

More than a lunch conversation:

*Shaping the Future:
Finland and the Quest
for UN Security Council
Reform*

Antje Herrberg

With many thanks to Helena Laukko Director of the UN Association of Finland for inviting and guiding this contribution, and my recognition to Olai Voionmaa for keeping up the conversation up over the years.

-Entrée-

"Today, Europe (and indeed the world), faces a pivotal moment akin to the historical Yalta or Helsinki periods, underscoring the urgency for decisive action in redefining global security and peace structures"¹.

(Finnish President Alexander Stubb
at the Munich Security Conference 2025).

With the world facing such a daunting challenge, the question is: Is the United Nations Security Council a relic of the past or an indispensable force for global stability? Few institutions spark as much debate as the UN and its Security Council. For those not deeply immersed in its intricate bureaucracy, it can seem opaque, slow-moving, and, to some, even irrelevant in addressing today's global crises. This perception has fueled a growing narrative that the UN is no longer capable of solving the world's most pressing problems. Yet, despite its flaws, the UN remains the world's foremost international organization—one with unparalleled legitimacy and potential to foster peace, stability and dialogue. At its core, stands the Security Council. This is the central, if not the sole forum where global security decisions are made. Reforming this body is not just a lunch conversation or academic debate and much more than just a diplomatic exercise; it is a question of how the international community can effectively respond to conflict, maintain peace, and shape the future of global governance.

Comprised of five permanent members and ten elected rotating members, the Security Council operates through a mix of written and unwritten rules, traditions, and practices that can bewilder even seasoned experts in international relations. Its specialized nature has made it a field of study in itself— but it is one that demands the attention of a broader community, despite its complexity.

Talking about meaningful reform of the Security Council today can be seen as an unattainable goal—dismissed by some insiders as an illusion—but it is vital to keep the discussion alive. Broadening the conversation to include value-based approaches to peace and security is not only necessary but urgent. Finland, with its strong tradition of supporting international cooperation and multilateralism, is uniquely placed to contribute to this discourse.

This paper emerged from a series of conversations with a Finnish colleague and friend Olai Voionmaa who is also keen observer global issues and, very much, the UN. Our dialogue began over 12 years ago when we both worked for the United Nations Department for Political Affairs. Now both working in Niger, sharing lunches in a small Chinese restaurant discussing the UN in this remote corner of the earth are just an example how all pervasive the problem of UNSC reform is. Our discussions eventually led to a request from the Finnish UN Association to write a paper addressing key questions surrounding the Security Council and its resolutions for a broader policy audience.

¹ Financial Times. Finnish President warns Europe faces new Yalta or Helsinki moment. 16.2.2025

This paper, therefore, is an attempt to address the subject of UN Security Council Reform, helping to address issues and options that are available for public deliberation to shape the course of advocacy and action vis a vis the UN. In doing so, I outline seven critical themes that should be addressed when considering the reform and future role of the UN Security Council. These reflections aim to provide a foundation for continued debate both in Finland and its group of likeminded actors. In a second follow up version, we will have put these questions and tentative answers to test, by prompting a Finnish and Nordic expert community for a follow up action plan.

The UN SC and Need for Reform: The Basics

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) serves as the most central body of the international community in terms of peacekeeping and conflict management at large. Unlike the General Assembly, its decisions are legally binding under international law. This grants the Council extensive powers, including the ability to notably impose sanctions, thus directly affecting the sovereignty of states.

The Security Council, consisting of 15 members, hosting five permanent members (China [originally the Republic of China, Taiwan], France, Russia [initially Soviet Union], the United Kingdom, and the United States) and ten-non permanent members elected by the General Assembly for two year terms based on regional allocation. The P5 were granted permanent status and veto power under Art. 23 and Art. 27 of the UN Charter. The only reform of the Security Council took place in 1965, increasing the number of non-permanent members from 6 to 10. These 10 members are elected for two year terms, in line with the trend of decolonisation and need for greater representation of African and/or Asian states in the Council. Regional representation thus is: 5 seats for Africa and Asia; 2 seats for Latin America & the Caribbean; 2 seats for Western Europe & Others; 1 seat for Eastern Europe. A Council decision requires 9 out of 15 votes-but the P5 retain veto Power.

It is clear to most, possibly except three members that the composition of the Security Council does not reflect (or no longer reflects) today's geopolitical realities. A clear majority of UN member states support a comprehensive reform, including an expansion of both permanent and non-permanent seats. This said, there is also opposition, particularly regarding the addition of new permanent members. The reform process is managed in a very UN-like forum: Since 2008, negotiations within the framework of the Intergovernmental Negotiations in the UN General Assembly have been ongoing, but so far without results².

In the deliberation of this paper, judging from podcasts, papers and expert opinion surveyed there is a consensus that the current state of the Security Council represents a genuine crisis that threat-

² UN GA Resolution 62/557, composed of G4, African Group, Uniting for Consensus Group, L.69 Group and the P5

ens to undermine the United Nations' credibility and cohesion. As mentioned above, the issue has become even more divisive in the current geopolitical climate, particularly with events such as the re-election of President Donald Trump and the increasing polarization within the UN system. The U.S. did not succeed to solve the UNSC reform conundrum although the Biden administration tried especially in the later years.

