

The United Nations

Day 35. Charter, organs, record, reform — and India's case for the permanent seat — in a single pass. *Revise → write a little → don't break the chain.*

PART A Origins and the Charter

I From Functional Unions to San Francisco

"The United Nations was not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell." — Dag Hammarskjöld, Secretary-General (1953–1961)

Established on **24 October 1945**; began with **51 states**, today **193 members**. The only genuinely worldwide and universal international organisation, with a broad agenda across almost every field of governance — the premier platform for matters that cut across national borders, which no single state, however powerful, can settle alone. States use it to discuss, develop and expand international law on trade, human rights, freedom of navigation and maritime use, counter-terrorism and more. The **General Assembly** sits at the centre of the structure as the main venue for multilateral diplomacy.

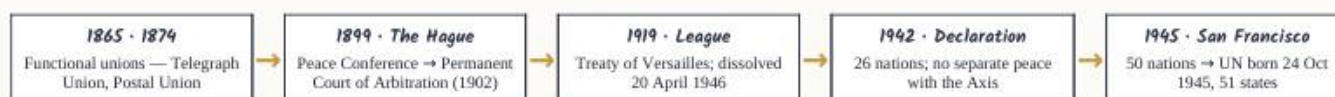
Precursors — functional cooperation first, political union later

- **International Telegraph Union**, 1865 (later the International Telecommunication Union) and the **Universal Postal Union**, 1874 — both now UN specialised agencies. States first built international organisations from 1865 to cooperate on specific functional issues.
- **International Peace Conference, The Hague (1899)** → tools for peaceful settlement, averting war, codifying the rules of war → the Convention for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes → the **Permanent Court of Arbitration** (operational 1902).
- **League of Nations (1919)** → founded after the First World War under the Treaty of Versailles; the direct forerunner of the UN. Mandate: "to promote international cooperation and to achieve peace and security." Dissolved on **20 April 1946**, transferring its assets, library and archives to the new UN Secretariat.

Origins

- The term "United Nations" was coined by US President **Franklin D. Roosevelt**.
- **1942** → 26 nations signed *The Declaration of the United Nations*, pledging to fight together against the Axis Powers (Rome–Berlin–Tokyo) and not to make a separate peace.
- **25 April – 26 June 1945** → the *United Nations Conference on International Organization* at San Francisco; representatives of 50 nations.
- Charter ratified by China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, the United States and most other signatories → the UN formally came into being on **24 October 1945**.
- Seventy-five years on it still works for peace and security, international law, human rights and humanitarian relief — while taking on tasks its founders never anticipated: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and collective climate action.

The road to the Charter



2 Purposes and Principles of the Charter

The four purposes

1. To maintain international peace and security.
2. To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for equal rights and the **self-determination of peoples**.
3. To cooperate in solving international economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems, and in promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.
4. To be a centre for harmonising the actions of nations in attaining these common ends.

The five principles

- **Sovereign equality** of all members.
- Members fulfil their Charter obligations in **good faith**.
- Disputes settled by **peaceful means**, without endangering peace, security and justice.
- Members refrain from the **threat or use of force** against any other state.
- Neither the UN nor its members interfere in matters essentially within a state's **domestic jurisdiction**.

3 The Organs at a Glance

Organ	Composition	Core function
General Assembly	All 193 members; one state, one vote	Chief deliberative body — the “World Parliament of Nations”; recommendations, not binding law
Security Council	15 — the P5 plus 10 non-permanent members on two-year terms	Primary responsibility for international peace and security; the only organ whose decisions bind members
Economic and Social Council	54 members; usually a two-month session each year	Coordinates the economic and social work of the UN and its specialised agencies — the UN Family
Trusteeship Council	Chapter XIII; supervised 11 Trust Territories under seven administering states	Prepared them for self-government and independence; operations suspended 1 November 1994
International Court of Justice	Seat at the Peace Palace, The Hague — the only main organ not based in New York	Settles legal disputes between states; advisory opinions for authorised organs and agencies
Secretariat	Over 41,000 international civil servants from the 193 members	Serves the other organs and runs the day-to-day work; headed by the Secretary-General

4 The General Assembly

The chief deliberative body — the nearest thing the world has to a global parliament, and known as the “**World Parliament of Nations**”.

- **Membership** → every member state is represented; one state, one vote, on the basis of sovereign equality.
- **Voting** → ordinary questions by **simple majority**; important questions by a **two-thirds majority**.
- **Powers** → may discuss and make recommendations on any matter within the Charter. Its resolutions carry the weight of world public opinion, morality and law, but are **not legally binding** on members. It does not enact law like a national parliament.
- **Key responsibilities** → appoints the Secretary-General on the Security Council’s recommendation; elects the non-permanent members of the Council; approves the UN budget.
- Rests on the premise that a “war of words” is better than one fought with bombs.

