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Reforming the UN Security Council: Legal and political challenges

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■ **Abstract.** This study examined the legal and political-institutional conditions for reforming the United Nations Security Council and assesses the significance of such reform for international law and global governance. The research was based on formal-legal, historical-legal, comparative, and problem-oriented legal methods. The study argue that Security Council reform has a distinctly political and legal character, since any modification of the Council's composition, the status of its members, or its decision-making procedures must be consistent with the Charter of the United Nations. The veto power remains one of the main constraints on the Council's effectiveness, as it enables a permanent member to prevent the adoption of a decision even when that decision is supported by a majority. The Charter amendment procedure also creates a high legal threshold for reform because it requires ratification by all permanent members of the Security Council. The 1963 enlargement of the Council demonstrated that institutional reform is legally possible, but it also illustrates the limits of reform that does not address the status of permanent members or the veto mechanism. The study showed that the positions of the Group of Four, comprising Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan, the African Union, United for Consensus, the United Kingdom, France, and China reflect different approaches to representation, regional balance, and the distribution of institutional privileges. The legal implications of reform depended not only on enlarging the Security Council, but also on reducing the blocking effect of the veto, strengthening transparency, and increasing the accountability of permanent members. For small states, particularly North Macedonia, reform was important as a means of enhancing the predictability of the international legal order and promoting a more equal application of international legal norms. The study concluded that Security Council reform should be approached as a gradual process aimed at broader representation, constraints on the use of the veto, greater accountability, and stronger global governance. Its practical significance lies in the possibility of using the findings to develop expert assessments and recommendations on Security Council reform, the reduction of the negative effects of the veto, and the improvement of the Council's effectiveness

■ **Keywords:** veto power; voting procedure; procedural accountability; global governance; regional representation

■ Introduction

Reform of the United Nations (UN) Security Council remains a central issue in contemporary international law and global governance, since the Council's institutional design continues to reflect the distribution of power established after the Second World War. The substantial increase in UN membership, the growing political importance of the Global South, Africa's claims to permanent representation, criticism of the veto mechanism, and the Council's limited ability to respond effectively to certain international crises all demonstrate the need to reconsider its legal and political framework. This debate includes several reform options currently discussed within the UN intergovernmental negotiations on Security

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Council reform: enlarging the Council through additional permanent and non-permanent seats, improving the representation of underrepresented regions, especially Africa, reconsidering the procedure for the use of the veto, and improving the Council's working methods (United Nations General Assembly, 2025). At the same time, reform is constrained by a fundamental legal contradiction. Amendments to the UN Charter require the consent of the permanent members of the Security Council, although these are precisely the states whose institutional privileges, veto power, permanent status, and special political and legal position could be affected by such reform. As a result, legally possible changes remain difficult to implement, because they depend on the approval of actors that have a direct interest in maintaining the existing system of institutional privileges.

In the academic literature, reform of the Security Council is examined from several analytical perspectives. S. Amevor *et al.* (2025) associate the reform agenda with the need to enhance both fairness and institutional effectiveness by involving additional influential states in the Council's decision-making process. From this perspective, enlargement is not merely a political aspiration of particular states, but a broader attempt to bring the institutional structure of the United Nations closer to the actual distribution of power in the contemporary international system. B.Z. Winther (2022), however, offers a more critical assessment of the reform agenda advanced by the Group of Four (G4) – Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan. In his view, the G4 approach does not sufficiently reflect the concerns and priorities of the Global South, because it is primarily centred on the pursuit of new permanent seats. Consequently, the expansion of permanent membership may fail to resolve the problem of institutional inequality within the Security Council and may instead reproduce it by creating an additional category of privileged states.

The African aspect of Security Council reform is addressed by A. Sellström (2023), who draws attention to the institutional asymmetry between permanent and elected members of the Council, particularly with regard to the participation of African states. From this perspective, broader African involvement is significant not only as a matter of regional representation, but also as a condition for strengthening the legitimacy, inclusiveness, and institutional balance of the Security Council. G. Mbara's (2021) analysis of the Ezulwini Consensus further shows that the African Union's position is not limited to a demand for representation. It also reflects a broader effort to remedy historical injustice within the system of global governance. Accordingly, Security Council reform should be understood not only as an institutional adjustment, but also as a process with a distinct legitimising function. M. Binder & M. Heupel (2021) emphasise the inherent complexity of the reform process. Their analysis suggests that the maximalist positions advanced by different groups of states tend to neutralise one another, making comprehensive reform difficult to achieve. For this reason, a viable reform model would need to balance representation, effectiveness, and political feasibility. Such an approach supports the view that Security Council reform is unlikely to occur as a single comprehensive transformation; rather, it should be seen as a gradual process shaped by the legal constraints of the UN Charter and by the political consent of the permanent members.

In relation to North Macedonia, G. Leka *et al.* (2025) demonstrate that limited territorial size and material capacity do not necessarily prevent a state from pursuing an active foreign policy. Their study shows that small states may increase their international agency through participation in multilateral institutions, diplomatic flexibility, and reliance on normative instruments. G. Leka (2025) further examines North Macedonia's foreign policy between 2006 and 2017, interpreting it as part of the state's broader effort to enhance its international status. From this perspective, the foreign policy of small states serves not only to protect national interests, but also to strengthen external recognition and political visibility. T. Risteski (2026) adds another dimension by emphasising the influence of the European political and security architecture on North Macedonia's development during the first three decades of its statehood. This suggests that engagement with European and multilateral security frameworks is an important condition for stability, international integration, and the consolidation of small states' positions within the broader international order.

