2025-26 Model United Nations Regional Conferences

Security Council Reform Background Guide

United Nations Security Council Reform

Committee: United Nations General Assembly – Administrative and Budgetary Committee

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I. Introduction

Since its creation in 1945, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has stood as the UN's most powerful body, responsible for maintaining international peace and security. However, over the past seven decades, global power dynamics have shifted dramatically — yet the structure of the Council has remained largely unchanged.

Many member states argue that the Council's composition no longer reflects the geopolitical realities of the 21st century. Questions of representation, legitimacy, and effectiveness have fueled ongoing debate about how to reform the UNSC to ensure it remains credible, representative, and capable of fulfilling its mandate.

II. Mandate and Structure of the Security Council

The Security Council is composed of 15 members:

- 5 Permanent Members (P5) with veto power: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
- 10 Non-Permanent Members, elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly on a regional basis.

The UNSC's powers include authorizing peacekeeping missions, imposing sanctions, and approving the use of force. Each decision requires nine affirmative votes, including the concurrence of all permanent members (the "veto rule").

III. Historical Background of Reform Efforts

The Security Council's composition has been changed only once — in 1965, when membership expanded from 11 to 15 members. Since then, reform has been discussed in various formats:

- 1993: The Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Security Council Reform was established by the General Assembly.
- 2005: The High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change proposed expanding membership and improving working methods.
- 2009–Present: The Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) process continues under the General Assembly framework, though progress remains slow due to divisions among member states.

IV. Key Issues in the Debate

1. Representation and Legitimacy

Critics argue the current Council reflects the power structure of the post–World War II era, not today's multipolar world.

- Africa and Latin America lack permanent representation.
- Emerging powers such as India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan (the "G4 nations") have advocated for permanent seats.
- The African Union (AU) proposes at least two permanent seats for Africa, with veto power.

2. The Veto Power

The veto remains the most controversial feature. While it ensures great power participation, it often paralyzes the Council — as seen in recent deadlocks over Syria, Ukraine, and Gaza. Proposals include:

- Abolishing the veto altogether.
- Restricting its use in cases of mass atrocities.
- Expanding veto power to new permanent members.

3. Working Methods and Transparency

Non-permanent members often criticize the Council's opaque decision-making and limited consultations. Proposals call for:

- More open briefings and consultations.
- Greater coordination with the General Assembly and regional organizations.
- Rotational presidencies that promote inclusivity.

4. Regional Balance

There is growing consensus that reforms must address regional equity, ensuring fair representation for Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and small island developing states (SIDS).

V. Major Country and Bloc Positions

Bloc / Country	Position Summary
P5 (China, France, Russia, UK, US)	Support reform "in principle," but differ on scope. France and the UK support expansion; China and Russia prefer limited changes.
G4 (Germany, Japan, India, Brazil)	Seek new permanent seats; propose 25-member Council with six new permanent members.
Uniting for Consensus (UfC)	Oppose adding new permanent seats; support only more non-permanent members. Includes Italy, Pakistan, Mexico, and South Korea.
African Union (Ezulwini Consensus)	Calls for two permanent and five non-permanent African seats, with full veto rights.
L.69 Group	Developing countries from Africa, Latin America, and Asia advocating for expansion and equitable representation.

VI. Questions to Consider

1. Should new permanent members be added? If so, which regions or countries should be represented?

2. Should new permanent members have veto power?
3. How can the UNSC be reformed without undermining its ability to act swiftly in crises?
4. What mechanisms could improve the Council's accountability to the General Assembly?
5. Can consensus be achieved through regional compromises (e.g., rotating permanent seats within regions)?

VII. Possible Reform Models

Model	Description
G4 Model	Adds six new permanent members (G4 + 2 African states) and four new non-permanent members.
UfC Model	Adds only non-permanent seats, possibly with longer or renewable terms.
African Union Model	Adds two permanent African seats with veto and five non-permanent African seats.
Intermediate Model	Creates new "semi-permanent" seats with renewable terms, as a compromise.

VIII. Conclusion

Security Council reform represents one of the most enduring and politically charged debates in the UN system. While nearly all Member States agree that reform is necessary, deep divisions persist over how it should be achieved. Delegates must balance the ideals of fairness and inclusiveness with the practical need for an effective and decisive Security Council.

True reform may depend not only on institutional redesign but also on the political will of both emerging and established powers to share responsibility for global peace and security.

IX. Recommended Readings

1. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 62/557 (2008) – Intergovernmental Negotiations on Security Council Reform.
2. “A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility” (2004) – Report of the High-Level Panel.
3. The Ezulwini Consensus (African Union, 2005).
4. Global Policy Forum: *Security Council Reform Chronology*.
5. UN Charter, Chapters V–VII.