1. Why talk about reform of the Security Council ?

The basis of this discussion is built on the premise that we agree that it has never been more important and timely to discuss Security Council reform. At a time when the role of multilateral organisations such as the UN and NATO are under threat, where the newly elected US government will influence the future of the organisation, the UN faces substantial challenges to its continued existence. In 2024, the Security Council passed the lowest number of resolutions since since 1991³. At the same time, it used the highest number of vetoes since 1986. Many experts, commentators and diplomats argue, that this trend increases the threat of a deadlock moment in global politics. « It is dominated by a great power club compromising the five permanent members of the Security Council- who often flagrantly violate the very rules and standards to which they hold other countries ». ⁴

The reform agenda issue is indeed not a new one; it has reappeared on the UN General Assembly (GA) agenda since the UN had its first reforms in 1978⁵. What is still most striking is that the African continent, which is the focus of the majority of deliberations in the Security Council, and home to 84 per cent of the peacekeeping forces, remains starkly underrepresented despite the fact that we are entering a new period of deep decolonisation, as witnessed for example through the ousting of France in the Sahel region. Anecdotal evidence shows that Security Council reform is the most debated topic by member states. However, the disparate perspectives reflect frustrated national or regional perspectives rather focussing on improved decision-making of the International Community as a whole⁶.

The institutional discussions are, according to Christopher Heusgen, a former German UN ambassador and until recently chairman of the Munich Security Conference, one of the most frustrating issues at the UN. Heusgen recounts the re-labelling of the intergovernmental negotiations, or its acronym IGN, as "It Goes Nowhere"⁷, whereas Richard Gowan one of the most seasoned observers of the UN calls them outright « deadly dull ». It is maybe for this reason that most discussions are held outside the Security Council in so called "meetings in between meetings": in the hallways and during coffee breaks. Nonetheless, UN Secretariat have woken up to this and it is reported that the Committee on Intergovernmental Negotiations has had a new sense of dynamism since the Ukraine

³ Security Council Report (2025). In Hindsight: the Security Council in 2024 and Looking Ahead 2025. January 2025 Monthly Forecast.

⁴ Rohan Mukherjee . (2023) India. In Stewart, Patrick (ed.) UN Security Council Reform: What the World Thinks. Pg 28 op. cit.

⁵ his was on the question of equitable representation or an Increase in the Membership of the Security Council, raise particularly by African Members.

⁶ Alexandra Novosseloff. (2023) France. In Stewart Patrick (ed.) UN Security Council Reform: What the world thinks. Pg 22

⁷ Christopher Heusgen. (2023) Germany. Ibid

Invasion. Subsequently, the election of President Trump, appears to have put colleagues possibly into a state of shock and paralysis.

Despite the frequent deadlocks caused by the use of the veto, most notably in the past two years on issues such as Ukraine, Gaza, Syria, North Korea and Sudan – and given the institutional set up – the Security Council remains the central forum for global peace diplomacy. Whilst the space where states engage in focused, high level discussions not possible in more open or informal settings, the Security Council, thanks to the Secretariat remains functionally active in some key areas: It continues to authorize the extension of UN missions; impose and adjust sanctions; issue statements; and serve as a platform for decisive debates.

On the surface UN Security Council public sessions in its iconic chamber are well known to public attention as they are shared live. However, substantive discussions happen behind closed doors and in private rooms. Here, devoid of public record, this allows for frank exchange and negotiations to shape the decision of the Council. The dichotomy between open public meetings presenting outcomes that have been crafted in seclusion are just the surface of the Council's intricate and some would even argue intransparent decision making processes.

It is also interesting to note that whilst the world is also increasingly struggling with thematic, cross cutting, international issues, as it seems as though the permanent members tend to focus on state-centric issues such as interstate conflicts and military threats. Topics like Women, Peace and Security; Climate, Peace and Security; Cybersecurity; and the COVID-19 pandemic—often seen as less politically contentious—have advanced, not necessarily by design, but out of necessity. In many cases, these issues have served as entry points for cooperation, allowing the Council to sidestep the gridlock that more divisive geopolitical disputes often create.⁸

At the same time, broader initiatives to bypass the Security Council and still move forward with reform such as the **New Agenda for Peace** (see below) and the **Pact for the Future** have gained some traction. These efforts aim to foster a renewed sense of unity and purpose within the United Nations system, providing a framework for addressing global challenges more cohesively. Importantly, these initiatives also highlight the need for the Security Council to adapt and redefine its role within this evolving vision for the UN. By positioning itself as a key actor in advancing these agendas, the Security Council could save its image in terms of its relevance and capacity to respond to 21st-century challenges, even as debates about its reform continue.

