

Institutional Paralysis and International Peace: The Role of the United Nations Security Council in Safeguarding Self- Determination

Divya Subramanian (author)¹

University Prep

Abstract

This article explores the principle of self-determination as a fundamental element of national autonomy and geopolitical affairs through the lens of the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) capacity to defend it in the context of the increasingly expansionist and nationalist agendas of powerful member states. The 2014 annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation is the case study analyzed in this paper as a guide for examining the impediments faced by the UNSC in attempts to uphold the self-determination of United Nations (UN) member states due to its structural limitations—specifically the veto power of the five permanent members of the council (P5) inhibiting resolutions intended to protect self-determination from passing. Through the synthesis of academic debates and UN documents, this article considers

potential proposals for UNSC reform, ranging from structural adjustments to veto regulation, with a primary focus on altering the distribution of power between P5 members and non-permanent members to enhance the defensibility of self-determination. This paper contends that unless such reforms are implemented, the UNSC will be ineffective in protecting the self-determination of its member states if a nation's autonomy or territorial integrity is threatened by the military advances of another country, especially as many P5 nations are becoming increasingly aggressive.

Keywords: self-determination, UNSC, Crimea, expansionism, P5

Introduction

In 1918, during the final months of the Great War, then-President Woodrow Wilson of the United States famously advocated for the principle of self-determination of nations as an integral quality for emerging nation-states to establish their place in the modern international state system. With the evolution of geopolitics, self-determination has garnered attention as a key factor in the foundation of a nation-state. Today, with major powers pushing expansionist aspirations as an outlet for rising nationalistic sentiments within their foreign policy agendas, self-determination has a broader significance. It has been used not only as an ideal to enable developing nations to integrate into international affairs, but also as a justification for established world powers to quell such emerging countries, due to a perceived threat they may present to their authority. Self-determination, a principle built on the natural right of existence for a people and their security in being governed by one of their own, has become a rationale for unprovoked

military action wielded by existing strongholds of power against their smaller neighbors, not for fear of invasion but rather of a shift in the ratio of power available for them to claim.

So, in such a situation, can the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which, as an international peace-keeping organization, details its foundational purpose to be the protection of self-determination, defend this principle as a fundamental pillar of an international system assailed by nationalistic aspirations? Considering the political debates on the practical aspects of maintaining national autonomy without other countries exerting their military or political influence, it becomes evident that there is a need for an external force to protect and regulate the establishment and maintenance of self-determination among nations where this right is threatened. Thus, due to self-determination being less of a guarantee under international law at the moment, the credibility of the UNSC becomes especially crucial in the current international order. In the present geopolitical atmosphere, self-determination can only be valued and upheld when the UNSC functions as an effective and efficient legislative body that can defend its right to exist.

Method

Synthesizing political science and historical analysis, this paper assesses the capacity of the UNSC to uphold self-determination. A combination of primary source documents, including the UN Charter and UN General Assembly resolutions, as well as secondary source scholarly articles that examine the structural limitations of the UNSC and its potential, serves as a foundation for the analysis conducted throughout the paper and the steps for the future section. In

addition, this paper employs a case study framework to guide the application of the theory discussed on the topic of the UNSC's ability to safeguard self-determination, with the 2014 annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation serving as the central example. Academic literature heavily informed this region of the article, as did historical analysis.

This article also incorporates the concepts of neorealism and the liberal international order to critique the UNSC's structure and its effectiveness in mitigating geopolitical conflicts. Scholarly debates and evaluations of UNSC reform, as well as the implications of nationalistic foreign policies pursued by P5 members, are given particular attention. This method enables a critical examination of the practical limitations of the UNSC and provides grounded, academically corroborated insights into proposed structural reforms aimed at improving the defensibility of the principle of self-determination on the part of the UNSC.

Self-Determination and the United Nations

Self-determination is the concept that each nation has the right to govern itself, with the people within its borders determining their method of leadership and independence from external governing influences (*Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*, 1960). It enables a government to focus on the development of its own country and, under ideal circumstances, the well-being of its people. Especially since it often refers to the state of national autonomy that emerges within a country following its liberation from colonial or imperial rule by another nation, self-determination advocates for each nation to establish its sovereignty, its right to exist, and its involvement with the world outside its borders.

