

India's Case for a Rebooted Security Council

GS Paper II — International Relations | GS Paper III — Global Security

Relevant for: UPSC CSE 2026 | APSC CCE 2026

01 KEY TERMS AND EXPLANATIONS

Before diving into the substance of UNSC reform, it is essential to build a conceptual vocabulary. These terms recur not just in international law but in UPSC answers, where precision of language distinguishes a good answer from an excellent one.

A. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

The UNSC is the only organ of the United Nations vested with legally binding authority under Chapter VI and Chapter VII of the UN Charter. It has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Its decisions — in the form of resolutions — are binding on all 193 UN member states, making it qualitatively different from the General Assembly, whose resolutions are merely recommendatory. Structurally, the Council comprises five permanent members (P5) — the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China — and ten non-permanent members elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms. The P5 configuration reflects the post-World War II power architecture, frozen in 1945.

B. The Veto Power

The veto is the single most consequential and most criticised feature of the UNSC. Any substantive resolution before the Council can be blocked by a single 'No' vote from any of the five permanent members. This structural asymmetry means that a resolution condemning the actions of a P5 member, or of its allies, will almost always fail. The veto was originally justified as a realist mechanism to ensure great-power participation in the UN — the logic being that without such a safeguard, major powers might simply ignore the body. However, in practice, the veto has been used to shield belligerents, block humanitarian interventions, and prevent accountability. Russia and China together blocked multiple resolutions on Syria; the United States has historically used the veto to protect Israel. The veto power thus transforms the UNSC from a collective security body into an arena of great-power bargaining.

C. Article 108 of the UN Charter

Article 108 governs the amendment procedure for the Charter. Any amendment must be adopted by a two-thirds majority of all UN member states AND ratified by two-thirds of them, including all five permanent members. This means that even if 190 nations demand UNSC reform, a single P5 member can veto the amendment. The reform paradox is thus embedded in the Charter itself: the very states who benefit most from the existing structure must consent to change it. This is not merely a procedural obstacle — it is a structural lock-in that has made Charter-based reform virtually impossible for eight decades.

D. The Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN)

Established in 1993 under General Assembly Decision 48/26, the IGN process is the primary multilateral forum through which UNSC reform is negotiated. Launched formally in 2009 under the mandate of General Assembly Decision 62/557, the IGN operates on a consensus-based model that effectively gives any determined bloc of states a quiet veto over progress. The IGN has five key areas of discussion: categories of membership, the question of veto, regional representation, size and working methods of an enlarged Council, and the relationship between the Council and the General Assembly. Despite three decades of deliberation, the IGN has produced no binding outcome, operating largely as a talk-shop — a diplomatic courtesy to aspirant nations.

E. The G4 Group

The G4 is a coalition of four major democracies — India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan — that collectively advocate for permanent membership in an expanded UNSC. The group represents approximately one-sixth of humanity and includes some of the world's largest economies and most populous nations. The G4's case rests on the twin pillars of democratic legitimacy and global significance: these are countries that contribute substantially to UN peacekeeping, development finance, and multilateral governance. However, the G4's bid is complicated by regional rivals — Pakistan opposes India, Argentina opposes Brazil, Italy opposes Germany, South Korea and China oppose Japan — and by the structural veto problem under Article 108.

F. The Uniting for Consensus (UfC) Group — 'Coffee Club'

The UfC, informally known as the Coffee Club, is a bloc of roughly twelve states that opposes the expansion of permanent seats. Led by Italy, with Pakistan as its most active operational partner, the group argues that creating new permanent seats would further entrench power asymmetries. The UfC alternatively proposes the creation of long-term renewable seats — elected for extended terms — rather than permanent membership. The group's opposition is partly principled (concern about democratic accountability of unelected permanent members) and partly strategic (regional rivalry with G4 aspirants). Pakistan's active role in the UfC directly targets India's aspirations, framing it as a geopolitical containment strategy.

G. Chapter VI and Chapter VII of the UN Charter

Chapter VI covers the Pacific Settlement of Disputes — it authorises the UNSC to call on parties to negotiate, arbitrate, or use other peaceful means. Chapter VII is the enforcement chapter, authorising binding measures including economic sanctions (Article 41) and military force (Article 42). It is under Chapter VII that the Council authorises interventions such as those in Korea (1950), Libya (2011), and Iraq (1990). The misuse and paralysis of the Council lies precisely in the abuse of Chapter VII — either by blocking legitimate action through the veto, or by using the enforcement chapter to legitimise regime change and unilateral operations.

H. The L.69 Coalition and the African Group

The L.69 is a coalition of developing nations from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean that supports comprehensive UNSC reform, including expansion in both permanent and non-permanent categories. It has been a consistent ally of India's position. The African Group, representing 54

nations, demands at least two permanent seats with full veto rights — enshrined in the Ezulwini Consensus and the Sirte Declaration — as reparative justice for Africa's historic exclusion from global governance. The alignment between India, the L.69, and the African Group represents a formidable Global South coalition, though translating this coalition into Charter amendments remains the fundamental challenge.

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02 MAIN ARGUMENTS AND SUBSTANTIVE PARTS

The case for UNSC reform is not new, but it has acquired a sharper urgency in the current geopolitical moment. The argument unfolds across three registers: institutional dysfunction, representational injustice, and strategic obsolescence.

A. The Core Thesis

The foundational argument for UNSC reform rests on a stark observation: the architecture of global peace and security governance was designed in 1945 to reflect the power realities of a world that no longer exists. The Council's P5 structure was calibrated to manage a bipolar post-war order, with Western powers and the Soviet Union as the twin poles. Today's world is multipolar, decolonised, and demographically transformed. The continued dominance of five self-selected states over binding global security decisions is not merely anachronistic — it is actively counterproductive to the goals the UN was created to serve.