Although the reform of the UN Security Council has been widely discussed in the existing literature, most studies tend to focus on separate dimensions of the issue, such as representation, the positions of regional groups, Africa's role, the G4 proposal, the veto power, or the relevance of reform for small states. Less attention has been paid to the interaction between the legal limitations established by the UN Charter, the political interests of states, and the practical difficulty of reaching a commonly accepted reform model. Accordingly, this study aimed to examine the legal and political factors shaping the reform of the UN Security Council and to assess their implications for international law and global governance. To achieve this aim, the study pursues the following objectives:

1. to determine the legal basis for reforming the UN Security Council, in particular the provisions of the UN Charter, the procedure for amending it and the role of the veto right;

2. to analyse the political approaches of states and groups of states to reforming the UN Security Council – the G4, the African Union, Uniting for Consensus, the United Kingdom, France, China;

3. to clarify the legal consequences and prospects of reforming the UN Security Council for international law, global governance and small states, in particular using the example of North Macedonia.

Materials and Methods

The study was based on a qualitative theoretical and legal research design aimed at examining the legal, institutional, and political-procedural dimensions of UN Security Council reform. The chronological scope of the analysis covered the period from the 1963-1965 reform, when the Council's membership was formally enlarged, to the intergovernmental negotiations conducted in 2024-2025. This timeframe was selected because the 1963-1965 reform remains the only completed formal amendment to the Council's composition, while the 2024-2025 stage reflects the current debate on categories of membership, regional representation, the veto power, and the Council's working methods. The historical-legal method was used to reconstruct the main stages in the institutionalisation of the reform process. These stages included the enlargement of the Council in 1963-1965, the inclusion of equitable representation and an increase in Security Council membership as a separate item of negotiation in 1993, the establishment of a requirement for broad support among Member States in 1998, the launch of intergovernmental negotiations in 2008, and the continuation of discussions during the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly (1963; 1993; 1998; 2008; 2025; 2026). Particular attention was also paid to the 2025 generalisation of state positions on membership categories, regional representation, the veto power, the Council's working methods, and possible reform models. The collected materials were systematised according to several criteria: the year or stage of the reform process, the relevant document, the substantive characteristics of each stage, and its analytical significance for the development of Security Council reform. This approach made it possible to trace the evolution of the reform agenda from the first formal change in the Council's composition to the intergovernmental negotiation process of the twenty-first century.

The formal-legal method was applied to examine Articles 23, 24, 27, 108 and 109 of the United Nations Charter[1], which define the Security Council's position within the UN system, its composition, mandate, voting procedure, the special voting role of permanent members, and the legal requirements for amending the Charter. This analysis made it possible to determine the legal limits of Security Council reform, particularly with regard to changes in the Council's composition, the voting procedure, and the potential revision of the powers of permanent members. The comparative legal method was used to analyse the positions of the principal actors involved in the reform debate. The comparison covered Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations (2026), African Union Executive Council (2005), Government of Canada (2024), the United Kingdom (Young, 2024), France (Dharmadhikari, 2025), and China (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2025). These actors were selected because their positions reflect the main approaches to Security Council reform and illustrate the political contradictions that hinder the formation of a commonly accepted reform model. The comparison was conducted according to four criteria: the actor or group of states, its main position on reform, the justification of that position, and its analytical significance for the broader reform process.

The problem-legal method was applied to examine the veto power as a distinct legal and political-procedural issue within the broader context of UN Security Council reform. The analysis relied on materials from the United Nations Security Council (n.d.a), the United Nations General Assembly (2022), and Security Council Report (2026). These sources were selected because they provide a basis for assessing the practice of veto use, mechanisms of political accountability, voluntary restraints on the veto, and possible approaches to reducing its negative effects. Generalisation and systematisation were used to identify the legal implications of Security Council reform for international law and global governance, as well as the conditions under which such reform could have practical significance. The analysis was based on the works of M. Khalil & F. Lavaud (2024), C. Tomuschat (2008), Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly No. 377 A(V) "Uniting for Peace"[2], and documents of the United Nations Security Council (n.d.b). The legal consequences were classified according to four criteria: the direction of influence, the nature of the consequence, the conditions for implementation, and the risks associated with implementation.

The position of North Macedonia was examined as an illustrative case of a small state that does not seek permanent membership in the Security Council but has a clear interest in a predictable international legal order, greater accountability of the Council, and

[1] United Nations Charter. (1945, June). Retrieved from https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text.
[2] Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly No. 377 A(V) "Uniting for Peace". (1950, November). Retrieved from https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/666446?v=pdf.

a more equal application of international law. The analysis focused on the statement delivered by the President of North Macedonia (Siljanovska-Davkova, 2025) and the EU statement joined by North Macedonia (Delegation of the European Union…, 2025). These materials were used to support practical recommendations concerning a phased approach to UN Security Council reform. The study is limited by its theoretical and analytical character. It relies on legal norms, official documents, and publicly available positions of states, while informal diplomatic negotiations and closed processes through which states formulate their positions on Security Council reform remain outside the scope of the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Legal and political foundations of the reform of the UN Security Council

The legal basis for reforming the UN Security Council is laid down in the UN Charter. The UN Charter defines the place of the Security Council within the UN system, including its composition, powers, voting procedure and the procedure for amending the UN Charter itself. In particular, Article 24(1) of the United Nations Charter[1] states that the Member States of the UN "entrust the Security Council with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security". Thus, the reform of the Security Council cannot be a political issue alone. The issue of reform of the Security Council also has legal aspects to it. The decisions of the Security Council have a significant impact upon international law, including in determining whether there is a threat to peace, a breach of the peace or an act of aggression against another State, and in determining the need for the application of sanctions to those states that are initiating such threats, breaches or acts. Thus, reforming the Security Council has an impact upon international law.