Thus, we agree that effective multilateralism is essential for preserving global peace and stability, the UN Security Council—an institution designed to be the cornerstone of international cooperation—has paradoxically become one of its main stumbling blocks. In the six key points that follow, I critically examine how the Security Council shortcomings undermine its mandate and jeopardize collective security and outline some themes coming out of this. These points are necessary for Finland and the Nordic bloc to reflect on necessary reforms to restore this vital institution to its intended purpose.

⁸ See also Susan Hannah Allen, Amy T Yuen. (2024) As Time goes by: Action in the UN Security Council. *Global Studies Quarterly*, vol 4, Issue 3, July

2. What are we actually talking about, when we speak about the UN Security Council Reform?

The truth is that the debate around the Security Council Reform dates back to the inception of the UN in 1945. Over the decades numerous attempts have been made to address the composition and working methods, but none have yielded significant change⁹. The urgency for reform has then become even more pronounced after the Cold War, as the geopolitical landscape shifted and new powers emerged. Despite this, and as mentioned above, the Security Council remains reflective of a mid 20th century order, unable to adequately represent the realities of today's multipolar world. The challenges of Security Council are deeply rooted in structural, political and institutional complexities can summarised in **five** main points.

The **first** and possibly most substantial challenge concerns the **power dynamics** of the five permanent members (the so called P5) – the United States, China, Russia, the United Kingdom and France (major Allied powers that emerged as victors of WWII) creating the United Nations in 1945. These states own the privilege of permanent membership and veto power in the Security Council, which allows them to unilaterally block any substantive resolution. All members of the P5 are reluctant to relinquish or dilute this power. The rhetoric on multilateralism and inclusivity are seen as no more than lip service when reforms threaten to undermine the entrenched dominance of these nations. For instance, while France and the UK frequently advocate for global governance reforms, their position remains quite ambiguous when it comes to their own privileges within the Council. This lack of alignment among the P5 could further exacerbate the stalemate. These countries support the reform knowing that it will not materialize.

The **second major obstacle** is the **deep seated regional rivalries** that complicate any agreement of expanding membership. Aspirants for permanent seats, such as India, Brazil, Germany and Japan (the "G-4" group), face opposition not only from the P5 but also from their regional counterparts. For example, India's bid is opposed by Pakistan, while Japan's aspirations are met with resistance from China. Similarly, Brazil's regional ambitions are met with resistance from other South American countries, and Germany's pursuit of a seat is contested by European neighbours who question whether the EU as a bloc should be represented instead. These regional tensions expose the stark reality: without a central authority to arbitrate or enforce decisions, consensus remains a distant illusion.

⁹ This is regarding the first Expansion (1963-1965), expanding UN membership expanding the Council to 15 members, and the 1993 General Assembly Working Group on UNSC Reform (Open Ended) on the Question of Equitable Representation on an Increase of Membership of the Security Council; the G4 Proposal (2004-present) to advocate for permanent seats; The African Union Proposal (2005), and the L.69 Group and Global South Push including the countries from Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific; the Kofi Annan Reform Proposal in 2005; and still relevant the Intergovernmental Negotiations (2008-present) and in 2022-2024 shift in momentum of US position, African Union seat in the G20, and more global south advocacy.

Who Are the Voting Blocs?

Three main blocs remain entrenched in their positions on Security Council reform

1. The G4 Coalition: Comprising Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan, this group seeks permanent membership on the Council, supported by their allies.

2. The Uniting for Consensus Coalition: Led by the G4's regional rivals—Argentina, Mexico, Italy, Pakistan, South Korea, and Türkiye—this bloc opposes new permanent members, advocating instead for an expansion of non-permanent seats.

3. The African Union (AU): Its 54 member states remain committed to the 2005 Ezulwini Consensus, demanding two permanent seats with full veto rights for Africa.

A **third** related and important **issue** is the **(under) representation of the Global South**. Much lip service is paid to the importance of including Africa and Latin America, as these regions are often at the forefront of global conflicts and crises. Proposals to include the African Union, or to create a new permanent seat for countries in these regions are frequently discussed but rarely agreed upon. Disagreements over how this representation should be structured, whether through blocs or individual nations- create substantial impasses, further stalling progress.

A **fourth challenge** involves the **institutional complexity** of reforming the Security Council. An amendment to the UN Charter requires a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly and ratification by all P5 members. To some, this represents an insurmountable legal and political hurdle as the P5 will create alliances to vote in their favour. Even if a consensus could be reached among member states, the lack of a strong executive central authority (the Secretary-General) to fully push or execute such a reform ensures that the process is gridlocked.

Fifth, we need to consider the **evolving nature of global threats**. Transnational issues such as cybersecurity, climate change, and the rise of non-state actors such as international capitalism (business), NGO's, armed and terrorist groups and mercenaries, are increasingly shaping international relations. The Security Council, designed to primarily address conflict between states, struggles to remain relevant in this rapidly changing context. Expanding its membership is very much focussed on national representation but it seems to ignore how this can shape the Councils or the UN's ability to adapt to modern challenges that are at the root cause of crises. Without getting into great detail, the G20 could also be seen as alternative decision-making bodies to the UN, particularly on broad global governance and crisis management. Lacking the overall legitimacy and operational nature of the UN, these are more flexible groups of major economies that can act quickly on global economic and political issues.