B. The Dysfunction Argument — Misuse and Paralysis

- **Misuse:** The UNSC has oscillated between two pathologies: misuse and paralysis. Misuse occurs when powerful members leverage the Council for legitimising actions that serve narrow national interests — as seen in the 1991 Gulf War (Resolution 678 authorising 'all necessary means'), and the 2003 Iraq War where the United States and UK sought to manufacture a justification through the Council.
- **Paralysis:** Paralysis occurs when the veto is deployed to block action on genuine humanitarian crises. The Syria conflict is the most cited modern example: multiple draft resolutions addressing war crimes and chemical weapon use were blocked, preventing even a humanitarian ceasefire.
- **The Paradox:** The result is a Council that is simultaneously too powerful to ignore — its resolutions bind all member states — and too compromised to trust, because its decisions reflect P5 interests rather than global consensus.

C. The Representational Injustice Argument

- **Africa's Exclusion:** Africa, with 54 nations and 1.4 billion people — over a sixth of humanity — has no permanent seat. This is not just a statistical anomaly; it reflects the racial and colonial logic of the 1945 settlement, when most African nations were not independent.
- **Latin America:** Latin America and the Caribbean, home to major democracies like Brazil, have no permanent representation despite being a region of significant economic and demographic weight.
- **Global South Marginalisation:** The Global South collectively — accounting for the majority of humanity and the largest share of conflicts being managed by the Council — has no permanent voice in the body that makes binding decisions about their security.

D. The Mandate Narrowing Argument

The article makes a sophisticated point about the narrowing of the UNSC's mandate in practice. The Open-Ended Working Group on Council Reform, established in 1993, and the subsequent IGN process have generated enormous diplomatic activity with negligible structural change. The 2024 UN Pact for the Future called for action but the IGN itself has not acted. The gap between the rhetorical commitment to reform and the structural inertia of the process reflects a deeper truth: the P5 has no incentive to dilute its own power, and the amendment procedure under Article 108 ensures that it need not.

E. The P5 Positions — Divide and Rule

- **Stated Unity:** All five P5 members publicly support reform in principle while opposing any specific reform that would diminish their structural advantage. This is the divide-and-rule stratagem at work.
- **China's Strategy:** China is studiously indirect in its opposition to India's bid, supporting 'African inclusion' in generic terms while backing the Coffee Club's resistance to new permanent seats.
- **UK and France:** The United Kingdom and France are vocal supporters of the G4 and have remained the most consistent procedural advocates for permanent membership reform among the P5, though their support has not translated into Charter amendment.
- **United States:** The United States, under the Biden administration, stepped back from the text-based negotiation process — a move that represented a softening of engagement rather than active support.

F. India's Specific Case — The Vocation Argument

India's argument is distinctive in that it does not merely claim a seat on the grounds of size or economic weight, though both are relevant. India positions itself as the voice of the Global South — a civilisational democracy with a record of responsible multilateral engagement, peacekeeping contribution, and developmental partnership. India's admission to the G20 leadership, its partnership with the African Union's G20 inclusion, and the PM Modi-led consensus on inclusivity and democratic representation have built diplomatic capital. India's case is that it would formalise a standing the country already has in practice — not as a supplicant seeking entry, but as a responsible actor seeking institutional recognition of an existing role.

03 HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE ISSUE

Understanding UNSC reform requires tracing the arc from the League of Nations' failure to the present-day deadlock — a story of idealism repeatedly defeated by great-power realism, and of a post-colonial world still seeking institutional recognition.

A. Pre-1945: The League of Nations Experiment

- **League Origins:** The League of Nations (1920–1946) was the first systematic attempt at collective security governance. Its Council had permanent members — Britain, France, Italy, Japan — with a veto-like requirement of unanimity for substantive decisions.
- **Structural Failure:** The League's failure to prevent World War II stemmed from the United States' non-membership (the Senate rejected it), the appeasement of fascist powers, and the inability to enforce decisions against determined great-power aggression.
- **1945 Lesson:** The lesson drawn in 1945 was the opposite of what reform advocates now argue: the drafters of the UN Charter believed that great-power unity, guaranteed through veto rights, was the prerequisite for collective security — even at the cost of representational justice.

B. 1945–1965: Founding Architecture and Early Cracks

- **Founding:** The UN Charter was signed in San Francisco in June 1945. The P5 — USA, USSR, UK, France, China (then the Republic of China/Taiwan) — were granted permanent seats and veto rights as a realist concession to ensure their participation.
- **Membership Explosion:** The original Council had 11 members — 5 permanent and 6 non-permanent. The decolonisation wave of the 1950s and 1960s rapidly increased UN membership from 51 founding states to over 110 by 1965, making the original Council composition increasingly unrepresentative.
- **1965 Amendment:** In 1965, the Charter was amended — the only successful amendment in UN history — to expand the non-permanent membership from 6 to 10, bringing the Council to its current 15-member configuration. Significantly, permanent membership was NOT expanded, establishing a precedent of partial, inadequate reform.

