

How Foreign Policies Impact the International System: “The Case of U.S., China, and Russia Veto Power”

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ABSTRACT

Using a qualitative research approach, specifically document analysis, this article has unpacked the detrimental effects of foreign policies on the international system. It equates the global system to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) endowed with the responsibility of maintaining international peace and security. With an emphasis on realism and liberalism as the significant frameworks for foreign policy, this paper argues the U.S., China, and Russia have been using their veto power as instruments to protect their national interests protected by respective foreign policies. Citing empirical pieces of evidence, this article maintains that whenever, the U.S., China, and Russia use their veto power that blocks any UNSC resolution strategic to its core functions, it paralyzes the effectiveness of the international system. As such, global security is held hostage by UNSC vetoes. Consequently, it paints the system as impartial, promoting a culture of impunity in some parts of the globe, and a toothless bulldog for enforcing international law.

About the way forward, this article sees it to be bleak on grounds that some of the permanent members, most notably the United States, China, and Russia have repeated time and again used their veto to protect and advance their respective interests.

Keywords: China, Foreign Policy, International System, National Interest, Russia, United States, United Nations Security Council, Veto Power

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the impact of the United States (U.S.), Russia, and China’s foreign policies on the international system. Foreign policy extends beyond the state and applies to international and domestic contexts Akokpari (2016).

At the state or national level, the interactions between states are guided by their respective foreign policies, which are relevant to their national interests. At the international level, the political behavior between states is also influenced by the protection of their national interests, which cannot be separated from their respective foreign policies. Within the United Nations (UN), states not only promote their national interests

but also seek protection. Since national interests play a crucial role in enhancing the legitimacy of states and their sovereignty, any disruptions in the international system are likely to result in a backlash or setbacks.

The article is divided into five segments, which make up its structure. The first segment provides a conceptual analysis, where foreign policy and national interest are discussed as two intertwined concepts. It then clarifies the international system, focusing on the United Nations (UN). The second segment features a theoretical perspective on the relationship between foreign policy and national interest. The third segment briefly reviews the foreign policies of the U.S., Russia, and China. The fourth segment, which is the focus of the article, assesses the impact of the foreign policies of these three countries on the international system. It examines to what extent their foreign policies contribute to the stability, objectives, and mission of the international system. Finally, the fifth segment concludes the article.

METHODOLOGICAL OUTLINE AND MATERIALS

The article used a qualitative research approach, specifically document analysis. This involved gathering secondary data from academic sources such as books, journal articles, and online materials highly relevant to the paper's subject matter. Document analysis is a structured process used to assess various types of documents, whether in print or digital form (such as those found on computers or the internet). Like other techniques in qualitative research, document analysis involves thoroughly examining and interpreting data to uncover significance, enhance comprehension, and establish factual insights (Corbin, 2008). This method was chosen for its adaptability and appropriateness for the qualitative nature of the research.

The main reason for selecting the U.S., Russia, and China stems not only from their critical position in the international system but also from their influence on the international system since the demise of the Cold War. In other words, these countries are meticulously selected because of their too much involvement with the international system in contemporary international politics.

Justification

This study provides a unique perspective on the subject matter in the field of international relations. It presents new insights and may serve as a guide for future research. The paper highlights areas for further investigation that the author did not address. This research outcome contributes to the discipline by shedding light on previously unexplored angles of the topic.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts two notable theories widely discussed in international relations that also incorporate the study of foreign policy and national interest as two of the fundamentals of the international system.

Realism

The realist school of thought is a significant approach to foreign policy. According to realists, states are the primary actors in the international system, and their foreign policy is driven by a desire to safeguard their national interests and protect their sovereignty on the global stage (Antunes and Camis o, 2018). This means that a state's political behavior in the international system is influenced by its national interest and foreign policy. For instance, in November 2022, Russia and China vetoed a U.S.-drafted United Nations Security Council resolution intended to strengthen sanctions on North Korea (Beech, 2022). In this example, Russia and China's political posture or behavior was motivated by their respective national interests that resonate with their foreign policies. Both countries embarked on the ballistic missile strategy to protect their national security interests. Similarly, the U.S. motive behind the draft resolution was driven by its national security interest and foreign policy and safeguarding its sovereignty against a perceived threat from North

Korea.

Realists also believe that the international system is anarchic and that states must rely on their military and economic capabilities to secure their interests. National interest, foreign policy, and sovereignty are all interconnected concepts in international relations or international politics. The political behavior or realist posture of states in the international system has implications for the system. In other words, the international system is highly vulnerable to backlash or setbacks due to the realist behavior of states. The example of Russia and China's realist position just cited may explain the setbacks or backlash on the World order.

In conclusion, this article submits that the fundamental argument articulated by the realist is that states will always act according to their best interests, which embody their foreign policies that cannot be aloof from their right of sovereignty.