5 The Security Council

The Charter gives it **primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security**. It can meet at any hour, and its decisions are binding on members.

- **Composition** → 15 members. The **P5** — permanent, veto-holding, nuclear-armed: China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, the United States. Ten **non-permanent** members, elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms.
- **Functions** → asks parties to settle peacefully; may set out principles of settlement or mediate; may direct the Secretary-General to investigate and report; works to secure a ceasefire once conflict breaks out; with the parties’ consent, deploys peacekeeping forces (troops or observers) to separate combatants and ease tension.
- Its decisions, unlike the Assembly’s, are legally binding and enforceable — through military action or economic sanctions — under the principle of **collective security**.

The veto

A “no” vote by any permanent member blocks a substantive decision. The Charter frames this as the “**Great Power unanimity**” rule.

6 ECOSOC, the Trusteeship Council and the Secretariat

Economic and Social Council

The absence of war does not by itself secure a peaceful order. The founders created machinery for social and economic advancement, to reduce the root causes of future conflict; **ECOSOC** carries this task.

- 54 members; usually meets for a two-month session each year.
- Coordinates the economic and social work of the UN and its specialised agencies — together known as the **UN Family** or **UN System**.
- Work includes the economic development of developing countries, development and humanitarian aid, promotion of human rights, action against discrimination against minorities, the spread of science and technology, and cooperation on housing, family planning and crime prevention.

Trusteeship Council

- Created under **Chapter XIII** of the Charter (1945) to supervise 11 Trust Territories administered by seven member states, and to prepare them for self-government and independence.

- All Trust Territories attained independence or self-government by 1994. Operations **suspended on 1 November 1994**; a resolution of 25 May 1994 dropped the requirement of annual meetings — it now meets only as and when needed.

Secretariat

- Services the other organs and administers the day-to-day work; over **41,000** staff worldwide, drawn from the 193 members.
- Staff serve as **international civil servants** and pledge not to take instructions from any government or outside authority.
- Headed by the **Secretary-General**, appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council.

Nine Secretaries-General to date:

Trygve Lie · Norway	Dag Hammarskjöld · Sweden	U Thant · Myanmar	Kurt Waldheim · Austria	Javier Pérez de Cuéllar · Peru
Boutros Boutros-Ghali · Egypt	Kofi Annan · Ghana	Ban Ki-moon · Republic of Korea	António Guterres · Portugal (current)	

7 The International Court of Justice

Established in 1945 under the Charter as the **principal judicial organ**; seat at the **Peace Palace, The Hague** — the only main organ not based in New York. Judgments are enforced by the Security Council under the Charter — but a permanent member can veto enforcement.

Two-fold jurisdiction

Contentious cases — legal disputes submitted by states, decided in accordance with international law. **Advisory proceedings** — opinions on legal questions referred by authorised UN organs and specialised agencies.

The bench “as a whole must represent the principal legal systems of the world and the main forms of civilization.” — on the composition of the Court

Role in dispute settlement

- Uses **negotiation, enquiry and mediation** for the pacific settlement of disputes between states.
- Only states that are UN members and parties to the Court’s Statute, or that have accepted its jurisdiction, appear in contentious cases. Judgment is **final, binding on the parties, and without appeal**.

Achievements

- Guarantees every party a fair and impartial hearing — the **Kulbhushan Jadhav** case, where it asked Pakistan not to proceed with the execution.
- Laid down principles for judging disputes — baselines on territorial waters, fishing rights, and calculating the continental shelf.
- Settled the **El Salvador–Honduras** border dispute and the **Cameroon–Nigeria** conflict.
- Advisory opinions that set the tone for post-conflict affairs — declaring in 1971 that South Africa’s presence in **Namibia** was illegal; admitting the genocide case against **Myanmar** over Rohingya atrocities.

Limitations

- No jurisdiction to try individuals for war crimes or crimes against humanity; jurisdiction is confined to **states**.
- Individuals, corporations, NGOs and other non-state bodies cannot participate directly, keeping many human-rights and humanitarian issues outside its reach.
- Can hear a dispute only when one or more states request it. Jurisdiction rests on **consent, not compulsion**.
- Lacks full separation of powers: permanent members can veto enforcement, even in cases they consented to be bound by.
- Larger powers such as the US, and allies like Israel, have openly refused to comply; developing countries criticise it for serving Western interests.

