The UN Security Council Through The Numbers: How Does The Council Maintain International Peace in Practice?

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Abstract: The recent major ineffectiveness or inactivity of the UN Security Council in the Russian aggression over Ukraine, Israel's wars in Gaza and Lebanon or the conflict in Sudan, has sparked renewed criticism and calls for reform of this body. The Council was envisioned to be the international community's primary authority in the maintenance of peace and security, yet too often it seems like the Council is failing in its responsibility. Thus, a question arises as to how the Council has acted in its responsibility so far in practice? How engaged the Council was overall; where did it (prefer to) take action, how long it took the Council to act, or what were the main driving factors for its (in)action, are some of the main subquestions that should be answered in this regard. Drawing on numerous different studies on the Council's engagement in various types of conflicts and crises, this work presents their main findings and interprets them in order to understand the Council as an institution in practice. Putting these studies side by side with an interpretation of the UN Charter provisions referring to the powers and responsibilities of the Council, as well as subsequent normative and other practical developments related to the (UN) security system, this work offers thoughts on how to interpret the Council's record and how to address some of its failures.

Keywords: UN Security Council (UNSC), UN Charter, international peace and security, armed conflicts

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Introduction

2025 marks 80 years since the establishment of the United Nations (UN). The main purpose of the UN has been to maintain international peace and security, and, to achieve that end, to take necessary collective action in order to prevent or suppress threats and breaches to peace or acts of aggression (UN Charter, 1945). The main body that was mandated with the principal responsibility to maintain international peace and security on behalf of the international community is the Security Council (UN Charter, 1945). Thus, every time there has been (a threat of) an armed confrontation, and especially a major one, the international attention is immediately turned to this body. Unfortunately, there has been a surge of armed confrontations in recent years. According to the latest Uppsala Conflict Data Program study on conflicts and political violence, and the International Institute for Strategic Studies Armed Conflict Survey, the past three years have been the deadliest since the end of the Cold War (Davies et al., 2024; IISS, 2024). Although civil wars and armed confrontations between non-state armed actors "remain the dominant form of conflict globally", they are increasingly being internationalized (meaning one or more States get involved in support of one or the other warring faction) and the number of state-based armed confrontations has reached the highest number recorded in 2023 (IISS, 2024: 5; Davies et al., 2024: 674).

The ongoing major conflicts – for instance, the Russian aggression in Ukraine, Israel's recent bombardments of Gaza and Lebanon, or the wars in Sudan and Democratic Republic of Congo – where the UN Security Council has been inactive or ineffective, have sparked renewed criticism of this body and calls for its reform. Unfortunately, in the 80-year-old history of this body, there were many instances, in addition to the abovementioned, where it has not taken any action, or its action was late and/or ineffective, such as the genocides in Rwanda in 1994, and in Srebrenica in 1995, the war in Iraq from 2003 onwards, or the 14-year war in Syria that ended recently. No doubt, the Council has also exercised its responsibility successfully in some instances, like, for example, in the 2011 situation in Cote d'Ivoire. Thus, the main question that this paper will deal with is how the Council has acted in its responsibility to maintain international peace in

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practice more specifically? How engaged has the Council been overall? Where did it (prefer to) take action? How long it took the Council to act? What were the main driving factors for its (in)action?, etc. The first part of the paper will briefly outline the normative framework that underpins the Council's functioning. Then, drawing on numerous different previous works on the Council's engagement in various types of conflicts and crises, the second part of this paper will present and interpret its main conclusions in order to understand the Council as an institution in practice. In the last section, a brief discussion will be provided on how to interpret the Council's record and how to address some of its failures.