However, self-determination has come to mean more than Wilson's ideal of a nation and its people existing within its independent borders. Following World War I, there were more distinct nation-states with advanced foreign policies than ever before, kindling a sense of tension between preexisting powers and new neighbors. Self-determination often arises as a question for states experiencing some form of political instability. It is often hindered in its growth by neighboring countries or empires with their own conflicting agendas. This situation is primarily characterized by issues of sovereignty, albeit emerging from differing contexts. In the words of Tomis Kapitan, "These include regions that (i) were formerly dominated by another community but are currently free from that domination because of wars, decolonization, etc., (ii) are currently under some form of internationally sanctioned trusteeship, or (iii) have been accorded the right of secession by a larger state of which it is presently apart" (Kapitan, 2006, p. 366). Of these three, secessionist self-determination often creates a rift between the larger country and the newly established, smaller bordering nations, with unbalanced dominance leading to power struggles between the two.

The Formation and Powers of the United Nations Security Council

Wilson saw a need for international cooperation following the First World War. In his Fourteen Points speech, this final idea was, in his own words, "A general association of nations...formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike" (Wilson, 1918, para. 16). This type of international organization was effectively implemented after the end of

World War II, when the United Nations, particularly the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), was created.

The UNSC outlines its purpose as follows: “to maintain international peace and security in accordance with the principles and purposes of the United Nations; to investigate any dispute or situation which might lead to international friction; to recommend methods of adjusting such disputes or the terms of settlement; to formulate plans for the establishment of a system to regulate armaments; to determine the existence of a threat to the peace or act of aggression and to recommend what action should be taken” (*What is the Security Council?*, n.d., Mandate section). The UNSC is the only UN organization with the power to make mandatory demands that all affected member states must comply with. The Security Council consists of fifteen total members at any given time, of which ten are temporary, elected members, and the remainder are five permanent seats belonging to the victors of the Second World War: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The five permanent members (P5) have the power to veto any resolution presented to the Council, which renders the resolution null and void. With many of these nations pursuing increasingly nationalistic goals, the credibility of the UNSC decreases.

Case Study: Crimea and the Challenge of Enforcing Self-Determination

Historical Background of Crimea

The United Nations recognizes the Autonomous Republic of Crimea as a de jure administrative region of Ukraine (*General Assembly Adopts Resolution Calling upon States Not*

to Recognize Changes in Status of Crimea Region, 2014). Surrounded on all but one side by the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, Crimea is attached to mainland Ukraine only through the Isthmus of Perekop, which connects at the latter's Kherson Oblast. The largest city by population in the region is Sevastopol, which houses a strategically located naval base serving as the headquarters for the Russian Navy's Black Sea Fleet (The Editors of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2025; Jasutis, 2018). Crimea's primary administrative center is Simferopol, the second-most populous city. On February 20, 2014, the Russian Federation invaded the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and completed its annexation on March 21 of the same year, declaring it an official Russian territory known as the Republic of Crimea. While most countries have not recognized the annexation of Crimea, Russia and seventeen other United Nations member states recognize Crimea as a territory of the Russian Federation (*Ten Years of Occupation by the Russian Federation: Human Rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, Ukraine*, 2024).

Long before the 2014 annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, however, Crimea belonged to the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and, prior to that, to tsarist Russia. In 1783, Catherine the Great annexed the Crimean Khanate from the declining Ottoman Empire due to its strategic position, which allowed for control of the Black Sea and neighboring regions, making it part of Russia (The Editors of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2025). After almost two centuries, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic transferred the Crimean Peninsula to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1954. During this time, the ethnic demography of Crimea was roughly seventy-five percent Russian and twenty percent Ukrainian (Cramer, 2014).

Russia viewed this transfer as bolstering Soviet control within the fifteen member states, particularly Ukraine (Cramer, 2014). In 1991, before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Crimea was briefly an autonomous region within the USSR. However, Crimea was again transferred to the newly independent Ukraine following the collapse of the USSR.