Prabhash Ranjan on the Russia–Ukraine dispute: the Court raised the question of whether a state may unilaterally use force against another to punish or stop an alleged genocide, but did not rule on whether Russia had violated the Genocide Convention, as that is a matter of merits — which suggests Russia’s use of force is hard to defend under the Convention. Cynics note that as a permanent member Russia can veto enforcement of ICJ decisions; yet the indifference of authoritarian populist governments to international law does not lessen its importance.

Way forward: the most far-reaching attempt yet to apply the rule of law to international disputes. Scholars call it the UN’s least effective body, with a modest effect on post-war international law — even so, it remains the archetype of international adjudication and, as the “principal judicial organ,” holds a special place among international courts.

PART C The Record — Peace, Development, Achievements, Failures

8 Peace and Security: the Envisaged Role

Collective security

Aggression by one state against another is treated as an **assault on all members**. The Security Council is the key organ, and acts against an aggressor only when all five permanent members agree.

- The Cold War between the US and the USSR blocked the UN from resolving many crises, despite the Charter’s careful drafting. Even so, it mediated ceasefires and negotiations and supplied peacekeeping forces that helped defuse several conflicts.
- Its record in non-political work — refugee care, human rights, economic planning, health, population and hunger — has been far stronger.
- A veto halts action and negates the principle. During the Cold War (1945–1991) the Council was repeatedly paralysed by vetoes.

Collective security — the design, and the point at which it breaks



9 The Record in Major Conflicts

On balance the UN has outperformed the League of Nations, especially where the interests of the major powers were not directly engaged (the Congo civil war, 1960–1964). Like the League, it has often failed where a great power's interest was at stake (**Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968**).

Conflict	What the UN did	Verdict
Palestine 1947 onwards	Partitioned Palestine and created Israel; supplied supervising forces, arranged ceasefires, cared for Arab refugees	One of its most contested decisions, rejected by the Arab states. Three Arab–Israeli wars followed (1948–49, 1967, 1973). The question stands unsettled — Arab division and steadfast US support for Israel
Korean War 1950–53	The Council quickly condemned North Korea's invasion and called on members to aid South Korea	The one time the UN acted decisively in a crisis touching a superpower's interest — possible only because the USSR was boycotting the Council over the exclusion of the PRC
Suez Crisis 1956	Council condemnation vetoed → the General Assembly passed the "Uniting for Peace" resolution (64 to 5), demanded withdrawal, and sent 5,000 peacekeepers	After Nasser nationalised the Canal, Israel, Britain and France invaded Egypt. Pressure from the US and USSR was decisive, but the UN was largely effective in keeping the peace. Far less success in the 1967 war
Iran–Iraq War 1980–88	Years of mediation, then a brokered ceasefire	Helped by the near-exhaustion of both sides
Gulf War 1991	After Iraq invaded oil-rich Kuwait (August 1990), the Council demanded withdrawal, then authorised a large force	Kuwait liberated in a brief, decisive campaign. Critics: Kuwait was helped only because the West needed its oil — small states such as East Timor (seized by Indonesia in 1975) received no such help

10 Why Peace Enforcement Has Fallen Short

No standing UN army

No consensus among the P5

The veto power of the P5

Shortage of funds

Member states unwilling to cooperate

11 Socio-Economic Development — MDGs to SDGs

Most of the UN's resources go to the Charter's pledge to "promote higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development." — **UN Charter**

- The organisation is popularly linked mainly to peace and security, but the premise here is different: economic and social well-being is a **precondition for lasting peace**.
- It sets priorities and goals for cooperation and provides a forum, through global conferences, for new developmental agendas — the FAO, for instance, works against famine.
- It has brought human rights, sustainable development, environmental protection, good governance and the advancement of women into the development paradigm.
- The accepted approach today is **sustainable development** — growth that combines economic opportunity, social well-being and environmental protection.
- Millennium Declaration (2000)** → the Millennium Summit adopted the **eight MDGs**: measurable, time-bound goals for 2015 — eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, environmental sustainability, gender equality, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, fighting HIV/AIDS and malaria, and a global partnership for development.
- 2030 Agenda (2015)** → world leaders endorsed the **17 SDGs**; formally adopted on 1 January 2016.
- Three further 2015 agreements underpin the global development agenda: the **Addis Ababa Action Agenda** (financing for development), the **Paris Agreement** (climate change), the **Sendai Framework** (disaster risk reduction).

12 Achievements

- Decolonisation** — among its finest contributions. Eighty current members were colonies in 1945; the UN helped many of some **750 million people** gain freedom, and made international relations more democratic.
- Peacekeeping** — since 1945, UN forces have mediated **172 peaceful settlements** across more than 60 field missions; peacekeepers currently work in around 20 hotspots.
- Human rights** — a complete body of human-rights law: civil, political, economic, social and cultural. The **International Bill of Human Rights** comprises the UDHR (1948) and the two International Covenants of 1966.
- Global law** — more international law produced in seven decades than in all prior history: Genocide Convention (1948), ICCPR (1966), ICESCR (1966), ICERD (1966), CEDAW (1979), UNCLOS (1982), Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), CTBT (1996).

