

## THE POLITICIZATION OF THE UN BY P-5

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



### Introduction

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) plays a key role in global diplomacy, with responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. At the core of the Council's effectiveness lie the P-5 countries: the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and France. Founded in 1945, five of the UNSC's 15 members are permanent and have the right to wield veto power. This special status authorizes the P-5 to block any substantive resolution, regardless of the support it receives from other members. Although intended to encourage collaboration among world powers, this veto power has also put forth questions over whether it confines the Council's capability to move decisively in times of emergency.

The P-5's responsibility goes beyond the veto, as it is anticipated to take the lead in missions to maintain peace and resolve conflicts. They frequently facilitate discussions, put forth resolution proposals, and influence the Council's objectives because of their political influence and worldwide stature. However, this influence has been met with criticism, with concerns about political motivations clouding impartiality, objectivity in decision-making processes, and the increasing frequency of the use of veto, which is seen as inhibiting its functionality.

To varying degrees, the P-5 members have wielded their veto power. Russia has used its veto the most frequently, blocking 152 resolutions, followed by the United States with 87 and China with 19

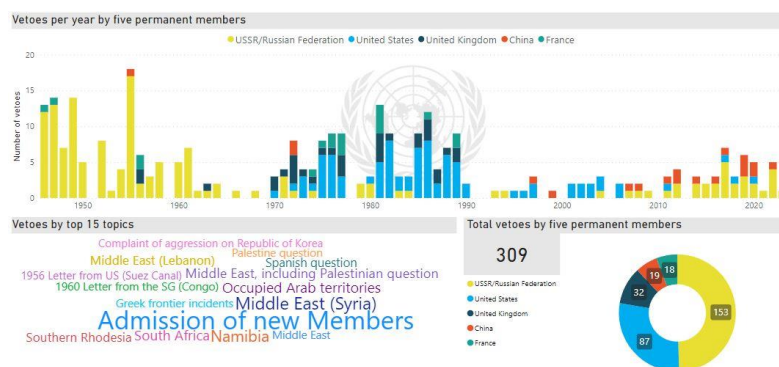
times, while France and the United Kingdom since 1989 have not used their vetoes and have urged other P5 members to refrain from doing so.<sup>1</sup>

Country	Since 1991 dissolution of USSR	Before dissolution of USSR
Russia/USSR	32	120
United States	18	69
China	16	3
United Kingdom	0	32
France	0	18

**Source:** *Russia uses the veto more than other P-5 countries since the 1991 dissolution of the USSR and before the dissolution of the USSR<sup>2</sup>*

### The UN and its Challenges

The UN's founders, while laying the basic foundations of this multilateral organization, envisioned the use of military force and sanctions as substantive tools for resolving global conflict. However, unequal power distribution—the privilege of veto granted to the permanent members of the UNSC—has always been a hurdle to making peaceful decisions. Due to the power distribution, the UN is under heavy blow by its critics because of its sluggish response to international crises, surging problems in reaching consensus, and the static nature of the institution. The failure to adequately address issues like violent extremism, civilian protection, and state-building dilemmas has compelled the organization to reevaluate its policies. Thus, the biggest challenge lies in resolving global issues while respecting the border sovereignty of the states.



**Source:** *United Nations, Peace Security Data Hub<sup>3</sup>*

- <sup>1</sup> "The UN Security Council," *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 28, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/background/un-security-council#:~:text=The%20Security%20Council%20has%20five,are%20not%20afforded%20veto%20power.>
- <sup>2</sup> "Vetoes - UN Security Council Meetings & Outcomes Tables," *United Nations*, <https://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick/veto>

The five permanent members of the UNSC since 1946 vetoed 309 times on draft resolutions, parts of outcome documents (amendments and individual paragraphs) as well as decisions on whether or not a vote can be considered to be procedural.

