UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

Power Plays in the United Nations

A Qualitative Study Exploring Member States' Positions on the Veto Power through Multilateralism and National Interests

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines the attitudes and positions of United Nations Member States towards the veto power in the UN Security Council (UNSC). Through a content analysis of official meeting notes from UN General Assembly plenary meetings, it examines how Member States discuss and perceive the veto power, particularly in relation to and through the lens of multilateralism and national interests. The empirical material, retrieved from the United Nations Digital Library, consists of meetings that took place after the adaptation of resolution 76/262, also known as the veto initiative. The statements studied are from meetings held after a veto has been cast by any of the five Permanent (P5) Members of the UN Security Council as well as the initial debate from when the resolution on the veto initiative was adopted. The analysis reveals nuanced perspectives on the veto power and sheds light on the dynamics of power relations within the UN. Using a qualitative approach rooted in theoretical frameworks on multilateralism, national interests, and power dynamics, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexity of attitudes and positions towards the veto in the UN.

Keywords

UN, UNSC, UNGA, veto, power dynamics, global politics, national interests, multilateralism

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1. Introduction

This introductory section provides a succinct overview of the research objectives and the scope of the field of study. The introduction provides an overview of the background and the central issues that the research seeks to address. This is followed by a presentation of the purpose and the research questions that guide the analysis. Finally, the section considers the limitations of the study and its relevance to the subject matter.

1.1 Background

The international organisation United Nations (henceforth referred to as the UN) was founded in the year of 1945 in the aftermath of World War II with the purpose of being a forum for international peace and security. In establishing the organisation, the UN had 51 Member States. Thereafter, the organisation has grown significantly, and today it consists of 193 Member States. Since its founding, the UN has continued to be the most prominent place to discuss and develop collaborative solutions to major global issues (United Nations, n.d.-a). One of the main responsibilities of the UN on the global arena is the promotion and maintenance of international peace and security. Within the UN, the body with the most power, and therefore also the largest responsibility, is the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) because of its right to adopt legally binding resolutions in order to preserve international peace (Gould & Rablen, 2017, p. 146). Its functions and responsibilities include the following, as described in the United Nations Charter,

> In order to ensure prompt and effective action by the United Nations, its Members confer on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and agree that in carrying out its duties under this responsibility the Security Council acts on their behalf. (U.N. Charter art. 24, para. 1)

The UNSC consists of fifteen members which represent fifteen Member States. Five of these are permanent and the remaining ten serve a period of two years. The Permanent Members in the UNSC are China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America (U.N. Charter art. 23). The Permanent Members are often referred to as the P5 and they were given these seats because of their significance after World War II (United Nations, 2023). Not only do the P5 have a

permanent seat on the Council, but they also hold a power to veto, meaning they can block resolutions from being adopted regardless of how many other members vote in favour (United Nations Security Council, n.d.). The veto power has been debated for a long time and especially whether or not the veto disrupts the legitimacy for the Council and the UN as a whole. Questions regarding how the Security Council is affected by the P5 that hold veto power have risen and whether they are using their power to promote international peace and security or if they are largely acting in their national interests (Frederking & Patane, 2017, p. 347). Since 1946, the veto has been formally cast almost 300 times, with the majority of vetoes being exercised by Russia or the former Soviet Union (Security Council Report, 2024).

Many times, the use of veto has led to a debate whether the veto is used in a correct manner according to the UN Charter. This has resulted in the drafting of a resolution in 2022, resolution 76/262, initiated by Liechtenstein's UN Ambassador Christian Wenaweser (United Nations, 2022). The resolution, also known as the veto initiative, concludes that when a veto is cast in the Security Council, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) shall be convened within ten days. In the General Assembly, there is then an opportunity to discuss, debate and question the veto that has been cast (G.A. Res. 76/262).

> There has never been a stronger need for effective multilateralism than today. And there has never been a stronger need for innovation in order to secure the central role and voice of the United Nations in this respect. (Wenaweser, 2022)

The resolution was largely followed by positive reactions from Member States and it was adopted without a vote on 26 April 2022. The quote above from Wenaweser shows his position regarding the resolution and the strengthening of the UN system after the resolution was adopted. The effects of the resolution at an early stage has been examined by scholars and Barber (2023, p. 347) expresses how the majority of states have been supporting the resolution and expressed the need for accountability and how this is in line with the UN Charter. Furthermore, Barber (2023, pp. 351, 360) explains that while the veto initiative has established a forum that enhances accountability, it does so in a way that is not entirely satisfactory. The outcomes of the veto initiative are debated, yet they are considered better than taking no action at all.

1.2 Purpose of Study & Research Questions

The use and possession of the veto power in the UN Security Council has been debated for several decades, both within the UN and also outside of the organisation by scholars in the field of international relations and international law, among others. Attitudes and positions on the veto vary depending on the context, historically, geographically and according to the current power balance in world politics. Considering the veto initiative outlined in General Assembly Resolution 76/262, this study aims to identify, explore and analyse current positions and attitudes towards the veto, and how the veto is discussed between different Member States in an official context and formal setting. This includes an examination both from the perspective of those who possess veto power and those who do not. The analysis will cover eight meetings in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and the related official meeting notes from the plenary.

The meetings that will be analysed cover the initial debate on the veto resolution after it was adopted and meetings after three different vetoes, one by each country that has issued a veto since the resolution came into force in order to gain a nuanced understanding. All of the meetings in the UNGA that will be the foundation of the analysis have been held after the veto resolution's adoption and took place between April 2022, when the initial debate was held, and December 2023, when the last meeting that will be analysed took place. The study then aims to identify patterns in the Assembly's discussions by categorising statements from predefined themes stemming from the concepts of multilateralism, national interests and power dynamics. This approach contributes to a deeper understanding of the current attitudes of UN actors towards the veto. By analysing the meeting records of the UN General Assembly, the study will shed light on prevailing perceptions and opinions.

In order to effectively fulfil the purpose of the study, the following research questions will serve as central focal points for analysis and discussion. The first two questions are empirical and guide the examination of current attitudes and positions towards the veto power, while the last question is analytical and provides a summary of the findings to explore the issue on a deeper level.

- ➔ How do the discussions in the UN General Assembly, initiated by the veto initiative resolution, exemplify Member States' views and attitudes towards the veto?

- ➔ How do attitudes towards the veto, expressed in the Assembly meetings, vary between the P5 and the other Member States?

- ➔ How do Member States' expressed positions on the veto reflect their views and approaches to multilateralism, national interests, and power dynamics in the UN?

1.3 Delimitations

This study aims to analyse documented meeting coverages from the UN General Assembly after a veto has been cast in the Security Council, which can provide a limited picture of the attitude towards the veto on a larger scale. As the resolution only entered into force two years ago, the material, i.e. the meeting coverage from plenary sessions in the General Assembly, is limited to this period, which affects the study in that it will only cover the current landscape and not the historical one. This, however, has already been analysed by other scholars such as Blessing and Sheriff (2018) and Beardsley and Schmidt (2012).

This study could have been expanded to include a larger and more diverse sample, to include additional material beyond the meeting records and to cover a longer period of time. The analysis could have been further expanded by including a wider range of documents, such as other official documents and statements, as well as statements from informal settings. Moreover, examining a longer historical period could provide insights into how attitudes towards the veto have evolved over time. This extension could have added depth to the conclusions and provided a more comprehensive perspective on the topic. However, due to time and space constraints, some limitations have been necessary. Given the study's focus on current attitudes to the veto, a broad generalisation of the entire debate is not required to effectively answer the research questions. The chosen scope thus allows for a targeted and meaningful analysis within the available resources.