The current model of the United Nations Security Council is based on the special position of the five permanent members of the Council, as defined in Article 23 of the UN Charter. While there is no explicit mention of the veto power of the permanent members in the Charter as such, the voting rules laid out in Article 27(3) state that the decisions of the Security Council on matters that are not procedural in nature are to be adopted with the concurring votes of the permanent members of the Council. Thus, any one of the permanent members has the power to reject any proposals that are put forward by the other members of the Council, regardless of the voting outcome of the other members of the Security Council. The main legal obstacle to reforming the United Nations Security Council is the procedure for amending the United Nations Charter. According to Articles 108 and 109 of the UN Charter, the proposed amendments to the charter must first gain the approval of a majority of all Member States of the United Nations, as well as be ratified by each of the permanent members of the Security Council itself. Thus, any country whose privileges may be amended by a reform to the Security Council still holds the power to reject that proposed reform. Consequently, while it is legally possible to reform the United Nations Security Council, the procedural difficulties of such a reform indicate that it would be necessary not just to gain the support of a majority of the United Nations' Member States, but also the support of each of the permanent members of the Security Council.

Historical practice demonstrates that reform of the Security Council is possible within the existing international legal framework. In 1963, the General Assembly adopted a resolution providing for an increase in the number of Security Council members. After the relevant amendments entered into force in 1965, the Council's membership was enlarged from 11 to 15 members. This precedent confirms that the institutional structure of the Security Council may be modified through the formal amendment procedure. At the same time, the 1963-1965 reform had a limited scope, since it did not alter the status of permanent members or affect the veto power. The current reform agenda is broader and more complex. It concerns not only the size of an enlarged Council, but also categories of membership, regional representation, possible restrictions or revisions concerning the use of the veto, and the Council's working methods. These issues are reflected in the Co-Chairs' document on convergences and divergences in the positions of states on Security Council reform (United Nations General Assembly, 1963). The principal legal difficulty is therefore not the absence of a reform mechanism, but the fact that the use of this mechanism depends on the consent of the permanent members. This creates a structural contradiction within the current model: reform seeks to reduce the imbalance between permanent members, which possess veto power, and non-permanent members, which do not have comparable blocking authority. For this reason, a gradual reform strategy appears more realistic. Such a strategy would combine improvements in the Council's working methods, greater transparency, broader representation, mechanisms of political accountability for the use of the veto, and a stronger role for the General Assembly in situations where the Security Council is blocked. The main stages in the institutionalisation of this reform process are summarised in Table 1.

[1] United Nations Charter. (1945, June). Retrieved from https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text.

Table 1. Stages of institutionalisation of the UN Security Council reform process

Year/stage	Document	Stage characteristics	Analytical importance for reform
1963	United Nations General Assembly	In 1963, a resolution on expansion was adopted, and the changes entered into force after ratification in 1965	The only example of a successful formal change in the composition of the Security Council. At the same time, the reform did not change the status of the permanent members and the right of veto
1993	United Nations General Assembly	The issue of equitable representation and an increase in membership in the Security Council was submitted to a separate negotiation process	The reform became a systemic issue on the UN agenda after the end of the Cold War
1998	United Nations General Assembly	The requirement for broad support of member states for decisions on Security Council reform was established	Raising the political threshold for reform and complicating the promotion of models that do not have a broad consensus
2008	United Nations General Assembly	Intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform were initiated	Intergovernmental negotiations on the reform of the UN Security Council became the main platform for the negotiation process
2024-2025	United Nations General Assembly	Discussions on reform continued within the 79th session of the General Assembly	This is confirmed that the reform remains a relevant item on the UN agenda
2025	United Nations General Assembly	The positions of states on the composition of the Council, categories of membership, regional representation, veto power and working methods were summarised	There are both points of convergence and differences between states, due to which the reform remains incomplete

Source: compiled by the author based on United Nations General Assembly (1963; 1993; 1998; 2008; 2025; 2026)

The reform of the UN Security Council has developed much more slowly than the international system itself. Since 1945, UN membership has expanded substantially, while the political weight of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Global South has also increased. However, the institutional structure of the Security Council has only partially reflected these transformations. The documents adopted or discussed in 1993, 1998, and 2008 show that the reform process gradually became institutionalised within the UN framework. At the same time, the length of this process indicates persistent disagreements among states regarding the future structure of the Council. The 2024-2025 stage demonstrates that states generally accept the need to make the Security Council more representative, transparent, and accountable. Nevertheless, there is still no common position on the creation of new permanent seats, the possible expansion of non-permanent membership, the future of the veto power, or the model of regional representation.

A similar logic of overcoming procedural deadlock can be found in earlier UN practice. One example is the "Uniting for Peace" mechanism, discussed by C. Tomuschat (2008) and embodied in Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly No. 377 A(V) "Uniting for Peace"[1]. This mechanism was designed for situations in which the Security Council is unable to act effectively because of the absence of unanimity among its permanent members. In such circumstances, the General Assembly may consider the matter and recommend collective measures to Member States. Although this mechanism did not abolish the veto or alter the institutional structure of the Security Council, it created a procedural alternative for addressing situations in which the Council is blocked. A comparable function is performed by United Nations General Assembly (2022) Resolution 76/262, which provides for the automatic convening of a General Assembly debate when a veto is cast in the Security Council. This resolution also leaves the UN Charter unchanged and does not restrict the formal veto power of permanent members, but it increases the political accountability of the state that uses the veto. Previous UN practice therefore demonstrates that, where agreement on deep institutional reform is absent, procedural adjustments may still be possible. These include strengthening the role of the General Assembly, improving transparency, requiring public explanation of positions, and developing mechanisms of political accountability. The central obstacle is therefore not the absence of procedural instruments, but the lack of political consensus on the substance of Security Council reform. These disagreements are reflected in the positions of key states and groups of states concerning the future model of the Council, as shown in Table 2.