Normative Framework of the UN Security Council

The UN Security Council (UNSC) is the international community's recognized authority on international peace and security. Pursuant to the UN Charter, the Council has the primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security and its decisions are binding on all States (UN Charter, 1945, Articles 24, 25; ICJ, 1971). In this regard, the UNSC has powers and responsibilities concerning peaceful settlement of disputes (Chapter VI of the Charter) and, especially, in matters related to collective actions with respect to peace and armed violence (Chapter VII). Here, the Council has, firstly, according to Article 39, the power to evaluate whether a certain situation constitutes a "threat to peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression" (UN Charter, 1945, Article 39). However, despite the word "shall" being used in this Article to describe this power of the UNSC, when looking at its *travaux préparatoires* (and the practice of the Council, as it will be outlined in the next section), it is clear that the Article does not impose an obligation on the Council to do this kind of assessment of situations that are (or could be) violations to peace (Kirsch, 2012a; Selkirk, 2003). Nor does the Article provide definitions of the three aforementioned categories of violations to peace, and the Council, in practice, favors the "threats to peace" phrase, as the most conceptually flexible out of the three (Selkirk, 2003). Thus, although the Council is limited, legally, in the exercise of its responsibilities by the Purposes and Principles of Charter (as prescibred by Art.24 of the Charter) and by international law in general (ius cogens norms, international humanitarian law, human rigths law) ((Orakhelashvili, 2005; Krisch, 2012b; ICTY, 1995, par.28)),

Article 39 offers flexibility and latitude to the Council's members in its implementation. When, however, the Council does decide to assess a certain situation under this Article, it can then further decide whether it will undertake certain measures, and if yes, what kind of measures. The Council can authorize measures without the use of force under Article 41, such as economic sanctions, or, if these measures "would be or have proven to be inadequate", it can authorize measures with the use of force, under Article 42 (UN Charter, 1945, Articles 41, 42). Nevertheless, much like with Article 39, the decisions whether to undertake any measures in the maintenance of international peace (even if it determines that there exists a threat to peace, breach to peace, or aggression), and what kind of measures, are political decisions left to the Council itself to decide, and there exists no obligation to undertake any (particular) measure.

To implement a Council's decision in practice, since the UN has no standing army of its own, Articles 43-50 of the UN Charter envisioned a collective security system where all UN member States would contribute to and/or assist the UN (and the Council in particular) in enforcing its decisions and would refrain from helping the State against which force is undertaken. However, in practice, this system has never worked as envisioned, and the Council has been relying on UN peacekeeping missions, regional organizations or "coalitions of willing" States to carry out its decisions.

Finally, pursuant to Article 27 of the UN Charter, the decisions of the Council for matters on peace and security (most often in the form of 'resolutions') must be adopted by at least nine votes out of the fifteen members of the Council (with each member having one vote). Among these votes, there must be the "concurring votes" of all five permanent members (UN Charter, 1945, Article 27). In other words, each of the five permanent members (P5) has a veto power that is not restrained specifically in the scope or manner of its employment.

UNSC Through the Numbers

Before we analyze the Security Council and its functioning, we need to outline the environment in which it operates and for which it exists. The characteristics of war and warfare today are not the same as those in the middle of the last

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century when the Council was designed. Firstly, from being predominantly interstate, as they were in the early and mid-20th century, conflicts today are primarily internal. Pettersson and Wallensteen's research shows that in 2014, for example, there was only one interstate conflict (between India and Pakistan) that resulted in fewer than 50 victims (Pettersson & Wallensteen, 2015: 537). The remaining 39 conflicts in 2014 were internal, and 13 of them became internationalized, that is, one or more states became involved in a particular conflict with their troops on one of the sides in that conflict. Similarly, in 2023 there were only two such interstate conflicts (Davies et al., 2024). In fact, the last time there were three or more interstate conflicts annually was in 1988 (Davies et al., 2024). Thus, internal or non-state conflicts are the dominant type of armed violence, especially after the Cold War, but these have been increasingly internationalized (Davies et al., 2024; Rustad, 2024; IIIS, 2024).

Secondly, as it was mentioned in the introduction, although the number of interstate conflicts is on the decline, the first three years of this decade have been the deadliest since the end of Cold War, with the exception of 1994 and the Rwandan genocide (Davies et al., 2024; Rustad, 2024). The number of state-based armed conflicts (armed confrontations over government/territory where at least one party is a State and the confrontation results in at least 25 but below 1000 battle-related deaths) is on the rise as well in the past decade. Between 2000 and 2013, the annual average of these confrontations ranged between 31 and 39, and since 2015 it has risen to at least 50 such conflicts annually, peaking in 2023 with 59 (Davies et al., 2024; Rustad, 2024). The number of wars (armed confrontations resulting in a minimum of 1000 battle-related deaths) has been increasing as well, peaking at 13 wars in 2014, and in 2023 reaching 9 such confrontations (Davies et al., 2024; Rustad, 2024).