1.4 Subject Relevance

Global studies encompasses a wide range of interdisciplinary concepts and issues, from globalisation and international relations to development and governance. Within this field,

debates often centre on power dynamics, diplomatic relations and the role of international institutions. This thesis contributes to these discussions by examining the dynamics of the veto power within the UN Security Council. The veto power in the UN Security Council has given rise to long-standing debates because of its inherent privileging of some states over others. This division into privileges has fuelled disputes over the principles of equality between sovereign states (Mahmood, 2013, p. 118).

Examining discussions in the UN General Assembly and analysing attitudes towards the veto and whether they differ may therefore be relevant in order to find out how the veto is viewed from various perspectives. As the veto is of a controversial nature, this provides a significant empirical basis for further research and analysis. By delving into Member States' attitudes towards and positioning around the veto power, this research sheds light on broader issues of power dynamics, representation and the effectiveness of multilateral diplomacy in addressing global challenges. As such, this study is relevant to understanding the complexity of global issues and provides insights into how diplomatic processes shape international relations.

2. Previous Research

Much of the previous research on the veto power focuses on why the UN intervenes in some conflicts and not in others, and how the veto creates power imbalances and inequalities. This type of research focuses on the Security Council and whether the P5 with veto power act according to the UN Charter or according to their own interests. Beardsley and Schmidt (2012, pp. 33–34) discuss this very point and explain how the P5 can shape the way in which the UN engages and intervenes and how this manifests itself according to their own national interests. Furthermore, they emphasise that if the UN support in situations of war and crisis is dominated by the most powerful members, the outcome of the UN's core mission will be marginal at best. Concrete examples of how the use of the veto has resulted in the UN's ineffectiveness are highlighted by Mahmood (2013, p. 126), who describes the silence of the Security Council in relation to the Iraq war in 2003 and the Georgian war in 2008.

Furthermore, Diehl (2019, p. 540) emphasises how recent events, with a rise in nationalism in Europe, the United States and elsewhere, and Member States acting more in their national interests will lower the priority for the collective good, causing further reductions in UN peacekeeping activities. The prioritisation of national interests in a multilateral organisation for peace and security, such as the UN, can lead to political deadlock and disagreements. With the P5 possessing veto power, their interests can, as mentioned above, shape how the UN operates (Diehl, 2019, p. 543). In addition, Mahmood (2013, p. 128) further explains that no other intergovernmental organisation in the present day gives such significant power or privileges to a select few members as the Permanent Members of the Security Council have with their veto power. In general, intergovernmental organisations are largely based on the sovereign equality of states. However, Frederking and Patane (2017, p. 348) point out how this criticism of the Security Council and the veto power is not always sufficiently justified. All Member States have signed and approved the UN Charter, which gives this kind of authority to the Security Council. They state how despite much criticism, Member States have not explicitly withdrawn their consent from the global social contract that is the UN.

In addition to previous research on why the UN intervenes or abstains from intervening in conflicts or threats to peace and security, other research is largely based on the consequences of the veto and how it has affected the global political landscape and the balance of power in the world. Blessing and Sheriff (2018, p. 115) indicate how the power given to the P5 often

leads to smaller and weaker states being marginalised in international politics. In practice, these states become insignificant in the political landscape when it comes to important decisions on international peace and security. Furthermore, Blessing and Sheriff (2018, p. 110) point out how states with the veto power do not primarily act in the interest of humanity, but rather on the basis of national economic, political and ideological interests, which was also emphasised by Beardsley and Schmidt (2012) as mentioned earlier.

However, the veto has served as an important tool to reassure world leaders during times of tension in the global landscape. But it has also been an obstacle to the UN's efforts to achieve its goals and the veto has also been perceived as undemocratic and exclusionary (Blessing & Sheriff, 2018, p. 113). This also leads to an impact on the global balance of power. The global political landscape has changed since the UN was founded in 1945, but the veto power is still limited to a few states. Although the number of vetoes has decreased since the end of the Cold War, there is still a threat that a resolution will be denied, which has created an uneven balance of power (Mahmood, 2013, pp. 117, 127). In order to mitigate these power imbalances, the veto initiative resolution from 2022 was passed in order to enhance accountability within the Security Council. By doing so, it seeks to redistribute power dynamics, slightly shifting the responsibilities for peace and security towards the General Assembly. The research on potential effects and consequences of the resolutions is not yet that broad since the resolution has not been around for a longer period of time. As mentioned in the background, Barber (2023, p. 360) examined the resolution at an early stage and concluded that the outcomes of the resolution are contested in whether it has created change or not, but that the veto initiative is seen as better than nothing.

Much of the previous research on the subject deals with the consequences of the veto power in the UN Security Council, how the veto creates power relations and whether the P5 use it for the common interest of the UN, or their own interests. The existing research on the resolution itself, on which this study is based, is largely focused on whether or not the resolution has had an effect and in what way. This study will add to the debate by exploring and identifying the general attitude of Member States towards the veto based on what is said in UNGA meetings after a veto has been issued, and whether or not the attitudes differ between the P5 and the other Member States.

3. Theoretical Framework

To address what the study aims to examine and answer the research questions, relevant concepts will be applied to analyse the results. These have emerged through a critical review of previous research on the subject. The key previous research presented above has led into the concepts of multilateralism, national interests, and power and power dynamics that will be used for the analysis. The concepts are explained and defined below based on how they will be useful in the upcoming analysis.

3.1 Multilateralism

The principle of multilateralism in international relations is something that is necessary to take into account when studying the UN. The UN describes itself as a multilateral organisation and in 2018 they adopted a resolution for the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace (G.A. Res. 73/127). This resolution recognises the following, showing the UN's strong relation to multilateralism,

> *Recognizing* the United Nations as the most representative international organization and the utmost expression of multilateralism, which is the main instrument to address multifaceted and complex global challenges through collective action,
>
> *Recognizing also* the urgent need to promote and strengthen multilateralism and that the United Nations plays a central role in this regard,
>
> *Recognizing further* the role of international, regional and subregional organizations in the promotion and preservation of multilateralism and in the facilitation of diplomacy, and noting in this regard the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and its political declaration of 26 September 2018. (G.A. Res. 73/127)

Based on this resolution, multilateralism is clearly an important part of the UN and how it operates, making it particularly important to be considered when studying Member States attitudes and position to the veto power. For this study, the definition and use of multilateralism will be based on Keohane's (1990) definition and explanation of the principle.

> Multilateralism can be defined as the practice of co-ordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions. (Keohane, 1990, p. 731)

This definition can also be found on the official UN website along with a more comprehensive description of how the concept revolves around consultation, inclusion and solidarity and how multilateralism not only is a form of organisation but also a method of co-operation (United Nations, n.d.-b). Before going into more of how Keohane describes the concept, it is important to note that there are other definitions and scholars who see problems with Keohanes definition. Ruggie (1992, p. 565) expresses how this definition is formal and somewhat superficial and can sometimes cause problems because it involves institutional forms that have previously been seen as expressions of bilateralism, not multilateralism. In addition to this, there are realist scholars such as Kenneth Walz who believe that multipolarity heightens the potential for great power conflict, while bipolarity fosters more equitable power distribution among great powers and reduces the risk of miscalculation that often leads to outbreaks of war and armed conflicts (Mearsheimer, 2020, p. 59; Waltz, 1988, p. 622). However, to be able to make a clear study, limitations to one definition is necessary.

Multilateralism is in many ways founded and expressed through co-operation as the key factor but this is not always the easiest to exercise in practice. Keohane (1990, p. 740) discussed this very issue and explained that the difficulties of co-operation, such as the existence of conflicting interests and different power dynamics, can make it difficult to see who or what has influenced the design of institutions or specific policies. Despite these difficulties, multilateral co-operation has, according to the UN, made it possible to achieve great things, such as agreements on arms control limitation and promotion of the strengthening of human rights (United Nations, n.d.-b). The concept of multilateralism can only exist if there is a balance between supply and demand in relation to international co-operation and multilateral agreements. This is based on where national preferences lie, and these can naturally change over time because of the changes of national political institutions or, on the global arena, through an increase in interdependence. Often the demand for multilateral agreement rises because of an increase in interdependence (Keohane, 1990, pp. 741–742), which stems from situations characterised by mutual effects between countries or actors in different countries. The effects of interdependence is however not limited to situations where everyone benefits (Keohane & Nye, 1977, p. 122). National interests can

therefore be seen as the centre of all global political co-operation, as national interests must be aligned with agreements for there to be a functioning form of multilateralism.