- **Poverty and hunger** — feeds and aids around 80 million people across 80 countries; vaccinates millions of children and saves some 3 million lives a year; protects and assists 67.7 million people fleeing persecution, famine and war; supports maternal health for over a million women each month.
- **Development goals** — completed the eight MDGs; now pursues the 17 SDGs to 2030.
- **Adjudication** — the ICJ has settled significant disputes, though the veto has limited its reach at key moments.
- **Climate and humanitarian scale** — works with 195 countries to hold warming below 2°C; 104,000 peacekeepers in 14 operations; addresses a global water problem affecting over two billion people; a US\$24.7 billion appeal for the humanitarian needs of 145 million people; assists about 50 states a year with elections.
- **Nobel recognition** — the UN Peacekeeping Forces (1988); the UN and Secretary-General **Kofi Annan** jointly (2001); the World Food Programme (2020).

13 Shortcomings and Failures to Protect

- **Nuclear disarmament** — despite the NPT (in force from 1970), states including North Korea, Israel, Pakistan and India developed nuclear weapons in defiance of the NPT and the Partial Test Ban Treaty, exposing the UN's inability both to advance disarmament and to enforce rules on violators.
- **International Criminal Court** (established 2002) — has charged several war criminals, but is criticised for targeting African leaders while Western states that also committed war crimes go unprosecuted.
- **Failures to protect** — over 800,000 killed in **Rwanda** in 100 days; 8,000 Muslim men and boys killed at **Srebrenica's "safe zone"** (1995); an estimated 300,000 dead in **Darfur**; more than 13,000 killed by Boko Haram in Nigeria.
- The **"Body Count"** assessment attributes, as a result of US foreign policy, "over 220,000 people... killed in Afghanistan and 80,000 in Pakistan," along with a million deaths in Iraq.
- **Gaza** — 2,200 Palestinians killed as homes, schools, hospitals and UN shelters were bombed. With the US vetoing action against Israel, the Security Council failed to act.
- **Arab Spring and after** — regime changes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen; over 40,000 dead in Libya, over 220,000 in Syria, more than 50 million displaced, and the rise of ISIS.
- **Structural resistance** — the Security Council is charged with being arrogant, secretive and undemocratic, yet the veto powers resist change, while great-power breaches of the Charter keep eroding the organisation's effectiveness.

Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights **Navi Pillay** warned that "Israel was purposefully violating international law in its military offensive in Gaza and that world powers should hold it accountable for possible war crimes." — **Navi Pillay**

"Short-term geopolitical considerations and national interest, narrowly defined, have repeatedly taken precedence over intolerable human suffering and grave breaches of — and long-term threats to — international peace and security." — **Navi Pillay, to the Security Council**

PART D Reform of the United Nations

14 Collective Security under the Charter — the Challenges

Article I of the Charter calls for "effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of peace." — **UN Charter, Article I**

- **Sovereignty over collective action** → states are unwilling to place collective action above their own sovereign interests. Critics hold that collective security has never been fully implemented worldwide, and would carry real meaning only if it extended equally to strong and weak states.
- **Over-reliance on a few powers** → the Council depends heavily on states such as the US, UK, Germany and Japan for support; this dependence lets them act independently during conflicts without Council authorisation.
- **Lack of regional diversity** → the narrow composition of the Council weakens its capacity to maintain peace. Small and medium states feel excluded, since the system benefits them only when the interests of a "big" power, above all the US, are at stake.
- **An undefined, idealistic concept** → collective security has never been defined by treaty and can therefore be exploited by powerful states in a lopsided Council. Its flaws must be addressed, including the newer duties never originally conceived — preventing terrorism and the spread of WMDs — and expanding the Council to manage the interests of states seen as driving these new threats.
- The flaws do not make the system useless; they mark the reforms it needs.