Liberalism

Liberalism is another theoretical approach to foreign policy that emphasizes the importance of institutions, norms, and values in shaping state behavior (Meiser, 2018). Liberals argue that states can cooperate and achieve their interests through international institutions like the United Nations and the World Trade Organization. They also emphasize the importance of human rights and democracy in shaping foreign policy (Antunes and Camisã, 2018). Individuals' freedom is at the base of Liberalism. Liberal theorists focus on analyzing individuals as the most important aspect. Liberalism emphasizes the freedom of the individual, which is its essential principle. This principle emphasizes the right of every person to be treated ethically, as a moral being, and not as a mere object or means to an end (Parry, 2021).

In his article, Parry (2021) argues that while liberalism has been successful in promoting peace and cooperation among liberal states, it has failed to effectively guide foreign policy beyond the liberal world. In a similar tone, Doyle (2017) argues that while liberalism successfully created a peaceful zone among liberal states, its foreign policy faced repeated failures when dealing with powerful non-liberal states. The attempts at diplomacy repeatedly failed, and negotiations regarding mutual interests were not successful. This resulted in conflicts between liberal and non-liberal states. Therefore, peaceful coexistence appears possible only between liberal states, and there are numerous tensions between liberal and non-liberal states (Doyle, 2017). The tensions between the U.S. and North Korea, the U.S. and Russia, the U.S., and China, and the U.S. and Iran bordering on nuclear weapons or ballistic missiles that often impact the international system (UN) are classic examples of both (Parry 2021, and Doyle, 2017) assertions or basic arguments. Besides the U.S., China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea are considered non-liberal states. As such there will always be a clash of national interests.

In summation, while liberal democracies tend to negotiate rather than escalate inter-liberal disputes and respect other democratic states, liberalism can exacerbate tensions with non-liberal states in the international system.

ANALYSIS OF IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

The available relevant literature provides a conceptual analysis of the international system, foreign policy, and national interest.

The International System

In this segment, this article analyzes the international system with a focus on the United Nations as the most significant player.

Due to its complex nature, it is not easy to define the international system. However, scholars have made some significant attempts to put the concept in context.

Kenneth N. Waltz, a prolific scholar in international politics conceptualizes the international system also known as the world order as composed of a structure and interacting units, and a structure by the arrangement of its parts (Walt, 1979). He contends that the units are sovereign states in international politics. It is a structure that defines the arrangement, or the ordering, of the parts of a system. Describing the nature of the structure, Walt argues that the international system is decentralized and anarchic, and stresses that states seek to ensure their survivability.

Kaplan (1957) is known for his strong belief in the International System and the balance of power that maintains order within it. He defines a System as a group of interconnected points, where changing or removing one point affects the others. Hence, states do not allow any one state to become too dominant or be rejected by the others (Guruge, 2015).

The Immerse Education website defines the international system as a network of states, organizations, and individuals that interact on a global scale. It provides a framework for international relations that outlines who interacts with whom, how they interact, and what the rules of engagement are. It also provides context for individual countries to set foreign policy and develop international diplomatic relations (Immerse Education, 2023).

According to de Nardis (2020), an international system consists of a group of states that interact with each other within a framework of rules, institutions, and organizational roles. Typically, this system is hierarchical, and it is based on the level of influence that one or more states exert in creating and changing the rules of the game.

All the definitions provided above for the international system revolve around three irrefutable fundamental concepts. Firstly, it is important to note that there can be no international system without the presence of states. This means that states are the primary actors in the global system. Secondly, the survival of states is closely intertwined with the existence of the system, as their national interests are inextricably linked to it. Lastly, the system serves as a platform for setting a global agenda and shifting of global politics.

From research, it is learned that the evolution of the international system is traceable to the peace of Westphalia of 1648 which ended the “Thirty Years’ War” and the “Eighty Years’ War” between Spain and the United Provinces. These treaties established the principle of the sovereignty of nation-states, stating that each state is free to govern its territory without external interference. This principle of sovereignty became a fundamental pillar of the international system and laid the foundations of modern international law (de Nardis, 2020). Arguably, The League of Nations (1920 – 1946) was the first and most significant player in the international system established to promote international cooperation and to achieve international peace and security. It is often referred to as the predecessor of the United Nations now the most significant player in the world order or international system.

Actors in the International System

The definitions of the international system embody three key players or actors in the international system which are important to understand.

National Actors

In the international system, states are the key players. They engage with each other directly or indirectly, as well as with international organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union, African Union, etc.

States have diverse economic, political, and cultural relationships with each other, which significantly impact the dynamics of the international system. To safeguard their interests and maintain a balance of power in global politics, states often form alliances such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU), European Union (EU), The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Group of 20 (G20), Group of 7 (G7), Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), etc. (Immerse Education, 2023).

Intergovernmental Organizations

International organizations serve as platforms for countries to interact with each other and provide a more structured approach to the international system. These organizations play a crucial role in establishing policies and standards, resolving conflicts, formulating economic policies, and ensuring global stability. Examples of such actors include the UN, the EU, the AU, NATO, etc. (Nebo, 2023).

