Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

By: The Editorial Board

The UN Security Council faces a choice – either it is reformed or turned into a museum

The United Nations Security Council, the body that was supposed to keep the peace in the post-war world, is now facing an existential crisis of confidence.

The Council, founded in 1945 with five permanent members with veto power and ten rotating seats, aimed to ensure global security. But while the number of UN members has risen from 51 to 193, the demographic and economic centres of power have shifted to the east and south—India, Brazil, and African and Asian countries are looking for seats at a table whose rules have remained unchanged for eight decades.

The formal discussion on the reform began on 4 March 2025 in New York, when the President of the UN General Assembly launched the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) using the "Sole Chair" method.

At that time, the delegations of all five major powers agreed that dialogue was necessary, but the veto-wielding powers immediately clarified that they would not allow even a minimal reduction of their privileges.

In the months that followed, it became clear that the negotiations had reached a deep impasse: countries seeking an extension of permanent membership, countries seeking only additional rotating seats, and countries rejecting any thought of new "permanent" positions.

Already on 17 February this year, at the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, the 55 countries of the organisation unanimously called for "restorative justice" in the structure of the Council.

The continent with 1.4 billion inhabitants was looking for at least two permanent and five new non-permanent seats. The argument was clear: Africa participates in peacekeeping missions and makes enormous sacrifices, but it does not have a single vote in the body that approves mandates and budgets for peacekeeping operations.

Less than two months after Addis Ababa, delegates from the ten current non-permanent members—known as the "C10"—met in Freetown, Sierra Leone, on 25 and 26 April.

The aim was to draw up a "strategic plan" and call for the achievement of visible results by the end of the 80th session of the General Assembly (December 2026).

And while the African representatives warned against deadlines, the permanent powers rejected the very discussions on mechanisms that would limit the privilege of the veto.

Irreconcilable attitudes

This clear divide between those who seek the right to vote and those who defend it is sinking into political paralysis. India, which accounts for almost 18% of the world's population and has the fifth largest economy, has no permanent seat.

Brazil, the economic giant of South America and founder of the BRICS, also has no permanent seat. Africa, which constitutes a quarter of all UN members, also lacks strong representation. While the economy and demographic development are changing, the Council's rules remain frozen.

The right of veto today often blocks measures in humanitarian crises, even though it is intended to prevent the dominance of a single power. While Russia has repeatedly vetoed resolutions on Syria since 2011 and later resolutions on Ukraine, China has blocked interventions in Myanmar since 2021.

Last November, the US vetoed a resolution on a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. Over the decades, the cooling of relations between the West and the East has turned the veto into an instrument of politics rather than peacekeeping.

The Council also suffers from the selective application of international norms. While one country is sometimes subject to decisive intervention, the other remains beyond the

reach of sanctions and peacekeeping missions.

Such unequal rules undermine trust and force states to look for regional security mechanisms—from NATO to AUKUS and the BRICS Forum to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), and the Peninsula Shield Force (GCC).

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The uncertainty of the negotiations is exacerbated by the announcement by US President Donald Trump at the beginning of February 2025 that the USA will "reconsider" its membership of the UN.

The temporary suspension of funding for UNRWA, UNESCO and the Human Rights Council, as well as the threat to make funding conditional on reform of the Council, represents an element of coercion.

America is the largest donor—22% of the UN budget and almost 28% of peacekeeping operations depend on its payments. Therefore, any change can be both a result and a condition of American foreign policy.

Veto report

The key players formed irreconcilable blocs. The G4 (Brazil, Germany, India, Japan) insists on four new permanent seats and twice as many rotating chairs.

Their claim is based on their contribution to the UN budget, their participation in peacekeeping missions, and their geopolitical weight. However, Russia and China are against it: they guard the veto as a bulwark against any external interference and will therefore not readily accept a supermajority model or the introduction of a "veto report" mechanism.

The veto report is a proposal that stipulates that each permanent member of the Security Council is obliged to submit a written statement on its decision when exercising its veto right.

Instead of the veto remaining merely a procedural measure without additional explanations, the document would contain the legal and political reasons for blocking the resolution as well as the expected objective of this decision.

This would significantly increase transparency – other members of the UN and the public would gain an insight into the motives behind any blockade, making it difficult to use them arbitrarily or purely tactically.

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By introducing the veto report, the permanent member would have to take full responsibility for its decision, as the written report would remain on the official record of the Council.

This would publicise diplomatic pressures, and any report could be critically assessed on the basis of international law and past precedents.

The idea is not to abolish the veto but to give it an additional mechanism of self-regulation—the veto still protects vital interests, but its abuse can no longer be hidden.

Although this model has not yet been adopted, it is considered one of the most effective tools to reduce institutional silence and improve accountability within the UN's most powerful body.

In parallel, Uniting for Consensus (UfC), led by Italy and Mexico, favours only the expansion of rotating seats, a structure to which permanent dominance cannot be applied. They believe that the new permanent members only contribute to inequality and make it difficult to reach consensus decisions more quickly.

Possible directions of reform

In this climate of uncertainty, the fate of the negotiations seems unclear. If there are no phased concessions over the next year—such as increasing the number of non-permanent seats from 10 to 16 or introducing a supermajority in key decisions— the December 2026 deadline is unlikely to be met.

On the other hand, if a new crisis breaks out in one of the hotspots, the pressure on the P5 may open up an opportunity for a broader agreement.

Three options are possible until 2028. The first and most practicable is a pragmatic, step-by-step reform: the Council increases the number of non-permanent members (for example, from 10 to 16), introduces a mandatory supermajority of 12 votes for decisions on the use of force and sanctions, but does not allocate any new permanent seats. This would mitigate the pointless use of the veto, and the P5 would retain their formal privileges.

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The second, bleakest option envisages a complete blockade: the permanent members reject any meaningful compromise, the veto paralysis continues and the Council remains trapped between the rivalries of the major powers.

In such a scenario, states would increasingly turn to regional or bilateral security mechanisms, accelerating the fragmentation of the global UN system.

The third, unplanned, may occur in response to a crisis — either a sudden escalation of armed conflict in a hotspot or a massive cyberattack on critical infrastructure systems.

Then the risk of global collapse would persuade even the most adamant opponents of reform to support a comprehensive solution: a combination of new permanent seats (for example, Germany and India) and a radical improvement in the decision-making process.

Each of these three outcomes has consequences: whether adopting limited but real change, remaining trapped in the status quo, or reacting only when a shock event forces us to do so, the fate of the Security Council will be critical to the credibility and effectiveness of the UN in the years ahead.

Without reform, the Security Council risks becoming a relic of the past and losing its central role.

Today, without broader support and the participation of new actors, peacekeeping missions are becoming less important, and regional alliances are gradually taking over the tasks that should be the UN's.

Global challenges require a body whose decisions are undeniably democratic and moral in character.

Before the Security Council is a crucial phase in which it must move from rhetoric to concrete steps. Without a clear agreement on "supermajority," the extension of rotating seats, and the introduction of a veto explanation mechanism, the Council will become an ineffective witness to its own demise.

When the only institution capable of preventing escalation to global war loses operational strength, no bilateral agreement or regional pact will be able to replace it. Reform has no alternative—it is the last chance for the United Nations to remain the guardian of world peace, not a historical exhibit.