C. 1971–1993: Cold War Paralysis and the Reform Idea Emerges

- **China's Entry:** In 1971, the People's Republic of China replaced the Republic of China (Taiwan) as the Chinese permanent member, consolidating mainland China's place in the Council.
- **Cold War Paralysis:** Throughout the Cold War, the UNSC was routinely paralysed by US-Soviet vetoes, rendering it largely ceremonial in major conflicts — Korea being a rare exception, possible only because the USSR was boycotting the Council at the time.
- **Post-Cold War Hopes:** The end of the Cold War in 1991 initially revived hopes for a more functional Council. The 1991 Gulf War saw unprecedented P5 cooperation under Resolution 678. But the Iraq intervention of 2003 shattered that optimism, revealing that great-power unity is transactional rather than principled.

- **1993 Reform Initiative:** In 1993, the General Assembly established the Open-Ended Working Group on UNSC reform — the institutional origin of the IGN process — reflecting growing demand for structural change from the Global South.

D. 1993–2009: The IGN Era and India's Candidacy

- **G4 Formation:** The G4 coalition took formal shape in the early 2000s, with India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan coordinating their campaigns for permanent membership. Their joint resolution in 2005 proposed expanding the Council to 25 members with 6 new permanent seats.
- **India's Momentum:** India's candidacy gained significant momentum in the 2000s, backed by the United States (which first endorsed India's permanent membership bid under the George W. Bush administration), the UK, France, and Russia.
- **UfC Counter:** The UfC (Coffee Club) crystallised in opposition to the G4 proposal, arguing that new permanent seats would entrench power asymmetries. Pakistan's active role in this coalition was a direct strategic counter to India.
- **IGN Launch 2009:** In 2009, the IGN was formally launched under General Assembly Decision 62/557, replacing the ad-hoc working group with a structured multilateral process — but retaining the consensus requirement that effectively allows any group to veto progress.

E. 2015–2024: Accelerating Pressure and the Pact for the Future

- **G20 Diplomacy:** India's election to the G20 Presidency in 2023 and the African Union's admission to the G20 in the same year — both championed by India — significantly elevated the geopolitical case for UNSC reform.
- **Ukraine Paralysis:** The Russia-Ukraine war from 2022 re-exposed the Council's structural paralysis: with Russia as a permanent member and active belligerent, the Council could not pass a single binding resolution to stop the conflict.
- **Pact for the Future:** The 2024 UN Pact for the Future, adopted by the General Assembly, called for accelerated UNSC reform and endorsed the principles of inclusivity and representational balance — but stopped short of mandating specific structural changes or timelines.
- **India's 2026 Position:** India's Permanent Representative, Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish, signalled in 2025–26 that India would accept a permanent seat while not conditioning its candidacy on the veto — a nuanced diplomatic positioning designed to build the broadest possible coalition.

04 LOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL BASE

The debate over UNSC reform is not merely a diplomatic negotiation — it is a clash of foundational philosophies of international order. Understanding these philosophical underpinnings transforms a factual question into an analytical one, which is precisely what UPSC mains rewards.

A. Realism vs. Liberal Institutionalism

- **Realist Foundation:** The P5 veto structure is built on classical Realism — the Hobbesian assumption that international order is ultimately maintained by power, and that great powers must be co-opted rather than outvoted. The veto is the institutional form of this philosophical commitment.
- **Liberal Critique:** The reform argument draws from Liberal Institutionalism — the Kantian belief that durable peace requires legitimate institutions that reflect shared values, democratic accountability, and representative governance. An unrepresentative Council lacks the moral authority to enforce its own decisions.

B. The Legitimacy-Effectiveness Dilemma

The philosophical core of the reform debate is a genuine dilemma between legitimacy and effectiveness. A Council with fewer members and concentrated power (current structure) may be more effective in reaching decisions quickly — but lacks legitimacy. A larger, more representative Council may gain legitimacy but risk becoming as unwieldy and ineffective as the General Assembly. This is not a false dilemma: it reflects real institutional trade-offs that any reform proposal must navigate. The G4 implicitly argues that legitimacy is itself a precondition for effectiveness — that a Council whose decisions are routinely challenged as politically motivated cannot effectively enforce those decisions.

C. John Rawls and International Justice

Rawlsian justice, applied to international institutions, demands that the basic structure of global governance be designed from behind a 'veil of ignorance' — where architects do not know whether they will be powerful or weak, rich or poor, Northern or Southern. The 1945 settlement was obviously not designed this way: it was designed by the victors to perpetuate their advantage. A reformed UNSC, by contrast, would need to approximate Rawlsian fairness — distributing veto rights or representation in ways that any nation, regardless of its current power, could endorse as just.

D. Amartya Sen's Capability Approach

Sen's capability approach, when extended to institutions, argues that what matters is not merely the formal rules of an institution but whether those rules actually expand the real freedoms and capabilities of affected peoples. The current UNSC structure fails this test: it systematically constrains the capability of African, Asian, and Latin American nations to influence decisions about their own security. India's case for a permanent seat is, in Sen's terms, a claim for institutional capability — the actual ability to participate in decisions that shape one's world.

E. Habermas and Communicative Rationality

Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action holds that legitimate norms must emerge from an inclusive deliberative process where all affected parties participate as equals. The IGN process nominally approximates this — all member states participate — but is structurally compromised by the consensus requirement, which gives veto power to entrenched blocs. True Habermasian legitimacy would require that reform decisions reflect genuine deliberative consensus, not manufactured consent by the status quo powers.

F. The Philosophical Paradox of Reform

- **The Structural Lock-in:** The reform paradox is philosophically interesting: the very institution that needs reforming controls the mechanism of its own reform. Article 108 creates a Kafkaesque situation where the Council's dysfunction can only be resolved with the consent of those who benefit most from its dysfunction.
- **False Necessity:** This parallels what philosopher Roberto Unger calls 'false necessity' — the tendency to naturalise historically contingent power arrangements as if they were inevitable features of the world. The P5 structure is not natural or necessary; it is a historical accident that has become self-perpetuating.
- **Philosophical Resolution:** The philosophical way forward is not to abandon realism — great powers will always have disproportionate influence — but to distinguish between legitimate influence earned through contribution and action, and illegitimate structural privilege embedded in formal veto rights.