Non-States Actors

These actors can impact the international system through different means, such as influencing public opinion or engaging in diplomatic negotiations. These actors can significantly contribute to bringing about change. For instance, non-state actors like Greenpeace have played a crucial role in raising awareness about environmental concerns globally. Examples of such non-state actors include corporations, NGOs, media outlets, and individuals. To be precise, multinational corporations, Greenpeace, Red Cross/Red Crescent, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Worldwide Fund for Nature, etc. fit in the examples of non-state actors (Nebo, 2023).

The United Nations

In the study of the international system, the United Nations (UN) is regarded as the most influential actor or player. In passing, the UN is a global organization established in 1945 with the primary objective of promoting international peace and security, fostering friendly relations among nations, encouraging international cooperation, and acting as a central platform for coordinating the actions of nations. Without a doubt, it is the largest international organization in the world and the most significant player in the international system (United Nations, n.d.). Currently made up of 193 Member States, the UN, and its work are guided by the purposes and principles contained in its founding Charter (United Nations, n.d.).

The UN Security Council (UNSC)

Although all member states of the United Nations are part of the General Assembly, it is the UNSC that holds the highest decision-making power in the international system (Better World Campaign, n.d.). The UNSC has the authority to enforce legally binding obligations on member states and is responsible for maintaining international peace and security. The Council has multiple tools at its disposal to prevent and manage conflicts. According to Chapter VI of the UN Charter, the Council can make recommendations to resolve threats to international peace and security through peaceful means. If these recommendations fail, the UNSC can authorize enforcement measures under Chapter VII, which may include sanctions and military force (Better World Campaign, n.d.).

The UNSC is composed of 15 Member States: five permanent members (also known as the P5), made up of the “Big Four” Allied Powers from World War II or their continuator states (the U.S., the U.K., Russia, and China) plus France; and ten rotating non-permanent members, elected to two-year terms by the UN General Assembly based on equitable geographic distribution among regional groups. Votes on non-procedural matters require the concurrence of the P5, effectively giving them a veto over such decisions (Better World

Campaign, n.d.).

The UNSC has been established as a significant platform to address security challenges. It has authorized over 70 peacekeeping missions in some of the most perilous regions around the world, implemented global sanctions against rogue regimes such as North Korea and terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and ISIS, and aimed at fostering international collaboration on issues ranging from terrorist financing to nuclear nonproliferation (Better World Campaign, n.d.).

Foreign Policy

The study of International Relations and International Politics highlights the significance of foreign policy as the foundation of all international relations. It is impossible to comprehend the dynamics of the international system without taking into account the foreign policy of each state. Foreign policy has various definitions, as it is a vital aspect of international relations.

According to the National Museum of American Diplomacy (n.d.), “foreign policy is how a country uses different strategies to guide its relationships with other countries and international organizations.”

In a narrower perspective, the Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica (2024) conceptualized foreign policy as general objectives that guide the activities and relationships of one state in its interactions with other states.

According to the O.P. Jindal Global University (2024), foreign policy is the set of goals, strategies, and actions that a state or a non-state actor pursues in its relations with other actors in the international system. Accordingly, the concept reflects the interests, values, and preferences of the actor, and it guides its decisions and behaviors in the global arena.

As for Frazier, (2019), the Foreign Policy of a country can be defined as a set of goals that seek to outline how that country will interface at an official level with other countries of the world and, to a lesser extent, with non-state actors in pursuit of its national economic, political, social, and cultural interests.

In the view of the author of this article, a foreign policy could be defined as a deliberate course of actions that guide a state’s interaction or relationship with another state, or non-state actors germane to its national interests in the international system. In this context, the course of actions may include laws, policies, strategies, etc. that guide the political behavior of state relations with other states in the international system.

The analysis of the above definitions suggests that foreign policy is all about protecting the national interests of states in the international system. Arguably, this national interest influences the political behavior of states in the international system, whether regional or continental.

Veto Power- Instrument of Foreign Policy in the International System

In the realm of international relations, states conspicuously employ various instruments or tools to pursue their foreign policy goals or objectives and national interests. Those instruments or tools generally fall into three broad categories namely Political, Economic, and Military (World 101, 2022). Political, and economic fall under the category of soft power diplomacy, while military is hard power diplomacy.

