

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2023 · 20 marks

Discuss the structure and functions of UN Security Council.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves**Intro routes**

R1 Charter's primary responsibility for peace and security → only organ whose decisions bind → but structure decides when those powers can be used

R2 composition settled in 1945, veto sitting inside it → structure and functions are not two lists but one relation

Body flow

15 members: 5 permanent + nuclear-armed / 10 non-permanent, GA-elected, two-year terms → veto blocks substantive decision = "Great Power unanimity" → functions from persuasion to force: settle peacefully / principles of settlement / mediation / SG investigation → ceasefire → peacekeeping troops or observers with consent → decisions bind, enforceable by sanctions or force under collective security (aggression against one = assault on all) → but powers move only on P5 agreement: Korea 1950 (only because USSR was boycotting), Kuwait 1991 → paralysis when interests clash: Cold War, Rwanda, Bosnia, Syria, Ukraine → same structure breeds the critique: no permanent seat for Africa or Latin America, "secretive and undemocratic" → **Edward Luck**: credibility → membership tracking geopolitical and demographic shifts → G4 / Ezulwini / L69

Counter-view

the flaws are not a case against the Council → they mark the reforms it needs, not its uselessness

Conclusion routes

R1 functions are wide, but work only as the structure allows → **Vajpayee**: the UN is as effective as members allow

R2 composition and veto are the precondition for function → until they change, the Council acts only where the great powers already agree

The charter gives the UNSC primary responsibility for international peace & security, & its decisions alone bind members. Its composition settled in 1945, decides when those powers can be used.

The council has 15 members. 5 are permanent & nuclear armed : China, France, the Russian Federation, the UK & the US. 10 non-permanent members are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms. A negative vote by any permanent member blocks a substantive decision, the charter's rule of "Great Power unanimity."

Its functions run from persuasion to force. It asks parties to settle peacefully, sets out principles of settlement or mediates & may direct the Secretary-General to investigate and report. Once fighting begins it works for a ceasefire and, with the parties' consent, sends peacekeeping troops or observers to separate combatants. Unlike Assembly resolutions, its decisions bind and are enforceable by sanctions or military action under collective security: aggression against one member is an assault on all.

These powers move only when the PS agree. Korea in 1950 was the one decisive intervention, possible because the Soviet Union was boycotting the Council; in 1991 it authorised the force that liberated Kuwait. Where PS interests clash it stalls: the Cold war, then Rwanda, Bosnia, Syria and Ukraine.

The critique argues that no permanent seat for Africa or Latin America, and the charge of being "secretive & undemocratic". According to Edward Luck, credibility depends on adapting membership to geopolitical & demographic shifts, as the G4, Ezulwini Consensus and L69 demand. The flaws do not make the Council useless; they mark the reforms it needs.

The functions are wide and they work only as the structure allows. As A.B. Vajpayee said, "the UN can be as effective as its members allow it to be."