As for the location of conflicts around the world, with the exception of Europe and America after the early 1990s, and Europe in 2014 with the conflict in Ukraine, they show some consistency, with Africa, followed by Asia and the Middle East being at the "top" of this ranking. (Pettersson & Wallensteen, 2015; Davies et al., 2024; Rustad, 2024). In terms of the number of victims since the

Cold War, conflicts in Africa dominate as well. (Pettersson & Wallensteen, 2015; Davies et al., 2024; Rustad, 2024; IIIS, 2024).

Scope of Security Council Activity

One of the most important statistics that should be presented at the very beginning is regarding the scope of work of the Security Council. Namely, almost all the data that explain or describe the behavior of the Council focus only on those situations in which the Council did decide to take action. Therefore, the key to getting the whole picture is to first see how active the Security Council actually is, and in how many situations the Council did not take any action.

The Council's record in this regard is not at all commendable. Even during the Cold War, some of the most important and bloodiest conflicts of this period – Afghanistan, Mozambique, Burma, Sudan, Uganda, Vietnam – were not even on the Security Council's agenda (Wallensteen & Johansson, 2016). If this is easily explainable, given the ideological and bloc division that prevailed at that time, then a similar trend after the Cold War points to more serious problems. Thus, out of 44 civil wars in the period 1989-2006, which, as we saw at the beginning of this section, are the most common type of conflict after the Cold War, the Security Council got 'engaged' (i.e. adopted a decision) in 27 of them. So, for 17 situations of civil wars (39%), no action was taken by the Council (Cockayne et al. 2010). Of these 44 wars, 24 began after the Cold War, and the Council became involved in two-thirds of them. Even more striking is the fact that for the period 1989-2012, the Security Council did not adopt any resolutions on 10 of the 25 deadliest conflicts in this period (Wallensteen & Johansson, 2016). Furthermore, of the 84 countries that experienced an armed conflict in the post-Cold War period of 1989-2019, "only 43 appeared in formal UNSC deliberations" (Lundgren & Klamberg, 2023: 958). If, in addition to the Security Council, we add the involvement of other UN bodies (e.g. the Secretary General), according to Wallenstein and Johansson (2016: 51), in the period after the Cold War, "the Council and the UN [more broadly] in various ways were involved in about half of all ongoing armed conflicts from a security perspective."

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Similar conclusions about the frequency of UNSC's involvement in situations involving international peace and security can be drawn if we observe the activity of the UNSC while exercising its Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) populations from mass atrocities. Out of fourteen RtoP cases from 2005 to 2018, the Council took (effective) action in eight (60%) while in six (40%) of them it was inactive or blocked.[1] Thus, what is important at the outset to be emphasized is that most of the statistics that describe the functioning of the Council (and that will follow in this paper as well) derive only from situations in which the Council took action, and these account for about half to two-thirds of all crises and conflicts in the world.

This initial conclusion should be borne in mind, especially when presenting the most common statistics related to the work of the Council. Namely, its increased activity after the end of the Cold War, measured by the increased number of meetings and resolutions adopted, as well as the decreased casting of the veto by P5. The Council has more than doubled the total number of (public and private) meetings for the shorter period after the Cold War (7.431 meetings for 34 years, from 1990 to 2024) than during that period (3.080 meetings for 43 years, 1946-1989) (Wallensteen & Johansson, 2016; Sievers & Daws, 2014; United Nations Security Council). Of the total of 2,767 resolutions adopted from 1946-2024, 646 were adopted by 1989, and since then until the end of 2024 as many as 2.121 resolutions have been adopted (Ibid). Although with the increasingly frequent discussion of general security topics and the adoption of so-called "thematic resolutions", not all of these 2.121 resolutions are dedicated to specific conflicts, the fact remains that there is a several-times-increase in comparison to the Cold War. In this regard, the increased activity and cooperation of the Security Council in maintaining international peace is even more evident, if we compare the resolutions that refer to Chapter VII of the Charter. Of the 1.002 resolutions that invoked Chapter VII from its inception until 2024, only 22 were adopted during the first 43 years, while 880 were adopted after the Cold War (Ibid; United Nations (a)). This trend of increased activity and cooperation in the Council after