15 Need for Reform

Head	The evidence	Scholar
Institutional	Structural weakness, above all in the Security Council. The P5 veto is used to create logjams — Russia's veto over Ukraine	Richard Falk — the dominance of Western liberal democracies within the UN framework perpetuates historic power imbalances
Peace and security	Council paralysis through the decade-long Syrian Civil War, as competing US and Russian interests blocked resolutions; failure to prevent the Rohingya crisis once the warning signs were clear	Michael Barnett (<i>Empire of Humanity</i>) — the UN has worked reactively rather than building preventive capacity, prolonging suffering
Climate and global governance	UNFCCC and conferences such as COP28 gather all nations, but outcomes fall short; Paris commitments remain partly unfulfilled as major emitters (China, the US, the EU) resist proportionate burden-sharing	Jeffrey Sachs — reliance on voluntary pledges rather than binding commitments limits the UN's capacity to handle existential crises

Development and inequality	The MDGs cut extreme poverty, but the SDGs struggle with low finance and global economic shocks; COVID-19 deepened inequalities as the UN could not ensure equitable vaccine distribution	—
Representation and legitimacy	The P5 still reflects post-1945 geopolitics. India, Brazil and South Africa, with growing global weight, remain outside permanent membership; India's consistent peacekeeping record and climate leadership through the International Solar Alliance mark it as a deserving candidate	Anne-Marie Slaughter and Thomas G. Weiss — the UN must reflect current power realities. Edward Luck (<i>UN Security Council: Practice and Promise</i>) — credibility depends on adapting membership to geopolitical and demographic shifts
Reform and resistance	The 2005 World Summit Outcome Document called for a more representative Council, but members found no unanimity; the main obstacle is the P5's unwillingness to dilute the veto. The UN also stays dependent on major contributors — the US paid 22% of the regular budget in 2022	Thomas Weiss — meaningful reform cannot occur amid such entrenched interests without changing the equation on equitable burden-sharing
Technology and new threats	Cyber threats and artificial intelligence outpace current frameworks; there is no comprehensive UN treaty on cyber governance, and COVID-19 exposed the WHO's inability to mobilise timely global responses	Ian Goldin — the UN must be proactive and innovative, working through strengthened multilateral cooperation

16 Restructuring — Scholarly Positions

A global debate on restructuring has run since the Security Council's Heads of Government met on **31 January 1992**. The aim: a UN — and above all a Council — that is more democratic, effective and responsive to a changing world, since its tasks now reach almost every field of human activity.

Scholar	Position
Miguel Ruiz-Cabañas Izquierdo	Three efforts matter as the UN looks to its next 75 years: a worldwide antiviral consortium, safeguarding biodiversity, and stronger early-warning systems inside UN institutions
Harsh V. Pant	Maintaining the status quo is no longer an option; if reform fails, India may look for solutions elsewhere, reshaping New Delhi's relationship with the UN — and India would not be alone
Tiejun Yu	Great-power rivalry still shapes world politics and the order remains one of nation states, so structural and functional reform will be a long process filled with grievances; even so, it gives states a public forum whose legitimacy no other body can replace
John Ikenberry	Supports a more inclusive structure that accommodates new powers and regional organisations such as the African Union and ASEAN, in keeping with a multipolar world
Samantha Power	The UN should adopt a more assertive posture on humanitarian and human-rights concerns, and put such policies into practice
Shashi Tharoor and Kofi Annan	Stress the necessity of UNSC reform; the African Union's demand for representation and the G4 proposals for permanent membership show how urgent it has become
Joel Ng	Legitimacy must be restored in fact and in perception, through two elements — effectiveness and representation. The UN should become more representative across its whole structure, not only the Council; people and ideas from the East and South remain under-represented, and agencies must deliver public goods and earn credit for it

17 Proposed Models for Council Reform

Model	Who	The demand
Ezulwini Consensus African Union, 2005	Africa's only unified plan	Strong continental representation for Africa
G4	Brazil, Germany, India, Japan	Backing one another's bids since the late 1990s; expand the categories of membership and reform working methods. Brazil and India are also in L69. The G4 has twice reopened the reform debate in the past decade
L69	Forty-two developing countries from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific — eleven African Union states, eleven CARICOM nations and two CARICOM observers	"United by a common cause — to achieve, lasting and comprehensive reform of the UN Security Council." Backs a non-permanent seat for small island developing states in every region
CARICOM	The Caribbean grouping, increasingly active	A 2013 communiqué called for a non-permanent seat for Small Island Developing States in all regions and backed the African position. Its draft resolution proposes six new permanent seats — two for Africa (decided by Africa), two for Asia, one for Latin America and the Caribbean, one for Western Europe and other states — elected by the General Assembly
Uniting for Consensus (UfC)	Argentina, Canada, Italy, Malta, Mexico, Pakistan, South Korea, Spain, Turkey and others	Grew from a "coffee club" of Italy, Spain, Mexico and Pakistan alarmed at the G4's momentum, believing neither the G4 nor their own regions would represent their national views

"Africa is of the view that so long as it exists, and as a matter of common justice, it should be made available to all permanent members of the Security Council, even though it is opposed in principle to the veto." — **Ezulwini Consensus, 2005**

18 Reforms Undertaken So Far · Guterres's Three Pillars

- **Membership** → expanded from 51 founding members to 193, mostly during 1960s decolonisation.
- **Security Council** → non-permanent members raised from **6 to 10 in 1963**; recurring intergovernmental meetings on working methods and representation.
- **New agencies and programmes** → UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, among others.
- **Human rights** → the Human Rights Council replaced the Commission on Human Rights in **2006**.
- **Sustainable development** → the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs replaced the MDGs.
- **Development coherence** → North–South negotiations on a New International Economic Order in the 1970s; **Kofi Annan's** coherence reforms in the 1990s.