[1] Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly No. 377 A(V) "Uniting for Peace". (1950, November). Retrieved from https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/666446?v=pdf.

Table 2. Comparative characteristics of approaches of key actors to reform the UN Security Council

Entity/group of states	Main position regarding reform	Justification of approach to reform	Analytical value
G4: Brazil, Germany, India, Japan	Support the expansion of the Security Council in both permanent and non-permanent categories	The discrepancy between the influence of the G4 states in the international system of the twenty-first century and the absence among the permanent members of the Security Council	The G4 model enhances the representativeness of the Council, but at the same time raises the issue of new permanent privileges
African Union	Calls for the redress of historical injustices against Africa and for permanent African representation on the Security Council	The need to address the imbalance between the role of Africa in the UN system and its lack of permanent representation in the Security Council	Strengthens the legitimisation dimension of reform, since without proper representation of Africa, the Security Council cannot fully reflect the universal nature of the UN
Uniting for Consensus	Opposes the creation of new permanent seats and supports the expansion of mainly non-permanent or long-term elected members	The creation of new permanent seats may reproduce existing inequalities and consolidate new forms of privileged status	Proposes a more flexible approach, but does not satisfy the demands of states that aspire to permanent membership, in particular the G4 and the African Union
the United Kingdom	Supports the expansion of the Security Council, including permanent seats for Africa, Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan	The position is based on the need to make the Security Council more representative, taking into account the modern political realities of the twenty-first century	Demonstrates support for expansion from part of the P5, but without a radical revision of the veto
France	Supports the expansion of the Security Council, including permanent representation for the G4 and greater representation of Africa	Combines the argument for the need for broader representativeness with the need to preserve the Security Council's ability to act effectively	Is open to expansion, but does not address the issue of the powers of new permanent members
China	Supports "necessary and sensible" reform, emphasising the priority of developing countries, particularly Africa	Prioritising the interests of developing countries and strengthening the representation of the Global South	Demonstrates one of the key political barriers: the P5 may support reform in general, but restrain specific models that change the balance of power

Source: compiled by the author based on African Union Executive Council (2005), Government of Canada (2024), A. Young (2024), J. Dharmadhikari (2025), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2025), Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations (2026)

A comparison of the positions of the key actors demonstrates that the political difficulty of Security Council reform does not result from a general rejection of reform itself. Rather, it stems from the absence of a shared model for implementing institutional change. The central disagreement concerns the future status of membership. The G4 and the African Union support the expansion of permanent representation, whereas United for Consensus opposes the creation of new permanent seats, arguing that such a model could reproduce existing institutional inequalities in another form (African Union Executive Council, 2005; Government of Canada, 2024). These divergent positions show that the debate is not limited to the question of representation. It also concerns the preservation or redistribution of permanent privileges within the Security Council. The positions of the current permanent members further illustrate the limited and selective nature of support for reform. The United Kingdom and France favour an expansion of the Council, while China links reform primarily to stronger representation of the Global South and underrepresented regions (Young, 2024; Dharmadhikari, 2025; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2025). In particular, China's representative to the United Nations, Fu Cong, emphasised during the 80th session of the UN General Assembly that Africa and other underrepresented regions should receive greater representation in the Security Council. However, none of these positions implies a fundamental revision of the veto mechanism. Therefore, although there is formal recognition of the need to update the Security Council, this does not amount to consensus on its future composition, categories of membership, regional distribution, or the status of potential new members.

Reform of the UN Security Council should therefore not be treated merely as a question of political expediency. It is directly connected with the UN Charter, which regulates the Council's composition, voting procedure, the status of permanent members, and the procedure for adopting amendments. Any redistribution of authority within the Council must therefore satisfy two conditions: it must comply with the formal requirements of the Charter and, at the same time, obtain political support from states, especially from the permanent members of the Security Council. This conclusion corresponds to T. Rensmann's (2024) approach, which examines institutional change within the UN system through the legal provisions and procedures of the Charter. However, the present study applies this perspective

specifically to the Security Council and shows that the legal framework of reform has not only procedural but also political significance. The findings also correspond to O.A. Hathaway *et al.* (2025), who emphasise the difficulty of formal UN reform due to the high procedural threshold and the role of permanent members. At the same time, this study develops the argument further by focusing on the structural contradiction of the Security Council model. The UN Charter allows institutional amendments, but their implementation depends on the consent of the very states whose privileges may be affected by reform. For this reason, the legal possibility of Security Council reform does not automatically ensure its practical feasibility. The main limitation lies not in the absence of a legal mechanism, but in the dependence of that mechanism on the political will of the permanent members.

The political dimension of the reform shows that the main difficulty is not the absence of broad recognition that the UN Security Council requires renewal. Rather, the problem lies in the lack of agreement on what such renewal should involve. This view is consistent with D. Archibugi *et al.* (2025), who connect Security Council reform with questions of representation, the veto power, and the effectiveness of decision-making. For the G4, representation is primarily understood through the expansion of permanent membership to include Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan (Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations, 2026). Such a model could make the Council more consistent with the contemporary distribution of political and economic influence. At the same time, it may also create an additional layer of permanent privileges rather than overcoming the existing hierarchy. The African Union approaches reform from a different perspective. Its position is linked to the need to address Africa's historical underrepresentation in the Security Council and therefore gives the reform a legitimising dimension (African Union Executive Council, 2005). By contrast, United for Consensus adopts a more cautious position. It opposes the creation of new permanent seats and instead favours the expansion of elected or longer-term elected membership. This approach may reduce the risk of entrenching new permanent privileges, but it does not meet the expectations of states seeking permanent membership.

