



France Renews Push for UN Security Council Reform and Responsible Veto Use Amid Growing Demands for Collective Security

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Recent Developments:

- During the **81st session of the United Nations General Assembly**, France renewed its call for strengthening the United Nations system, particularly through **regulation of the veto** and reform of the Security Council. France is holding the presidency of the Security Council during September 2026.
- France and Mexico have advocated since **2015** for voluntary restraint by the permanent members from using the veto in situations involving **mass atrocities**, including genocide, crimes against humanity and large-scale war crimes.
- By September 2026, **127 UN Member States** supported the French-Mexican initiative, including the United Kingdom, which became the second permanent member after France to support it.
- France has also called for broader **Security Council reform**, including expansion of both permanent and non-permanent membership to provide greater representation to Africa, the Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean.
- The proposal seeks to distinguish between the **existence of veto power** and its responsible exercise, rather than immediately abolishing the veto. France argues that veto power should be treated as a **responsibility rather than a privilege**.

United Nations: Institutional Structure and Security Mandate:

Establishment and Membership:

- The **United Nations** was established in **1945** through the United Nations Charter to maintain international peace and security, promote international cooperation and advance human rights and development.
- The United Nations currently has **193 Member States**, all of which are members of the General Assembly.
- Admission of a new state requires a decision of the General Assembly following a **recommendation of the Security Council**.
- The principal organs of the United Nations are the **General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice and Secretariat**.

Security Council:

- The **Security Council** has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security under the United Nations Charter.
- It consists of **15 members**, comprising **5 permanent members and 10 non-permanent members**.
- The permanent members are **China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States**.
- Each permanent member possesses the **veto**, meaning a negative vote by any permanent member prevents the adoption of a substantive Council decision even when the required affirmative votes are otherwise secured.

- The 10 non-permanent members are elected by the General Assembly for **2-year terms**, with seats distributed according to equitable geographical representation.

Election of Non-Permanent Members:

- The General Assembly elects **5 non-permanent members each year** for 2-year terms, replacing half of the elected membership annually.
- The 10 seats are distributed regionally as follows:
- **5 seats** for African and Asian States,
- **1 seat** for Eastern European States,
- **2 seats** for Latin American and Caribbean States,
- **2 seats** for Western European and Other States.
- A candidate state requires a **two-thirds majority of members present and voting** in the General Assembly.
- Elections are conducted through a **secret ballot** involving the 193 Member States.
- India last served as a non-permanent member of the Security Council during **2021–22**.

Why Security Council Reform Is Required:

Changed Global Order:

- The Security Council reflects the geopolitical structure that existed at the time of the United Nations' creation in **1945**, while the distribution of economic, demographic and political influence has changed substantially.
- Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and parts of the Asia-Pacific region remain inadequately represented in the permanent membership structure.
- Reform is therefore linked to the principle that the composition of the principal body responsible for international peace and security should reflect **contemporary global realities**.

Democratic Legitimacy and Representation:

- The Security Council combines **permanent membership and veto power** with an elected membership that has limited influence over substantive decisions.
- This creates an institutional asymmetry between the permanent and non-permanent members.
- Greater regional representation could strengthen the Council's **representativeness, legitimacy and perceived fairness**.

Effectiveness of Collective Security:

- The veto can prevent collective action even when a substantial majority of Security Council members supports a proposed resolution.
- The problem becomes particularly significant during major conflicts and humanitarian crises when rapid collective action may be required.
- France's position focuses on preventing veto use from paralysing the Council in situations involving **mass atrocities**.

Emerging Global Challenges:

- The post-1945 institutional structure faces challenges arising from **climate change, pandemics, cyber threats, artificial intelligence, terrorism, technological disruption and transnational conflicts**.
- Many of these challenges require collective responses involving states beyond the traditional great-power structure.
- Security Council reform is therefore connected with the broader debate over **multilateralism and global governance reform**.

Veto Power: Constitutional Basis and Reform Debate:

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Nature of the Veto:

- The veto originates from **Article 27 of the UN Charter**, under which substantive Security Council decisions require the affirmative votes of 9 members, including the concurring votes of the permanent members.
- In practice, a negative vote by any permanent member blocks the adoption of a substantive resolution.
- The veto was incorporated into the post-World War II institutional structure to secure the participation of the major powers in the collective security system.

French-Mexican Initiative:

- France and Mexico proposed in **2015** that the permanent members should voluntarily refrain from using the veto when a mass atrocity has been determined to have occurred.
- The initiative does **not require immediate amendment of the UN Charter** because it is based on voluntary political restraint by the permanent members.
- France has stated that it has not exercised its veto since **1989**, while continuing to argue that the veto should be exercised responsibly.
- The initiative therefore represents a **working-method reform** rather than formal abolition of the veto.