Soon after taking office, Secretary-General **António Guterres** announced wide changes across three areas, with three internal review teams overseeing each.

Pillar	Content
Development system	Restructured for coherence and delivery
Peace and security architecture	Redesigned in five elements (below)
Management — the Secretariat	Administrative reform of the UN's own machinery

The five elements of the peace-and-security redesign

1. Creating a Department of Political and Peace-building Affairs and a Department of Peace Operations.
2. A single political-operational structure under Assistant Secretaries-General with regional responsibilities, reporting to the Under-Secretaries-General for Political and Peace-building Affairs and for Peace Operations.
3. A Standing Principals' Group of these two Under-Secretaries-General, under the Secretary-General's chairmanship.
4. Strengthening priority areas for coherence across the peace and security pillar.
5. Several non-structural changes in the pillar's day-to-day work.

19 Kofi Annan's "In Larger Freedom" (2005)

Two routes to a 24-member Council — Annan stated no preference

PLAN A

Six new permanent members + three new non-permanent members



PLAN B

Eight seats in a new class on renewable four-year terms + one non-permanent seat

Total: 24 members

Total: 24 members

In 2005 the Secretary-General urged consensus on expansion, offering the two options without stating a preference.

The direction of reform is clear: a Council that reflects contemporary power, protects legitimacy through representation and effectiveness, and adapts to new security challenges. Major-power rivalry means the process will be slow, but the forum the UN sustains has no substitute.

PART E India and the Security Council

20 India and the UN — the Approach

- **Harsh V. Pant** → Indian leadership holds that working in and through bodies like the UN serves both India and the wider international community. India saw the UN as the central instrument for peace during the Cold War; since then its engagement has shifted, and it now spearheads reforms to make the body more representative, credible and effective.
- Among these reforms, **UNSC reform** is of special interest. From the early 21st century India has pursued permanent membership, building collective positions through the **G4** (from late 2004) and the **L69** group (from 2007), and cultivating individual pledges.
- **April 2023** → EAM **S. Jaishankar** said India would soon become a permanent member, arguing that the West cannot keep its door closed to a rising economic power for long.
- **Harsh V. Pant** is cautious: reform is highly unlikely soon, yet India keeps spending precious diplomatic capital on the seat, treating it as an almost indispensable foreign-policy priority.
- **Why the Council must change** → the UN was formed after the Second World War and still mirrors that order, not today's distribution of power. It failed to prevent the genocides in **Rwanda** and **Bosnia**, the interventions in **Iraq** and **Libya**, and the enforcement of law in the **Nicaragua** and **South China Sea** disputes; failure was visible in **Syria** and **Yemen**, and is visible now in the **Russia–Ukraine** war. Whenever a veto-wielding P5 interest is engaged, the Council fails.

The process of reform — the real barrier

Charter amendment needs **two-thirds of the General Assembly**, and **two-thirds of the Security Council including all permanent members**. The second threshold is the barrier: most P5 members (apart from the UK and France) oppose significant change and can veto it.

The five reform issues

- Categories of membership
- The veto
- Regional representation
- Size and working of an enlarged Council
- Council–Assembly relationship

21 India's Case for a Permanent Seat

A permanent seat has been on India's agenda since the Cold War's end; the collapse of the Soviet Union left India without its primary ally and forced a reorientation.

- **C. Raja Mohan** → India first saw veto power as essential to its national interest, if only to keep others out of its affairs.
- **Manu Bhagavan** → economic reforms turned India into the new "Asian Tiger"; the Pokhran detonation announced its entry into the elite nuclear club. With this status, India embraced a narrative of **exceptionalism** and demanded a permanent seat in recognition of its significance.
- Securing its rightful place in the "comity of nations" has been a goal since Nehru. As the Council reflects the archaic post-1945 order, it must be restructured to reflect India's current standing.
- **The objective basis** → population, size, GDP and economic potential, civilizational legacy, cultural diversity, and a working democratic system.
- **Contributions** → the most consistent and **third-largest contributor of troops** to UN peacekeeping; a demonstrated ability, as a non-permanent member, to work the machinery of global governance.
- **Harsh V. Pant** and **Chirayu Thakkar** → India is expanding its footprint in multilateral bodies and preparing to become a global rule-maker; a revisionist China's rise has pushed the US to seek India's role in upholding the rules-based order — but India cannot play that role without a permanent seat.
- **Aarshi Tirkey** → the Council's decision-making is archaic and has obstructed action: China's obstruction meant the **1267 Sanctions Committee** took nearly a decade to designate Masood Azhar as a global terrorist. Reform is urgent to make the process representative, legitimate, efficient and transparent.