05 NEW FEATURES AND UNIQUE IDEAS

Reform proposals around UNSC are not static — they have evolved from simple expansion to sophisticated structural redesign. Evaluating the feasibility and originality of these proposals is a core UPSC analytical skill.

A. The Two-Track Reform Proposal

- **India's Tactical Innovation:** India's current positioning — accepting a permanent seat without making the veto a non-negotiable condition — is a strategically novel approach. It decouples representational reform (more permanent members) from procedural reform (veto extension), making the coalition-building easier.
- **Feasibility Assessment:** This creates a potentially winnable reform formula: expand permanent membership, defer the veto question for a future negotiation. It is coherent, strategically executable, and builds on existing diplomatic momentum.

B. Non-Permanent Rotating Seats for Small States

- **SIDS Seat Proposal:** The proposal for a dedicated non-permanent rotating seat for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) is a genuinely original idea that addresses the representation gap at the bottom of the power hierarchy, not just at the top.
- **Feasibility:** SIDS face existential threats — climate change, sea-level rise, economic vulnerability — that require Council attention, yet their voice in the existing structure is negligible. A dedicated seat would institutionalise their representation without requiring Charter amendment if structured as a sub-category of existing non-permanent seats.

C. Africa's Ezulwini Demand for Full Veto

- **The Ezulwini Demand:** The African Group's demand for two permanent seats with full veto rights — the Ezulwini Consensus — is distinctive in insisting on equal power, not just equal representation. It explicitly rejects the concept of second-class permanent membership.
- **Feasibility Assessment:** Feasibility is low in the short term — existing P5 members are unlikely to accept new veto-wielding members who could independently block their preferred resolutions — but the demand is philosophically powerful as it frames reform as a reparative justice project, not merely institutional modernisation.

D. Text-Based Negotiations

- **Procedural Innovation:** The shift from general discussion to 'text-based negotiations' — where specific draft reform texts are tabled and negotiated — is procedurally significant. It forces member states to put concrete positions on the table, making obstruction more visible and politically costly.
- **India's Role:** India's consistent advocacy for text-based negotiations, combined with the United States stepping back from this approach, creates a geopolitical fault line in the reform process itself.

E. The African Union's G20 Admission as a Reform Precedent

India's championing of the African Union's admission to the G20 in 2023 established a significant precedent: that continental bodies — not just individual states — can receive institutional representation in global governance forums. If this logic were extended to the UNSC, it could provide a pathway for African representation that sidesteps the impossible task of choosing between 54 competing national candidacies. The concept of a continental permanent seat held rotationally by the African Union — rather than by any single African state — is an architecturally novel idea that deserves more analytical attention than it currently receives.

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06 SUSTAINABILITY OF THE IDEA

Sustainability of institutional reform is assessed not just by whether a proposal can be adopted, but whether it can endure — whether it is robust to changing power distributions, resilient to political cycles, and rooted in durable legitimacy.

A. Constitutional and Legal Sustainability

- **Charter Amendment Challenge:** Any UNSC reform requires amendment under Article 108 — a procedure that has succeeded only once in UN history (1965). Legal sustainability of reform depends on whether the political conditions for a two-thirds adoption and ratification, including P5 consent, can be assembled. The structural prognosis is deeply uncertain.
- **Working Methods Reform:** Short of Charter amendment, partial reforms — changes to working methods, transparency, informal consultation practices — can be implemented by Council resolution alone and require no P5 ratification. These 'softer' reforms are legally sustainable but structurally inadequate.

B. Political Sustainability

- **India's Political Durability:** For reform to be politically sustainable, it must have durable cross-regional support that survives government changes, bilateral irritants, and shifting alliances. India's campaign has been sustained across multiple governments and foreign policy orientations — from Gujral to Modi — indicating institutional depth.
- **P5 Inconsistency:** However, P5 support has been inconsistent: the US has oscillated between active endorsement and passive disengagement; Russia and China have been structurally opposed; France and UK have been supportive but not sufficiently mobilised.

C. Ethical Sustainability

- **Ethical Legitimacy:** A reformed Council that reflects the demographic and civilisational diversity of the current world is ethically more sustainable than the current structure, which derives its authority from a 1945 settlement most of the world's nations had no voice in.
- **Compliance and Authority:** The ethical case for reform is also a case for durability: institutions that people regard as just are more likely to be complied with and defended. A UNSC with African and Asian permanent members would command greater moral authority in conflict zones across those regions.

D. Societal Sustainability

- **Public Legitimacy Deficit:** The growing disconnect between global public opinion — which broadly supports a more representative UNSC — and the structural inertia of the institution is not indefinitely sustainable. As global communications deepen and civil society organisations focus more on UN governance, the pressure for reform will intensify.
- **Institutional Bypass Risk:** The risk is that without reform, states and coalitions increasingly bypass the UNSC entirely — as seen in various NATO operations, regional security

arrangements, and minilateral coalitions — hollowing out the Council's authority even without formally abolishing it.

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07 CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE ISSUE

The challenges to UNSC reform are structural, geopolitical, procedural, and diplomatic — and they interact with each other in ways that make simple solutions impossible. Understanding their layered nature is essential for nuanced UPSC answers.