3.2 National Interests

To understand and analyse the statements articulated by different Member States, it is important to examine them through the perspective of national interests. Since the UN is an international organisation with the common goal to create and preserve peace and security around the world, one could think that this is every state's individual goal in the UN as well. However, as mentioned in the section on previous research, some scholars highlight that states within the UN sometimes act according to their national interests instead.

To grasp the origins and perceptions of national interests, it can be beneficial to begin by considering the perspective of state identity. The notion of identity can be explained in various ways, but to lead into and in relation to the concept of national interests, one important part is how identity is created by, and also creates different groups. Throughout history, identity is seen to play a major role in the quality of life and for survival. This is if we are identified as belonging to or being outside the hegemonic group where those in the outgroup are assumed to have weaker characteristics (Wibben & Rutazibwa, 2019, p. 82). These ingroups and outgroups can create gaps between people, where some get more privileges than others, not only at the individual level but also in global politics (Aggestam, 1999). Unrecognised privilege is dangerous both personally and politically because it means we are oppressors without even realising it. This can give some people advantages within certain social structures, the ingroup, but it can be difficult to see this from the inside (Wibben & Rutazibwa, 2019, p. 86).

Since identity in many ways form a nation and a national identity this is partly how national interests arise. In global politics, this can be seen in alliances, different forms of strategies, economy etc, which all express different forms of national interests through foreign policy.

> Both identity and security are relational concepts that imply the existence of an `other' against which the notion of a collective self and conditions of insecurity are articulated. (Aggestam, 1999)

States formulate their foreign policy taking into account how it will affect their national interests. Before formulating a foreign policy, it is crucial that a state has a clear understanding of its own national interests since the interest is the determination of how a state acts on the international political arena (Ebegbulem, 2010, pp. 139–140). The creation of national interests is often based on the economic well-being, military security and safety, and ideological principles, where states with similar ideological backgrounds often have similar interests. In addition to this, the type of government also plays a major part in how national interests form, where a democratic state will listen to interest groups and such, and a less democratic state will only listen to the elite (Ebegbulem, 2010, p. 141). How national interests form can also be seen through different theories. According to liberal thought, different strategies that are either universal or particular can be used to either limit or expand political influence and form a nation's priorities and interests. What matters is how effective each strategy is in separating politics from private life. If the particular strategy helps to keep politics in check, it is prioritised. But if the universal makes it easier to deal with excessive political involvement from the specific, it is chosen instead (MacLellan, 2021, p. 559). In contrast to liberalism, realism suggests that the interests of a nation are defined in terms of power and therefore power is the main goal for political actions (Morgenthau, 1978, pp. 5–6). Realists also suggest that the national interest is what matters the most for states in the international sphere and foreign policy and not moral principles (Morgenthau, 1949, p. 211).

These different approaches to national interests and how they are made and formed are essential to understanding and analysing the material in this study since the study is founded upon documents which contain different Member States and their position on foreign policy in the multilateral organisation of the UN. Underlying the concepts of national interests and multilateralism is power and power dynamics which can be recognised in different shapes and forms.

3.3 Power & Power Dynamics

Power is a broad and complex concept with different dimensions and because of this, a limitation to the concept is needed. For this study, the limitation of the power concept will be, in most part, to the work of Foucault (1982; 2002) because of how his work offers a complex yet deep understanding of power dynamics. By focusing on Foucault's studies of political

institutions and different mechanisms for exercising power, it allows for an exploration of how power relations can be subtle and internalised, providing a more nuanced insight into the complexity of power in society. Other scholars' work will also be complementary to get an even more comprehensive picture for this analysis. Foucault (2002, pp. 102–104) describes power as something that exists everywhere but that the definition of power is often misinterpreted, because of how power is not a structure or institution, but neither is it something that only some people have. He continues to explain power in terms of relations and describes how power relations is what matters the most in order to understand the concept of power. The possession of power and how this expresses itself and emerges in international organisations is something that Adler (1997) also describes as multidimensional.

> […] international organisations are related to power, because they can be sites of identity and interest formation, and because states and sometimes individuals and other social actors can draw on their material and symbolic resources. (Adler, 1997, p. 261)

In addition, Foucault (2002, pp. 108–109) means that the complexity of power stems from its dynamic character and therefore can be changed over time. From Foucault's perspective, studies of political institutions should be based on examining processes, strategies and mechanisms, especially those that shape power dynamics. These mechanisms and strategies define, control and regulate individuals who are subject to the power structure. To understand an institution, one needs to focus not on its formal legal character, class composition or associated behaviours, but rather on the ideas or concepts that define the institution (Bevir, 1999, p. 352).

For the concept of power to materialise in practice, one actor must exercise power over the other. Power arises when relationships are initiated and are not visible or recognisable without relationships between different parties (Foucault, 1982, p. 786). Power in global politics can be seen in various instruments, such as in the military, economic, diplomatic, cultural and also symbolic (Goddard & Nexon, 2016, p. 11). But power does not have to be directly visible to exist or to be analysed. What characterises a power relationship is how the actions of the power holder affect the actions of the other, directly or indirectly, more or less visible to the masses (Foucault, 1982, p. 789). To be able to analyse power, one needs to look at the ways in which it is exercised.

> "How," not in the sense of "How does it manifest itself?" but "By what means is it exercised?" and "What happens when individuals exert (as they say) power over others?". (Foucault, 1982, p. 786)

Power can therefore be seen as the authority to shape shared meanings that constitute the identities, interests and actions of states, which also can be understood as by what means the power is exercised. By shaping identities and interests and sharing these with other like minded states, power can be exercised through control of access to and distribution of resources and benefits (Adler, 1997, p. 261). In the global political landscape, it is precisely this sharing of interests with other like-minded people and then collectively mobilising for their own policies, that makes global power politics visible. This is reflected in how different actors strategically work to increase their influence and reduce the power of their rivals through different tactics and strategies. At the same time, relationships, transactions and decisions within political communities can also be shaped and influenced by prevailing power dynamics (Goddard & Nexon, 2016, p. 7). Power is not something that a person, actor or group obtains and then always possesses, but more of a technique, which means that it can change between those who possess it, demonstrating the dynamic nature of power (Foucault, 1982, p. 781).

3.4 Relevance for Analysis

In the context of the structure and dynamics of the UN, the understanding of multilateralism, national interests and power are highly interlinked. Multilateralism represents a quest for co-operation and agreements between multiple states, with national interests constantly influencing these interactions. Power dynamics are fundamental, often determining which national interests will be favoured or disfavoured in any given situation. Powerful states, particularly those with veto power on the Security Council, shape outcomes to align with their strategic goals, sometimes at the expense of collective multilateral aims. This interplay creates a complex environment where states advance their national interests while navigating the existing balance of power. These concepts are essential for analysing political relations within the UN, revealing how actors navigate to advance their own national interests while trying to maintain or challenge the existing balance of power.

4. Method & Material

This section describes the method and material used in this study. The research is based on a qualitative analysis of official UN General Assembly meeting notes retrieved from the United Nations Digital Library, and the emphasis of the material collected is on discussions on the use of the veto. The data selection was guided by a purposive sampling method which aimed to ensure relevance to the research questions, with a particular focus on cases where veto power was exercised by one of the Permanent Members of the Security Council. The method of analysis involved qualitative content analysis, which allowed for the identification of both predetermined and emerging themes and sub-themes relevant to the objectives of the study.