Limitations to Security Council Reform:

Permanent Member Consent:

- Formal amendment of the UN Charter faces a major structural obstacle because amendments require ratification by **two-thirds of UN Member States, including all permanent members of the Security Council** under Article 108.
- Consequently, the states whose institutional privileges could be affected by reform retain a decisive role in approving the amendment.
- This creates a fundamental tension between the demand for institutional reform and the existing distribution of constitutional power.

Regional Rivalries:

- Expansion raises difficult questions about which states should receive permanent or longer-term representation within each region.
- Regional rivalries can therefore complicate consensus even among states that broadly support Security Council expansion.
- The question of representation becomes particularly complex when multiple states claim regional leadership or strategic importance.

Veto for New Permanent Members:

- There is no universal agreement on whether new permanent members should receive the same veto power as the existing permanent members.
- The **African Union position**, expressed through the Ezulwini Consensus and subsequent reform proposals, supports permanent African representation with veto rights if the veto continues to exist.
- Different positions on the veto therefore create a second layer of disagreement beyond the question of membership expansion.

Charter Amendment Complexity:

- Article 108 requires approval by a **two-thirds majority in the General Assembly** followed by ratification by two-thirds of UN Member States, including all permanent members.
- Article 109 provides another Charter-review mechanism, but amendments emerging from such a process also require ratification by two-thirds of members, including all permanent members.

- The procedural design makes comprehensive structural reform legally and politically demanding.

India and UN Security Council Reform:

India's Case for Permanent Membership:

- India has consistently identified **comprehensive Security Council reform** as a major foreign-policy priority.
- India seeks permanent membership in an expanded Security Council and has worked through groups such as the **G4 and L.69** to build support for reform.
- India's argument is based on its **population, economic weight, contribution to UN peacekeeping, developing-country representation and long-standing participation in multilateral institutions**.
- India has served multiple terms as an elected member but has not held permanent membership since the Council's creation.

Importance for Global South:

- India's permanent representation would strengthen the presence of **developing countries and emerging economies** in the Council's decision-making structure.
- A reformed Council could provide greater institutional representation to regions whose political and economic significance has increased substantially since 1945.
- India's reform position is therefore connected with the wider demand for **representative and inclusive multilateralism**.

Way Forward:

Incremental Institutional Reform:

- **Veto restraint** in cases involving mass atrocities can be pursued through voluntary political commitments without immediately amending the UN Charter.
- Greater transparency in Council deliberations, improved coordination with the General Assembly and stronger accountability for veto use can improve institutional legitimacy.
- France's proposal demonstrates how **working-method reform** can operate alongside the longer-term effort to amend the Council's composition.

Comprehensive Security Council Reform:

- A durable reform package should address **membership categories, regional representation, veto arrangements, working methods, Council size and the relationship between the Security Council and General Assembly**.
- Africa's reform position demonstrates that regional representation and the future of the veto cannot be considered independently.
- Reform should seek to make the Council simultaneously **representative, legitimate, effective and capable of timely collective action**.

Conclusion:

- The 2026 French initiative highlights a central contradiction in global governance: the international community increasingly demands **collective action**, while the Security Council retains a decision-making structure designed in the geopolitical conditions of 1945.
- The French-Mexican initiative seeks to address one dimension of this problem through **voluntary restraint on veto use during mass atrocities**, while France's broader reform proposal seeks expansion of both permanent and non-permanent membership.
- Comprehensive reform remains difficult because any formal Charter amendment ultimately requires the participation of the existing permanent members.

- For India, the reform debate is closely connected with **permanent membership, representation of the Global South and strengthening rules-based multilateralism.**

Value Addition for UPSC:

Key Constitutional and Institutional Provisions:

- **Article 23:** Provides the constitutional basis for the composition of the Security Council, including permanent and elected members.
- **Article 27:** Establishes the voting framework under which substantive Security Council decisions require the required affirmative votes without a negative vote from a permanent member.
- **Article 108:** Prescribes the principal procedure for amending the UN Charter and requires ratification by two-thirds of Member States, including all permanent members.
- **Article 109:** Provides for a Charter-review conference and establishes an alternative framework for considering amendments.
- **French-Mexican Initiative:** Seeks voluntary restraint in the use of veto during situations involving mass atrocities rather than immediate abolition of the veto.
- **African Position:** The African Union's reform model seeks **2 permanent African seats with veto rights if the veto continues**, along with 5 non-permanent seats.
- **UPSC Mains Analytical Line:** *UNSC reform requires reconciling two competing principles: the democratic demand for representative multilateralism and the institutional privileges historically granted to major powers to secure their participation in collective security.*