Furthermore, critics argue that the UN has become the extended hands of big fishes', the P-5, and that the veto power enjoyed by the P-5 states, since its formation, has remained unchanged, only pursuing their interests and does not carry any sovereign mandate in combating global security risks, which affects their role as mediators and facilitators in peaceful decision-making. These embedded interests of powerful nations (hegemony) are evident in current conflicts between Russia and the US, where veto power is pursued to fulfil their national and geopolitical aims, which constrains the role of the UNSC as a mediator and facilitator of peace. Therefore, the structure and entities of the UN, which were put in place decades ago, are now viewed as being out of date and incapable of handling the complexity of contemporary conflicts.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Politicization of the UN by P-5 Veto-Wielding Powers**

The purpose of the veto members, which were created to tackle global challenges, has changed over time as they have grown more politicized. The P-5 members possess strong geopolitical power and have a significant impact on the world. Over time, as geopolitical interests and agendas have evolved, including strategic alliances and rivalries, the use of veto power has increasingly been driven by political considerations. Some P-5 members have used their veto to guard their state interests or to protect allies from probable sanctions or accountability, instead of focusing solely on the broader objective of maintaining global peace and security.

Therefore, the veto rights granted to the P-5 members have taken on a double-edged sword and do create circumstances where global issues are influenced by their personal preferences and geopolitical alignments, whereby the UNSC is politicized. This can be seen in unresolved issues such as the Palestine issue, the Jammu & Kashmir dispute, and the Ukraine issue, where resolutions have been vetoed, obstructing decisive actions and impeding efforts to end these protracted conflicts.

#### **Palestine Issue:**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to be the most complex and contentious issue in international affairs. Since the end of World War II, this issue has been on the UNSC's agenda. The

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<sup>3</sup> "Security Council Data - Vetoes Since 1946," *United Nations*, July 28, 2023, <https://psdata.un.org/dataset/DPPA-SCVETOES>

<sup>4</sup> Nina Kalantar, "The Limitations and Capabilities of the United Nations in Modern Conflict," *E-International Relations*, July 10, 2019, <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/07/10/the-limitations-and-capabilities-of-the-united-nations-in-modern-conflict/>

UN General Assembly proposed Resolution 181 in 1947, calling for the partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, which sparked conflict and led to the establishment of the Israeli State.<sup>5</sup> The UN Security Council has taken up the matter on numerous occasions to settle the conflict between the two, however, this issue remains unresolved, because of the political and geopolitical interests of the P-5 members, particularly the United States as it has a strong partnership with Israel and consistently backs its policies.

The US has vetoed numerous UNSC resolutions that have been critical of Israel during the past 50 years, including at least 53 since 1972.<sup>6</sup> This has prevented the Council from taking significant steps towards a fair and sustainable conclusion, disappointing other member states who were hoping for a more impartial approach and accountability for all parties involved.

The following is a list of some of the significant US vetoes over the years on the agenda item “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question:”

Date	Draft Resolution	Written Record	US Remarks
June 1, 2018	<a href="#">S/2018/516</a>	<a href="#">S/PV.8274</a>	The US vetoed it, stating it presented "a grossly one-sided view of what has taken place in Gaza in recent weeks."
December 18, 2017	<a href="#">S/2017/1060</a>	<a href="#">S/PV.8139</a>	US vetoed, with the US Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, stating that the US “had the courage and honesty to recognize a fundamental reality. Jerusalem has been the political, cultural and spiritual homeland of the Jewish people for thousands of years.”
February 18, 2011	<a href="#">S/2011/24</a>	<a href="#">S/PV.6484</a>	US vetoed, then-US Ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, explained that while Washington agreed settlement activity is illegal, “we think it unwise for this Council to attempt to resolve the core issues that divide Israelis and Palestinians. Therefore, regrettably, we have opposed this draft resolution.”
December 14-15, 2001	<a href="#">S/2001/1199</a>	<a href="#">S/PV.4438</a>	US vetoed, then-US Ambassador to the UN, John Negroponte, stated “the draft resolution before us fails to address the dynamic at work in the region. Instead, its purpose is to isolate politically one of the parties”.

