



# UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY BACKGROUND GUIDE

## **Letter From The Executive Board**

Dear Delegates,

We, the executive board members of UNGA, find immense pleasure in being a part of SHIS

Only if you work with full determination and with a will to learn, you will be able to gain perspective in understanding the importance of debating at the platform which is provided to you right here and widen your horizons. We don't want you to feel anxious, but rather enthusiastic, because we have this marvellous opportunity to debate such an important and, more significantly, widespread world topic. We want you to be confident and engage as much as possible since MUNs are about learning, not just winning, so be prepared and don't be concerned about the outcome. Our competence will be put to efficient use as a guide, mentor, and trainer. We want to be able to make this MUN Conference flourish by assuring that everyone learns enough about the UN system, rules of procedure, and the issue at hand.

We are looking forward to an engaging conference with all of you and hope that we can all maximise the overall brand of experience we will deliver. Looking forward to meeting everyone, and please do not hesitate to contact us, if you have any questions before attending the MUN.

Regards,

**Arnav Gupta(Chairperson)**

## **VALID EVIDENCE IN THE COMMITTEE**

Evidence or proof from the following sources will be accepted as credible in The UNGA:

1. State-operated News Agencies – These reports can be used in support of or against the State that owns the News Agency. These reports, if credible or substantial enough, can be used in support of or against any country as such but in that situation, they can be denied by any other country in the council. Some examples are,

I. RIA Novosti (Russia)

II. IRNA (Iran)

III. BBC (United Kingdom)

IV. Al Jazeera (Qatar)

V. Xinhua News Agency (PR China)

2. Government Reports - These reports can be used in a similar way as the State Operated News Agencies reports and can, in all circumstances, be denied by another country.

However, a nuance is that a report that is being denied by a certain country can still be accepted by the Executive Board as credible information. Some examples are,

i.) Government Websites like the State Department of the United States of America or the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation

ii.) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of various nations like India or the People's Republic of China

iii.) Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Reports

iv.) Multilateral Organizations like the NATO

3. United Nations Reports- All UN Reports are considered credible information or evidence for the Executive Board of the UNGA:

i.) UN Bodies like the UNSC or UNGA

ii.) UN Affiliated Bodies like the International Atomic Energy Agency, World Bank International Monetary Fund, International Committee of the Red Cross, etc.

iii.) Treaty Based Bodies like the Antarctic Treaty System, the International Criminal Court

### **About UNGA:**

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) stands as the primary deliberative, policy-making, and representative organ of the United Nations. Composed of all 193 UN member states, it serves as a unique forum for dialogue and cooperation on a vast array of pressing global issues. Each member state has one vote, ensuring a democratic platform for addressing international challenges.

UNGA convenes annually in regular sessions, typically starting in September, where world leaders deliver speeches outlining their national priorities and perspectives on global affairs. These speeches set the tone for the session's agenda, which is then further developed through six main committees, each focusing on specific areas like political and security issues, economic and financial matters, social, humanitarian and cultural affairs, and disarmament and international security.

Within these committees, member states engage in lively debates, propose resolutions, and negotiate solutions. Resolutions, once adopted by a two-thirds majority vote, set international norms and guidelines for addressing specific issues. While not legally binding, they carry significant political weight and influence the actions of member states. Beyond resolutions, UNGA fosters international cooperation through declarations and conventions, promoting collective action on global challenges like climate change, human rights violations, and sustainable development.

### **COMPOSITION OF UNGA**

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) prides itself on its truly global makeup. While other UN bodies have limited memberships, the UNGA includes all 193 member states of the United Nations, making it the most inclusive organ in the UN system. This inclusiveness ensures that every nation, regardless of its

size or influence, has an equal say, as each member state holds one vote. This democratic framework provides a unique platform for worldwide discussion and cooperation. At UNGA sessions, delegates from member states—typically diplomats or government officials—represent their countries, bringing their perspectives and priorities to the table. Through discussions and negotiations on various global issues, UNGA serves as a crucial forum where the international community collectively addresses challenges.

**Agenda: Discussion on reforming the use of VETO power with emphasis on expanding its accountability from the permanent five (P5) to the global community**

The United Nations (UN), established in the wake of World War II, was conceived in the spirit of maintaining international peace and security through collective decision. The cornerstone of its organizational structure is the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), an institution with the chief mandate of maintaining peace in the world. Yet, through the decades, the one major source of disagreement has been the special privilege accorded to the five permanent members of the Security Council—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—by exercising the veto power. The privilege gives each of the P5 countries the ability to preemptively stop any meaningful resolution, irrespective of global agreement. The objective of this agenda—reframing the exercise of veto power with a focus on broadening its responsibility to the world community—demands careful examination of the equity, legitimacy, and effectiveness of the existing veto system. It asks whether the authority that was historically legitimized by the Cold War geopolitics of 1945 remains serviceable to a multipolar, interconnected, and fast-changing world.