In addition to the aforementioned instruments or tools, the concept of veto power, which falls under the category of soft power, is a crucial tool utilized by the five permanent (P5) countries within the international system to advance and protect their foreign policies that are critical to their national interests. It is the sole tool available to them for this specific purpose. In simpler terms, the veto power enables the P5 countries to promote, protect, or safeguard their national interests as expressed in their foreign policies. Throughout history, the P5 countries have frequently, unilaterally, or multilaterally used the concept of veto power to

block several UNSC resolutions to advance their national interests as outlined in their foreign policies. Russia, in particular, has used the veto power most often, having blocked 155 resolutions since the formation of the Security Council (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). The United States has used its veto power 90 times, most recently in December 2023 when it vetoed a resolution calling for a cease-fire in the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). The United States typically uses its veto power to shield Israel from Security Council decisions, with about one-third of its negative votes since 1972 being applied to resolutions critical of Israel. China, historically more restrained in its use of the veto power than the United States or Russia has used it more frequently in recent years, having blocked twenty resolutions so far. Since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, China and Russia have vetoed together more than a quarter of the time (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). Below are some contemporary examples of how the P5 countries used their veto power to advance and safeguard their national interests. In February 2024, the United States used its veto power to reject a UNSC resolution that would have called for an immediate cease-fire in the Gaza Strip. The US ambassador was concerned that this resolution could disrupt hostage negotiations and, therefore, vetoed it as a precautionary measure. This decision marked the third time that the US had vetoed a resolution demanding a stop to the fighting in Gaza. It highlighted America's isolation in its continued and forceful support of Israel, which speaks volumes about its foreign policy toward Israel (Fassihi et al, 2024).

In March 2024, Russia, to protect its national security, vetoed a UN Security Council resolution to renew an independent panel of experts investigating North Korea's violations of Security Council sanctions. This happened at a time when North Korea had become a key supplier of munitions for Moscow's war against Ukraine, and Russia was fully aware of the importance of its foreign policy toward North Korea concerning its national security (Roth, et al, 2024). Russia remains the main backer of North Korea in the international system.

In February 2020, China, in consideration of its economic interests, utilized its veto power to reject a resolution put forth by non-permanent members of the Security Council, specifically Belgium, Germany, and Kuwait. The resolution sought to extend the cross-border transfer of humanitarian goods, such as medicines and surgical supplies, for one year. Nevertheless, Beijing contended that the organizations responsible for delivering aid should collaborate with the Syrian government instead of directly aiding the vulnerable populations (Foot, 2020). Within the UN, both China and Russia are key supporters of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government.

National Interest

The notion of national interest has always been a crucial aspect of the foreign policies of independent states, and it is expected to remain so in the future. However, a clear and definitive definition of what constitutes national interest is lacking, and there is no consensus among experts and practitioners of international politics on the nature and composition of a state's national interest. In international relations, national interest refers to a country's perception of what is valuable for its survival as a sovereign state (Ebegbulem, 2010). The subjective and abstract interpretation of this definition makes it problematic. Nonetheless, scholars have analyzed the concept in terms of basic components: political interests, security interests, economic interests, cultural interests, and other interests of a country. This implies that the definition could encompass any of these components. Let's consider a few definitions to facilitate logical analysis.

Morgenthau (1952), a prominent scholar of international relations and politics, described national interest as the safeguarding of a nation's physical, political, and cultural identity from encroachment by other nation-states. Similarly, Dyke (1957) defined it as the values, desires, and interests that states seek to protect or achieve with each other.

According to Samuel Huntington, national interest is a public good that concerns everyone or most citizens;

a vital national interest is one for which they are willing to shed their blood and spend their wealth to defend. National interests typically combine security with material concerns on one hand, and moral and ethical concerns on the other (Gentilia METEA, 2020).

From the above definitions, it is evident that the concept of national interest lacks a clear-cut definition and carries various meanings depending on the context in which it is used. Individual states determine the most appropriate definition, and it is often manipulated by governments and politicians to serve their interests and justify their actions. In the international system, when a state's actions are criticized, what prevails is the protection of its national interest above all else. For instance, the recent decision by the US to veto a draft UNSC resolution demanding a ceasefire in Gaza, despite strong international criticism, exemplifies the prioritization of national interest in favor of Israel (Tiwfik and FitzGerald, 2024).

In summation, the notion of national interest varies from one nation to another, as different criteria are used to define it. Scholars often debate who determines a nation's national interest in terms of foreign policy formulation. In attempting to answer this question, Alade (1997) argues that the national interest is often influenced by the dominant class that controls the government machinery of the state. From Alade's claim, it can be inferred that the President or Head of the Government is the chief architect of a country's national interest.

The Nexus Between Foreign Policy and National Interest

Foreign policy and national interest are two closely related concepts in international politics, supported by realists and liberalists. Through its foreign policy, a nation advances its interests on the global stage. For a nation to have a successful foreign policy, it must have a clear and strong sense of its national interest, which should be aligned with its foreign policy objectives. Essentially, the national interest serves as the foundation for a country's foreign policy and drives a nation's interests. According to Morgenthau, the father of realism, national interest is the prime motivation for foreign policies. He furthered the argument that the objectives of foreign policy must be defined in terms of the national interest and must be supported with adequate power (Morgenthau, 1951).