Military Annexation of Crimea and Russia's Political Influence

Russia's sights on Crimea did not fade for long. On February 20, 2014, Russia began its military operation to annex the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, which was internationally recognized as a region of Ukraine. On March 21, 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared the area a territory of the Russian Federation. Most nations have not recognized this annexation, affirming Ukraine's right to its territorial integrity. The move to annex Crimea followed the deposition of the pro-Russian President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, through the Maidan Revolution. After Yanukovich was forced out of power, Moscow began to express concerns about the security of Russian citizens in Crimea and other parts of Ukraine (De Maio, 2016). Putin perceived the Maidan Revolution to be an illegal rebellion that posed harm to the security of ethnic Russians living in the region, and justified Russia's invasion of Crimea under that rationale. Due to the existing chaos and pressure from their powerful neighbor, the government in the Ukrainian capital city of Kyiv began to lose control over Crimea, and the latter began to fall into de facto Russian occupation. At this point, Ukrainian command over the region had considerably weakened, and Putin took advantage of this time to formally enter and annex Crimea.

Additionally, Moscow significantly influenced the creation of organizations, political parties, media outlets, and other elements of Crimea's existence and functioning that affected the public and its views toward Russia (Konończuk, 2024). Furthermore, beginning from the split between the seventy-five percent Russian and twenty percent Ukrainian population, the ethnic composition of Crimea also served as a tool for Russia to exploit in its effort to garner the region; for instance, the presence of five hundred and fifty-five Russian-language schools compared to the mere six Ukrainian-language educational institutions in place at the time exemplified the stark difference in linguistic demographics within the area (Cramer, 2014; Konończuk, 2024). Together, these reasons facilitated Russia's rapid annexation of Crimea. Putin viewed Crimea as a geographically and politically vital region to control due to its natural gas reserves, strategic positioning for the Russian Navy's Black Sea Fleet, and the aim to maintain influence over Ukraine and decrease its ability to integrate with the West.

Legal Disputes and Referendum Controversy

Self-determination is the right of a nation to govern itself autonomously. Annexation is a blatant violation of this ideal. However, bearing in mind that Crimea was not a part of Ukraine directly under the management of the central government, there are numerous issues to consider. For one, Crimea, as a region outside Russia's sphere of direct legal influence, should be regarded as a separate entity with its own right to exist. Imposing that autonomy with overt military operations is not justified under the definition of self-determination. While Crimea may have changed hands multiple times throughout history, its most recent transfer to Ukraine, exactly six decades before the date of the annexation, was a peaceful gift, as the Russian Federative Soviet

Socialist Republic referred to it at the time of the mid-twentieth-century shift, to revitalize and memorialize the union of Russia and Ukraine (Cramer, 2014). However, Putin has since denounced this act, claiming that despite Crimea's vote in favor of independence and the mutual recognition of state borders between Ukraine and Russia, the fact that the landmass was transferred between two states without its own consent in 1954 should have been illegal (Reuters, 2024). This declaration contradicts the current situation, as the dubious referendum held by Russia during the 2014 annexation has been deemed unofficial and illegal by most UN member states due to the accuracy of its results and the conditions in which they were collected being contested (*UN Security Council Action on Crimea Referendum Blocked*, 2014).

In 2014, Theodore Christakis wrote an article detailing the situation in Crimea, specifically regarding the internationally contested referendum held by Russia in Crimea following the initial annexation procedure, which supposedly affirmed Crimea as part of Russia rather than Ukraine, based on uncorroborated accounts of the public vote. The author states that the referendum was presented as a *fait accompli*, thereby diminishing Ukrainian and Crimean rights to autonomy and security over their territory (Christakis, 2015). This point again ties into the question of possible safety nets for situations such as annexation that threaten a nation's self-determination.

Russian Nationalism and Strategic Ambitions

Another angle on the violation of self-determination has more to do with Russia and Ukraine being former members of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Russia was the

largest state in the USSR in terms of area, population, and power allocation relative to the other republics. When the USSR collapsed, Russia lost a significant share of its global influence, transitioning from a fifteen-state empire to a nation-state trying to find its footing in the post-Cold War world order (Cramer, 2014). Russia has since rebuilt itself in almost every respect, from its economy to its military to its overall geopolitical influence. However, despite Russia's resurgence, it remains a lone, singular federation, with its name etched across only within its own borders, rather than the seat of power dominating many smaller parts of a larger whole.