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1   PhD research on RtoP cases by the author. The cases where the UNSC took action were: Ivory Coast, Mali, Libya, Burundi, DR Congo, Sudan (Darfur), South Sudan and Central African Republic, while it did not take (effective) action were: Myanmar, Yemen, North Korea, Sri Lanka, Kenya and Syria.

the Cold War is also confirmed by the decreasing use of the veto by the five permanent members. During the Cold War, 232 vetoes were cast, blocking 192 draft resolutions (sometimes more than one veto was cast on a single resolution), and since then until 2024, 82 vetoes have been cast, preventing the adoption of 65 draft resolutions (Dag Hammarskjöld; Wallensteen & Johansson, 2016; Sievers & Daws, 2014; United Nations Security Council; United Nations (a)).[2]

Not only has the UNSC been meeting and adopting decsions more often, the number of peace missions authorized by the UNSC has also been increasing after the Cold War. During the Cold War, only 18 peacekeeping missions were authorized, while since 1990, 53 such missions have been authorized, out of which, currently, 11 such missions are active (United Nations (b); UN Peacekeeping (a); UN Peacekeeping (b)).Additionally, the Security Council has often authorized military operations that were not under the direct command and control of the UN. For the period 1950-2007, for example, 27 such operations were authorized (Roberts, 2016).

Thus, while all of the above shows that the Security Council is indeed more engaged and active after the Cold War, it should not be forgotten that its overall scope has not changed as much throughout this period, and the Council is still active in 50 to 60% of all ongoing conflicts.

Where does the Council get involved?

Mindful of the initial statistics that the Council's increased activity does not cover all possible conflict hotspots, in order to obtain a more precise picture of this increase, a more detailed scrutiny is needed. It is necessary to provide answers (or at least indications), firstly, about where the Council's activity has been focused? This question can be answered from the perspective of the geographical location to which a particular resolution refers, or from the perspective of the characteristics of the conflicts in which the Council was involved in distinction to those in which it was not involved.

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2   The statistics for vetoes from 1946-2024, cast at public and private meetings for which records are kept are as follows: USSR (Russia) 153 vetoes (114 during the Cold War, 39 after it), USA 91 vetoes (67 during, and 24 after), Great Britain 30 vetoes (30 during, 0 after), China, 21 vetoes (3 during and 18 after), and France 18 vetoes (18 during, 0 after).

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From a geographical perspective, the African continent dominates the agenda and resolutions of the Council. This fact was prevailing during the Cold War as well as after its end, and is even more established when it comes to resolutions adopted under Chapter VII. Thus, of all resolutions adopted after 1990 until 2014, 40% refer to Africa, while of all resolutions under Chapter VII, 50% refer to Africa (Wallensteen & Johansson, 2016). Similarly, out of 48 decisions adopted by the Council in 2024, for instance, 24 concerned (conflicts in) Africa, and out of the 24 resolutions under Chapter VII, 16 concerned the African continent (United Nations Security Council). During the Cold War, and in the first decade afterwards, both Europe and America had a high place on the agenda of the Security Council too. However, such regional statistics can give a misleading impression. Namely, during the Cold War, out of 81 resolutions dedicated to Europe, 80 were related to the Cyprus issue (Wallensteen & Johansson, 2016). At the beginning of the 90s, Europe was also in focus and most of all resolutions were related to the wars in the former Yugoslavia (Cockayne et al. 2010). The impression is similar about Haiti and the American continent. For the period 1993-2012, 48 resolutions were adopted that referred to the Americas, of which 39 were dedicated to Haiti (Wallensteen & Johansson, 2016). In this regional overview, it is also interesting to note that Asia, despite often ranking rather high in terms of the number of conflicts (e.g. due to conflicts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Myanmar, etc.), is rarely on the formal agenda and in the Council's resolutions.[3]

Observed from the angle of the properties of the conflicts/crises in which the Security Council was (not) involved, the 17 (out of a total of 44) civil wars in which the Council did not adopt any resolution for the period 1989-2006, have 19% higher "national capacities"[4] than those 27 where it adopted some resolution. More specifically, the Council is not inclined to adopt resolutions in conflicts in countries with larger populations, in countries that have larger armies, that spend more on military purposes and have higher energy consumption,

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3   This is due to many factors such as the prevailing normative views of many of the countries of this region (including China) that oppose any interference from outside without the consent of the sitting government even though there might be (involvement by that government in) a war and/or massive human rights violations happening in that country.