A. Structural Challenges

- **The Amendment Lock:** The Article 108 amendment requirement is the foundational structural challenge: any reform proposal must secure the consent of the very powers most invested in the status quo. This is not a negotiating problem — it is an architectural problem.
- **Veto of the Veto:** The veto itself creates a circular logic: the P5 can veto any reform that threatens their veto. Even if 190 nations agree on a reform text, a single P5 dissent ends the process.

B. Geopolitical Challenges

- **China's Block:** China's opposition to India's permanent membership is the most consequential geopolitical obstacle. Framed in terms of 'consensus' and 'procedural correctness', China's position is strategically motivated by a desire to prevent a democratic, independent-minded neighbour from gaining a veto over global security decisions.
- **Pakistan's Role:** Pakistan's role in the Coffee Club, acting as the operational front for opposition to India's candidacy in the IGN process, illustrates how bilateral rivalries translate into multilateral obstruction.
- **Russia's Ambiguity:** Russia's evolving position — under increasing Western pressure post-Ukraine — creates uncertainty. Moscow may support India's candidacy as a diplomatic hedge, or it may use the reform process as a bargaining chip in broader geopolitical negotiations.

C. Implementation Challenges

- **Size-Functionality Trade-off:** Even if reform were agreed in principle, designing an expanded Council that is both representative and functional is genuinely difficult. A Council of 25-30 members risks replicating the procedural paralysis of the General Assembly.
- **Selection Dilemmas:** The question of which nations receive permanent seats — and how regional representation is allocated — is itself deeply contentious. Within Africa, multiple nations aspire to represent the continent; within Asia, China's presence complicates any new Asian permanent seat.

D. Stakeholder Resistance

- **Organised Opposition:** The Coffee Club / UfC bloc — representing a coherent, well-organised opposition — has successfully prevented reform progress for three decades. Its members have a genuine philosophical objection to entrenched permanent membership, but also clear strategic interests in preventing specific nations from gaining permanent seats.

- **Small State Scepticism:** Some smaller nations worry that an expanded Council dominated by new major powers would be no more responsive to their concerns than the current P5-dominated body — a legitimate concern that reform advocates must address.

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08 MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

Multidimensional analysis is the hallmark of high-scoring UPSC mains answers. The UNSC reform issue touches virtually every dimension of international relations, political philosophy, law, and ethics — making it exceptionally rich territory for analytical writing.

A. Social Dimension

- **Humanitarian Neglect:** The UNSC's composition has a direct social dimension: it shapes whose security is prioritised and whose grievances are institutionally ignored. African conflicts — from Rwanda to Sudan — have historically received inadequate Council attention, with devastating humanitarian consequences.
- **Social Diversity:** The inclusion of diverse permanent members would bring different social perspectives — postcolonial experiences, development priorities, conflict resolution traditions — into the Council's deliberations, enriching its analytical framework.
- **India's Social Significance:** India's candidacy specifically carries civilisational weight: as the world's most populous democracy with millennia of pluralistic governance traditions, India's permanent membership would signal the Council's openness to non-Western models of order.

B. Political Dimension

- **Domestic Consensus:** UNSC reform is simultaneously domestic politics and international diplomacy. In India, the permanent membership bid enjoys rare cross-party consensus, making it one of the few foreign policy positions that does not change with government — a significant political asset.
- **Multilateralism Signal:** Globally, UNSC reform is a barometer of multilateralism's health. Its failure signals the dominance of unilateralism and great-power politics; its success would validate the liberal internationalist vision of a rules-based order.

C. Legal Dimension

- **Charter Constraints:** The legal architecture of reform is unforgiving: Article 108 creates a near-impossible threshold. Legal scholars have proposed creative workarounds — amending the Charter piecemeal, using advisory opinions from the International Court of Justice, or creating new treaty-based mechanisms outside the Charter framework — but none command consensus.
- **Veto Legality:** The veto's legality has itself been challenged: does a single state's veto power constitute an unlawful barrier to collective security obligations? This question remains legally unresolved but politically significant.

D. Ethical Dimension

- **Intergenerational Justice:** The most powerful ethical argument for reform is intergenerational: future generations will inherit a world governed by institutions designed for 1945. They had no voice in that design, and it is ethically indefensible to perpetuate it indefinitely.

- **Stability vs. Justice:** The ethical case against reform focuses on stability: institutional change, even beneficial change, carries transition costs and uncertainty. Defenders of the status quo argue that a dysfunctional UNSC is preferable to institutional chaos.

E. International Dimension

- **Order Transition:** UNSC reform is inseparable from the broader question of global order transition: whether the 21st century will be governed by rules designed by the 20th century's dominant powers, or whether a genuine multipolarity will be institutionalised.
- **India's Systemic Role:** India's role as a Global South leader — bridging the developed and developing world in forums like the G20, BRICS, and the Non-Aligned tradition — gives its candidacy a systemic significance beyond its own national interest.

F. Economic Dimension

- **Economic Power of the Seat:** Permanent UNSC membership confers significant economic advantages: greater credibility in multilateral financial institutions, enhanced bilateral bargaining power, and the ability to shape sanctions regimes that affect global trade.
- **Conflict-Economic Nexus:** Conversely, the current Council's inability to resolve conflicts efficiently imposes enormous economic costs — through refugee flows, development disruption, and the diversion of humanitarian resources. A more effective Council could reduce these costs.

09 LINKAGES WITH NCERTs

Connecting current affairs to NCERT foundations demonstrates conceptual grounding, which examiners value. The UNSC reform issue is woven into multiple NCERT chapters across history, political science, and social science.