"Only reformed multilateralism with a reformed United Nations at its centre can meet the aspirations of humanity." — **PM Narendra Modi, ECOSOC speech**

22 Points in Favour of India

- Russia, the US, France and the UK have consistently supported India's cause; more than **50 other countries** have openly done so.
- At the **2023 G20 Summit**, US President Joe Biden reaffirmed support for India's permanent membership.
- The only permanent member opposing India's entry is **China**; it supports reform in principle but has never explicitly backed India's expansion call.
- India has served **eight times** as a non-permanent member; in 2021 it won its eighth term with **184 of 192 votes**.
- India is part of the **G4**, working to expand both permanent and non-permanent seats; in 2021 the G4 reiterated the need to enlarge the Council to meet complex threats.
- **Harsh V. Pant** and **Chirayu Thakkar** → India has no militarised disputes and shows no revanchist policy beyond standing issues with China and Pakistan, so the risk of abuse of power is low and it could take a relatively impartial global role.
- India has good relations with both the developing and the developed worlds — part of the **G77** and (partially) the **G7**, and a member of the **G20** — positioning it as an ideal candidate.

23 Challenges to India's Demand

- **Opposition to the G4** → regional rivals formed **Uniting for Consensus** (the "Coffee Club" — Italy, Pakistan, Spain, Argentina, Canada, Mexico, South Korea), which opposes new permanent seats but supports enlarging the non-permanent category.
- The **African Group** wants two permanent seats for Africa, citing historical injustice and the continent's weight on the Council's agenda, to rotate among African states.
- The rigid amendment process (two-thirds plus all P5) makes expansion look like a **pipe dream**.
- The US, UK, France and Russia express support, but the US has offered **no formal written backing**.
- Given India's frequent alignment with Russia and China (BRICS, SCO, AIIB), the US and the West suspect it of belonging to a counter-hegemonic bloc, so American support is of questionable seriousness.
- **The China factor** → the primary obstacle; China presses for a "**package solution**" acceptable to all, through the widest possible consultation.
- Rivalries run deep: many Europeans oppose Germany, Argentina questions Brazil, Pakistan opposes India. Reform is like a **Rubik's Cube** — it will languish while divisions are so sharp.
- **Aarshi Tirkey** → experts question India's readiness to share the financial, material and political burden. India contributes about **\$23.4 million** to the UN's roughly **\$3-billion** operational budget; the question is whether New Delhi will carry a larger share.

Permanent member	Stated position on India
United States	Supports permanent membership for Japan and India, and a small number of extra non-permanent members
United Kingdom & France	Support the G4 position — permanent seats for Germany, Brazil, India and Japan, and a greater African presence
China	Backs stronger developing-country representation and a greater Indian role, but has not endorsed India's Council ambitions
Russia	Has endorsed India's candidature, though its support is not guaranteed given Moscow–Beijing convergence

24 Evaluation and Policy Suggestions

Scholar	Position
Manu Bhagavan	Whether or not India gets a seat — and especially if it does — India must also work to reform the UN, which needs a capable bureaucracy and resources, and must overcome members pushing narrow national agendas. India should send its most skilled people to serve, raise financial contributions, and provide forces and material for missions