This thesis used a case study design to explore and analyse attitudes and positions towards the veto power among UN Member States, with a particular focus on the General Assembly meetings in 2022 and 2023. By closely examining one specific case, that is the discussions around the veto power within the UN General Assembly, the study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the multilateralist and national interest-based perspectives, as well as the power dynamics that characterise these discussions. Official meeting notes from the General Assembly plenary are used as the primary source, allowing for a detailed and contextual analysis of the current debates and decision-making within the UN.

4.1 Empirical Method

In this study, the empirical material has been retrieved from existing sources in order to fulfil the purpose of the study and answer the research questions. All documents that will be analysed have been collected from the United Nations Digital Library (n.d.). These are all official meeting notes from General Assembly plenary sessions. In order to get a nuanced picture of the debate, a purposive sampling has been used as a sampling method. This type of sampling method means that the empirical material is selected on the basis of how the material is relevant to enable the research question to be answered (Bryman, 2018, p. 498). In order to get the most diverse picture possible, the statements selected have not been limited to specific Member States, but the focus is more on statements that give a reflection of the debate. However, in order to answer the research questions, the focus has been on extracting statements from different P5 Members as well as statements from Member States from

different parts of the world and of different sizes. This is to get a broader representation of attitudes.

The Dag Hammarskjöld Library (United Nations, 2024) has been used to identify all vetoes cast and at what dates. The meetings selected are based on three different occasions when the veto has been used, once by the Russian Federation, once collectively by the Russian Federation and China, and once by the United States of America. This selection has been made to ensure that all of the P5 that have vetoed since the veto initiative came into force are included. As China has not been alone in vetoing, but only in conjunction with Russia, Russia is included twice. The other two P5 Members, the United Kingdom and France, have not vetoed anything since the resolution came into force and therefore no meetings on their vetoes have been selected as they do not exist. In addition to this, the session in the General Assembly where the veto initiative resolution was adopted has also been selected to further add an objective dimension and get additional statements on the veto without specifically singling out any state.

Since the material consists of official meeting notes from UNGA, there is a need to be aware of how these are produced and how this affects credibility. Official documents from private sources are most likely genuine and meaningful, but they are also written based on something that the sender wants to communicate, which is important to keep in mind (Bryman, 2018, pp. 665–666). The fact that only some meetings and their documents will be analysed, it is important to know how these meetings are, explicit or implicit, connected to various other documents and contexts inside, and sometimes outside, of the organisation (Bryman, 2018, p. 675). Other factors that are essential to consider are factors such as the authenticity and representativeness of the documents. The authenticity of official documents may come into question, particularly when considering that the authors likely have specific ideas or perceptions they aim to convey (Bryman, 2018, p. 666). In the case of these specific meeting notes, authenticity remains intact as they capture the discussions that took place during the meetings and include different voices. It is not only the perspective of one person or organisation that shapes the content. However, representativeness may be compromised due to the selective nature of the documents chosen for analysis. These documents deal with specific issues, and the analysis of them must include a consideration that they are produced in context rather than representing the whole reality (Bryman, 2018, p. 676).

4.2 Analytical Method

The analytical method that has been used to analyse the empirical material is a qualitative content analysis. Qualitative research has a large emphasis on words and is based on perceptions and interpretations of the social reality it is made in. This differs from quantitative research, which instead places the greatest emphasis on numbers and quantification (Bryman, 2018, p. 61). A content analysis can be carried out both qualitatively and quantitatively and many content analysis studies can incorporate both of these research methods (Boréus & Kohl, 2018, p. 51). Qualitative content analysis, however, make greater use of complex interpretations, which is appropriate for this study as the aim is to interpret attitudes towards the veto power in the UN Security Council, how this can be understood and whether or not it differs between different actors depending on their possession of the veto power or lack thereof.

This qualitative content analysis has been carried out by systematically describing the meaning of the data and then categorising it through a code scheme (Schreider, 2014, as cited in Boréus & Kohl, 2018, p. 50). The method is partly inductive where both the predetermined research questions and themes exist, but other categories may also emerge during the course of the work. The analysis that will be carried out is primarily based on this, but can also be seen to have an abductive approach. This is because abduction enables the creation of a theoretical understanding of the empirical material. This is done by starting from the languages, meanings and perspectives that shape the worldview of the material (Bryman, 2018, p. 478).

For the analysis, three primary themes have been developed to facilitate the analysis, each rooted in the theoretical framework. These themes have proved essential to understanding the complex dynamics of the research context. In addition, several sub-themes within each primary theme were identified, which have developed organically through engagement with the material. The themes are as follows:

1. Attitudes towards the veto
    - Opinions on the veto
    - Perception of the veto

2. Multilateralism vs. national interests
    - Community and co-operation
    - National identity
    - Compromises

3. Power and power dynamics
    - P5 vs. other Member States
    - Power relations
    - Positioning in relation to other states

These themes are linked to the different research questions. Theme 1 largely addresses the first two research questions, that is *How do the discussions in the UN General Assembly, initiated by the veto initiative resolution, exemplify Member States' views and attitudes towards the veto?* and *How do attitudes towards the veto, expressed in the Assembly meetings, vary between the P5 and the rest of the Member States?*, which both have a more empirical basis due to the way they are formulated to investigate Member States' attitudes and how these differ. Themes 2 and 3 are more related to the last question, *How do Member States' expressed positions on the veto reflect their views and approaches to multilateralism, national interests, and power dynamics in the UN?*, which has an analytical character, but these themes also emerge in connection with the first two questions, as the material consists of statements from actors and is therefore dynamic in nature. These themes and sub-themes provide a structured approach to this analysis, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the complexities of this research topic. By incorporating both theoretical frameworks and empirical insights, the study strives to create a deeper insight into the contested dynamics surrounding veto power and opinions on it in the UN General Assembly.

The fact that this study is carried out through a content analysis contributes to the study's improved reliability, which can otherwise be difficult in qualitative studies due to the fact that it is not possible to keep a social context unchanged, which can make it difficult to repeat a qualitative study (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, as cited in Bryman, 2018, p. 465). Since this study focuses on analysing official meeting notes with statements already made, reliability is increased because the statements can be systematically analysed and the study can therefore be repeated in a similar way. Therefore, content analysis is more suitable for this study than interviews, which could reduce reliability. Nevertheless, changes in the social and political

worldview may affect the possibility of conducting exactly the same study again and obtaining similar results. However, the external validity of this analysis is something that may suffer as a result of the limited sample as the results will not achieve complete generalisability (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, as cited in Bryman, 2018, p. 466).

4.3 Ethical Considerations

Ethics play a crucial role in research, especially when it comes to positional bias. As researchers, our own backgrounds, experiences and perspectives inevitably influence our interpretations and analyses. Despite efforts to maintain objectivity, it is a challenge to completely eradicate subjectivity, especially when it comes to selecting and analysing statements. In this study, an active awareness of the inherent subjectivity of qualitative analyses and an effort to reduce bias has always been prominent. However, it is important to realise that while objectivity is sought, it may not be possible to achieve complete neutrality.

Due to the fact that the empirical material that will be analysed is taken from already existing sources, the study avoids having to take into account some of the ethical principles that exist, including avoiding invasion of privacy and avoiding that participants may suffer harm or experience discomfort (Bryman, 2018, p. 170). As society changes and evolves, so does research ethics. Issues of ethics are dynamic and existing principles must be applied in new ways (Vetenskapsrådet, 2023), such as in the case of electronic sources, which is what will be used in this study. The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity emphasises the predominant ethical principles as reliability, honesty, respect and accountability, and further explains how research integrity is of great importance to ensure trustworthiness (ALLEA, 2023, pp. 3, 5).