Originally, the veto was a political imperative. It was designed to make the great powers join a new world system of peacekeeping by making sure that their

essential national interests would never be disregarded. Essentially, it was a concessionary agreement—otherwise, the UN may never have come into existence. However, as international norms, state sovereignties, and global dynamics have shifted drastically, the veto has come to be viewed not only as an instrument of protection but also as a mechanism of obstruction. Repeated occurrences wherein humanitarian interventions, conflict resolutions, and sanctions against flagrant human rights abuses have been blocked or delayed because of the veto reflect how the instrument is becoming more like a stumbling block than a protection device.

Over the past few years, the veto reform debate has become more heated as there has been an increasing feeling of its abuse—especially in situations where permanent members have used it to protect friends or advance national goals at the cost of international justice. The Syrian Civil War, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Russia's moves in Ukraine, and other major world issues have witnessed the Security Council brought to a standstill as vetoes have been used to block final action. This has reinforced demands for change from several directions, including smaller countries, civil society, and regional groupings like the African Union, G4 countries (India, Germany, Brazil, and Japan), and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The crux of their position is not just about the abolition of the veto, but about making its exercise more transparent, accountable, and answerable to the wider international community, rather than the vested interests of the P5.

A suggested avenue for reform focuses on creating procedural rules governing the application of the veto, especially in instances of mass atrocities such as genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document reaffirms that sovereignty is not a privilege but a responsibility. In such spirit, numerous

international players call for a "code of conduct" or political pledge that P5 countries would accept voluntarily—excluding veto usage in the event of such crimes. France and Mexico, for example, have championed an initiative calling for voluntary restraint of the veto in cases of mass atrocity. These, however, are non-binding promises that so far have not gathered wide-ranging endorsement among all five permanent members.

Another aspect of reform considers democratizing the Security Council's composition itself. It is claimed by critics that the veto system is, by its very nature, undemocratic under the UN Charter by concentrating disproportionate power with a few people and disenfranchising the majority. Increasing the number of permanent members, as part of all-around UNSC reform, is one such method of readdressing the imbalance. India, Brazil, Germany, and South Africa have long insisted on membership in the Council's permanent category as countries of considerable regional influence, people, peacekeeping contributions, and economic status. Yet this expansion, if unrestrained veto power or extended to new members without reforms, may end up exacerbating the same issue it aims to remedy.

The absence of clarity regarding the veto decision-making process also feeds suspicion and double standards charges. There is no need for a P5 member state to justify its veto publicly, nor is there any obligation to clarify how the veto supports international law and the UN Charter. Such procedural lack of accountability creates opaqueness and tends to undermine the Council's moral legitimacy. To counteract this, reform activists suggest mechanisms that would compel any vetoing member to declare publicly its reason and place it under examination in the General Assembly or the International Court of Justice. These procedural controls would not abolish the veto, but they would oblige its users to deal with world public opinion and international norms.



In addition, the asymmetry induced by the veto cascades outside the Security Council and influences the operations of the whole UN system. It distorts decision-making, undermines multilateralism, and induces a pecking order of states, under which the geopolitical agendas of the few predominate over the democratic will of the many. This creates disillusionment among smaller states, particularly from the Global South, who increasingly see the UN as a power politics-dominated forum rather than an expression of collective conscience. Reforms need, therefore, to go beyond rebalancing power, to re-instilling trust in multilateral governance, international justice, and institutional legitimacy.

It is significant that demands for veto reform are not motivated by idealism in isolation—instead, they are influenced by a recognition of pragmatic global realities. Today's world is far removed from 1945. Global power has spread, non-state actors have vital roles to play, and transnational issues like climate change, pandemics, and cybersecurity require cooperative responses that cannot be held hostage by great power rivalries. The very concept of global governance in the 21st century necessitates inclusive, fair, and effective institutions. The veto, as presently unchecked, is anathema to those ideals.

Reforming the veto, however, is one of the hardest institutional reforms to implement. Ironically, any UN Charter amendment that touches on the veto must be ratified by all five permanent members—those that enjoy the existing order. This built-in stalemate has rendered real reform impossible despite decades of debate. However, soft-law strategies, political promises, and mounting diplomatic pressure have started to change the debate. The General Assembly has also been more proactive in its role, e.g., through the "Uniting for Peace" resolution and more recent actions demanding that the Assembly

convene within 10 days of any veto exercised in the Council, thereby providing a platform for global accountability, albeit tangentially.