Related to the above, there is also, a countercurrent – the **widespread fear of dilution of even increased inefficiency** and decision making capabilities. A larger and more diverse membership, threatens to make consensus even harder to achieve, potentially reducing the legitimacy and effectiveness of the UN as a whole. While the desire for inclusivity is frequently expressed, the practical implications of a restructured Security Council dampens the enthusiasm for change.

Discussing the cumulative effect for these challenges results in long lunches and I am sure many headaches in New York and national capitals. We see an intractable deadlock where vested interests, geopolitical rivalries and institutional inertia prevail over the collective need for a more equitable representative and effective Security Council. A reform seems a distant goal without political will and innovative solutions of how to address the multifaceted barriers.

3. Why does the President of Finland propose UNSC Reform?

Overall, in the context of UN reform, **Finland** has positioned itself as an **advocate for significant changes in the Security Council**, often proposing ideas that member states deem quite ambitious or even utopian. During the 79th session of the UN General Assembly, President Alexander Stubb¹⁰ delivered a speech that underscored Finland's commitment to revitalising the UN's institutional framework to better reflect global realities. His proposals for Security Council Reform were bold and provocative, signalling Finland's belief in the need for systemic change to address current challenges to international peace and security.

Perhaps most strikingly (although not a new idea), President Stubb proposed the **suspension of the voting rights of member states that violate the UN charter**. He suggested that countries engaging in illegal wars (although what a legal war is, is of course debatable), or other actions contravening international law should face accountability measures, including the suspension of their influence in the Council's decision making processes. This, he argued, would reaffirm the UN's founding principles and reinforce its legitimacy at a time of growing scepticism about its effectiveness.

By boldly framing the current era as pivotal, or a turning point in history «we are standing at a crossroads » in the history of the United Nations, his speech sought to galvanise support for transformative change. Whilst his proposals were met with mixed reactions – praised by some as visionary and dismissed by others as unrealistic – they underscored Finland's role as a champion of multilateralism and institutional reform.

From a broader perspective, Finland's interest in the UN Security Council reform reflects and mirrors its foreign policy priority. A small but highly active member State, Finland has always **advocated for a rules-based international order** and effective multilateral institutions. In this sense, the reform of the Security Council aligns to the foreign policy goals of fairness, inclusion, and accountability in multilateral

¹⁰ United Nations (30 September 2024). Finland – President Addresses United Nations General Debate, 79th Session #UNGA. See <https://gadebate.un.org/>

institutions such as the UN. As a member of the EU, Finland's proposals resonate also with broader EU goals of enhancing the UN's legitimacy and operational effectiveness particularly in addressing global challenges such as conflict resolution, climate change and protection of human rights.

In championing such reforms, Finland also wants to amplify the voices of smaller states and align with its identity as a constructive and innovative player in the UN.

As our lunch conversation went, a reader could now ask why the Finnish President, of all countries would suggest such an unrealistic, even utopian initiative. But this is not new practice for the UN, and it is worth illustrating some, although not entirely comparable examples. Such practices serves the purpose of Agenda setting and shaping of a global discourse. Consider Nelson Mandela's plea in his first speech at the UN GA to end apartheid in 1994 which seemed absolutely off the charts – then it succeeded. It shows thoughtful leadership and moral authority, comparable to a speech that former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Aherne gave in 2018 addressing issues such as climate change, disarmament and gender equality putting her country on world stage as a progressive force. Moreover, Stubb's speech illustrates highlights the ambition (and sometimes reality) that Finland seeks to punch above its weight and keeping up its international reputation. True to himself, he ventured to challenge the status quo and expose the hypocrisy of entrenched powers lacking the willingness to adapt to the global reality. In 2006, (and no comparison here), Hugo Chavez's criticism of the P5 dominance in the Security Council spotlighted longstanding frustration with the UNSC Reform, echoing calls from other nations for reform.

Thus, Finland's calls for 'utopian' reform at the UN should not be read as immediate action, though urgently needed, but rather about shaping a long-term vision for the institution's future. They serve to frame the narrative, positioning Finland as a thought leader in global governance and reaffirming its deep commitment to multilateralism. With this in mind, we can now explore in greater depth Finland's strategic interests in the UN Security Council and its reform agenda.

PUTTING IT ON THE TABLE: WHAT ARE THE FINNISH INTERESTS REGARDING THE SECURITY COUNCIL?

It makes sense to frame and understand the Finnish engagement with the United Nations as a firm commitment to multilateralism, the rule of law and a fair and sustainable order. Finland has consistently sought to champion the voices of smaller nations, advance human rights, promote sustainable development and address emerging global challenges like climate security, women peace and security and youth peace and security. All these issues have shaped Finland's role in the UN and its aspiration to the Security Council.