- **Class XII Political Science — International Organisations:** Class 12 Political Science, Part 2 — Chapter 6 'International Organisations': This chapter directly discusses the United Nations, its structure, the UNSC, and the arguments around reform. It explains the P5 veto, the General Assembly's role, and India's position on UNSC reform. It is the most direct NCERT link and should be the first port of call for any student.
- **Class XII Political Science — Alternative Power Centres:** Class 12 Political Science, Part 2 — Chapter 4 'Alternative Centres of Power': This chapter covers the European Union, ASEAN, BRICS, and G20 — all relevant to understanding the shifting balance of power that makes UNSC reform both necessary and possible. The rise of new power centres makes the 1945 settlement structurally untenable.
- **Class X Social Science — Power Sharing:** Class 10 Social Science (Democratic Politics II) — Chapter 1 'Power Sharing': The philosophical principles of power sharing, checks and balances, and representative governance — developed in the domestic Indian context — apply directly to the argument for a more representative UNSC. The veto system is essentially a form of unbalanced power concentration that the chapter critically examines in domestic contexts.
- **Class IX — International Cooperation:** Class 9 Social Science (Contemporary India) — Chapter on 'Disaster Management and International Cooperation': Establishes the foundational understanding of why international cooperation — and therefore effective international institutions — matters for human security.
- **Class XII History — Cold War and Decolonisation:** Class 12 History — Chapter on 'The Cold War Era' and decolonisation: The historical origins of the UNSC, the Cold War paralysis, and the decolonisation movement that created the global justice argument for reform are all rooted in this history chapter. Understanding why Africa and Asia were structurally excluded in 1945 requires this historical grounding.

10 LINKAGES WITH UPSC CSE SYLLABUS

UNSC reform is one of those rare topics that genuinely spans all four GS papers, the Essay paper, and the Ethics paper. Mapping it carefully allows students to use the same conceptual preparation across multiple papers.

GS Paper II — Primary Domain

- **International Relations:** India and its Neighbourhood / Relations with Major Countries: India's permanent membership candidacy is a core bilateral and multilateral issue involving the US, China, Russia, UK, France, and G4 partners. Every bilateral India-P5 relationship has a UNSC reform dimension.
- **International Institutions:** Important International Institutions, Agencies and Fora: The UN, UNSC, General Assembly, IGAN, G4, UfC, L.69, African Group — all are directly syllabus-relevant.
- **India's Foreign Policy:** India's Foreign Policy: India's commitment to strategic autonomy, Global South leadership, and multilateral reform agenda is best illustrated through the UNSC campaign.

GS Paper I

- **Modern Indian History:** Post-Independence Consolidation and Reorganisation: India's early UN diplomacy, Non-Aligned Movement leadership, and evolving foreign policy tradition are historical context for the current UNSC bid.
- **Geography Context:** Salient Features of World's Physical Geography: Geopolitical context — Africa, Latin America, Asia-Pacific — is relevant to understanding regional representation demands.

GS Paper III

- **Security Architecture:** Security: The UNSC's role in global security architecture directly links to discussions of terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, peacekeeping, and regional conflicts — all GS III security topics.

GS Paper IV — Ethics

- **Ethics Dimension:** Probity in Governance / Ethics in International Relations: The veto power and its selective use raise fundamental questions about fairness, accountability, and the ethical foundations of international governance — directly relevant to the Ethics paper.

Essay Paper

- **Essay Topics:** Potential Essay Themes: 'A reformed United Nations is the best hope for global peace', 'The veto power is the greatest obstacle to international justice', 'India's rise is inseparable from multilateral reform' — all are plausible essay topics where UNSC reform provides the central argument.

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11 BEST LINKAGES WITH SYLLABUS, PHILOSOPHY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

The deepest intellectual engagement with UNSC reform involves not just knowing the facts but understanding the epistemic and philosophical assumptions that underlie different positions — the mark of a truly distinguished UPSC candidate.

A. Epistemological Dimension: Who Knows Best?

The structure of the UNSC embeds an implicit epistemological claim: that the P5, by virtue of their status as post-war victors, possess superior knowledge and judgment about global security. This 'epistemic authority' claim is philosophically untenable in a 21st-century context. Knowledge about conflict, development, and security in Africa is best held by Africans; knowledge about South Asian security dynamics is best generated by South Asians. The epistemic case for reform argues that the Council's decision-making would be factually richer and analytically sounder with more diverse permanent representation — not merely more just.

B. Rawlsian Veil of Ignorance Applied to UN Reform

If the UN Charter were being written today by parties who did not know which nation they would represent — Rawls's veil of ignorance — the resulting document would almost certainly not produce the current P5 structure. No rational actor, uncertain of their national identity, would consent to a system where five pre-selected states have permanent power over global security decisions. This thought experiment is not merely academic: it provides a powerful rhetorical and analytical framework for UPSC answers on institutional reform.

C. Amartya Sen's 'The Idea of Justice' — Nyaya vs. Niti

Sen's distinction between Niti (perfect institutional justice — getting the ideal institution right) and Nyaya (comparative justice — moving toward less unjust arrangements even without perfect institutions) is directly applicable. Perfect UNSC reform — the ideal democratically representative Council — may be Niti that is currently unachievable. But the Nyaya argument says: we can still move toward less injustice — more seats, better working methods, reduced veto use — even without achieving the ideal. India's pragmatic positioning (accepting a seat without insisting on veto rights) is a classic Nyaya approach.