Source: *United Nations*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> “History of the Question of Palestine,” *United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/unispal/history/>

<sup>6</sup> Creede Newton, “A History of the US Blocking UN Resolutions against Israel,” *Al Jazeera*, May 19, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/19/a-history-of-the-us-blocking-un-resolutions-against-israel>

<sup>7</sup> “Security Council - Veto List,” *United Nations*, <https://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick/veto>

### Jammu & Kashmir Dispute:

India and Pakistan have been engaged in a prolonged battle over Kashmir, each aiming to advance its interests and gain international backing from other countries. Immediately following the division of British India and the establishment of India and Pakistan as independent states, this matter was brought before the UNSC by India in 1948.<sup>8</sup> The dispute over the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir arose between India and Pakistan, leading to armed conflict. The UNSC passed resolutions urging a halt to hostilities and the demilitarization of the region and also appointed a UN Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) embodying the principle of the right of self-determination to the people of Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>9</sup>

### UN Resolutions Passed Over Jammu and Kashmir

The following is a list of some of the significant UN Resolutions passed over Jammu and Kashmir on the agenda item "The India-Pakistan Question:"<sup>10</sup>

Date	Resolution	Code/ Document No.	Agenda
April 21, 1948	<u>UNSCR 47</u>	S/726	The question of accession of Jammu and Kashmir should be decided through democratic methods of free and impartial plebiscite
August 13, 1948	<u>UNCIP Resolution</u>	1100, Para. 75	Part III: Pakistan and India reaffirm that the future status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir shall be determined by the will of the people
January 5, 1949	<u>UNCIP Resolution</u>	5/1196, Para. 15	The question of accession of Jammu and Kashmir should be decided through democratic methods of a free and impartial plebiscite
March 14, 1950	<u>UNSCR 80</u>	S/1469	To exercise all of the powers and responsibilities devolving upon UNCIP because of existing resolutions of UNSC and agreements of parties embodied in UNCIP resolutions of August 13, 1948, and January 5, 1949.
March 30, 1951	<u>UNSCR 91</u>	S/2017/Rev. I	Reminding government and authorities concerned of the principle embodied in its resolutions of 47 (1948), 80 (1950) and UNCIP resolutions of 1948 and 1949 that the final disposition of the state will be made by the people.

<sup>8</sup> "Kashmir - The History," *Pakistan Mission to The United Nations*, <https://www.pakun.org/kashmir/history.php>

<sup>9</sup> "UN Security Council Resolutions on Jammu & Kashmir," *High Commission For Pakistan Wellington, New Zealand*, October 23, 2019, <https://www.pakistanhc.org.nz/post/un-security-council-resolutions-on-jammu-kashmir-1>

<sup>10</sup> "UNSCR - Search Engine for the UN Security Council Resolutions," *UNSCR*, <http://unscr.com/en>

<b>December 23, 1952</b>	<u>UNSCR 98</u>	S/2883	Recalling the provisions of UNCIP resolutions of August 13, 1948, and January 5, 1949, that the question of accession would be decided through democratic methods, conducted under the auspices of the UN
<b>January 24, 1957</b>	<u>UNSCR 122</u>	S/3779	Reaffirm the affirmation in its resolutions of 47 (1948), 51 (1948), 80 (1950) and 91 (1951) and UNCIP resolutions of 1948 and 1949

Source: UNSCR<sup>11</sup>

These resolutions honoured the status of the people of Jammu and Kashmir in all decision-making processes while simultaneously recognizing their unalienable right to self-determination. However, many challenges occurred while applying these resolutions. Since then, the UNSC has approved several additional resolutions on the Kashmir dispute. In 23 years (1948-1971) the UNSC adopted 23 resolutions, established organizations, and appointed various officials to deal with the issue.<sup>12</sup> Thus, for the first time since 1971, the UNSC conducted an informal debate on the matter after Pakistan sought a closed meeting three times after 5<sup>th</sup> August 2019 to deliberate India's illegal and unilateral action of transforming the status of Jammu and Kashmir<sup>13</sup> and changing the demographic structure of the occupied territory. Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif also called for a peaceful resolution to the Jammu and Kashmir dispute during his address to the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2022.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, the US has forged a strategic alliance with India based on shared economic, security, and geopolitical interests. Thus, to preserve its relationship with India, the US has been cautious about adopting a firm stance on the Kashmir issue. As a result, the Kashmir dispute is still unsolved, and the P-5 members' national interests and the persuasion of alliances have contributed to the politicization of the problem and its impediment to resolution.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Zehra Nur Duz, "Pakistan to Raise Kashmir Issue at Every World Forum in 2020," *Anadolu Ajansi*, January 6, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/pakistan-to-raise-kashmir-issue-at-every-world-forum-in-2020-/1692972>