The positions of the United Kingdom and France indicate that some permanent members are prepared to support the enlargement of the Security Council, including through the addition of the G4 states and stronger African representation, but without a fundamental revision of the veto power (Young, 2024; Dharmadhikari, 2025). China also supports broader representation for countries of the Global South, although its approach remains cautious toward reform models that could alter the balance of power among the permanent members. For this reason, a phased and combined model of reform appears to be the most realistic option. Such a model would bring together broader regional representation, a stronger role for non-permanent or longer-term elected members, improvements in the Council's working methods, and greater political accountability for the use of the veto. This approach is more feasible because it takes into account the representational demands of the G4 and the African Union, the concerns of United for Consensus regarding new permanent privileges, and the dependence of reform on the positions of the P5. The negotiation process therefore remains incomplete not because of the absence of procedural platforms, but because of the incompatibility of political interests and competing reform models. The 1963 reform confirms that changes to the structure of the Security Council are legally possible within the existing international legal order. However, this precedent also has clear limits, since the 1963 enlargement concerned only the number of Council members and did not affect the status of permanent members or the veto power. This finding corresponds to the approaches of C. Cai *et al.* (2024) and S. Chesterman (2025), who examine the contemporary Security Council in the context of global polarisation, declining effectiveness, and criticism of its representativeness. In contrast to the 1,963 reform, the current reform agenda is broader and more complex. It concerns not only enlargement of membership, but also questions of legitimacy, institutional efficiency, and the distribution of privileged authority within the Council.

E. Parvanova (2023) examines the G4 position as an attempt by Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan to align their international status with their political and economic influence in the contemporary international system. N.M. Alene *et al.* (2023) connect the African Union's demands with the need to ensure fair African representation and to address historically rooted inequalities in global governance. N. Pirozzi (2023), in turn, analyses the position of Uniting for Consensus as an alternative reform logic. This approach rejects the creation of new permanent seats and instead favours a more flexible model of participation based on non-permanent or longer-term elected membership. Taken together, these positions demonstrate the absence of a shared understanding of what Security Council reform should ultimately entail. The G4, the African Union, and Uniting for Consensus all recognise the need for change, but they advance different visions of the Council's future structure. This explains the political complexity of the reform process not simply as a conflict between supporters and opponents of change, but as a competition between different concepts of representation,

status, and the distribution of influence within the Security Council.

The reform of the UN Security Council should not be reduced to the creation of additional permanent seats. A more practical direction may involve strengthening the role of non-permanent members, especially when this is combined with broader representation, greater transparency, and stronger accountability within the Council. This conclusion is consistent with V.N. Pay & P. Postolski (2022), who show that elected members of the Security Council can influence its work through diplomatic engagement, agenda-setting, and the promotion of specific norms. At the same time, a purely numerical enlargement of the Council would not, by itself, resolve the problems of effectiveness and legitimacy. Such enlargement would need to be accompanied by procedural mechanisms that improve transparency, accountability, and the Council's capacity to act. A useful analogy may be drawn from the practice of the European Union. Qualified majority voting in the Council of the EU reduces the dependence of decision-making on the unanimous consent of all member states (Council of the European Union, 2026). In addition, Article 16 of the Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union[1] provides for the public nature of Council meetings when draft legislative acts are discussed and voted upon. For the UN Security Council, this comparison should not be understood as a proposal to directly transfer the EU model. Rather, it shows that the effectiveness of a collegial institution may be improved through procedural openness, clearer decision-making rules, public explanation of positions, and a reduced capacity of individual actors to block collective action. This view corresponds to I. Johnstone's (2024) emphasis on the legitimacy of the Security Council and to R. Gowan's (2026) argument that pragmatic compromise remains possible within the Council's work. Accordingly, Security Council reform should be understood not only as a question of membership enlargement, but as a broader combination of representation, a stronger role for non-permanent members, transparency, accountability, institutional effectiveness, and political feasibility.

Thus, Security Council reform should be understood not merely as a question of membership enlargement, but as a broader political and legal problem connected with the UN Charter, the veto power, the status of permanent members, and the absence of an agreed reform model. The comparison with existing academic approaches confirms that the central difficulty lies in reconciling the legal possibility of reform with its political feasibility. For this reason, the most realistic direction is a gradual reform process that combines broader representation, a stronger role for non-permanent members, greater transparency and accountability, and the development of mechanisms of political responsibility for the use of institutional privileges.

Legal implications of UN Security Council reform for global governance

The veto power, which is legally grounded in Article 27(3) of the United Nations Charter[2], is of particular importance in the context of Security Council reform. It affects not only the Council's voting procedure, but also its practical capacity to carry out its mandate for the maintenance of international peace and security. In general, legal terms, the veto confirms the special status of the permanent members. However, when the legal consequences of reform are examined, it also appears as a mechanism that may directly limit the effectiveness of the international legal response to crises. The practice of veto use since 1946 shows that this mechanism has repeatedly been applied in matters concerning international conflicts, sanctions, peacekeeping operations, and humanitarian crises (United Nations Security Council, n.d.a). The legal difficulty becomes especially acute when a permanent member has a direct interest in preventing an international legal response to a particular conflict. In such situations, the veto is not merely a procedural instrument, but a systemic factor affecting the functioning of collective security. The complete abolition of the veto power in the near future appears unlikely. This is explained not only by the political unwillingness of permanent members to give up their privileged position, but also by the amendment procedure established by the UN Charter. Under Articles 108 and 109 of the Charter, far-reaching reform requires adoption and ratification in accordance with the prescribed procedure, including ratification by all permanent members of the Security Council. As a result, any revision of the veto power depends on the consent of the very states that currently possess and use this right.