Secession from the Soviet Union upon its dissolution guaranteed Ukraine the right to autonomy over its government and people (Kranz, 2014). This reduced Russian control over its neighbor, leaving the former power feeling threatened and weakened. Fierce nationalistic sentiments and aspirations rose within Russia, as well as a hope that the nation would again be a force to be reckoned with, as it had been before. Thus, the Russian Federation's decision to annex Crimea grew from the nationalistic aspirations born from the death of the Soviet Union (and, subsequently, the separation of the republics within it).

In 2013, Yanukovych intended to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union, which would have allowed Ukraine to work more closely with the EU. However, Russia feared that such a collaboration would bring Ukraine closer to the West, further separating it economically and ideologically from Russia (Konończuk, 2024). So, just before Yanukovych was expected to sign the deal, he bowed to pressure from Moscow and withdrew from the agreement. This sparked revolts from Ukrainian citizens in what became known as the Maidan Revolution, or the Revolution of Dignity. There were calls for Yanukovych to be deposed due to

accusations of treason. Moscow perceived this as a threat to the security of Russians in Ukraine and also felt that it demonstrated the latter's supposed inability to run a country effectively (De Maio, 2016). This situation was a direct cause of the timing of the annexation of Crimea, which took place specifically in 2014. Russia did not believe that Ukraine had the right to exist as its own nation and considered its secession from the Russian heartland to be invalid and unjustified (De Maio, 2016). The Maidan Revolution served as a long-awaited reason for Russia to disrupt Ukraine's physical security by annexing Crimea because the Russian government perceived the Ukrainian population's claim to self-determination as an illegitimate act of rebellion.

Another reason for Russia's interest in Ukraine is that Ukraine also serves as a "buffer state" to keep the Western world in check in terms of acting against Russia, particularly in relation to containing the eastward expansion of the EU and NATO's reach. Russia's maintenance of its Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol is also crucial to the nation because it enables Russia to maintain military control over the region. The presence of the fleet provides Russia with an outsized advantage over the area, and aggression toward Ukraine had already begun, starting with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and escalating to all-out war in 2022. If Ukraine were to join NATO at this time, under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, all other NATO members would immediately be obligated to provide military assistance against Russia (*The North Atlantic Treaty*, 1949). This gives Russia a political and territorial advantage over Ukraine and a hold over its bid to join NATO, which has been generally correlated with the West and, since its foundation, has been an anti-Russia supranational organization. Russia and Russians never considered Ukraine to be a nation in its own right following the collapse of the Soviet

Union, instead thinking of it as “Little Russia” and dismissing it with the thought that it would soon return to Russian control (De Maio, 2016). In 2014, with the annexation of Crimea, Moscow finally made its move.

UNSC Response and the Power of the Veto

The first chapter of the United Nations Charter outlines the organization’s purpose and principles. Article 1(2) states that one reason for existence is “to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace” (*United Nations Charter (Full Text)*, 1945). The pillar of self-determination supports the UN’s cause, but as evidenced by the annexation of Crimea, it is incredibly difficult to resolve conflicts when member states violate it.

When Russia first invaded Crimea and held a referendum, the accuracy and bias of which have since been questioned, the UNSC met to vote on a resolution that would have reaffirmed Ukraine’s self-determination, namely in its right to sovereignty, territorial integrity, internal unity, and independence. However, only thirteen of the fifteen members currently on the Council cast a favorable vote (*UN Security Council Action on Crimea Referendum Blocked*, 2014). The two who did not were both permanent members of the UNSC, meaning they had the power to veto the resolution, nullifying it entirely. Of these two P5 votes, China abstained from voting, and Russia vetoed it, thereby halting the resolution’s possibility of becoming valid at that time. In addition, even if the resolution had been passed, there is no body of power with the necessary

authority to physically remove Russian troops and administration from Crimea. From a neorealist perspective, this renders the UNSC almost entirely ineffectual in achieving its legislative purpose. Although a nation is bound by the UN Charter to obey any direct orders from the UNSC, disregard for this has resulted in military action involving other UN member states against the offending country. Should this happen regarding Crimea, the situation may be different due to the extent of Russia's military strength. Russia's veto was unsurprising, considering that the resolution was intended to directly remove its position in Crimea. On the other hand, while expected not to support the West, China did not vote alongside Russia due to an integral guideline in its foreign policy, which, as outlined in its Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, is non-interference in issues that do not concern it (Zhang, 2015). This is because China views conflicts such as the annexation of Crimea as an internal Ukrainian matter to be settled with Russia, not an issue that should involve the entire world, because that has a high likelihood of deepening the existing problem. China is also cautious not to violate the sovereignty of another nation.