David Held · Thomas Weiss	Held — “layered cosmopolitan perspectives” that account for local, regional and national formations. Weiss — global <i>government</i> , not merely global <i>governance</i> , is the way forward; insights close to the foresight of Gandhi and Nehru
Shyam Saran	There is no point chasing “illusionary goals”; India should focus on building military and economic strength
Harsh V. Pant	India’s credentials as a major power are recognised, but it must still persuade the world of a valid claim; under intense scrutiny on Iran, Israel–Palestine, Sudan, North Korea and Myanmar, India must discard old assumptions and balance national interest with the responsibilities of an emerging power
Richard Roth	The hurdle is that many aspire to a seat, but others are reluctant to grant it
Shashi Tharoor	Any single country, India included, is unlikely to secure a seat alone; reform must open the door to several contenders, or there will be no reform at all
C. Raja Mohan	In global politics it is “not a power of argument but an argument of power” that works; India must build internal strength while working with others to reform the UN
Manu Bhagavan (conclusion)	India has flailed in the UN, its diplomats taking misguided satisfaction in small victories while failing to achieve substance; a permanent seat — its main goal since the 1980s — appears no closer today, “dog bones and patronizing head pats from the United States notwithstanding”
Ramesh Thakur	India might try a “non-cooperation movement” with the UN, over peacekeeping, so that others realise its importance
Kate Sullivan de Estrada · Babak Moussavi	Indian representatives energised the reform deliberations, but procedural obstacles, competing proposals, doubts about an enlarged Council’s legitimacy, geopolitics and status contests made a straightforward solution elusive
Harsh V. Pant · Chirayu Thakkar	Reform is seen too narrowly through representation; two further aspects — resourcing, and a realignment of priorities toward climate change, pandemics, migration, terrorism and cyber threats — must be tackled together
Aarshi Tirkey	If serious about the seat, India must share the responsibilities: raise its financial, material and political contribution, and bring aspirations and obligations into closer alignment

25 Conclusion

The United Nations cannot and should not be expected to answer every problem facing the world. As **Jussi M. Hanhimäki** notes in *The United Nations: A Very Short Introduction*, it often offers ways to reduce tension and resolve problems, performs a great deal of useful humanitarian work, and makes it possible for the poor to improve their situation. It is far from flawless and, like individual states, it constantly needs to improve in behaviour and effectiveness. Yet it remains an organisation the world cannot do without — and the forum it provides, for communication and cooperation among states, has a legitimacy no other body can supply.

PART F Consolidation

26 Power Quotes

“The United Nations was not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell.” — **Dag Hammarskjöld**

“Short-term geopolitical considerations and national interest, narrowly defined, have repeatedly taken precedence over intolerable human suffering and grave breaches of — and long-term threats to — international peace and security.” — **Navi Pillay**

“Only reformed multilateralism with a reformed United Nations at its centre can meet the aspirations of humanity.” — **PM Narendra Modi**

“The UN can be as effective as its members allow it to be.” — **A.B. Vajpayee**

In global politics it is “not a power of argument but an argument of power” that works. — **C. Raja Mohan**

27 Scholar Index

Kofi Annan · Michael Barnett · Manu Bhagavan · Richard Falk · Ian Goldin · António Guterres · Dag Hammarskjöld · Jussi M. Hanhimäki · David Held · John Ikenberry · S. Jaishankar · Edward Luck · Narendra Modi · C. Raja Mohan · Babak Moussavi · Joel Ng · Harsh V. Pant · Navi Pillay · Samantha Power · Prabhash Ranjan · Richard Roth · Miguel Ruiz-Cabañas Izquierdo · Jeffrey Sachs · Shyam Saran · Anne-Marie Slaughter · Kate Sullivan de Estrada · Chirayu Thakkar · Ramesh Thakur · Shashi Tharoor · Aarshi Tirkey · A.B. Vajpayee · Thomas G. Weiss · Tiejun Yu

28 Previous Year Questions

Year	Question
UPSC 2023	Discuss the structure and functions of UNSC.
UPSC 2023	What is the structure and functions of International Court of Justice?
UPSC 2022	Describe the composition of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Discuss its voluntary jurisdiction.
UPSC 2022	Explain the factors which justify India's claim for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council.
UPSC 2021	What measures have been undertaken by the United Nations for its reforms?
UPSC 2020	Enumerate the challenges in the operation of the principles related to collective security in the UN Charter.
UPSC 2020	Discuss the significance and urgency of the UN Security Council reforms. Explain the relevance of the reform proposals made by the UN Secretary General António Guterres for the developing countries.
UPSC 2016	Do you endorse that the United Nations needs major changes in its structures and functioning? Suggest the changes for efficient improvements.
UPSC 2016	Critically analyze China's role in international politics against India's demand for permanent seat in UN Security Council.
UPSC 2014	Is India's quest for a permanent seat in the Security Council a possibility or just a pipe dream? Elaborate with reasons.
UPSC 2013	Bring out the objectives of India seeking permanent seat in Security Council.
UPSC 2010	Bring out India's perspectives and concerns on reform in the UN Security Council.

29 Today's Practice

1. Discuss the structure and functions of UNSC. (UPSC 2023)
2. Enumerate the challenges in the operation of the principles related to collective security in the UN Charter. (UPSC 2020)
3. Explain the factors which justify India's claim for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council. (UPSC 2022)

Model answers to these three follow on the channel [@psirbyamitpratap](#). Every point above is developed at length — scholars, debates and full answer frames — in the **Foundation & OGP** class notes and handouts. Revise, then write.

See you tomorrow with Day 36 — Regionalisation of World Politics.