In Ebegbulem's (2010), perspective nations develop their foreign policies by carefully considering how these policies will impact their national interest. Before formulating their foreign policy, a state must have a clear understanding of its national interest. Consequently, countries design and implement their foreign policies in a manner that safeguards their national interests. It is indisputable that a nation's national interest holds paramount importance during the formulation and execution of its foreign policy. A country's actions in the international arena are driven by its national interest, encompassing security, defense, economic interests, and other fundamental values crucial for the state's survival. Therefore, a country's foreign policy is shaped to advance its national interest. In this regard, these two concepts are intertwined.

Why the U.S., China, and Russia

In the international system, there are more than three actors. So, one may wonder why the emphasis is on the U.S., China, and Russia? Inarguably, these countries currently stand at the center stage or epicenter of international politics. They are the ones shaping the trajectory or direction of the international system through the use of their veto power to protect their national and geopolitical interests. They are the ones the global community is blaming for making the UNSC paralyzed so that it cannot effectively perform its core functions, especially maintaining international peace and security. For instance, in the Syria crisis, Amnesty International which is part of the global community has accused Russia and China of abusing their veto power to block a draft resolution that would have helped ensure accountability for the use and production of chemical weapons by all parties to the conflict in Syria. In verbatim, Amnesty International argued that "By vetoing this resolution Russia and China have displayed a callous disregard for the lives of millions of

Syrians. Both states are parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention– there is simply no excuse for their vetoes today,” (Amnesty International, 2017). Another classic instance to reference is the “Rohingya Crisis” from 2017-present in which China used its veto power to block resolutions aimed at addressing the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar. This has prevented the UNSC from taking effective action to hold the Myanmar government accountable for human rights abuses against the Rohingya people (Lukmaan, 2023). Likewise, the U.S. history of protecting and supporting Israel through its veto power that blocked critical draft resolutions is also replete dating far back to 1948 (Wolf, 2023). To wrap up, it is very rare for France and the UK who are part of permanent members of the UNSC to come under the international spotlight for using their veto powers to block draft resolutions critical to the core functions of the UNSC.

Brief General Overview of the Foreign Policy of the US, China, and Russia

As a concept, foreign policy is not static, but dynamic and flexible. It can adapt and change to the changing circumstances and conditions in the international system and the actor’s environment. Based on this premise, this segment of the article will review the foreign policy of three different countries, starting with the United States.

The United States of America

Since the end of the Cold War, the US has actively sought to promote its liberal values and democracy around the world. This was often done through regime changes, either by direct military intervention or meddling in the internal affairs of other nations. The US government initiated “color revolutions” in Eurasia and carefully planned the “Arab Spring” in West Asia and North Africa, which led to turmoil and catastrophe in numerous countries (Sajadi, 2023). The US Department of State openly acknowledged its significant involvement in these regime changes. In his recent book “Never Give an Inch: Fighting for the America I Love,” former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo revealed as cited in (Sajadi, 2023) that the US had devised a strategy to interfere in Venezuela. The strategy aimed to pressure the Maduro government into negotiating with the opposition, disrupt Venezuela’s oil and gold exports, create economic pressure, and affect the outcome of the 2018 presidential election (Pompeo, 2023, as in Sajadi, 2023). The US employed strategies characterized by dominance, coercion, and aggressive tactics to exploit and overpower others, often resorting to force and deceit. Their approach was a win-lose one, which caused significant damage and worldwide discontent, especially in the Global South and weaker states.

In brief, the US foreign policy aimed to establish a global system based on its core values of democracy, respect for human rights, freedom, multilateralism, and cooperation. The ultimate goal seeks to create a more prosperous and secure world where all nations can benefit mutually. However, with time, the U.S. foreign policy shifted its course, and its focus shifted towards shaping the international system to align with its own interests. Consequently, it began to rely more and more on hard power diplomacy to compel other nations to comply and exert influence.

The foreign policy of the US varies based on its national interest, which can result in different approaches toward other countries. For non-liberal countries, the US takes a more realistic approach. Additionally, it can be argued that the US sometimes adopts a double standard approach towards its foreign policy germane to its national interest. For example, despite its stance on human rights abuses anchored on liberal democracy, the US remains the indispensable backer of Israel’s all-out brutal operations to eliminate Hamas in pursuit of “total victory”, oblivious to the heartbreaking humanitarian crisis of biblical proportions and regardless of attempts for a sustainable long-term “Two States Solution” for Palestine. Following the latest Rafah incursions, some 1.3 million Gaza citizens remain trapped in need of water, food, and medical care, including many innocent women and children (Leung, 2024). Another classic example that is contrary to US foreign policy on global terrorism is its ignominious withdrawal from Afghanistan, leaving behind \$7 billion of military equipment to an oppressive Taliban government listed as a terrorist organization

(Kaufman, 2022).