Expansionism and Nationalism: Threats to the UNSC's Credibility

The permanent members of the UNSC are some of the most powerful nations today. As many of these nations embrace more expansionist agendas due to the rise in nationalism, the self-determination of smaller, less secure states falls into question. Examples such as Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the ongoing 2022 invasion of mainland Ukraine demonstrate the danger of giving absolute power to a state in a world so volatile. However, Russia is not the only P5 member to follow such lines of action. For instance, United States President Donald

Trump's slogan, "Make America Great Again," appeals to nationalistic sentiments for America's growth both domestically and in terms of its approach to foreign policy. Trump has recently suggested that Canada could become the fifty-first US state, that America may want to take Greenland, and that the Panama Canal should be returned to US control (Smith & Lee, 2025). Such expansionism would infringe upon claims to self-determination in Greenland and Panama and contradict the fundamental US dogma of being a nation in defense of freedom. China is also trying to expand its territorial influence by extending its control over the South China Sea. China, Russia, and the US have some of the world's largest and most capable militaries. If the permanent members of the UNSC can pursue agendas such as those previously mentioned and veto any resolution that may prevent such violations of other countries' rights to self-determination, then the UNSC cannot mitigate major global conflicts, contradicting the very reason for its existence.

Expansionism as an outlet for nationalism is a problem because it gives certain countries the idea that they are more critical to global affairs, that they deserve to take up more space, that their existence is more valid than that of their neighbors, and that other countries are either altogether irrelevant or dependent on them for survival. While this does not apply to all nations worldwide, many powerful countries have embraced foreign policies that prioritize this ideology over global peace and equality, using their self-determination as a pretext to threaten the self-determination of others. However, even within these countries, there are differences in the types of expansionism pursued. For instance, from the perspective of the United States, expansionism is largely centered on economic power and offshore balancing (as seen with the Panama Canal

and Greenland), allowing for higher protection of US security and flexibility in military positioning around strategic areas, thereby avoiding potentially unnecessary entanglement in regionally manageable affairs. In contrast, Russia's stance on expansionism falls into the category of neo-revisionist empire building, focused more on political power and historical glory, as well as preventing Western hegemony.

Reforming the UNSC: Academic Debates and Proposed Solutions

In the current geopolitical atmosphere that has enveloped global foreign policy, organizations like the United Nations Security Council cannot support the self-determination of nations attacked by the nationalistic aspirations that puppet powerful countries' expansionist agendas. This is primarily because a significant number of the permanent members of the UNSC have espoused these ideas. Each of their abilities to single-handedly nullify a UNSC resolution aiming to reverse such aggression jeopardizes the self-determination of other nations and allows their own to be weaponized.

Academic Discourse and Reform Proposals

John J. Mearsheimer, in his 2019 paper on the failure of the liberal international order, argues that a clear-cut order is necessary to prevent and mitigate conflict due to the complexity of the current international state system. Mearsheimer focuses on various liberal international orders that emerged following the Second World War, analyzing their creation and dissolution, particularly in light of the rise of neorealism in international affairs today (2019). Neorealism, as a concept, stresses the anarchical nature of the international state system, suggesting that it lacks

a central, overarching authority to hold power over all components of the world order, without which individual states automatically prioritize nationalistic aspirations over international cooperation and coexistence, which can lead to conflicts and competition (Mearsheimer, 2019). Due to this issue, the United Nations, as a presiding body, becomes essential for maintaining order and boundaries in the world today. As the UNSC is the most powerful organization within the UN in terms of resolving conflicts and producing resolutions that member states must follow, its system must be better equipped to protect notions of self-determination.