Finland's position as a small but influential state has made it an advocate for the rights and inclusion of smaller nations in global governance. This principle guided Finland during its term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council in 1969-1970 and also in 1989-1990. Finland worked to ensure that the perspectives of smaller states were heard in decisions affecting global peace and security, which aligns with its global commitment to equality. Today, Finland continues to galvanise

coalitions of smaller states to enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of the UN system.

Human rights and rule of Law

As such, Finland has also consistently emphasized human rights and the rule of law as cornerstones of its foreign policy and UN engagement. These values were prominently displayed during its presidency of the UN General Assembly (1961-1962) under Sakari Tuomioja. As a member of the Human Rights Council (last in 2022-2024) Finland has championed gender equality, children's right and the supremacy of international law.

Representation of Underrepresented Regions and Inclusivity

Finland actively supports reforms to ensure a more equitable representation within the Security Council, a commitment that also reflects its broader advocacy for themes such as women, peace and security as well as youth, peace and security and climate security. It sees its leadership in these areas as a bridge-builder, fostering collaboration between stakeholders.

Preventive Diplomacy and Peace Mediation

Preventive diplomacy and peace mediation are absolutely central to Finland's foreign policy identity. Finnish leaders such as the late Nobel Peace Prize laureate Martti Ahtisaari, have made significant contributions to UN led peace processes, such as the Namibia's independence and Kosovo status negotiations. During its time on the Security Council and beyond, Finland has consistently advocated for mechanisms and practices for conflict prevention and actions for peace, here again aligning it with the broader UN Agenda on preventive diplomacy. This gives it a reputational edge in advocacy within the UN as we see below. Finland has been a substantial and steadfast contributor to the UN peacekeeping missions since 1956. Starting with the deployment to the Suez Canal during the Suez Crisis¹¹, with its largest contribution in UNIFIL with 215 personnel. (South Sudan – UNMISS; Mali – MINUSMA; Cyprus – UNFICYP; Middle East – UNTSO; and Somalia – UNSOM).

Climate Security and Sustainability

is another theme that Finland has consistently and increasingly argued to be integrated into the overall security policy framework. In particular, efforts to address the intersection on water – related challenges have gained recognition in recent years. Finland's co-chairing of the Group of Friends in Climate and Security is a case in point.

From this vantage point of view it also seems evident that Finland's pursuit of a non-permanent seat should continue and be honoured. Despite not being successful in having a seat in its last campaign in 2013, it nevertheless continues to play a proactive role, punching, as I have argued above, in many senses, above its weight¹².

¹¹ United Nations RIC "UN thanks Finland for its contribution in peacekeeping"

¹² International Peace Institute. « Taking Stock, moving forward : Report to the Foreign Ministry of Finland on the 2012 Elections to the UN Security Council. » International Peace Institute 2013

4. Could the UN GA be an alternative to SC Reform?

In order to have some room for deliberations, the UN has in the General Assembly already begun to create an alternative to the frozen UN Security Council.

Enhancing the role of the General Assembly, is evidenced by a number of instances where it stepped in to address deadlocks. For example, the “Uniting for Peace” mechanism was already created as far back as in the 1950s to counter apartheid policies in South Africa and demonstrate the General Assembly’s potential to take decisive action when the Security Council is gridlocked. In 2021, the General Assembly voted on a resolution regarding the crisis in Myanmar, bypassing the Security Council’s paralysis. The year 2022 can be considered a watershed year for the General Assembly under the invocation of the Uniting for Peace Mechanism, witnessing four resolutions¹³ on Ukraine.

Increasingly, the General Assembly seems to be determined to hold the P5 accountable and expand its own role in international security¹⁴. Such would necessitate providing the General Assembly a more operational role, contingent on a two-thirds majority vote, which could also amplify the voice of underrepresented regions, particularly Africa, where representation in global decision-making structures remains disproportionately low at approximately 10%.

Given the Security Council’s paralysis—rooted in both the absence of consensus and the unchecked power of the veto—the 2022 Veto Initiative has empowered the General Assembly to scrutinize and debate key decisions, or the lack thereof. By introducing greater accountability and political pressure, this challenges the impunity with which veto power has long been exercised.

UN Veto Initiative: small state, big impact

The so called Liechtenstein Veto Initiative was adopted by the UN General Assembly in April 2022, increasing accountability for the use of veto power in the UN Security Council. When a P5 member exercises a veto, the General Assembly must convene within 10 days to debate the decision. This initiative, co-sponsored by over 80 states reflects a way to overcome Security Council paralysis, also due to the Russian repeated vetoes (14 out of 16 vetoes in 2024).¹⁵

¹³ Resolution ES-11/1 (March 2, 2022); Resolution ES-11/2 (March 24, 2022); ES-11/4 (October 12, 2022); Resolution ES-11/5 (November 14, 2022)

¹⁴ See also Stewart Patrick (2023) UN Security Council Reform: What the world thinks. New York. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