A more practically attainable way to reduce the negative effects of the veto is to strengthen the political accountability of the permanent members of the Security Council. One relevant mechanism is United Nations General Assembly (2022) Resolution 76/262, which provides for the automatic convening of a General Assembly debate when a veto is cast in the Security Council. Although this resolution does not alter the formal powers of the Security Council, it creates an additional accountability mechanism by requiring

[1] Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union. (2016, June). Retrieved from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/treaty/teu_2016/art_16/oj/eng.
[2] United Nations Charter. (1945, June). Retrieved from https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text.

political scrutiny of the permanent member that has used the veto. V. Serdiuk (2024) also interprets Resolution 76/262 as a means of strengthening the collective response of the international community in cases where Security Council action is blocked by the veto. Another possible direction is the voluntary restraint of veto use in situations involving mass crimes. The Code of Conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes calls on states not to vote against resolutions intended to prevent or end such crimes (Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency Group, 2015). This approach does not modify the formal authority of the Security Council, but it helps establish a political standard for the conduct of its members.

A further legal mechanism concerns the rule of mandatory abstention from voting, which is provided for in Article 27(3) of the UN Charter in relation to a party to a dispute. A. Kato (2025) argues that this provision could be applied more actively in cases where a member of the Security Council is itself a party to the dispute under consideration. This approach would not require the creation of a new legal rule; rather, it would involve a more consistent use of an existing provision of the Charter. The use of the veto in situations involving aggression raises an additional legal problem. Where a permanent member of the Security Council is itself an aggressor state, or has a direct interest in preventing a response to aggression, the exercise of the veto creates a tension between the procedural privileges of the P5 and fundamental principles of international law (Trahan, 2023).

The contemporary debate on the veto power therefore concentrates on practical mechanisms for reducing its negative effects. These include greater transparency, a requirement to explain the use of the veto, stronger involvement of the General Assembly, voluntary restraint in cases involving mass crimes, and increased political accountability of permanent members (Security Council Report, 2026). Accordingly, the veto power should be viewed as a systemic obstacle to effective Security Council reform. It affects not only the Council's ability to adopt decisions, but also the legitimacy of collective security and broader trust in international law. In these circumstances, the most realistic approach is not the immediate abolition of the veto, but the gradual reduction of its blocking effect. Such an approach may include the automatic consideration of veto cases by the General Assembly, voluntary abstention from the veto in situations involving mass crimes, more active application of the rule of mandatory abstention from voting, and stronger political accountability for permanent members of the Security Council. Reform of the UN Security Council is significant not only for the institutional structure of the United Nations, but also for the broader system of international law. Under the UN Charter, the Security Council bears primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and its decisions may produce binding legal consequences for Member States. Therefore, changes to the Council's composition, procedures, or institutional practice may affect the legitimacy, effectiveness, and practical functioning of the international legal order, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Legal consequences of reforming the UN Security Council for international law

Direction of influence	Feature of consequence	Conditions and risks of implementation
Legitimacy of international law	A more representative Security Council could increase the perception of its decisions as fair and balanced	Enlargement alone does not guarantee legitimacy unless accompanied by transparency, accountability and real participation of states in decision-making
Collective system security	Reform could strengthen the capacity of international law to respond to aggression, mass crimes and threats to peace	The effect will be limited if the veto continues to block the Security Council's response to gross violations of international law
The role of the General Assemblies	In cases of Security Council blockages, the supporting and compensatory role of the General Assembly could be strengthened	The Unity for Peace mechanism (Tomuschat, 2008) and UN General Assembly resolution 76/262 do not replace the Security Council's powers, but these instruments strengthen political control over the use of the veto
Responsibility to Protect	Reform could increase the practical relevance of the international community's responsibility to respond to genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity	If the veto blocks decisions on mass crimes, the Responsibility to Protect concept remains limited in practical implementation
Limitation of use of veto	Voluntary veto abstention in cases of mass crimes could strengthen the link between the Security Council, international humanitarian law and international criminal law	Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group does not change the UN Charter, but forms a political standard for state behaviour
Interpretation of the current norms of the UN Charter	A more active application of Article 27(3) of the UN Charter could limit the involvement of a state party to a dispute in blocking relevant decisions	Depends on wider acceptance of the practice of mandatory abstention

Table 3. Continued

Direction of influence	Feature of consequence	Conditions and risks of implementation
Reform without a complete revision of the Statute	Some of the changes could be implemented through the Council's working methods, political commitments, procedural practices and increased transparency	Does not completely eliminate structural problems, but is more realistic than formal change UN Charter

Source: compiled by the author based on United Nations Charter[1], United Nations General Assembly (2005; 2022), C. Tomuschat (2008), Code of Conduct Regarding Security Council Action Against Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity or War Crimes[2], J. Trahan (2023), M.A. Khalil & F. Lavaud (2024), A. Kato (2025), United Nations Security Council (n.d.b)

The legal impact of Security Council reform depends less on the formal enlargement of its membership than on changes in decision-making practice, the reduction of the veto's blocking effect, and the strengthening of transparency and accountability within the Council. A numerical increase in membership may improve representation, but it cannot by itself ensure greater effectiveness unless it is accompanied by procedural and institutional changes. For this reason, the legal implications of reform are multidimensional. They may strengthen the legitimacy of international law, reinforce the collective security system, and enhance the role of the General Assembly in situations where the Security Council is blocked. However, such effects can be achieved only through substantive reform rather than merely formal institutional expansion.