China

Throughout history, China's foreign policy has been guided by five core principles: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality, mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence (Asia for Educators, n.d.). Despite changes in the international landscape and China's policies, these principles continue to be pertinent. They offer an alternative to the U.S. vision of the world order, one in which international regimes and institutions, often representing U.S. interests and values, restrict the rights of sovereign states to develop and trade weapons of mass destruction, suppress opposition, violate human rights, pursue economic policies that interfere with free trade, and harm the environment (Asia for Educators, n.d.). China's foreign relations, particularly at the UN level, are guided by five principles. For example, China's relationship with Africa is based on principles of respecting sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs. Although some critics perceive China's engagement with Africa as exploitative and neocolonial, the country's approach is primarily driven by its economic interests. Unlike the U.S., China refrains from intervening in Africa's governance. Impressively, China has been the leading investor in Africa's infrastructure development for over two decades. Notably, China's two major foreign development banks have invested \$23 billion in infrastructure projects on the continent between 2007 and 2020 (Frimpong, 2023). More importantly, Africa and the Muslim countries together represent the two largest voting blocs within the UN, collectively accounting for over 50 and 40 votes respectively, which make up almost half of the U.N. membership. China's reliance on the support of these blocs is crucial for safeguarding its interests in the international system. Within the Muslim world, China has extended support to Syria in countering foreign interference, citing their strong economic ties. China has been Syria's leading partner since 2019, with trade reaching \$415.98 million in 2022. Syria's main exports to China include soap and essential oils, while China primarily exports machinery, electrical machinery and equipment, and fabrics to Syria.

Russia

On March 31, through a decree, the President of the Russian Federation approved a new "foreign policy concept," articulating Moscow's, strategic goals, major objectives, global priorities, and focus for the future. This 42-page document declares Moscow's inclination to maintain its combative stance against Western states, particularly the U.S. while focusing on strengthening cooperation with non-Western states; and changes to Russia's perception of, and response to, former Soviet countries have been detected (Seungsoo, 2023).

To put it differently, Moscow has demonstrated its increasing disdain for the rules-based international order and antagonism toward the United States and its European NATO partners. The 2023 document is Russia's first comprehensive foreign policy statement since its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, revealing how Moscow sees the war a year later and its vision for an emergent multipolar world (Ashby and Glantz, 2023).

Upon thorough analysis, the entire document implicitly underscores three key themes: extreme aggression, ideology, and propaganda. The document consistently employs propagandistic terms that diverge from the standard usage in official Russian government documents. These terms include "the Russian world," "Western hegemony," "neo-colonialism," "the collective West," "traditional values," "a multipolar world," "Anglo-Saxon," "Russophobia," and "neo-Nazism." Russia has frequently utilized these ideological and propagandistic terms to justify its invasion of Ukraine (Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Union, 2023).

In summary, Russian foreign policy is characterized as peaceful, open, predictable, consistent, and pragmatic. It is founded on the respect for universally acknowledged principles and norms of international

law and a commitment to fair international cooperation to address common challenges and advance shared interests. Russia's stance towards other nations and interstate associations is determined by the constructive, neutral, or unfriendly nature of their policies towards the Russian Federation. In its dealings with other countries, Russia also upholds the principle of non-interference in their internal affairs (Kirkinen, 2023).

In terms of foreign policy, Russia takes a distinctive approach at both continental and regional levels. For instance, in Africa, Moscow pursues a blend of military, diplomatic, and economic interests. Russia primarily focuses on weapons trade while also seeking to expand its operational footprint through agreements for new military bases. Nonetheless, Russia's official military presence on the ground is currently limited to an agreement to eventually establish a naval port in Sudan (Ferragamo, 2023). It's worth noting that Russia is the primary arms supplier to Africa, accounting for 40 percent of African imports of major weapons systems between 2018 and 2022. This exceeds the combined arms imports from the United States (16 percent), China (9.8 percent), and France (7.6 percent) during the same period. According to a report by the RAND Corporation, Russian weapons sales to Africa have increased from around \$500 million to over \$2 billion annually in recent years (Droin and Dolbaia, 2023).

The main diplomatic goal of Russia is to cultivate greater support for its vision of a multipolar world order that reduces the dominance of the West. At the United Nations, the Kremlin has found support from numerous African nations during crucial UN votes. This includes resolutions such as the 2014 General Assembly resolution condemning Russia's annexation of Crimea, the 2018 resolution urging Moscow to demilitarize the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, and the 2022 resolution denouncing Russia's attempted annexation of four Ukrainian regions. In each instance, a significant number of African countries either voted against the proposed resolutions, abstained, or did not partake in the vote, thereby directly or indirectly aiding Russia's efforts to challenge the United States and its allies within international frameworks (Droin and Dolbaia, 2023).

Economically, Russia is not a significant player in Africa. Less than 1 percent of the country's foreign direct investment goes to the African continent, and its \$18 billion in trade with African countries lags far behind the US \$64 billion and China's \$254 billion, according to the Congressional Research Service.

Russia is expanding its influence in Africa because it follows the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of African countries. Unlike the US, Russia does not dictate the trajectory of political governance in Africa. Additionally, the Kremlin does not make its arms deliveries contingent upon adherence to democratic principles or the protection of basic human rights. For example, when the US and its allies refused to sell arms to Nigeria to help repel Boko Haram attacks on the grounds of human rights violations, Nigeria turned to Russia for the deal (McGregor, 2019).