Because of the technological advances in society, it is important, as mentioned above, to apply ethical considerations in new forms. For this study where all material is gathered from already existing sources online, the ethical considerations need to concern electronic sources and communication. Electronic sources have the problem that it is not always clear whether the material is public or private. Pace and Livingstone (2005, as cited in Bryman, 2018, pp. 187–188) discuss electronic communication as sources in the context of research and emphasise that it can be used for research if it is archived in a public and easily accessible

way, is not of a sensitive nature and there are no regulations, laws or other rules prohibiting its use. This is something that was taken into account when collecting the material in order not to violate these ethical principles. However, the difficulty with these principles is how, or by who, these elements are defined and what is categorised as sensitive or not. In this study, all empirical material has been taken from the United Nations Digital Library, which should indicate an avoidance of violating these ethical principles.

5. Results & Analysis

The following presentation of results and analysis will be organised according to the dates of the different meetings. First, the initial debate from the adoption of the resolution on the veto initiative will be presented, followed by the different meetings of the General Assembly after the respective vetoes were cast in the Security Council. In each part concerning the different meetings, a short description on the background of every meeting is presented, followed by the results in the form of statements from the meetings, which have emerged from the different themes previously mentioned in the method section. The results in the form of the statements are rarely tied to only one of the themes developed, but these are often linked through several themes. In combination with the presentation of the results, the analysis will also take place. In the first section of the following chapter, the themes will be written out together with the analysis. In the later sections this will not be made explicit as the results become more and more intertwined with all the themes.

5.1 Adoption of Resolution 76/262, 26 April 2022

Standing mandate for a General Assembly debate when a veto is cast in the Security Council

The adoption of the resolution on the veto initiative (G.A. Res. 76/262), was met with different voices and opinions. Many of the Member States that do not hold veto power expressed a similar view to the new resolution. As this study is based on attitudes and perceptions about the veto power, the quotes from this meeting will therefore not focus on the resolution, but more on the views towards the veto power itself. As this is a document where Member States do not discuss a particular veto or vetoing state, many of the statements are falling under theme 1, that is "Attitudes towards the veto", and the responsibilities and privileges of the P5 Members are often discussed and can be interpreted in terms of this theme.

> Veto custodians in the Security Council have a duty of responsibility, rather than a right, and its application must be in the letter and spirit of engendering international peace and security, pursuant to the Charter of the United Nations.
> - Papua New Guinea, Mr. Sarufa (A/76/PV.69, p. 12)

> The use of the veto is not a privilege, but a heavy responsibility.
> - Luxemburg, Mr. Maes (A/76/PV.69, p. 18)

> Seventy-six years ago, the Charter of the United Nations included the veto as a guarantee that great Powers would never disagree to the point of returning to war. They would resort to the veto, that special privilege, with responsibility when their crucial national interests were involved. But as we have seen over the years, the veto has been used and abused and many times without any clear reason or justification.
> - Albania, Mr. Stastoli (A/76/PV.69, p. 19)

These three statements from representatives from Papua New Guinea, Luxembourg and Albania all speak of the same thing, the responsibilities of the P5 Members. As well as falling under theme 1, this can also be seen to fall under theme 3, "Power and power dynamics". These quotes above suggest that there is a big difference in power between the P5 and the rest, and how this is reflected in the fact that Member States are not happy with how the veto has been used historically. Since power is not something consistent or something that is always visible, these statements can show how the power dynamics have shifted during the existence of the UN. The power dynamics and relations in the UN and especially in the Security Council is largely based on the ideas and concepts that define them (Bevir, 1999, p. 352). When Member States exercise their right to call upon the veto and question the foundational ideas of the Security Council, power can be redistributed. This is because of how power can be exercised in the form of sharing interests and actions and therefore change the dynamics of power (Adler, 1997, p. 261).

In addition to this, below is a quote from the P5 Member United Kingdom that also expresses the privilege of holding veto power.

> The Charter of the United Nations, in giving that solemn duty, gives the permanent members the power of veto. That is a heavy responsibility, to be used in the interests of securing the peace and security that people around the world seek and the United Nations was established to provide.
> - United Kingdom, Dame Barbara Woodward (A/76/PV.69, p. 26)

This quote describes a similar view to those previously emphasised, that it is a responsibility that must be taken very seriously. The focus on multilateralism is also apparent in several of the quotes as they highlight the UN's fundamental mission to create and maintain peace and

security. However, it can be noted that co-operation and consensus on this is something that is difficult to achieve. In the multilateral organisation UN, different interests, approaches and power dynamics have made it difficult to change the institution (Keohane, 1990, p. 740), which can be interpreted through the dissatisfaction towards the veto. Furthermore, the positions of other P5 Members on the veto will be presented below.

> The right of veto of the permanent members of the Security Council is a cornerstone of the United Nations architecture. Without it, the Security Council would become a body merely rubber-stamping questionable decisions imposed by the nominal majority whose implementation would be unlikely. [...] In that regard, we are convinced that what needs to be criticized is not the veto but rather the lack of willingness of some members of Security Council to listen to and take into account the opinion of others, as well as their inability to find compromise and take balanced decisions. That is exactly what often compels us to use the veto.
> - Russian Federation, Mr. Kuzmin (A/76/PV.69, p. 15)

> By granting to each of the permanent members of the Council the ability to prevent the adoption of a resolution, the Charter entrusted them with a sombre and a solemn duty. There are times when a Permanent Five member will conclude that a particular resolution will not advance international peace and security, and it is within the authority granted by the Charter for that member to veto that resolution.
> - United States of America, Mr. Mills (A/76/PV.69, p. 24)

Both Russia and the United States emphasise the importance of the Security Council and advocate that the veto is necessary in certain situations. This position differs from the position of the other Member States discussed earlier. The P5's exercise of power through the veto, combined with the Russian and the United States arguments for the necessity of the veto in the Security Council, contrasts with the perspectives of the other Member States, suggesting a conflict of interest. These positions imply that the veto is essential in specific circumstances to ensure the effectiveness of the Security Council. However, these statements can be interpreted as an expression of national interests, as a state's behaviour in international politics is often driven by its own agenda (Ebegbulem, 2010, pp. 139–140). This raises the question of who ultimately decides how effective the UN Security Council is and which resolutions truly promote international peace and security.

Below are four quotes from different Member States, all selected on the basis of their position on the veto, which differs from the position presented by Russia and the United States.

> The privilege of using the veto has been vested in only five Member States. The General Assembly can do very little about it as, effectively, the permanent five have a veto over the veto. [...] Either all nations are treated equally in the context of voting rights or else the new permanent members must also be given the veto.
> - India, Mr. Raguttahalli (A/76/PV.69, p. 9)

> Argentina joined the consensus on resolution 76/262 in keeping with its historical position on the right of veto, as a privilege that violates the principle of the sovereign equality among States and must be abolished.
> - Argentina, Mr. Mainero (A/76/PV.69, p. 14)

> As a founding Member of the United Nations, Colombia adopts the traditional position of challenging the veto and advocating its elimination.
> - Colombia, Mr. Gutiérrez Plata (A/76/PV.69, p. 16)

> We joined the effort because the veto has failed as a tool of international law. The veto is not a right. It is a privilege that is too powerful to exist. It is an anachronistic privilege that creates odious differences both within the Council and among the membership — differences to which we should not contribute to increasing but, on the contrary, work together to limit and eliminate.
> - Costa Rica, Mr. Murillo Quesada (A/76/PV.69, p. 19)

The words used in these statements clearly show a position against keeping the veto power as a part of the Security Council. Expressions such as abolish and eliminate are something that appears prominent. In addition to this, the Indian representative describes how the P5 has a veto over the veto and this can be interpreted as dissatisfaction with the inequality within the organisation which touches upon theme 2, “Multilateralism vs. national interests”. The UN's description of itself as a strong multilateral organisation can be perceived to weaken somewhat when opinions on the organisation's fundamental pillars differ so much within the organisation. This may arise because multilateralism requires a balance between supply and demand in relation to co-operation and multilateral agreements (Keohane, 1990, pp. 741–742). If the balance between these factors is weakened and there is no support for multilateralism within the organisation, co-operation may decline.