4   Under "national capacities", used by the Correlates of War project, which is composed of several variables: energy consumption, iron and steel production, military spending, military personnel, total population and urban population of a country. See Cockayne et al., 2010.

and is more often engaged in countries with autocratic rather than democratic political systems. In terms of the economic development of a country, research shows that it is not a significant factor as the Council has engaged almost equally in underdeveloped and developed countries (Cockayne et al. 2010).

Concerning the question of where UN peacekeeping missions are headed, similarly to the engagement of the Council, we can give two types of answers – according to the geographical location of the countries and according to their characteristics. Of the 60 past peacekeeping missions authorized, 26 have been deployed on the territory of Africa (United Nations Peacekeeping (c)), and since 2000, 70% of UN troops have been deployed in Africa (Wallensteen & Johansson, 2016). However, if we take into account the ratio of troop deployments to the number of conflicts in a particular region, the figures show a regional bias. Namely, according to Gilligan and Stedman's research comparing missions after the Cold War until 2003, there is a much greater likelihood that the UN will send a mission to Europe and Latin America before doing so in Africa (Gilligan & Stedman, 2003). What is much more interesting is that, according to the same research, Africa is not the most marginalized region in terms of need and corresponding Counicl's action, but Asia (Ibid). As possible explanations for this, the authors point to the unwillingness of Asian states to consent to the deployment of a UN mission on their territory and the underdeveloped regional organizational structure and culture of traditional understanding of sovereignty (ASEAN is not as developed and pro-foreign intervention as, for example, NATO, the EU, and even the AU and ECOWAS) (Ibid).

Regarding the characteristics of the countries or conflicts where the UN deploys troops, Gilligan and Stedman highlight the following: the likelihood of the UN sending troops increases as the number of victims of the conflict and the duration of the conflict increase; the UN is less likely to send troops to a civil war in countries with large armies; there is no evidence that the UN sends troops more often to non-democratic regimes as opposed to democracies, that it intervenes more in countries with high primary commodity exports, that it intervenes more in former colonies of permanent UN states, or that it is more likely to send troops once there is some kind of peace agreement (although this may

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be due to several factors) (Gilligan & Stedman, 2003). The authors explain such results as "an attempt to balance the dictates of power and concern for principles" and therefore interpret them as both good and bad at the same time (Ibid). Additionally, some authors also investigate the patterns of characteristics of UN missions that have already been deployed somewhere, and point out that deployed UN troops primarily focus on violence directed against civilians and on confrontations between authorities and non-state actors (and not between non-state versus non-state actors), are primarily located around populated areas, around places with surfaced–based resources, with a developed transportation network, and around state borders (Townsen & Reeder, 2014).

When does the Council get involved?

Now that we have some idea about where the Security Council's activity is directed to, we can turn to the question of when the Council becomes active, that is, how long it takes the Council to adopt the first resolution in a certain crisis. In the history of the UN, in addition to the conflicts/crises in which the Security Council has not been involved, there are many examples where the Security Council got involved too late. Some of the most obvious are the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) in which, after half a million to one million victims and twice as many displaced persons, the Council adopted the first resolution with a Chapter VII reference in 1988. Then, there is the twenty-year civil war in Sudan that claimed 1 million lives and displaced about 5 million inhabitants, for which the Council adopted the first resolution only in 1996. Similarly, the adoption of the first Chapter VII resolution on Afghanistan was in 1999, although the country had been in a state of war since 1978 (Wallensteen & Johansson, 2016).