In Asia, Russia's relations with China remain cooperative despite the complexities of international politics. The two nations collaborate to challenge U.S. dominance in the international system. China's vocal support for Russia's actions in Ukraine has contributed to stronger trans-Atlantic ties. Additionally, North Korea is a steadfast ally of Russia in Asia.

The Impacts of the US, China, and Russia Foreign Policies on the International System

As mentioned, this article restricts or narrows the international system to the UN, precisely the UNSC. Notably, Article 24 of the Charter summarizes the core functions of the UNSC. They are:

1. Maintaining peace and security at the international level. It takes the lead in determining the existence of a threat to peace or an act of aggression.
2. Apart from maintaining peace, the UNSC can also deploy UN peacekeeping operations and impose

sanctions on states.

3. The UNSC can also impose diplomatic relations severance, financial restrictions and penalties, blockades, and even collective military action if required.

The effectiveness and implementation of these core functions rely on “Resolutions,” which are formal unanimous expressions of the opinion or will of the UN Security Council to address global issues. By definition, the resolution is an official document accepted by all fifteen members of the Security Council and is adopted by a vote of the Council members (UNRCCA, 2020). It takes effect if nine or more of the fifteen Council members vote for it and if it is not vetoed by any of the five permanent members (P5) (China, France, Russia, Great Britain, and the USA) (UNRCCA, 2020). For instance, the deployment of UN peacekeeping missions or operations is authorized by a unanimous resolution. Each peacekeeping operation comes with a specific mandate tailored to the nature and dynamics of the conflict, which is explicitly stated in the resolution. For example, the current mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan derives its legitimacy from “Resolution 2729 (2024).” This unanimous resolution encompasses the protection of civilians, creating conditions for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, supporting the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement and the Peace Process, and monitoring, investigating, and reporting violations of humanitarian and human rights law (UNMISS, 2024).

Similarly, UNSC resolutions may pertain to ongoing UN activities, such as elections to the International Court of Justice, but their primary function is to assist the UNSC in ensuring the peaceful resolution of international disputes and in eliminating threats to international peace and security. These resolutions may involve imposing sanctions aimed at maintaining peace and security. For example, in response to North Korea’s nuclear and missile activities, the UNSC has approved nine major unanimous resolutions of sanctions since 2006 (Arms Control Association, n.d.).

Sanctions can also include measures such as military actions against offending states, the establishment of international tribunals, the approval of peacekeeping force mandates, and the imposition of restrictive measures (such as asset freezes and travel bans) on individuals. According to the Charter of the United Nations, all Member States are obligated to comply with the Council’s decisions (UNRCCA, 2020).

The P5, or five permanent members of the international system, use their veto power as a tool to advance, project, or protect their national interests as articulated in their respective foreign policies. According to the Security Council Report (2024), the five permanent members use the veto to defend their national interests, uphold key aspects of their foreign policy, and in some cases, promote a single issue of particular importance to a state. Below are some historical instances worth learning from. Since 2011, Russia cast 19 vetoes, 14 of which were on Syria. Eight of the nine Chinese vetoes during this period were over Syria and one was on Venezuela. The remaining Russian vetoes since 2011 were against two resolutions related to the conflict in Ukraine, one on the 20th anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica, one on sanctions against Yemen, and one on Venezuela. (The US cast 14 vetoes since 2020, with all but two on Israel/Palestine issues.) (Security Council Report, 2024). Interestingly, since 1945, a total of 36 UNSC draft resolutions related to Israel-Palestine have been vetoed by one of the five permanent members – the US, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and France. Out of these, 34 were vetoed by the US and two by Russia and China (Asrar and Hussein, 2023). Inarguably, the US number of vetoed shows its support and protection for Israel. The most recent in which the interest of the US was paramount can be seen from its inclination to veto a widely backed U.N. resolution that would have paved the way for full United Nations membership for Palestine, a goal the Palestinians have long sought, and Israel has worked to prevent (Lederer, 2024).

Doubtlessly, how the US, China, and Russia continuously employ their veto power speaks to the protection of their national interests expressed in their foreign policy. In other words, these three countries use their veto power to protect any regimes (Bashar al-Assad of Syria, Kim Jong Un of North Korea, Benjamin

Netanyahu of Israel, etc.) that align with their foreign policy regardless of the obvious aftermath of their political behavior, or what the world might consider or think. A historical example is how Russia, with the support of China, has blocked Security Council decisions that would have punitive consequences for the Syrian government's use of chemical weapons that badly affected the lives of millions of Syrians (Amnesty International, 2017).