5.2 China & Russian Federation, 26 May 2022

Agenda Item: Non-proliferation - Democratic People's Republic of Korea

In May 2022, a draft resolution from the United States about sanctions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was discussed in the UN Security Council. The vote on the resolution took place a day after North Korea fired three missiles, including one of them that is believed to be the largest to date. China and Russia cast their veto which caused tension in the Council since the other thirteen members were in favour of a new resolution imposing sanctions on North Korea (Nichols, 2022). For almost two decades, the Security Council has been in agreement regarding sanctions on North Korea, but this changed 26 May 2022. Only a month after the veto initiative resolution was adopted, the General Assembly had to have their first meeting in this regard.

> Our vote against draft resolution S/2022/431, submitted by the United States, was entirely reasonable, justified and within China's rights as a permanent member of the Security Council. The fundamental aim of our vote is to maintain peace and stability on the peninsula, achieve its denuclearization and resolve the issue through dialogue and consultation.
> - China, Mr. Wu Jianjian (A/76/PV.78, p. 27)

> It seems that our American and other Western colleagues are suffering from a kind of block whereby their only response to crisis situations is sanctions. Russia has always considered such measures, taken exclusively by the Security Council, to be the most extreme response possible, requiring constant fine-tuning and calibration.
> - Russian Federation, Ms. Evstigneeva (A/76/PV.77, p. 5)

Both China and Russia defend their veto and seem to have the same view on how the veto should be used, as can be seen in the quotes above. Their identity is common on this issue, where specifically the United States but also other Western countries, are seen as the other. Because of this, a form of alliance is created between China and Russia where their interests are aligned (Aggestam, 1999). To a large extent, Russia's and China's statements here can be seen to fall under the realist view of national interests where power is central and the interests of the nation are what is more important than moral principles and co-operation (Morgenthau, 1949, p. 211, 1978, pp. 5–6). From the material, however, it is not possible to distinguish whether their behaviour is only based on interests or whether this also is their moral principles. However, from other statements, there are differences of opinion regarding how the veto has been used.

> Having heard the explanations from those who cast vetoes, Japan must express, with a heavy heart, its deep regret that the veto was used. Those explanations fall short of the accountability that we hope to see, especially in the light of two considerations.
> - Japan, Mr. Odawara (A/76/PV.77, p. 7)

> When the international community is abandoned by two of its permanent members, it deserves an explanation — one that we had hoped would be more substantive.
> - Costa Rica, Ms. Chan Valverde (A/76/PV.77, p. 18)

> Unfortunately, their explanations for exercising the veto were insufficient, not credible and not convincing. The vetoes were not deployed to serve our collective safety and security. Earlier this year, Russia and China pledged a "no limits partnership". We hope those vetoes are not a reflection of that partnership — of a partnership elevated above the collective interests of this organ and the multilateral institutions mandated to ensure the safety and security of us all.
> - United States of America, Mr. DeLaurentis (A/76/PV.77, p. 15)

These three statements from the P5 Member, the United States, and Member States Japan and Costa Rica, all largely highlight how they oppose the use of the veto in this situation and also that the explanations for why the veto was used were not sufficient. The United States also raises the potential partnership between Russia and China and its fear that this overrides the multilateral organisation and co-operation within it. As mentioned earlier, co-operation is a fundamental part of multilateralism. (Keohane, 1990, p. 740), and the UN itself highlights that multilateral co-operation within the organisation has enabled international progress in areas such as peace and security (United Nations, n.d.-b). Often the demand for multilateral agreements increases due to increased interdependence, but the effects of interdependence are not limited to situations where all parties benefit (Keohane, 1990, pp. 741–742; Keohane & Nye, 1977, p. 122). Different perspectives on the veto power in the UN Security Council can have a significant impact on multilateral co-operation. When conflicts arise because some argue that the veto undermines the principles of equality and justice, and others argue that the veto is a necessary mechanism to protect national interests and sovereignty, the dynamics of international relations can be reshaped and affect the outcome of multilateral co-operation.

> Some important, hard questions therefore need to be answered. We have to reflect on how the use of the veto in this case has contributed to the maintenance of peace and security. How has it helped the Security Council to be relevant and credible? How has it enabled the Council to

> perform its duties and live up to its responsibilities with regard to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea? How has the Council, in this case, been able to act on behalf of the wider United Nations membership? [...] This is not the way to promote peace and security. It is not the way to strengthen multilateralism, when nowadays that is needed more than ever. It is not the way to make the world a better and safer place, which we are all committed to.
> - Albania, Mr. Hoxha (A/76/PV.77, p. 12)

> This is an urgent situation. The North Korean regime is a threat to its people, its neighbours and the world as a whole. That is why we will spare no effort to ensure that the Security Council is able to act in the future — that is its role — and re-establish its unity in the face of this major challenge to international peace and security.
> - France, Mr. De Rivière (A/76/PV.77, p. 23)

Both these statements, from the Member State Albania and from the P5 country France, express similar positions, although in different ways and with different approaches. The Albanian representative raises many questions about the legitimacy and credibility of the Security Council and how this veto is not strengthening multilateral co-operation. France's representative is somewhat softer, but still expresses how the Security Council must act in unity to address peace and security concerns. These statements, both in favour of international peace and security, are nevertheless very different, which may indicate their different identities and roles within the UN. Since France has the privilege of being a Permanent Member and holding veto power, that is a different position than Albania. Unrecognised privilege in the political sphere can be dangerous since it can cause oppression of others and advantages to certain groups without realising it (Wibben & Rutazibwa, 2019, p. 86). However, with France not having cast a veto for more than 30 years, the last being in 1989 (United Nations, 2024), this could mean that their national identity has changed since then and that they are aware of, and recognise, their powers and privileges.

5.3 Russian Federation, 8 July 2022

Agenda Item: The situation in the Middle East

The next veto that led to a meeting in the General Assembly and will be analysed is from July 2022 when Russia cast a veto on a resolution which would have allowed the extension of permission for cross-border aid to Syria for one year without the support of Damascus. This permission for aid shipments across the border between Syria and Turkey has been in force

since 2014 but stopped with Russia's veto (Al Jazeera, 2022). Thirteen members voted in favour of the resolution and China abstained.

> By exercising our veto on 8 July, the Russian Federation once again protected the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. Who will protect the other States Members of the United Nations if they allow themselves to be dragged into others' games?
> - Russian Federation, Mr. Polyanskiy (A/76/PV.95, p. 3)

> The position of the Russian Federation was consistent with its full commitment to the principle of respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, which has been underlined in all the relevant Security Council resolutions. It also genuinely expressed its keenness to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people and improve the humanitarian situation of all Syrians, without discrimination, by supporting the efforts of the Syrian Government, the primary partner of the United Nations and its agencies in undertaking that task.
> - Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Sabbagh (A/76/PV.95, p. 4)

In the quoted statement from Russia, which vetoed the resolution, and from Syria, which was the subject of the resolution, there is a common emphasis on sovereignty and its importance. Both Russia and Syria defend this principled concept, which reveals some of their common national interests and thus a connection between their perspectives. As states formulate their foreign policy based on their national interests, this suggests that Russia and Syria share similar ideological principles in this area (Ebegbulem, 2010, pp. 139–141).

However, as Russia was the only one to vote against the resolution in the Security Council, this poses a challenge to multilateralism, as this principle can only exist if there is a will and a necessity for international co-operation (Keohane, 1990, pp. 741–742). The opposition of other states to this veto and the veto process itself creates a conflict over where interests should lie. This undermines the potential for effective international co-operation and can affect the stability of the global system.