¹⁵ United Nations (2022) <https://press.un.org/en/2022/ga12417.doc>; <https://press.un.org/en/2022/ga12417.doc>

There is an additional reason in mobilising the GA to bolster UNSC Reform. Namely to task the leadership to use the amendment of the UN Charter to address inconsistencies given its original framing as a “living document” through Article 109. Here, of course, the challenge lies in the political and procedural hurdles to amending it. While Article 109 provides for a General Conference to review the Charter, convening such a conference that would actually do so requires approval by a two-thirds majority of the General Assembly and ratification by all five permanent members of the Security Council (P5), making substantial reforms next to impossible without their unanimous consent. The pressing question is: should the institutional framework be rethought and pursued outside of formal Charter amendments, perhaps through innovative institutional practices or by strengthening alternative multilateral frameworks?

The expected arrival of German Diplomat Helga Schmid, former secretary general of the European External Action Service and the OSCE, a highly apt diplomat, provides for an excellent setting to advance the bolstering of the role of the General Assembly as part of general UN reform and in response to the ineffectiveness of the Security Council reform. Much expectation rest on her shoulders during this critical period.

PACT FOR THE FUTURE

A bypass solution of the core issue of Security Council reform to pursuing comprehensive, strategic reforms that address the UN system as a whole is embodied in the adoption of the Pact for the Future (see below) at the September 2024 General Assembly. This exemplifies such an approach. Secretary-General António Guterres himself reminded all member states of the urgency of these efforts, stressing that the UN must evolve beyond being merely a forum for dialogue and take concrete actions to address pressing global challenges, implicitly pointing out his own weakness as Secretary General.

The **Pact for the Future**, unveiled at the September 2024 Summit of the Future, was widely framed as a last-ditch effort to salvage meaningful UN reform. As social media posts from participants revealed, the initiative reflected a growing sense of urgency—an acknowledgment that the Security Council’s paralysis had reached a breaking point - in demanding institutional renewal. The Pact’s commitment to making the Council more representative, inclusive, transparent, efficient, effective, democratic and accountable is ambitious—perhaps even aspirational—given the UN’s history of entrenched power dynamics.

At first glance, the Pact looks like an intelligent maneuver to keep the UN afloat—a structural fix to mask deeper political dysfunction. The fact of the matter remains that **without the political will of the Security Council’s permanent members, its impact remains uncertain**. However, a notable shift appears to be underway: an increasing emphasis on strengthening the relationship between the Security Council and the General Assembly, particularly through Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN). By placing the General Assembly at the heart of the reform process, this trend signals a deliberate effort to rebalance power within the UN system, addressing the longstanding frustration of the broader membership, which has long found itself sidelined in major global decision-making.

Against this backdrop, the adoption of the Pact for the Future represents a symbolic yet significant moment—a collective commitment to reinvigorating multilateralism and enhancing the effectiveness of the UNSC in maintaining international peace and security. Whether this effort leads to substantive change, however, depends not on declarations, but as always, and in particular here, on political will to act.

The broader vision of the Pact for the Future, has identified key thematic issues that must be elevated in the UN's peace and security agenda. These include Climate Change Mitigation, Artificial Intelligence Governance, Conflict Prevention and Resolution and Inequality and Poverty Reduction—all of which hold particular relevance for Finland and the Nordic Group.

5. What should be on the Agenda of the UNSC in the coming years?

For Finland and the Nordic Group, it is timely and purposeful to advocate a specific set of Agenda items not necessarily focussed on state specific but thematic specific issues. For example, it is crucial that the UN Security Council's agenda in the coming years prioritize's a more strategic partnership with Africa's regional organizations to enhance peacekeeping efforts. As early as 2008, the UN panel led by Romano Prodi warned that deploying peacekeeping missions into hostile environments without adequate resources was a recipe for failure—a warning that has been repeatedly validated on the ground. Nowhere is this more evident than in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and West Africa, where African-led peacekeeping missions, often with insufficient UN support, have borne the burden of stabilization.

The upcoming Berlin Peacekeeping Ministerial Conference in May 2025 presents a key opportunity to redefine and institutionalize UN-African Union cooperation, ensuring predictable funding, operational support, and stronger political backing. The Security Council must do more to address neglected conflicts, such as the DRC crisis, which—despite its massive regional and humanitarian impact—has long been marginalized in Council discussions.

Beyond peacekeeping, the Security Council must embrace a more proactive approach to conflict prevention. A horizon-scanning mechanism, reintroduced as a regular, non-vetoable feature of Council deliberations, could serve as an early warning system, compelling both the UN Secretary-General and the Security Council or indeed through a Crisis Management Mechanism in the General Assembly, to engage with crises before they escalate—rather than reacting too late, as has too often been the case.

Addressing these challenges will require bold leadership, multilateral cooperation, and an unwavering commitment to strengthening the UN's capacity to maintain global stability in the 21st century.

6. Reinvigorating Art.6 of the UN Charter – or, better: How can Chapter VI of the Charter be strengthened in a way that binds the Security Council more seriously?