In his 2010 article on the potential benefits and drawbacks of solutions for UNSC reform, Jakob Silas Lund addresses five key ideas: size (number of members), membership categories, working methods, relationship with the General Assembly, and geographical representation. Altering the size of the council to include more nations would bring more voices to the table, but experts worry that too many countries will hinder efficiency and consensus (Lund, 2010). It is likely that the UNSC will not expand in size due to the scale of the shift, but will grow to include a more diverse group of countries. Lund captures the debate surrounding re-election, the balance between non-permanent and permanent members, and their differing roles, which comprise the most contentious area of academic and political considerations on UNSC reform. Another area of interest is veto law, particularly regarding ideas for regulating it, depending on the events discussed, or the possibility of extending it to non-permanent members or even abolishing it altogether. The solutions Lund presents, along with the analysis of their practicality and academic perspectives on each, offer insight into the potential for and likelihood of reforming the UNSC.

Geopolitical Representation and Veto Adjustments

The structure of the P5 must change for the UNSC's mission to genuinely materialize. While the victors of World War II should be recognized for their achievements, it is crucial to acknowledge that the global order has undergone significant changes in the eighty years since then. Today, participating nations such as Russia and the United States are actively involved in promoting and executing extensive expansionist methods (albeit in different ways and for dissimilar reasons) in foreign affairs, thereby shutting down possible avenues for peace in conflicts in which they are engaged, as evidenced by the Russian annexation of Crimea. Only if the UNSC undergoes reformative measures can the notion of self-determination be protected for nations in which it is threatened. This point is particularly true of conflicts involving a P5 member, such as the situation in Crimea. Neighbors of the P5 nations are at risk due to their geographically accessible status and the political friction between them and the larger power acting on nationalistic aspirations. Territorial aggression will only be perpetuated by an inefficient, biased UNSC. Unless the veto, in particular, is addressed, and self-determination is understood by all states deciding its fate, it cannot be defended.

Some academics suggest that the members of the P5 should change, even if the remainder of the UNSC's composition does not. The rationale is that while yesterday's powers currently rule the Council, tomorrow's powers should be the decision-making parties. In his paper on the academic debate about the UNSC's prospects for reform, Bjarke Zinck Winther observes that the ideological differences and the distribution of power between nations in the economic North and South are being disregarded in the current system of the UNSC, especially due to the

involvement of the P5, with unequal claims given to both sides. Changing this to include countries old and new, as well as those that are developing and long-industrialized, which hold different views but share an ideal of world peace and respect for the concept of self-determination, is vital to the practical transformation of the UNSC (Winther, 2020). Such structural reform methods can improve the UNSC's credibility and the trust all nations place in it. The UNSC would be able to create effective and efficient resolutions to combat the infringement of self-determination. However, this does not account for the UNSC's ability to act on such resolutions. As previously mentioned, the UN has authorized military action for conflict resolution in situations where member states obligated to abide by directives established by the Security Council refused to do so. Nonetheless, this is not a sustainable solution and cannot be applied in every similar situation. Since the United Nations is an international organization without its own sovereignty, it will always depend on its member states to execute resolutions, which is not a dependable route in the current system. For instance, the affirmative unanimity of the permanent members being a necessity for a resolution to pass makes it effectively impossible to field a conflict when one of them is involved, further exacerbating the issue of protecting the self-determination of other nations. A potential strategy to combat this problem could be to require a majority veto within the P5 for a veto to be recognized by the Council. This would mandate three out of the five P5 members to veto the resolution in order for it to be prevented from passing. Entirely abolishing the veto is impractical to expect in the near future, as it diminishes the esteem of the permanent members. However, unless the power of the veto is reduced, the UNSC will be unable to achieve its goals, prevented not by the events occurring in

the world outside but by the internal system of functioning on which it was founded. Moreover, other scholars write that in bolstering the P5's power, the ability of the ten non-permanent members to sway the functions of the UNSC is diminished and rendered semi-irrelevant in the face of extreme vehemence from a P5 member (Hathaway & Patrick, 2024).

In addition, the UNSC could become more economically and geographically diverse in representation, allowing for new perspectives on each issue and less bias in the overall decision-making process (Dayal & Dunton, 2023). However, this is only relevant for the larger body and affects only the requirement that at least nine of the fifteen members vote in favor of the resolution. Without a shift in the function of the P5, there is no hope for the UNSC to protect the self-determination of all nations equally as a fundamental pillar of its existence.

