

UN SECURITY COUNCIL

The Security Council is the UN's decision-making body conferred by the UN Charter with "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security." Empowered to pass legally-binding resolutions impacting Member States, the Council has several tools at its disposal for conflict prevention and management. Chapter VI of the Charter authorizes the Council to make recommendations to resolve threats to international peace and security by peaceful means. Under Chapter VII, the Council can authorize measures that include sanctions and military force.

The Security Council consists of 15 members - five permanent and ten rotating. The rotating members are elected to two-year terms by the UN General Assembly. The five permanent members (known as the P5) are the U.S., U.K., France, China and Russia. The presidency of the Security Council rotates monthly. Presidents oversee operations, manage workflow, chair discussions and set the Council's agenda.

Resolutions of the Council must receive affirmative votes from nine of the fifteen members and not receive a negative vote from any P5 state. As such, the P5 can unilaterally veto any substantive decisions.

Since its establishment, the Council has served as a key forum for addressing international security challenges. These successes include authorizing more than 70 peacekeeping missions to stabilize conflict zones, establishing international sanctions for North Korea and ISIS and deepening international cooperation to achieve nuclear nonproliferation.

At times, the P5 veto power has prevented the Council from fully asserting its role as a guarantor of global order. This was especially true at the height of U.S.-Soviet tensions during the Cold War. While the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought on a period of increased cooperation, disputes over crises in the Middle East and Ukraine have exposed divisions among the P5 and limited the Council's effectiveness in some contexts. Generally, the P5 compartmentalize the Council's business, cooperating on most issues, while taking especially contentious topics into more narrowly focused forums.

America in the Security Council

In its most recent terms serving as President of the Security Council, the U.S. used its position to condemn the coup in Myanmar, speak out against Iran's human rights violations and build on efforts for ethical AI governance.

America is also spearheading efforts in the Council on the crisis in Haiti. In October 2022, the U.S. penned Resolution 2653 with Mexico, establishing an arms embargo, travel ban and asset freeze against individuals threatening "the peace, security or stability of Haiti." Adopted unanimously, sanctions were renewed.