As a firm believer(s) in peace mediation and implicitly with the backing of the Finnish and mostly Nordic foreign policy establishment that have advocated for conflict prevention, peace mediation and peacebuilding for the last 20 years, the importance of Chapter IV of the UN remains (next to) undisputed.

Yet, the Council can only exercise the functions assigned in this chapter if its members are resolved to fulfil their unique responsibility under the UN Charter in peace and security. Clearly, Russia has decided to abandon this responsibility, rendering preventive efforts ineffective. Although the Council remains the only global body capable of compelling parties to cease hostilities without resorting to force, its record since 2011—marked by failures to avert crises in the Central African Republic, Haiti, Mali, Ukraine, Libya, South Sudan, Yemen, and Myanmar—evidence this fact. This chronic underutilization of conflict prevention measures has resulted in the pact for the Future approach.

Informal mechanisms such as “sofa talks” (by the Security Council) have been experimented with to allow discreet discussions among Council members on regional conflicts, while previous early-warning practices like horizon scanning have now been abandoned, particularly following the Ukraine war. These challenges also point to the need for more outspoken proactiveness of regional organisations, the OSCE and the EU. Ultimately, if the Security Council is unable to fulfill its core mandate of preventing, mitigating and resolving conflict, the very essence and legitimacy of the body are called into question. In any case, it is imperative that the goal of conflict prevention is not sacrificed at the altar of political deadlock.

Reinvigorating chapter VI in 2025 to, at minima, enhance the UN’s effectiveness in conflict prevention, peace mediation and keeping. This begs the question of how a binding mechanism can be created to ensure that the Security Council takes the issues seriously? Five possible ways are available:

First, again, the General Assembly tactics are decisive. It could pass resolutions under the **United for Peace mechanism** (Res.377A) (see also above). In addition, **a new procedural role** could be introduced requiring the Security Council to formally address any case where the General Assembly determines a “serious failure” to act under Chapter VI.

Second: The role of the **Secretary General** could be given a **stronger mandate** to trigger Security Council action under Article 99 thus forcing at least discussions, if not conclusions in this arena. Furthermore, the Secretary General could be given a stronger role in holding these accountable to the UN membership.

Third, the GA or any member state could request **an opinion of the International Court of Justice**

on the inaction of members of the Security Council, also in the framework of the Responsibility to Protect, which then in turn establishes the legal fact and increases political and judicial pressure on the cases in question.

Fourth, in addition to existing mechanisms, a **new Peace Mediation Council** under the General Assembly could be created through the patronage of the chair, which could be automated to step in when the Security Council fails to act under Chapter VI. This body could also provide expertise, engage in preventive diplomacy, mediation and conflict resolution when the Security Council is blocked (again) by vetoes.

Finally, the **role of regional organisations** should be strengthened as already stipulated for in Chapter VI. The UN could formalise partnerships with the African Union, EU, ASEAN and OSCE to create joint mediation teams acting under UN authority when the Security Council is inactive. These actions, whilst not reforming the UN or tackling the root cause of much needed reform, would force greater accountability and make it much more difficult to ignore conflict and crises without consequences.

7. Conclusion

Finland's historical engagement with the United Nations has long been shaped by a delicate balance between pragmatism and ambition. Since gaining membership in 1955, it has cultivated a reputation as a principled yet adaptable actor, navigating Cold War divides with what Unto Vesa in a comprehensive Paper on Finland and the UN published by FIIA in 2021 aptly termed its approach "a combination of caution and bold constructivism", arguably still relevant today. The term **bold constructivism** is interpreted as a pragmatic yet forward-thinking approach to international engagement, where Finland actively shapes global norms and institutions while maintaining a cautious diplomatic stance. As such, it reflects willingness to take initiative in practical ways, such as being an early advocate for peacekeeping, mediation, and multilateral cooperation, rather than just reacting to global events.

The UN provided Finland with a stage on which to exercise influence beyond its size, positioning itself as an impartial mediator between ideological blocs, especially during the cold war. Finland was truly a good student and member of the UN, and has engrained such foreign policy identity—rooted in neutrality, a commitment to international law, and a seemingly unrelentless belief in the UN's capacity to foster global stability. Finland's peacekeeping contributions especially during the cold war, and active engagement in multilateral institutions underscored its strategic use of the UN as both a platform for global engagement and a means of reinforcing its own security. Finland should continue advocating for reforms that improve the effectiveness, financing, and deployment and even re-inventing of UN peace operations.

From this perspective, Finland's evolving foreign policy reflects a profound shift from this historical posture. As a member of the European Union and now NATO, neutrality can no longer be the only defining pillar of its international identity. The challenge, then, is to redefine its role in a global order where the previous traditional non-alignment is neither a viable nor a necessary instrument of influ-

ence. Finland's commitment to multilateralism and mediation do, at least on the forefront, remain, and now contours of its engagement must adapt to the realities of a world shaped by geopolitical and possibly domestic polarization on global topics and shifting power dynamics. I am not questioning whether Finland can remain a force for constructive diplomacy, but rather how it will recalibrate its strategic positioning within the UN and beyond—leveraging its experience, credibility, and commitment to international cooperation in a way that aligns with its new security architecture.