Finally, this agenda compels the international community to reconsider basic questions: Who should have the power to determine the trajectory of international peace and justice? Is it equitable that the wish of 193 member states is overridden by the interests of a single one? What checks can be instituted to prevent great powers from being beyond the reach of international criticism? Reforming the veto does not equal eliminating it, but it does entail rethinking its application in terms of transparency, accountability, and collective global good. Through procedural reform, increased representation, or normative change in world behavior, the ultimate aim is always the same: to hold the UN Security Council to the original promise—acting for all nations, and not merely the powerful ones.

### **Root Issues:**

Among the most basic institutional defects of the United Nations Security Council is the uneven exercise of power by its members, specifically the privileges of permanent members China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States to exercise a veto over Council decisions. This built-in inequity, an artifact of the post-World War II international system, has come under growing pressure in contemporary times. Although it was initially meant to guarantee the involvement of the world's great powers and prevent a second world war, the veto mechanism now constitutes a system of entrenched geopolitical privilege. This framework contravenes the fundamental democratic ethos of sovereign equality in the UN Charter, by providing five states with the authority to negate the collective will of the international community. With the increasing multipolarity of the world order, with rising powers such as India, Brazil, and South Africa insisting on a place at the decision-making table, the

persistence of P5 dominance is an antiquated and exclusionist model of international governance.

Another fundamental issue is the uncontrolled and secretive way in which the veto is used. There are no binding procedural norms as of now that can compel permanent members to explain or justify the exercise of veto. Such absence of accountability permits the P5 to exercise the veto on behalf of parochial national interests, even in egregious human rights abuses or threats to international peace. For instance, serial vetoes during the Syrian Civil War—chiefly by Russia and China—have disabled the Security Council and halted collective international action against mass atrocities. Likewise, the United States has repeatedly employed its veto to protect Israel from resolutions regarding Palestinian rights. The lack of mechanisms of transparency and legal justification facilitates selective intervention, undermines the moral legitimacy of the UN, and supports the impression that the Security Council is a politicized and dysfunctional institution.

Inextricably linked with this is the veto's function in preventing humanitarian interventions and measures against mass atrocities. Although the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine was enshrined in 2005 to make certain that the international community would intervene when states become unable or unwilling to protect their citizens against genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, the exercise of the veto has tended to make this principle toothless. P5 members have exercised their veto to prevent passing resolutions that could punish their allies or engage their geopolitical stakes. This discriminatory safeguarding of human rights—whereby strategic interests are given priority over human concerns—undermines the integrity of international law and the principles on which the UN was established. Practically, the veto is a shield for impunity, rather than a guard of peace.

The asymmetry of power generated by the veto also subverts multilateralism through the de facto creation of an international hierarchy. This erodes international cooperation and consensus-building because smaller or non-permanent Council members are regularly left out in key deliberations. The P5's supremacy deters fair burden-sharing and enforces a system of governance where the strong call the shots and everyone else has to adapt. This disparity of power is most jarring when the General Assembly, comprising all 193 member states, passes resolutions unanimously or near-unanimously and are subsequently held up by a single veto in the Security Council. These incidents illustrate the chasm between world democratic will and institutional power relationships, affirming the need for reform not merely in terms of process, but as an issue of justice.

A second root issue is the inflexibility of the veto reform process itself. Paradoxically, any revision to the UN Charter—including modifications of the veto—must be agreed upon by all five permanent members. This makes it virtually impossible to reform since it essentially gives those who have the most at stake the authority to prevent it. The deep-rooted character of such privilege results in institutional inertia, and even the most popular proposals for modest restraint on the veto (e.g., not applying it in mass atrocity scenarios) find it difficult to catch on. Spontaneous efforts, such as the France-Mexico initiative on P5 self-restraint, remain short of consensus, primarily because of political competition and distrust among the P5 themselves. This structural self-defense mechanism effectively puts the Security Council out of reach of effective democratic reform, promoting cynicism and disengagement on the part of the wider UN membership.

In addition, the random and selective exercise of the veto undermines the legitimacy of international norms and law. Since vetoes are employed in a discriminatory manner and at times contradict international human rights norms, they serve to create perceptions of double standards in the UN system. P5-aligned states might be protected from sanction and criticism, whereas strategically less important states are at greater risk of coercive outcomes. This disparity creates resentment, undermines the deterrence utility of international law, and disjoins the incentives for abiding by global conventions. It also delegitimizes the notion of the UN as an objective referee, relegating it to a platform on which to fight out geopolitical agendas.