The International Peace Institute's study of civil wars from 1989 to 2006 indicates that it took different amounts of time for the Security Council to adopt the first resolution in a particular civil war during this period, and this depended on the location of the war. According to the study, for civil wars in Africa, it took 7 years on average before the Security Council adopted its first resolution. For wars in the Americas, it took 12 years before the first resolution, while for those in Asia, it took as long as 15 years. The situation was radically different for civil wars in Europe, where the Security Council adopted the first resolution after

only 6 months from the start of the wars (Cockayne et al. 2010). One explanation for the Council's rather late reaction on a general level, according to the study's authors, is that a large number of these civil wars had already begun before 1989, and the Security Council generally does not show a tendency to deal with "old" issues, i.e. issues that are a remnant of the Cold War. The authors point out that in civil wars that began after 1989, the time for reaction and adoption of a resolution by the Council is shorter. As for the discrepancy by region, the possible explanations vary. Conflicts in Europe are culturally, economically and geographically closer to three of the permanent members of the Security Council (France, Great Britain and the USA) and very often five to six of the 15 member states in the Council are from Europe. In contrast, the slower and decreased engagement in conflicts in America is explained primarily by the reluctance of Latin American countries to internationalize wars in their countries, while in Asia by the principled position of a large number of countries in this region (and above all China) for non-interference in the internal affairs of countries (Cockayne et al. 2010).

What kind of measures does the Council adopt?

The next aspect of the Security Council's activity that needs to be considered answers the question of what the Council's activity consists of, that is, what kind of measures it adopts and when it gets involved? Typical of the Council's resolutions after the Cold War is the innovation of the solutions contained in them, such as the creation of safe havens, ad hoc tribunals, or so-called "smart" or "targeted" sanctions (as opposed to the former comprehensive ones). Over time, the resolutions have become much more complex. For example, in Resolution 2227 (2016), which is 15 pages long, 20 different tasks are included for the MONUSCO mission in the DRC, and in Resolution 2274 (2016) for Afghanistan, there are 10 tasks on 20 pages (Security Council Report, 2016). This is also confirmed by the resolutions relating to civil wars, in which in 1989 the Security Council issued an average of one demand to the parties to the conflict, and in the early 2000s an average of 4.5 demands (Cockayne et al. 2010).

But what exactly is contained in these resolutions? In terms of the demands imposed on the parties to civil wars, the Council has focused on measures of

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coercive military action (22%), but also on internal political relations and governance (29%), cooperation with the UN (26%) and external relations (12%), as well as humanitarian issues (11%) (Cockayne et al. 2010). The trend, however, in this area, probably after the failures in state-building in the 1990s, indicates a reduced focus on the internal affairs of states at the expense of their external relations. Certainly, some of the operational paragraphs and sometimes entire resolutions also contain purely administrative requests (such as the appointment of judges for ad hoc tribunals). However, two statistical data in this category point to other significant implications. Firstly, 44% of all demands deal with calling the parties to the conflict to adhere to an already concluded agreement (peace agreement, ceasefire, preliminary framework agreement, etc.). Secondly, at the beginning of the 1990s, the Council most often issued such demands during the civil war, while since then, especially after 2002, the trend has changed and most of the demands have been issued after the end of the wars (Cockayne et al. 2010). These two data cumulatively, in combination with the data on the conflicts' properties where the UNSC does (not) get involved in, point to the conclusion by former UN Secretary-Generals B.B. Galli and Kofi Annan (Ghali, 1995, par.77; Annan, 1997, par.109) that "the UN is no longer in the enforcement business", (Weiss, 2015: 56, 57) and that increasingly, both the UN and the Council are committed to post-conflict management.

What are the effects of the measures the Council adopts?

