration of power in the hands of a few permanent members, coupled with the frequent use of veto power, has often resulted in delayed or ineffective responses to

critical international crises. Moreover, the evolving nature of global security threats—including terrorism, cyber warfare, climate-related conflicts, and large-scale humanitarian emergencies—has exposed the limitations of the Council's traditional security framework. In this context, meaningful and inclusive reforms are essential to enhance the legitimacy, representativeness, and responsiveness of the Security Council. Equally important is the need for stronger coordination with United Nations agencies involved in peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, development, and peacebuilding. Such coordination can ensure a more comprehensive and preventive approach to conflict management. Only through institutional reform, political commitment, and effective multilateral cooperation can the Security Council remain relevant and capable of addressing the complex security challenges of the twenty-first century.

References

1. United Nations. (2025). *Reforming the United Nations Security Council: Challenges and Prospects*. UN Publications, New York.
2. Weiss, T. G., & Daws, S. (2024). *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
3. Hurd, I. (2023). *International Organizations: Politics, Law, Practice* (4th ed.). Cambridge University Press.
4. Nations Development Programme. (2023). *Human Development Report: Security, Peace and Governance*. UNDP, New York.
5. Malone, D. M., von Einsiedel, S., & Ugarte, B. (2022). *The UN Security Council in the 21st Century*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
6. Bellamy, A. J., Williams, P. D., & Griffin, S. (2021). *Understanding Peacekeeping* (3rd ed.). Polity Press.
7. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2021). *Global Trends: Forced Displacement*. UNHCR, Geneva.
8. Thakur, R. (2020). *The United Nations, Peace and Security: From Collective Security to the Responsibility to Protect*. Cambridge University Press.
9. Chesterman, S. (2019). *One Nation Under Surveillance: A New Social Contract to Defend Freedom Without Sacrificing Liberty*. Oxford University Press.
10. United Nations. (2018). *Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace*. UN Publications, New York.
11. Hanhimäki, J. M. (2017). *The United Nations: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
12. United Nations. (1945). *Charter of the United Nations*. United Nations, San Francisco.