The example of North Macedonia illustrates why Security Council reform is relevant for small states that do not seek permanent membership but rely on a predictable international legal order, an accountable Security Council, and the equal application of international law. In her speech during the general debate of the 80th session of the UN General Assembly, the President of North Macedonia emphasised the need for a more democratic, accountable, responsible, and inclusive Security Council (Siljanovska-Davkova, 2025). A similar position is reflected in the EU statement joined by North Macedonia, which links Security Council reform to greater effectiveness, transparency, inclusiveness, and improved representation of underrepresented regions, particularly Africa (Delegation of the European Union…, 2025). For small states, therefore, the importance of reform lies not in the redistribution of permanent seats as such, but in strengthening the Council's capacity to act in accordance with the UN Charter, reducing the blocking effect of the veto, and preserving confidence in the international legal order.

Reform of the UN Security Council should be pursued as a phased process rather than as a single comprehensive transformation of the entire system. Its first priority should be to broaden the representation of underrepresented regions, including Africa, Latin America, Asia, and small states. At the same time, reform should not be reduced to the creation of additional permanent seats, since such an approach could merely expand the circle of privileged states without resolving the problem of the Council's effectiveness. A practical reform agenda should also include a stronger role for the General Assembly in cases where the veto is used, regular consideration of the reasons for and consequences of blocked Security Council decisions, and greater political accountability of permanent members. It would also be important to promote restraint in the use of the veto in situations involving mass crimes, including genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, on the basis of political commitments by states. In addition, the rule of mandatory abstention should be applied more consistently where a member of the Security Council is a party to a dispute. Transparency and accountability should be treated as equally important priorities. This requires more open procedures, clearer explanations of state positions, a stronger role for non-permanent members, and mechanisms for monitoring the use of the veto. Security Council reform therefore has a dual character: it is legally possible within the framework of the UN Charter, but politically constrained by the privileged status of permanent members and the absence of consensus on the Council's future model. Its success depends on the ability of states to develop a compromise approach that combines broader representation, reduced negative effects of the veto, greater transparency and accountability, and a stronger role for the General Assembly.

Thus, the veto power also has systemic significance for the Security Council, as it influences

[1] United Nations Charter. (1945, June). Retrieved from https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text.
[2] Code of Conduct Regarding Security Council Action Against Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity or War Crimes. (2015, December). Retrieved from https://www.globalr2p.org/resources/code-of-conduct-regarding-security-council-action-against-genocide-crimes-against-humanity-or-war-crimes/.

the voting procedure, the ability of the Council to respond to international crises, and the effectiveness of the legal response to those international crises. This conclusion correlates with the study by J. Gifkins (2021) on the decision-making process in the Security Council. The current study places an emphasis on the legal impact of the veto, specifically in relation to the effectiveness of the Security Council, the legitimacy of its decisions, and the trust that the international legal system places in its decisions. The results of the study revealed that one of the legal problems associated with the veto power is when a member of the Security Council that possesses the right to use the veto has an interest in the legal response to a conflict. This finding echoes the findings of Y. Okada (2023) that examines the use of the veto power within the context of international law in cases in which one of the permanent members of the Security Council becomes the aggressor in an international conflict. Overall, the results of the current study reveal that the legal contradiction between the special status of the permanent members of the Security Council and the effectiveness of the organisation as a whole to maintain international peace and security.

The complete abolition of the veto right in the near future is unlikely. The revision of the veto right depends on the consent of the members of the Security Council who are permanent. Within the framework of the study, the more realistic direction of the use of the veto right is the limitation of the negative consequences of the use of the veto right, in particular, the voluntary abstention from the veto in cases of mass crimes. This conclusion is correlated with the findings of the study by E. Staunton (2025) that investigated the formation of the norm not to use the veto and its impact on the Security Council. In a separate aspect of the research results, the relationship between the veto right of the members of the Security Council and the practical implementation of the Responsibility to Protect concept became apparent. The findings of the study reveal that the veto right of the Security Council members that enables them to block certain decisions in the case of mass crimes limits the practical implementation of the Responsibility to Protect concept. This finding is in agreement with the studies of A. Upadhyay & A. Mehrotra (2025) and B.D. Lepard (2021) that investigate the veto right as one of the factors that complicate the practical implementation of the Responsibility to Protect concept. Thus, comparing these studies with the results of this study enables the conclusion that the voluntary abstention from the use of the veto right in cases of mass crimes is an alternative to the revision of the UN Charter that could contribute to the reduction of the impact of the veto right in these specific situations.

M. Arcari (2022) examines the war in Ukraine through the lens of the difficulties of the international system's response to the war. T. Maluwa (2023) discusses how the war in Ukraine exemplifies the paralysis of the Security Council, leading to discussions of the need for reform of the Council. A. Peters (2023) researches the legal limits of the Russian veto in the context of the war in Ukraine. Each of these authors produced work that is relevant to the research that is performed in the current study. Each of these studies relate to the current study in that they discuss the issue of the veto in relation to the war in Ukraine – an issue that correlates with the findings of the current research study that the problem of the veto is systemic in nature. Furthermore, the fact that the legal problem associated with the veto is worsened when the permanent member of the Council also has an interest in blocking the legal response to the aggression that occurs is correlated with the findings of the current study. Thus, through comparing the work of each of these authors, it becomes possible to specify the findings of the current study in the context of the issue of aggression itself.