D. Gramsci's Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony

Gramsci's concept of hegemony — the domination of ideology and institutions by a ruling class — applies with striking clarity to the UNSC. The P5's ability to frame their structural privilege as 'responsibility', 'stability', and 'deterrence' is a hegemonic narrative that legitimises domination. The Global South's counter-hegemonic project — reframing the same structure as 'injustice', 'exclusion', and 'illegitimacy' — is a classic Gramscian challenge. India's leadership in this counter-hegemonic project gives its candidacy an ideological dimension beyond mere power seeking.

12 WAY FORWARD

The way forward on UNSC reform requires distinguishing between the achievable and the ideal — identifying practical reform pathways that can build momentum toward structural change without waiting for the perfect moment that may never arrive.

A. Short-Term Achievable Reforms

- **Procedural Reforms:** Working Methods Reform: Changes to the Council's internal procedures — more transparent consultations, clearer standards for invoking the veto, mandatory explanation when the veto is used — can be implemented by Council resolution without Charter amendment and can begin to rebuild institutional legitimacy.
- **Veto Restraint Norms:** Veto Restraint Initiatives: The Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) Group and similar initiatives promoting voluntary restraint on the veto in cases of mass atrocities — a norm-building approach rather than a structural one — deserve wider adoption and can create political pressure on P5 members who habitually obstruct.

B. Medium-Term Structural Approaches

- **IGN Reform:** Text-Based Negotiations: India should continue advocating for the transition from position-paper discussions to actual draft negotiating texts in the IGN, making obstruction more visible and forcing member states to defend specific positions publicly.
- **Coalition Building:** G4-Africa Convergence: Bridging the G4's permanent-seat demand with Africa's Ezulwini demand — perhaps through a formula of two African permanent seats without veto initially, with a sunset review clause — could build the broadest possible reform coalition.

C. Long-Term Structural Vision

- **Staged Veto Reform:** Decoupling Membership from Veto: A reform that expands permanent membership without immediately extending veto rights — with a 15-year review clause to evaluate new members' exercise of responsibility — could achieve the representational goal while assuaging P5 concerns about proliferated vetoes.
- **Demonstrated Capability:** Capacity Building: India's argument is strongest when it is backed by demonstrated capability — peacekeeping contributions, development financing, conflict mediation. Deepening these commitments strengthens the normative case independent of the formal reform process.

D. India-Specific Recommendations

- **Coalition Maintenance:** Maintain the Global South Alliance: India should deepen its engagement with the L.69 coalition, the African Group, and SIDS, ensuring that the reform coalition is seen as a Global South project — not an Indian national interest campaign.
- **China Engagement:** Build Bridges with China: A bilateral dialogue with China specifically on UNSC reform — separating it from bilateral irritants — could potentially shift Beijing's position, particularly if India can offer reciprocal support on issues where China seeks legitimacy.

- **Forum Leverage:** Use Multilateral Forums: India should use every G20, BRICS, SCO, and Commonwealth meeting to advance the reform agenda, making it a standard agenda item rather than an occasional diplomatic priority.

AXIA IAS ACADEMY

13 PREVIOUS YEARS' UPSC AND APSC QUESTIONS

Studying PYQs is the single most reliable guide to what UPSC rewards in answers. The UNSC reform theme recurs with striking regularity across Prelims and Mains, reflecting its centrality to international relations.

UPSC Prelims — Relevant Questions

- **2023 Prelims:** 2023: 'Consider the following statements about the United Nations Security Council (UNSC): [Statements on permanent membership, veto, non-permanent terms]' — Tests factual knowledge of Council structure.
- **2022 Prelims:** 2022: 'The veto power, as provided in the UN Charter, can be exercised only by [option choices]' — Direct factual question on P5 veto mechanism.
- **2019 Prelims:** 2019: 'With reference to the United Nations, which of the following is/are the principal organs of the United Nations?' — Tests institutional knowledge.
- **2015 Prelims:** 2015: 'The G4 nations are campaigning for permanent membership of the UNSC. Name the member countries.' — Direct factual recall.
- **2014 Prelims:** 2014: 'The concept of collective security in the UN Charter is primarily the responsibility of [organ choices]' — Tests Charter-level conceptual knowledge.

UPSC Mains GS II — Relevant Questions

- **2022 GS II:** 2022 GS II: 'India's G20 Presidency offers an opportunity to reshape global economic governance. Discuss India's priorities and the challenges it faces.' [Contextually relevant to India's multilateral leadership and UNSC reform agenda]
- **2020 GS II:** 2020 GS II: 'India's permanent membership of the UNSC is both a legitimate aspiration and a strategic necessity. Comment.' [Direct question — highly likely to return in 2025-26 cycle]
- **2019 GS II:** 2019 GS II: 'The United Nations' inability to resolve several conflicts in the world reflects its limitations. In this context, suggest measures to make the UN more effective.' [Directly on UNSC reform]
- **2016 GS II:** 2016 GS II: 'India is an aspirant for the permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council. What are the impediments in its way? How does India propose to tackle these?' [Classic UNSC reform question]
- **2014 GS II:** 2014 GS II: 'The UNSC must be reformed to reflect contemporary global realities. How would you reform the Security Council?' [Broad structural reform question]

APSC CCE — Relevant Questions

- **APSC Standard Theme:** APSC GS Paper (International Relations Section): 'Discuss India's position in the United Nations and its aspiration for a permanent seat in the Security Council.' — A standard APSC question type.
- **APSC Africa-India Nexus:** APSC GS Paper: 'What is the significance of India's engagement with the African Union? How does it relate to India's multilateral diplomacy?' — Tests India-Africa-UNSC triangulation.

- **APSC Essay Theme:** APSC Essay/GS: 'India as a global leader — aspirations and realities' — An essay topic where UNSC reform serves as a central illustrative example.