Thematic issues in which Finland should advocate for stronger accountability of the UN are -besides conflict prevention and mediation- human security, the nexus of women, peace and security, and climate peace and security. With the geopolitical tensions at hand and changing governments we could well witness growing pushbacks against gender equality in some states and thus create further complications in arriving at inclusive processes, proven to be more sustainable approaches. A new comprehensive human security doctrine built on the initial premise of the UNDP¹⁶, should be on the top of the Agenda of the Security Council, where Finland and its partners should act as initiators and penholders.

And last but not least, as former mentee of the late President Ahtisaari: I have witnessed firsthand how Finland's brand as a global promoter of peace is deeply rooted in the principle of replacing confrontation with dialogue and I am sure that he would object deeply to the failure of the Security Council on Ukraine which now displays a natural limit of a system of collective security. Should we permit that great power privilege trumps sovereign equality?

President Stubb, has throughout his career signaled that Finland is to be committed to these priorities and its investments in peace mediation, training and institutional capacities have only strengthened this trajectory. Now, in addition to Finland punching above its weight, organisations such as the CMI-Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation has become one of the most influential mediation organisations globally, raising also the issue of whether the state based cooperation remains the only center of international cooperation.

Finland has consistently leveraged its strengths to advance the UN agenda, and its role remains crucial in ensuring that multilateral diplomacy stays dynamic, adaptive, and, above all, effective. By championing a stronger institutional focus on mediation and conflict prevention within the Security Council's mandate, Finland can help transform the UN's ability to address global challenges—proving that meaningful reform is not just necessary but possible.

17.2.2025

¹⁶ Based on the 1994 UN Human Development Report

Themes and Options for Reform

Theme	Proposal	Proponents	Challenges	Likelihood
1. Ensuring Greater Representation	Expanding the Council to include historically underrepresented regions, particularly Africa and Latin America. Proposed by: G4 Nations (Germany, Japan, India, Brazil) – advocate for permanent seats.	African Union (AU) – demands permanent African representation (Ezulwini Consensus). The United States, France, and the UK – have expressed openness to expansion.	China and Russia oppose G4 expansion, fearing a shift in global power dynamics. Regional rivalries complicate consensus, particularly India-Pakistan and Brazil-Mexico.	Low – deep divisions remain, making expansion difficult.
2. Restricting the Use of the Veto	Introducing mechanisms to limit the abuse of veto power, allowing the General Assembly to override vetoes in certain cases. Proposed by: France and Mexico – proposed voluntary veto restraint in cases of mass atrocities (Code of Conduct Initiative).	Liechtenstein – led the Veto Initiative (adopted in 2022), requiring P5 members to explain veto use before the General Assembly. UN Secretary-General António Guterres – has publicly called for veto reforms.	P5 members strongly resist any limitations on their veto power. The initiative is largely symbolic, as it does not provide a way to override a veto.	Moderate – voluntary constraints may gain traction, but enforcement remains weak.
3. Enhancing Transparency and Accountability	Allowing greater engagement with non-state actors, civil society, and non-Security Council member states to improve accountability. Proposed by: ACT Group (Accountability, Coherence, Transparency) – led by Switzerland, promotes transparency reforms.	The UN General Assembly (UNGA) – has pressured the Security Council to be more open. The UN General Assembly (UNGA) – has pressured the Security Council to be more open.	The current Security Council resists transparency, citing diplomatic sensitivity. Greater transparency won't necessarily reduce gridlock.	Moderate – transparency measures may advance, but fundamental power structures remain unchanged.
4. Institutionalizing Regular Consultation for Greater Accountability	Establishing a formal mechanism for the Security Council to report and engage with the broader UN membership on a regular basis. Proposed by: Global South, Small and Middle Powers (e.g., Canada, South Korea) – favor stronger UNGA-SC coordination.	G77 and Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) – advocate for General Assembly input into Security Council decisions.	P5 members resist any formalization of General Assembly influence over the Security Council. While consultations already exist, they are largely symbolic; making them binding would require major structural changes.	Low – unless small and middle powers build stronger coalitions to push for change.
5. Strengthening Crisis Response Mechanisms	Ensuring that Security Council deadlock does not prevent urgent action, by developing alternative decision-making mechanisms. Proposed by: High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation (UN initiative) – suggests new crisis response mechanisms.	European Union & Latin American Countries – back stronger and more efficient crisis intervention tools. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine – was an attempt at bypassing Security Council inaction, but its implementation remains inconsistent.	Existing workarounds, such as the UNGA's "Uniting for Peace" resolution, exist but lack enforcement power. Any real reform would require P5 agreement, which is highly unlikely.	Low – alternative mechanisms may be proposed, but without P5 support, enforcement remains weak.