> We deeply regret that Russia's use of the veto forced the Security Council to ignore those calls based on the urgent humanitarian needs on the ground. We must put humanitarian needs above politics, and the fact is that there are no humanitarian grounds to justify a veto on cross-border assistance to those in humanitarian need.
> - Denmark, Ms. Wegter (A/76/PV.95, p. 5)

> The draft resolution was rejected by only one of the 15 members of the Council — Russia — undermining consensus and once again putting its interest above the humanitarian needs of the Syrians.
> - Albania, Mr. Hoxha (A/76/PV.95, p. 13)

> That single vote in the Security Council stood in stark contrast to the resounding and united chorus of voices from the majority of the Council membership, the Secretariat, its agencies, humanitarian partners and civil society. There has been some talk of politicization today and how inappropriate such talk is, but those are respected international organizations reflecting the best instincts of humanity. There is nothing political about it at all. It is a simple declaration that states that the extension of the lifeline is needed for at least another year.
> - Canada, Mr. Rae (A/76/PV.95, p. 14)

> We listened carefully to the reasons for the veto, and we believe that more could have been done by all delegations to close the divide.
> - Kenya, Ms. Kinyungu (A/76/PV.96, p. 7)

The first three quotes above from the representatives of Denmark, Albania and Canada highlight how the veto conflicts with the majority of views expressed on this specific case. Moreover, they emphasise the need to prioritise humanitarian issues over political ones. This criticism of Russia's veto suggests a convergence of national interests, where the ideological position is shared between states. This may indicate a more democratic orientation of their governments, as they take into account the views of interest groups and other actors in shaping their national interests (Ebegbulem, 2010, p. 141). Kenya's representative shares similar feelings of disappointment over the recent veto as the representatives from Denmark, Albania and Canada. However, unlike previous criticism that was mainly directed at Russia, this statement reflects that all parties had the potential to act more constructively. It emphasises that the responsibility for strengthening the resolution does not lie solely with Russia, but should be shared by all actors involved.

To conclude the analysis for this meeting, a quote from the United States will be discussed.

> These meetings are intended to promote accountability — accountability for the abuse of the very special veto power. There is no question that, in vetoing a draft resolution authorizing humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable Syrians, one Council member abused its veto.
> - United States of America, Mr. Mills (A/76/PV.96, p. 6)

Here, the United States representative expresses how they think the veto is a special power to hold and that Russia abused their use of the veto. The humanitarian perspective is prominent and shows the United States disappointment that Russia vetoed the resolution. In the next section, a meeting initiated by the use of the veto by the United States will be analysed, giving a mixed picture of the United States attitude towards the veto. This statement, along with previous ones on China's and Russia's veto, shows a resistance to misusing the veto. However, as will be seen, not everyone agrees with the position of the United States all the time.

5.4 United States of America, 8 December 2023

Agenda Item: The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

In December 2023, a draft resolution, supported by more than hundred of the Member States in the UN, was vetoed by the United States (TT, 2023). Despite strong support for the resolution, the United States veto prevented the UN Security Council from adopting a resolution calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. Thirteen Member States voted in favour of the draft resolution tabled by the United Arab Emirates, while the United Kingdom abstained (Al Jazeera, 2023).

> Of course, how Israel defends itself matters. Israel must avoid the mass displacement of civilians in the south of Gaza. It must ensure sufficient humanitarian assistance to those who have fled violence. And it must allow civilians in Gaza to return home as soon as conditions allow. We will continue to press at the highest levels for that and for the protection of civilians as Israel pursues legitimate military objectives, because perhaps most of all, while we cannot support a one-sided Security Council or General Assembly resolution that ignores so much of what we all stand for, we desperately want to see an end to the cycle of unceasing violence.
> - United States of America, Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (A/ES-10/PV.45*, pp. 5-6)

Given the United States veto of the Security Council resolution calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, the quote from the United States representative can be seen in the light of their conflicting actions. Despite stressing the importance of Israel defending itself in a way that minimises the suffering of the civilian population and wanting to see an end to the cycle of violence, it is through their veto that such a resolution is being prevented. This demonstrates the balancing act the United

States is trying to maintain between its national interests, which could be interpreted as supporting Israel, and its commitment to UN principles of multilateralism and creating peace and security.

In contrast to the US explanation of their veto, the following are statements that express different views on the veto and show strong disappointment

> People around the globe have been calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, including, of course, the Secretary-General and the leaders of United Nations humanitarian agencies. The United Nations, through the Secretary-General and all its agencies, has been calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. The humanitarian and human rights communities have been calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. The Security Council, through 13 of its members, was ready to call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, and it was blocked only by one vote, one veto. [...] The vote was unequivocal. The world is calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, with 157 countries having voted in favour of the resolution (resolution ES-10/22), and only 10 voting against it.
> - Palestine, Mr. Mansour (A/ES-10/PV.46, p. 11)

> We all witnessed the unjust use of the veto power against a draft resolution (S/2023/970) for a humanitarian ceasefire, despite having garnered the support of more than 100 States Members of the United Nations within a few hours. That is a sign that the majority of the international community is well aware of the seriousness of the current situation and its disastrous repercussions for international peace and security.
> - Egypt, Mr. Mahmoud (A/ES-10/PV.45*, p. 2)

> The United States has used the veto once again in the Security Council (see S/PV.9499). It stood against the will of the majority of Council members and caused a draft resolution (S/2023/970) to fail. [...] It is ironic that the State claiming to protect democracy and human rights and that is supposed to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security is now preventing the Security Council from shouldering its responsibility, namely, stopping the Israeli aggression. That proves the biased policies of the United States when it comes to protecting Israel and providing it with immunity for violating international law and the United Nations Charter.
> - Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Dandy (A/ES-10/PV.45*, p. 28)

These three statements provide a unified critique of the United States use of the veto, with Palestine and Egypt expressing similar positions by pointing out how the resolution had broad support within the UN and from other actors. Despite this, the veto was still used by

the United States, which they argue shows an unfair use of the veto power and a failure for international peace and security. By emphasising the broad support for the resolution and the single vote that blocked it, they point to the isolated position of the United States on this issue and the lack of unity within the Security Council. Syria's statement expresses similar criticism, pointing out the irony that the United States, which claims to defend democracy and human rights and is expected to help maintain international peace and security, is now preventing the Security Council from fulfilling its responsibilities. They also accuse the United States of bias, which may indicate the power that the United States and the other P5 countries actually possess and, through vetoes, exercise over the other Member States. This is because power can only arise when relationships exist and when the actions of the power holder affect others in different ways, which is clear in the cases where vetoes are used (Foucault, 1982, pp. 786, 789). These three statements highlight the different power dynamics and imbalances within the Security Council, where an individual country's veto can prevent majority-supported resolutions and where power relations can influence the decision-making process.

Below is a quote from Russia regarding the United States veto, in which the Russian representative praises the United Arab Emirates for putting forward the draft resolution but points out the problems with the United States veto.

> We commend Abu Dhabi's efforts to prepare and promote that document and the courageous and consistent line of our Emirati colleagues. As a result, their draft resolution was supported by 13 members of the Security Council. However, the United States again, as on 18 October (see S/PV.9442), so as to protect its main ally in the Middle East, vetoed the Security Council's draft resolution, and the United Kingdom abstained in the voting on the text, not having the courage to let Washington stand alone. [...] By vetoing a call for a ceasefire, the American side essentially issued a license to kill and now bears full responsibility for every new victim of the conflict in Gaza. The rest of the Security Council, and the United Nations membership as a whole, should not share this guilt with them.
> - Russian Federation, Mr. Nebenzia (A/ES-10/PV.45*, p. 29)

Russia's statement criticises the use of the veto by the United States in the Security Council, which according to Russia shows the United States' prioritisation of its alliances over humanitarian considerations. It is interesting to note the growing pattern of criticism between Russia and the United States regarding their use of the veto at the UN. Although both Russia

and the United States are likely to act in their own national interests when using their veto power, when either of them uses their veto power to block a resolution, they are severely criticised by the other. This points to a double standard in their rhetoric, where they try to justify their own actions while criticising those of their counterparts. This statement also provides an insight into the complex power dynamics within the Security Council, where different countries act on the basis of their own national interests while trying to balance it with their international obligations and ideals. However, the use of the veto may be an implication that national interests are the main concern for these states and not moral principles (Morgenthau, 1949, p. 211), even when it comes to the UN's mission to protect peace and security.