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14 MODEL ANSWERS FOR SELECTED QUESTIONS

Model answers demonstrate how to structure analysis, deploy evidence, and achieve the balance between breadth and depth that UPSC rewards. These are 250-word templates — expand with additional dimensions in the actual exam.

Q1: India's permanent membership of the UNSC is both a legitimate aspiration and a strategic necessity. Comment. (GS II, 2020)

India's case for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council rests on three mutually reinforcing pillars: civilisational standing, functional contribution, and strategic necessity.

Legitimacy of the Aspiration: With 1.4 billion people — one-sixth of humanity — India is the world's largest democracy and fourth-largest economy. It has contributed over 200,000 troops to UN peacekeeping missions, more than any other single nation historically. It leads the L.69 coalition of developing nations and secured the African Union's G20 membership, demonstrating genuine multilateral leadership. The current Council, where no South Asian nation has permanent representation despite South Asia hosting nearly 2 billion people, reflects a 1945 settlement that institutionalised colonial-era power hierarchies. India's aspiration for representation is therefore not merely a national interest claim but a demand for institutional justice.

Strategic Necessity: India's neighbourhood is among the world's most conflict-prone, with nuclear-armed neighbours and active terrorist networks. Permanent membership would give India the ability to shape binding Council resolutions on regional crises — currently, India can be affected by decisions it had no vote in formulating. It would also eliminate the structural anomaly where Pakistan — a significantly smaller economy and democracy — can mobilise the Coffee Club against India's multilateral interests.

Challenges: China's quiet opposition, the Article 108 amendment threshold, and the Coffee Club's resistance remain formidable. India's pragmatic approach — accepting a permanent seat without initially insisting on veto rights — represents a coherent and winnable reform strategy. The Council must reform to remain relevant; India's membership is integral to that reform's legitimacy.

Q2: The United Nations' inability to resolve several conflicts in the world reflects its limitations. Suggest measures to make the UN more effective. (GS II, 2019)

The United Nations was designed for a world that no longer exists. The architectural mismatch between its 1945 design and 21st-century global realities lies at the heart of its institutional limitations.

Structural Limitations: The Security Council's P5 veto mechanism has been the single most consequential structural failure. On Syria, Russia and China's vetoes blocked over a dozen humanitarian resolutions. On Ukraine, Russia's permanent membership rendered the Council helpless on the conflict most directly implicating a P5 member. The veto transforms the body from a collective security mechanism into a great-power bargaining arena.

Reform Recommendations: First, expand permanent membership to include underrepresented regions — at minimum two African seats and representation from South Asia and Latin America. Second, introduce veto restraint norms through a voluntary code of conduct committing permanent members to refrain from vetoing resolutions on mass atrocity situations. Third, transition the IG process to text-based negotiations, making reform obstruction politically costlier. Fourth, strengthen

the General Assembly's 'Uniting for Peace' mechanism — which allows the Assembly to recommend collective action when the Council is deadlocked — as a procedural safeguard against veto paralysis.

Financing and Implementation: The UN's effectiveness also depends on reliable, assessed financial contributions — the United States' periodic funding freezes undermine institutional capacity. Mandatory and predictable funding mechanisms would improve operational effectiveness independent of structural reform.

A reformed, representative, adequately funded Security Council would be more legitimate, more complied with, and more effective — making reform a precondition for effectiveness, not an obstacle to it.

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WHY THIS ISSUE IS UPSC-RELEVANT: A NOTE FOR STUDENTS

The UNSC reform debate is one of those perennial international relations themes that examiners return to precisely because it combines factual complexity, philosophical depth, and contemporary urgency. Here is how to approach your note-making strategically.

Why UNSC Reform Matters for UPSC

- **Multi-Paper Coverage:** It spans GS II (International Relations), GS IV (Ethics), and the Essay paper — rare multi-paper relevance.
- **Integrated Analysis:** It requires you to integrate historical knowledge (1945 Charter), institutional knowledge (P5, veto, IGN), philosophical frameworks (Rawls, Sen, Habermas), and contemporary current affairs (2024 Pact for the Future, India's G20 Presidency) — exactly what UPSC rewards in the best answers.
- **High Probability:** India's candidacy is a live diplomatic story — the probability of a UPSC question in the 2025-26 cycle is very high given ongoing IGN activity and India's heightened global profile.

Note-Making Tips

- **Mind Map:** Create a one-page 'Mind Map': Centre — UNSC Reform; Spokes — Historical Timeline, P5 Positions, India's Case, Philosophical Base, Reform Proposals, Challenges, Way Forward.
- **Quote Bank:** Prepare a 'Quote Bank': Three to five memorable quotes or framings — Eleanor Roosevelt's 'You must believe in it; you must work at it' (used for UN idealism), the Ezulwini Consensus formulation, India's 'Global South voice' framing — for use in introductions and conclusions.
- **Key Numbers:** Memorise the Key Numbers: P5, 193 members, 10 non-permanent seats, 2/3 Charter amendment threshold, 1965 as the only Charter amendment, India's 200,000+ peacekeeping contributions.
- **APSC Angle:** For APSC: Always connect to Assam/Northeast India — how UNSC decisions on conflict zones, climate (SIDS), and development finance affect the Northeast's strategic environment and connectivity goals.

The UNSC reform debate ultimately asks a profound question: Can the world build institutions that are simultaneously powerful enough to enforce peace and representative enough to be legitimate? India's answer — that these are not competing goals but mutually reinforcing ones — is both a foreign policy position and a philosophical claim worth defending in the examination hall.