The veto's impact also bleeds to other organs of the United Nations, weakening the UN's overall ability to respond to crises around the world. With an increasingly interconnected world confronting transnational crises like pandemics, climate change, terrorism, and cyber threats, collective action is more critical than ever. Nevertheless, Security Council paralysis through vetoes impedes timely and coordinated action. The pandemic of COVID-19 witnessed months of inertia at the Security Council level as US-China rivalries became paramount over global health coordination. This inertia lowers the UN's relative weight and compels member states to seek outside the multilateral system, resulting in regional alliances or unilateral action—additional drains on the spirit of international cooperation.

Another crucial impact of veto abuse is the breakdown of trust among member states, especially from the Global South. Most developing nations perceive that their voices are deliberately dismissed or excluded in major decisions. The lack of African representation within the P5, while the continent is the focus of a considerable majority of the Council's agenda, is a glaring injustice. Thus, large democracies such as India and Brazil—key contributors to peacekeeping and

economic progress—are excluded from a permanent voice. The veto enshrines colonial-era balances of power, and the continued failure to reform it enshrines a sense of disempowerment among countries that have long since transcended their post-war categorization as periphery players.

And, further, the veto encourages a culture of strategic calculation over moral obligation. States weigh whether a solution is congruent with the interests of P5 members prior to pushing forward with initiatives, thus biasing the Council's agenda from objective requirements to political acceptability. Such a climate narrows room for preventive diplomacy, creativity, and proactive conflict resolution, more often leading to delays until matters escalate into full-fledged crises. The consequence is not just institutional inefficacy but also concrete human misery that could have been averted with timely intervention

### **UN Actions:**

Although veto power in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is deeply ingrained, the UN system and the international community have attempted several times to challenge the problems that it presents. Although direct structural change is stalled by the need for consent from the P5, there have been various indirect mechanisms and programs developed over the years to try to enhance accountability, restraint, and international control over the exercise of the veto. These efforts are the UN's attempt to restore the balance of power and make the Security Council representative of the collective interests of the international community rather than merely the political will of the five permanent members.

The most significant response has been the France-Mexico proposal, launched in 2013, calling on the P5 to voluntarily commit to suspend their veto in instances of mass atrocity crimes—such as genocide, war crimes, and crimes

against humanity. Whereas this effort is not a legally binding amendment of the Charter, it espouses a kind of political restraint based on moral grounds derived from the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principles. France and Mexico have gained support from more than 100 member states, and the effort has become a pillar of soft reform efforts. Nonetheless, a number of P5 nations—most specifically the United States, China, and Russia—remain uncommitted to endorsing it formally, which restricts its application.

In addition to voluntary abstinence, the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) Group, initiated by a group of small and medium-sized UN member states, started an additional initiative in 2015. The proposal in this case also supports a "code of conduct" whereby Security Council members, including P5 members, pledge not to cast a negative vote against legitimate action intended to prevent or cease mass atrocities. The ACT Group also seeks to establish normative pressure on the use of the veto, emphasizing legitimacy, transparency, and norm-bound diplomacy. Although non-binding in nature, such efforts have bolstered dialogue within the UN and raised political costs associated with unjustified vetoes.

Yet another milestone improvement of veto accountability was through UN General Assembly Resolution 76/262, adopted in 2022. It requires that whenever there is a veto in the Security Council, the General Assembly is automatically convened within 10 working days to debate the issue and have the vetoing state appear before it. While the Assembly does not have the power of enforcement, this legislative reform enhances transparency and international oversight, enabling the broader UN membership to question and challenge the justification for vetoes. It constitutes one of the most tangible moves towards indirect accountability, compelling P5 members to justify their actions publicly in front of the international community.

In addition to these official initiatives, the UN Secretariat, civil society, and academic groups continue to undertake research, advocacy, and dialogue forums on Security Council reform. Think tanks, NGOs, and campaigning groups like the Elders, UNA-UK, and Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect have worked closely with diplomats and public opinion to keep pressure on P5 states and sustain the reform debate. These initiatives demonstrate a transition from legal or institutional reform alone to norm-making and public diplomacy, as an attempt to redefine the political environment surrounding veto application.

Lastly, numerous regional bodies like the African Union and the Group of Four (G4)—India, Germany, Japan, and Brazil—have advocated for extensive reforms that would either enlarge permanent membership or institute veto restraints for current or new members. Although these ideas have not yet been implemented, they embody a developing international consensus that the Security Council as it stands does not best represent the geopolitical and demographic realities of the 21st century.