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Besheer, "UN Security Council Discusses Kashmir Escalation," *Voice of America*, August 16, 2019, [https://www.voanews.com/a/south-central-asia\\_un-security-council-discusses-kashmir-escalation/6173965.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/south-central-asia_un-security-council-discusses-kashmir-escalation/6173965.html)

<sup>14</sup> Mallika Sen, "Pakistan's Prime Minister Talks Kashmir, Floods at UN," *AP News*, September 24, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-general-assembly-asia-poverty-kashmir-d98c8fea22b396fc7728f4bd9c3c382f>

## Ukraine Issue

Following periods of unrest and events, like the "Euromaidan" uprisings in Ukraine, the issue concerning Ukraine was presented to the UNSC in 2014.<sup>15</sup> The region experienced heightened tensions after Russia annexed Crimea in February 2014 and the removal of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich from power.<sup>16</sup> The situation swiftly grew worse and turned into a protracted conflict when Ukraine indicted Russia for violating its integrity and sovereignty.

The UNSC called emergency sessions to discuss the issue and look for a peaceful solution after hostilities escalated. However, due to Russia's status as a P-5 member, the matter became highly politicized as Russia wielded its veto power to obstruct actions that it saw as being against its interests. Similarly, on February 25, 2022, the Russian Federation utilized its veto power by preventing the Security Council from adopting a draft resolution intended to resolve the Ukrainian crisis,<sup>17</sup> handicapping the UNSC's inability to resolve the conflict.

## Russia Vetoing UN Resolutions on Ukraine Agenda

Date	Draft Resolution	Written Record	Agenda Item
September 30, 2022	<a href="#">S/2022/720</a>	<a href="#">S/PV.9143</a>	Maintenance of peace and security in Ukraine
February 25, 2022	<a href="#">S/2022/155</a>	<a href="#">S/PV.8979</a>	Letter dated 28 February 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council ( <a href="#">S/2014/136</a> )
July 29, 2015	<a href="#">S/2015/562</a>	<a href="#">S/PV.7498</a>	Letter dated 28 February 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council ( <a href="#">S/2014/136</a> )
March 15, 2014	<a href="#">S/2014/189</a>	<a href="#">S/PV.7138</a>	Letter dated 28 February 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council ( <a href="#">S/2014/136</a> )

Source: *United Nations*<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> "Peaceful Resolution of Ukraine Crisis Remains Possible, Under-Secretary-General Tells Security Council during Briefing," *United Nations*, March 13, 2014, <https://press.un.org/en/2014/sc11314.doc.htm>

<sup>16</sup> Nigel Walker, "Conflict in Ukraine: A Timeline (2014 - Present)," *The House of Commons Library*, February 24, 2023, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9476/CBP-9476.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> "Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Ending Ukraine Crisis, as Russian Federation Wields Veto," *United Nations*, February 25, 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14808.doc.htm>

<sup>18</sup> "Security Council - Veto List," *United Nations*, <https://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick/veto>

## Conclusion

The politicization of P-5 members' interests and alliances significantly impacts the effectiveness of the UNSC. The veto powers, intended to encourage cooperation, have instead contributed to the obstruction of resolutions on international matters, eroding the Council's authority as an impartial arbiter of international peace and security. Thus, the pursuit of national interests along with geopolitical interests by member states is a significant factor contributing to the politicization of the UN.

Resolving the problem of politicization necessitates a shared dedication from every member country to prioritize the common good rather than their national interests. To reduce politicization within the United Nations, it is essential to promote the wise utilization of veto power, foster cooperation, revive multilateralism, uphold international law, and encourage inclusive debate. Moreover, by embracing comprehensive transformations that ensure impartial representation and equitable decision-making, the United Nations can magnify its stature as a reputable and effective platform for promoting global peace, security, and collaboration. Through collaborative efforts, member nations can safeguard the UN's fundamental tenets and reaffirm their unwavering commitment to crafting an equitable, peaceful, and prosperous world for all.