If the offending nation's say is invariably considered when one of the P5 is the problem, the attacked nation should also have an equal say. In that case, voting parties could include the remainder of the UNSC members, but none of the countries themselves involved in the conflict at hand, as this could allow for a more even and unbiased result. This approach enables all sides to present their case with equal weight and provides more space for evaluating members to decide in favor of one or the other. Considering that this could reduce bias during the vote, there is a higher likelihood that the self-determination of the attacked nation will be protected. When considering this point in the context of the Crimea case, this second solution would have allowed the resolution condemning the referendum following the annexation to have passed, reaffirming Ukraine's territorial integrity. Even still, the UNSC would have been initially limited in enacting consequences, as Russia would have likely ignored the resolution. That said, the passing of the

resolution could have provided additional justification for a military, economic, or diplomatic response against Russia. If the UNSC did have an enforcement mechanism of some sort, however, such an issue of disregard for passed resolutions would not hinder the council's credibility and overall ability to serve as an international legislative body dedicated to upholding the ideal of self-determination of nations.

In addition to academic perspectives, world leaders are also weighing in on the issue of UNSC reform. The President of the Republic of Finland, Alexander Stubb, in particular, strongly advocated for specific methods of reform at the General Debate of the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York on September 24, 2025. He suggested that “the number of permanent members should be increased at the Security Council. At least, there should be two new seats for Asia, two for Africa and one for Latin America. No single state should have veto power. And, if a member of the Security Council violates the UN Charter, its voting rights should be suspended” (Stubb, 2025, para. 66). As previously discussed, scholars have substantiated the benefits of restructuring the UNSC to include more members from a wider geographic range, arguing that this will enhance the council's effectiveness by providing increased opportunities to consider a variety of views on matters at hand. The abolition of the veto would create an equal playing field. Stubb's final suggestion highlights the need for consequences for perpetrators who violate the fundamental principles of the United Nations. All three of these solutions have been corroborated by scholars as having potential for improved effectiveness in the functioning of the UNSC and reflect how the world order has shifted between the end of World War II and the current state of international affairs.

Conclusion

Self-determination can only garner respect and protection in a world where the UNSC can defend its right to exist. Under the current system, however, this is not a reliable possibility, as evidenced by the Russian Federation's 2014 Annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, still an internationally recognized administrative region of Ukraine. Nationalistic aspirations, especially in the context of expansionism, pose a threat to self-determination, particularly when a larger, stronger, and more powerful nation seeks to encroach upon that of a smaller neighbor. Self-determination and nationalism are inherently connected, as many nations legitimize their right to existence through their claim to self-determination. Self-determination emerges from nationalism, but, as seen in the case of the annexation of Crimea, nationalism can also serve as a threat to another country's self-determination. Crimea was a case of secessionist self-determination, as Russia did not acknowledge Ukraine's right to exist or ability to function following its secession from the Russian government and territory (Kapustin, 2015). Russia saw it as a fundamental purpose of its existence to have a claim over the regions neighboring it, believing them all to be part of the Federation. However, the reach of intrusion on self-determination on a global scale extends far beyond the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea. There are cases of colonial self-determination, national self-determination, and others that also result in conflicts worldwide. For every one of these issues, the UNSC has a responsibility to protect the self-determination of the attacked nation as a fundamental pillar of its existence, as its primary motive for international cooperation and world peace.

Every individual living on this Earth has a responsibility to stand up for what is right. Just as humans should be guaranteed natural and civil rights for a peaceful existence, nations reserve the right to exist within their borders and have an equally important responsibility to interact with other countries in a peaceful manner. While civilians cannot hope to walk into a government building and propose an acceptable treaty to end a war, supranational organizations like the United Nations Security Council can. Their duty to serve humanity is to establish and support a peaceful world where every nation has the right to be itself and not worry about nationalistic aggression from its neighbors. The UNSC must recognize the need for reform and adapt its methods to ensure a safer present and a more secure future. Whether through changes in physical structure, voting regulations, or ideology, the UNSC must strive to transform itself into a gold standard for global security and peace in the face of extreme nationalism.

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