Another way to reduce the negative consequences of the veto power is to strengthen the role of the United Nations General Assembly (2022). The resolution of the United Nations General Assembly is important not as a means of redistributing powers between the General Assembly and the Security Council, but as a means of holding to account the actions of the permanent member that used the veto. In his work, P. Arrocha Olabuenaga (2023) considers the role of the General Assembly in holding debates after the use of the veto by the permanent members. Furthermore, the work of L. Di Gianfrancesco (2025) discusses how the Veto Initiative can be used as a means of strengthening the role of the General Assembly. Thus, the significance of the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly within the framework of this current study is that it does not alter the nature of the veto in the present Charter of the United Nations, but it does create an additional means of political accountability in response to the use of the veto. Thus, the veto right in the context of reforming the UN Security Council can be considered both as a means of providing voting power to the permanent members of the Security Council, but also as a factor that impacts the effectiveness of the legal response of the United Nations. Given the complexity of the proposal to abolish the use of the veto altogether, the consideration of existing means or new proposals to limit its negative consequences is of practical importance – to strengthen the role of the General Assembly, to hold the permanent members to account for their decisions, or to encourage them to voluntarily abstain from the use of the veto in cases of mass crimes or to more actively utilise the provisions of the UN Charter.

■ Conclusions

The study has shown that reform of the UN Security Council is not only a political issue, but also a complex legal process, since it is directly conditioned by the provisions of the UN Charter. The Charter makes reform legally possible, but at the same time restricts it through a demanding amendment procedure that requires the consent of the permanent members of the Security Council. Therefore, the main obstacle is not the absence of a legal mechanism, but the dependence of that mechanism on the states that benefit most from maintaining the existing institutional model. The veto power is central to this problem. It reinforces the privileged position of the P5 and may prevent the United Nations from responding effectively to international crises. The chronological analysis of the reform process shows that the renewal of the Security Council has remained on the UN agenda for a long period. However, negotiations remain incomplete because states have not developed a shared vision of the Council's future model. The comparison of key actors' positions confirms that states generally recognise the need for reform, but interpret its content differently. The G4 supports the expansion of permanent membership, the African Union emphasises the need to correct regional and historical injustice, while Uniting for Consensus opposes the creation of new permanent privileges. The positions of individual permanent members also demonstrate selective support for change: they accept the idea of broader representation, but do not show readiness to reconsider the powers attached to permanent membership. As a result, the main difficulty lies in the absence of consensus on a specific reform model. Strengthening the role of non-permanent members may therefore serve as a realistic way to improve representation and accountability without immediately revising the status of permanent members.

In terms of the legal consequences of reform, the study establishes that changes in the functioning of the Security Council affect not only the institutional structure of the United Nations, but also the legitimacy of international law and the effectiveness of the collective security system. The veto power has a systemic character, since it may block Council decisions and weaken confidence in the Council's ability to act in accordance with its mandate. For this reason, the most realistic approach is not the immediate abolition of the veto, but the gradual reduction of its negative effects through transparency, accountability, and political commitments by states. The blocking of the Security Council may be partly offset by a more active role for the General Assembly. Reform is therefore significant not only for major powers, but also for small states that depend on a predictable and fair international legal order. The example of North Macedonia demonstrates that, for small states, transparency, accountability, compliance with the UN Charter, and the equal application of international law are of particular importance. Effective reform should therefore be gradual and should combine broader representation, a stronger role for non-permanent members, political accountability for the use of the veto, greater transparency, and enhanced involvement of the General Assembly. Future research should focus on a comprehensive assessment of possible scenarios for Security Council reform, taking into account their legal validity, political acceptability for Member States, and potential impact on the effectiveness of the international legal mechanism for maintaining peace and security.

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■ **Анотація.** У цьому дослідженні розглянуто правові та політико-інституційні умови реформування Ради Безпеки ООН, проаналізовано значення такої реформи для міжнародного права та глобального врядування. Дослідження ґрунтувалося на формально-правових, історико-правових, порівняльних і проблемно орієнтованих правових методах. У дослідженні констатовано, що реформа Ради Безпеки має виразно політичний та правовий характер, оскільки будь-які зміни в складі Ради, статусі її членів або процедурах прийняття рішень мають відповідати Статуту Організації Об'єднаних Націй. Право вето залишається одним із головних обмежень ефективності Ради, оскільки воно дає змогу постійному члену заблокувати прийняття рішення навіть тоді, коли це рішення підтримує більшість. Процедура внесення поправок до Статуту також створює високий правовий поріг для реформи, оскільки вимагає ратифікації всіма постійними членами Ради Безпеки. Розширення складу Ради 1963 року продемонструвало, що інституційна реформа є юридично можливою, але також ілюструє обмеження реформи, яка не стосується статусу постійних членів або механізму вето. Дослідження засвідчило, що позиції «Групи чотирьох», яку утворюють Бразилія, Німеччина, Індія та Японія, Африканського союзу, коаліції «Об'єднані за консенсус», Великої Британії, Франції та Китаю відображають різні підходи до питань представництва, регіонального балансу й розподілу інституційних привілеїв. Правові наслідки реформи залежали не лише від розширення складу Ради Безпеки, а й від обмеження блокувального ефекту права вето, посилення прозорості та підвищення підзвітності постійних членів. Для малих держав, зокрема Північної Македонії, реформа була важливою як засіб підвищення передбачуваності міжнародного правового порядку та сприяння рівноправному застосуванню міжнародних правових норм. У дослідженні сформульовано висновок, що реформа Ради Безпеки є поступовим процесом, спрямованим на розширення представництва, обмеження використання права вето, підвищення підзвітності та зміцнення глобального врядування. Його практичне значення полягає в можливості використання отриманих результатів для розроблення експертних оцінок і рекомендацій щодо реформи Ради Безпеки, зменшення негативних наслідків права вето та підвищення ефективності діяльності Ради

■ **Ключові слова:** право вето; процедура голосування; процедурна підзвітність; глобальне врядування; регіональне представництво