> We are deeply disappointed that the casting of a veto yet again prevented the Security Council from agreeing on a result on a response to a pressing crisis.
> - New Zealand, Ms. Schwalger (A/ES-10/PV.45*, p. 19)

> The Charter initially conceived the power of veto as a tool to maintain and ensure international peace and security. However, today that authority is frequently abused to obstruct the very establishment of peace and security. This trend is a clear alarm, signalling the imperative need to eliminate such discriminatory practices.
> - Islamic Republic of Iran, Mr. Iravani (A/ES-10/PV.45*, p. 17)

> The Security Council has failed to adopt a draft resolution on a humanitarian ceasefire, in support of the values and principles of our Organization. That failure affects the credibility of the United Nations and its ability to address current and future crises. It also highlights the fact that genuine reform of the Security Council is more urgently needed than it has ever been.
> - Yemen, Mr. Al-Saadi (A/ES-10/PV.47, p. 6)

> A veto today is enabling potential war crimes. Should we still continue with that practice, even as the veto continues to erode the faith people have in the United Nations; even as the veto continues to stand in the way of ending atrocities and violence; and even as the veto continues to raise questions about the value of multilateralism itself?
> - Maldives, Mr. Zuhuree, quoting the President of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Muizzu (A/ES-10/PV.47, p. 13)

To conclude this chapter, which has presented and analysed the results, the four quotes above show a similar picture expressed by many Member States previously. This is the strong criticism of the veto and how the Security Council, because of the privilege that the P5

Members possess, cannot fulfil its mission to maintain and ensure international peace and security. Like these quotes from New Zealand, Iran, Yemen and the Maldives questioning the use of the veto and its continued existence, earlier quotes from the majority of other Member States make the same point. The attitudes towards the use of the veto expresses power as a technique (Foucault, 1982, p. 781), with those who have used the veto defending it while the rest either express disappointment with the specific veto, but also with the veto power itself. In addition to this, the Maldives also raises an issue that has been raised before, namely how the veto is not consistent with multilateralism in the UN, as multilateralism is not only a form of organisation but also a method of co-operation (Keohane, 1990, p. 731). Doubts about multilateralism can be seen to arise from the fact that Member States see those who use the veto doing so according to their national interests, which may be contrary to the interests of the international community. What is clear is that there is a strong desire for a reformation of the Security Council.

6. Discussion & Conclusions

In summary, this thesis has examined how different UN Member States' attitudes and positions on the Security Council veto are expressed during General Assembly meetings. By analysing these discussions from the perspectives of multilateralism, national interests, and power dynamics, both shared and conflicting views between the Permanent Members (P5) and other Member States have been identified. The study has been based on official meeting notes from the General Assembly plenary sessions and a qualitative content analysis has been used to interpret and categorise the material. This approach has revealed the complex interactions and power relations that shape the UN's decision-making processes. Based on the results and analysis of the study, the conclusions related to the three research questions are presented below.

6.1 Empirical Questions

In accordance with the following two empirical research questions, the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the material will now be presented.

- ➔ How do the discussions in the UN General Assembly, initiated by the veto initiative resolution, exemplify Member States' views and attitudes towards the veto?

- ➔ How do attitudes towards the veto, expressed in the Assembly meetings, vary between the P5 and the other Member States?

Discussions in the UN General Assembly revealed widespread dissatisfaction with the veto and a strong desire for reform, with attitudes ranging from cautious to very direct expressions of criticism. Many Member States consistently criticised the use of the veto in the Security Council and underlined the urgent need for change. The tone and intensity of criticism varies, with some states expressing their disapproval more cautiously, while others are more explicit and direct, but overall the majority show disappointment with the way the veto is used.

There has been a clear difference in how the P5 Members of the Security Council and other Member States perceived and managed the veto power. The United States, China and Russia, the veto holders on which the analysed meetings are based, have been quick to defend their

vetoes. They have done so by highlighting how they consider their actions to be justified and legitimate, often by emphasising the need for peace and security. At the same time, they have been quick to criticise each other when the veto has been used by someone else. The other two P5 Members, the United Kingdom and France, have been more muted in their explanations of their privileges and more often used diplomatic arguments to justify their positions. This reflects an awareness of their position and privileges, and a consciousness of the ongoing discussions on the need for reform within the Security Council. This is probably also due to the fact that they have not exercised a veto for a long time and therefore have not acted in ways that clearly show a domineering power role.

Many of the other Member States have expressed the need for a reform of the veto system and the Security Council. Proposals have ranged from extending the veto power to more states to abolishing it altogether. Criticism of the veto has been more prominent among those states that do not hold this power, while those states that hold the veto are tending to focus on defending their position and their use of the veto. While P5 Members that consistently use the veto tend to defend their use of it as necessary to protect and ensure peace and security, other Member States have different views and often express frustration with how the veto blocks majority decisions and prevents effective international co-operation.

6.2 Analytical Question

The analytical question is presented below, together with the related conclusions.

- ➔ How do Member States' expressed positions on the veto reflect their views and approaches to multilateralism, national interests, and power dynamics in the UN?

Member States' positions and attitudes reveal a fundamental tension between the ideal of multilateralism and the reality where national interests often guide actions and decisions. While many are in favour of international co-operation, their actions often show that national interests and power dynamics remain the main drivers of their actions at the UN. It is clear that national interests underpin most of the decisions and opinions expressed in the UN General Assembly and Security Council. These interests are deeply rooted in the power dynamics that have existed since the creation of the UN. Despite the frequent rhetoric in

support of multilateralism, which emphasises collective action and international co-operation, Member States often prioritise their own strategic objectives and national priorities, especially the ones casting vetoes. This duality creates a paradox: on the one hand, states advocate the benefits of international co-operation and the strengthening of global institutions, while on the other hand, their actions are primarily motivated by national interests. This self-interested behaviour can be observed in the way states negotiate, form alliances and vote, often with the aim of maximising their own benefits and minimising vulnerabilities.

The persistence of this paradox suggests that while multilateralism provides a platform for dialogue and co-operation, underlying power dynamics and national interests continue to shape the practical work of the UN. As a result, decisions and policies within the UN are often a reflection of these competing national interests, rather than a purely collective international will. This tension underlines the complexity of achieving true multilateralism in an international system where power and national interests remain paramount. Overall, Member States' positions on the veto illustrate how deeply intertwined their views on multilateralism are with their national interests and power dynamics. It highlights the ongoing struggle to balance these factors within the UN system, reflecting the complex and often conflicting motives that drive international relations and decision-making processes within the organisation.

6.3 Further Research

It is important to note that the meetings covered by this study, i.e. meetings of the UN General Assembly, are a specialised and highly formal forum. Extracting and analysing statements from these meetings is unlikely to provide the full picture of the views, reasoning or interests of the different Member States. Further research could therefore examine a broader picture of attitudes towards the veto in the UN Security Council. It could examine statements in more forums, both national and international, more and less formal. In addition to the fact that further research on the topic could be carried out through a larger study with similar questions, the impact of these debates can also be investigated and analysed to see whether the criticism raised against the veto in the Security Council could make a reformation of the Security Council possible.

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