The next question that arises is what are the effects of Security Council decisions? In terms of civil wars from 1989 to 2006, those conflicts in which the Security Council adopted resolutions ended on average 5 years earlier than those in which it did not adopt a single resolution. Moreover, in these conflicts the number of direct casualties was almost 9% lower per conflict than in those where the Council did not adopt a resolution (and there were 16% fewer casualties from battles on the ground) (Cockayne et al. 2010). The shortcoming of the statistical data presented in this manner is, of course, that they do not take into account the specifics of the particular conflict and the circumstances outside the Council that could influence the results. Hence, it is clear that it is impossible to draw any causality or correlation in this relationship. On the contrary, as

the International Peace Institute study itself indicates, it is even unclear what is the cause and what is the consequence of this relationship – whether the Security Council, with its engagement, contributed to their faster completion or whether the Council got involved in these crisis situations because they were "easier", that is, because they possess such characteristics and have the prospect of a faster completion. Additionally, even if these effects can be attributed to the Council's activity, it is certainly not only due to the adoption of a resolution, but also due to the (successful) implementation of the measures in that resolution. Finally, viewing the issue from a binary perspective – is there an effect or not after the end of the war – does not give the whole picture of the problem and also loses sight of the various intangible effects of the Council's work, such as reputational costs to (the member states of) the Security Council, sending positive signals to those who adhere to what has been agreed and negative signals to those who (would) violate it, providing informal motivation for participation in the peace process to parties that hesitate to do so, reducing the domestic political costs for implementing a decision of the Security Council or the (peace) agreement in place, etc. (Ibid).

Regarding UN peacekeeping operations (UNPKO), Hoeffler (2014) concludes, based on the summary of several studies that consider this issue, that peacekeeping missions are effective. However, as the author herself emphasizes, all these studies may suffer from selection bias. Thus, if the UN is, for instance, "more likely to send peace-keepers to easier situations, we would observe a positive association of UNPKOs with longer durations of peace, but this positive association could not be interpreted as causal. Alternatively, the UN may send peace-keepers to more difficult situations, thus underestimating the effectiveness of peace-keeping. In either case, the deployment decision would be based on an estimate of the risk of conflict (in which case UNPKOs are endogenous), making it difficult to disentangle causal effects." (Ibid: 85).

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Discussion

In sum, from all that was presented above, one can conclude that although the Council has become much more active after the Cold War the scope of its activity is not comprehensive enough and covers only half-to-two-thirds of all crises in the world. The UNSC is selective in its involvement, preferring conflicts which are not in their peak, and situations and regions where it has support (or at least does not have the opposition) of major powers, local authorities and regional organizations. The Council very often gets involved too late in a crisis, and is also frequently ineffective in maintaining international peace and security. Thus, the principal impression about the Security Council's record is that the only thing that is consistent about this body is its record of inconsistency (Hehir, 2013). The trajectory of the Security Council's action (not only regarding RtoP cases, but in general) "has been characterized by a **preponderance of inertia punctuated by aberrant flashes of resolve and timely action, impelled by the rare confluence of interests and humanitarian need**" (Ibid: 137). This is why, for instance, in conflicts such as the Russian aggression in Ukraine or Israel's war in Gaza, where there is an opposition of (at least) one major power, the Council ends up being selective or ineffective. On the other hand, when there isn't such an opposition but rather there is support for the Council's engagement and an agreement about the broader geopolitical and normative considerations among Council's members, such as during the 1990 Iraq occupation of Kuwait, the Council gets involved, in a timely manner, and is effective.

But ought this inconsistency, tardiness and inactivity/ineffectiveness to be expected, having in mind the normative framework which governs the Council, or is the Council failing, underachieving in its responsibility? This raises the broader question of what kind of institution the Council was designed to be? For those who considered the Council to be designed as a Concert of big powers (Bosco, 2009; Bosco, 2014) or a system of "selective security" (Roberts & Zaum 2008; Roberts, 2016) the UNSC's record in practice is as it should be expected. A Concert of big powers is a rudimentary form of collective security where major powers are the most important players, where all decisions rest on an agreement between them, but, at the same time, the system offers them flexibility in

the decision-making and in protecting their own interests. Therefore, it should not be expected that the record of such a body is to be on a scale of a body representing an ideal system of collective security where the reaction is mandatory and automatic. Similarly, a system of selective security rest on the idea that there is not only one body that is responsible for maintaining the security system in place, and some degree of selectivity in its decision-making process is included in the design of that body and such selectivity is good for practice.