It is worth noting that whenever a resolution is vetoed by either the U.S., China, or Russia who are now the focus of global politics, it affects and undermines one of the core functions of the UNSC, especially maintaining world peace and security. For instance, if a resolution seeks to prevent what is viewed as an ongoing genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes on a large scale as in the case of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Israel-Gaza conflict, and Syria, it makes the international system a toothless bulldog or a bulldog that does not have the strong teeth to bite. Moreover, this kind of political behavior driven by the protection of their national interests not only prevents justice the international system should uphold or protect but undermines the very essence of its existence. Also, it undermines the potential of the international system to protect international laws as well. In other words, at the expense of serious humanitarian catastrophe veto power is used to protect the nation interest of either the U.S., China, or Russia. More importantly, it has for ages questioned the ability of the international system to maintain peace and security in some parts of the globe. A classic instance to reference is the "Rohingya Crisis" from 2017-present in which China used its veto power to block resolutions aimed at addressing the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar. This has prevented the UNSC from taking effective action to hold the Myanmar government accountable for human rights abuses against the Rohingya people (Lukmaan, 2023).

Debatably, it can be inferred that France's inclination to have advocated a voluntary restraint on the veto on the part of the permanent members since the mid-2000s explains the negative impact is having on the international system (Security Council Report, 2024). It can be recalled that in September 2014, on the margins of the 69th session of the General Assembly, France, joined by Mexico, organized a ministerial-level event on this issue. Then High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein made a statement in support of the French initiative. In a summary of the event, the co-chairs called on the P5 to "voluntarily and collectively pledge not to use the veto in case of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes on a large scale." However, among the permanent members, only the UK has supported the initiative (Security Council Report, 2024).

Arguably, the use of veto power especially by the U.S. is responsible for the lack of a durable solution to what this paper sees as a never-ending conflict between Israel and Palestine. The combination of unwavering U.S. support (economic and military) for Israel since the October War in 1973 till 2024 coupled with the number of vetoes in favor of Israel convincingly make it difficult to disassociate the international system from the solution to the conflict. Consequently, the international system could be blamed for the impunity enjoyed by Israel.

Similarly, the use of the veto power by Russia and China is also responsible for the international system's inability to find durable solutions to the Syrian conflict. At the expense of humanitarian disaster evidenced by the usage of chemical weapons that badly affected millions of Syrians, the international system through the use of China and Russia respective veto power has promoted a culture of impunity for Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria.

CONCLUSION

As a contribution to the body of knowledge of international politics, this article has unpacked the devastating impacts of the U.S., Russia, and China foreign policies on the international system. Empirically, it has illustrated how the concept of veto power has been used as a tool to advance and protect the national

interests of the U.S., Russia, and China. Readers may reject the analysis and arguments supporting the claim of this article, of course, but the pieces of evidence on which they rest are not contentious or controversial.

On the flip side of the same coin, this article has in no way implied the irrelevance of veto power used as a tool to protect the national interest of the U.S., Russia, and China. Instead, it has decried the abuse or misuse of the tool that weakens the ability and capacity of the international system to effectively implement its core functions, especially maintaining world peace and security. Consequentially, it creates the grounds and inclination to question the existence of the system. Moreover, it paints the system as an impartial institution.

In short, veto power is the most undemocratic element of the international system, as well as the main cause of inaction on war crimes and crimes against humanity, as it effectively prevents the international system's action against permanent members and their allies. Because of this veto power, the international system responsible for maintaining international peace and security has been repeatedly paralyzed by the willingness of P5 members, to act unilaterally to protect their national interests. Finally, this article may be used or cited as another crutch for the clamor to reform the UNSC, especially the concept of veto power.

THE WAY FORWARD

The legal framework, especially Article 108 of the Charter of the United Nations is the only reliance to advance the UNSC reform. It lays out the procedures or stages. In the first stage, the General Assembly, in which all 193 member states have one vote each, must approve the reform by a two-thirds majority (i.e. at least 128 states).

Once approved, the Charter of the United Nations, an international treaty, is amended during the second stage. The amended Charter must then be ratified by at least two-thirds of the member states, including the five permanent Council members, following national procedures.

What happens when one of the five permanent members vetoes the proposed amendment? It does not mean the amendment cannot be ratified. History records a similar situation. For example, in the vote on enlarging the Security Council in 1963, only one permanent member voted in favor. However, by 1965, just 18 months later, all five permanent members had ratified the amended Charter. The reform entered into force in 1965 (Baccarini, 2018).

In 2005, African Union countries sponsored a draft resolution which called for the power of veto to be extended immediately to include new permanent members. Regrettably, Africa the biggest voting bloc, with 54 countries, (27,97 % of all votes) unable to leverage its influence to change the narrative (Tawat, 2022).

Despite Article 108 stipulates the need for reform, the way forward seems to be bleak on grounds that some of the permanent members, most notably the United States, China, and Russia have repeated time and again used their veto to protect and advance their respective interests.

DISCLAIMER

The author of this article is solely responsible for the views expressed herein. The organizations including the academic institutions the author is attached to do not take positions on the scholarship of the faculty and this article should not be interpreted or portrayed in any way as reflecting the official position of either organization.

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