Nevertheless, while the Council certainly was not designed to be a system of (ideal) collective security (meaning, to react "automatically" when there erupts or threatens to erupt a crisis or an armed conflict), it is much more than a system of selective security or a Concert of major powers. There are severeal main arguments in support of this reasoning. Firstly, the main objective that inspired the creation of the UN and which the Council is tasked to achieve, is to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". In this regard, the veto power of P5 and the felxibility of the Council were designed and intended to be used for the better fulfilment of this goal, not as an backdoor for inaction or the pursuance of major powers interests. Even State's right of self-defense and the power of regional organizations to act fot international peace are also connected to the actitions by the UNSC and not completely independent from it, as a sign of its lack of power, which further shows that the UNSC was envisioned to be the international authority expected to maintain international peace. Additionally, the broader normative developments which includes, *inter alia,* human rights, international humanitarian law and international criminal law, and which constitute the normative framework in which the Council operates has significanlty got biger and wider in the eight decades following the UNSC inception   , and accordingly, there are much bigger expectations that the Council should deliver on. Related to this, there has also been a shift in understandings of the phrase "international peace" to include not only "interstate" but also internal situations, and not only the absence of war, but a "positive peace" (which means that the root causes of a situation and the links to human rights, rule of law and sustainable development should be taken into consideration).

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All of things mentioned above point to the conclusion that the Council should operate in practice far better than it has – more often, faster, more efficient and more effective .[5] In fact, if this is how the UNSC was intended to function in practice, there would not have been so many calls for its reform, dating back virtually from its inception. In this regard, one of the latest such calls, and even an affirmation by all UN member States that a reform of the Council is needed to address some of its shortcomings, "as a matter of priority and without delay", was made in the Pact for the Future, that the UN adopted last year at the Summit of the Future (Pact for the Future, 2024, Action 40). The Pact even talks about the potential introduction of a "review clause" in order "to ensure that the Security Council continues over time to deliver on its mandate and remains fit for purpose" (Ibid, Action 39(h)), which also implies that the Council has not (sometimes) delivered in practice as it was intended and could be better. Yet, while the main section dedicated to Council reform (Action 39) is a comprehensive one, and includes improvements of its representativeness, its working methods and the use of the veto, the main focus seems to be on the need to enlarge the Council. This type of reform is certainly needed, but it will probably not make the Security Council function substantially more in line with its responsibilities. Reform of the working methods, and especially the (use of the) veto of the P5 are needed even more so, in order for the Council to uphold its mandate even better.[6]

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5   See more about this in See Ljupcho Stojkovski, "Collective Security, Selective Security, Concert or Something Else? What Kind of Institution is the UN Security Council?" in Tolga Sakman (ed.),"Securitized World Order and New Security Spaces", Nobel Akademik Yayinclik, 2024, pp.225-238.

6   See more about this in Ljupcho Stojkovski, "Some Perspectives on the UN Security Council Reform Proposals", Iustinianus Primus Law Review, vol.14, is.1, 2023, and the works referenced there.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to scrutinize how the UN Security Council has acted in practice in its eighty-year-old existence - how engaged the Council has been, where and in what situations it is (preferring to) take action, how responsive it is, and what are the effects of its engagement. Drawing on numerous different studies on the Council's engagement in various types of conflicts and crises, this work presented their main findings and interpreted them in order to understand the Council as an institution in practice. Putting these studies side by side with an interpretation of the UN Charter provisions referring to the powers and responsibilities of the Council, as well as subsequent normative and other practical developments related to the (UN) security system, the work also offered some thoughts on how to interpret the Council's record and how to address some of its failures. Thus, it is noticeable that - by looking at its powers and limitations as enshrined in the UN Charter (particularly Articles 27 and 39) - the Council was not designed to act immediately and in every possible conflict, and, as a political body, it was granted vast flexibility in performing its responsibility to maintain international peace and security. Yet, viewed in light of the UN security system as a whole, and especially the transformation of the nature of warfare and the normative developments, the Council should have a better record - be more responsive, more engaged, less unjustifiably selective, and more substantially involved - than it has been in practice so far. Thus, as it was affirmed in the Pact for the Future, urgent reform is needed of this body. However, beyond any institutional reform (especially if such reforms never materialize, which is a real possibility), what is needed is for the (permanent) members to govern international security matters (for the collective good) and not only to understand and exercise the politics in the UNSC as an opportunity to protect, preserve and promote their interests and those of their allies.

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