Stuck Again? Does the 'New Cold War' Impact the Functioning of the UN Security Council?

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ABSTRACT

The "new Cold War", which we are now allegedly living through, is not an exact term in international relations. Some observers use it to refer to the renewed tension and animosity between the USA and Russia. Others talk of the looming Cold War-like rivalry between the USA and China, while for many, the concept encompasses the relations between all three major powers. Regardless of these differences of opinion, what is certain is that all three countries are permanent members of the UN Security Council (P3), and if we are indeed living through a second Cold War, this could affect the functioning of the Council as well, which is the international community's authority for peace and security. During the 'first' Cold War, the Security Council was generally dormant and/or blocked by the vetoes of the permanent members, so it is worth investigating whether a similar passiveness and/or ineffectiveness could be expected during the new Cold War. In this paper, it will be argued that while there has been an increased use of vetoes by Russia and China in recent years, a complete paralysis of the Council, like in the past, is not to be expected. Due to the different socio-economic and normative context in which the new Cold War is occurring and in which the Security Council operates, as well as the shared and individual interests that the P3 have in keeping the Council operative, this institution will continue to be functional for most situations that it deals with.

Keywords: Cold War; New Cold War; UN Security Council; permanent three (P3).

Introduction

The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, and especially its invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and the ensuing Western response of massive sanctions against Russia and financial and military support for Ukraine, revived the fears that we are living in a "new Cold War" today between the East and the West. In addition to this rivalry, the animosity between the USA and China on many geopolitical and economic issues has also been growing in the past decade(s), leading many to also label this separate confrontation as the new Cold War. Despite the many ambiguities related to this new cold clash between superpowers, what is certain is that all three of these countries are permanent members of the UN Security Council, and if we are indeed living in a second Cold War between (some of) them, this could affect the working of the UN Security Council. The Council is the body recognized as the international community's authority for the maintenance of international peace and security, so its proper functioning is quite significant for the whole world. During the Cold War, however, this was not the case. The Security Council was sharply divided between the Eastern and Western blocks and, as a result, was generally dormant and/or blocked by the vetoes of its five permanent members. Therefore, it is worth investigating whether similar passiveness and/or ineffectiveness by this body is already present or could be expected to happen during the 'new Cold War'.

In this paper, it will be argued that while there has been an increase in the use of the veto in recent years by Russia and China, the Council would not be (as) inactive or blocked, as it was during the Cold War. This argument will be outlined in the following four parts. Firstly, a brief sketch will be provided of the 'new Cold War' and the different implied meanings of this term, followed by an explanation of the Security Council and its (non-) functioning during the Cold War. Afterwards, a numerical comparison of the Council's record during and after the Cold War will be provided to demonstrate that there is not a trend pointing to the Council being in a Cold War mode. Finally, in the fourth part, it will be explained why the Council is not and probably will not experience a paralysis similar to the first Cold War in the future.

The New Cold War

For many international relations observers, today we are living in a 'second' or 'new Cold War' between major world powers. The Cold War period, which began almost immediately after the Second World War and lasted until the collapse of the Soviet Union, was characterized by major global friction between the two blocks on political, economic and military matters. The largely bipolar world order was full of covert conflicts and proxy wars in which each block supported a party in the conflict, and while direct hostilities between the two superpowers were avoided, a looming threat that a certain conflict would escalate into a Third World War, this time with nuclear weapons, was always present. The great power rivalry in the "new Cold War", the reasoning goes, shares many of the features of the 'old' one. Primarily, in this new confrontation, major world powers also demonstrate hegemonic aspirations; there is great strategic competition between them; there is not a direct military confrontation, but there are many low-intensity disputes and disagreements; the technological and arms race is as heated as ever; and they have quite different ideological and normative positions on main international issues.

The 'new Cold War', however, is a rather ambiguous concept. Some experts see the Russian invasion of Ukraine in the past year as evidence of the renewed tension and animosity between the USA and Russia and a new Cold War between these two countries (Bremen, 2022). Others, the majority, talk about a cold rivalry between the USA and China, primarily visible in the trade wars and economic competition between the two countries, in the territorial-security issues in the Asia-Pacific, the technological competition, or the rising spying incidents between them (Brands & Gaddis, 2021; Rizzi, 2023). A third group of authors points at an antagonism between all three of the above-mentioned countries, with China and Russia joining forces (and China being in charge) against the USA (Abrams, 2022; Bluhm, 2023). Opinions also differ regarding the commencement of this new clash. For some, the old Cold War never actually ended (Kotkin, 2022). For others, the new Cold War came to the fore with the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Trenin, 2014) or with the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 (Lucas, 2008). China's rapid economic growth at the end of the last century and the beginning of this century is pinpointed by some as the period when the Asian country began entering into the global geopolitical equation that we have today (Jisi, 1999). Nevertheless, even though it is not precisely clear who exactly are the adversaries in this new Cold War and when this confrontation began (or if it has begun at all), it is clear that all three of the (potentially) involved states are permanent members of the UN Security Council, so it should be outlined how the 'old' Cold War impacted this body.

The UN Security Council and its Functioning During the Cold War

The UN Security Council consists of fifteen UN member states, out of which five are permanent (P5) – the USA, China, Russia, the UK and France – and have a veto power over any proposed substantive

decision of this body. As part of the new normative landscape after the Second World War, in which the use of force between states was absolutely prohibited (aside from self-defense), the Security Council was created as the single global entity that is legally allowed to authorize the use of force, if it deems it necessary, in order to address a world crisis that endangers or has already breached international peace. It is a political body that functions continuously, and its decisions are binding on the whole international community (provided that they are in accordance with the UN Charter and international law). These features make the Security Council quite different from its predecessor – the Council of the League of Nations – as well as from any other post-Second World War political-military arrangement. And while the whole UN security system is not a system of collective security in an ideal sense, and the Security Council has many features of a Concert of great powers (Elrod, 1976; Bosco, 2014) – primarily the veto and the body's huge flexibility in the selection of the crises to address and the measures to apply to them, it is more than a Concert[1]. Nonetheless, good faith behavior and cooperation between the permanent members of the Council are essential for this body to function properly.

This is exactly what was missing in the Council during the Cold War. Unlike in the first couple of years after the Cold War when, following the successful authorization of force by the Council against Iraq for its invasion of Kuwait, the permanent members "genuinely wish[ed] to cooperate to resolve international conflicts" (Malone, 1996, p.17), during the Cold War the P5 were, as one former UK representative in the Council points out, at "daggers drawn" at each other (Hannay, 2008, p.15). The Council was largely dysfunctional, with vetoes from both sides crippling its decision-making capacity (Hannay, 2008, p.12). During this four-decade period, the Security Council authorized military action under Chapter VII of the UN Charter on only two occasions – the first time in 1950 in order to repel North Korea's invasion of South Korea – which only happened because the Soviet Union was temporarily absent from the Council – and the second time in the 1960s when it authorized the ONUC peacekeeping mission in the Congo, the Council's only enforcement action in an intrastate war in this period (Hannay, 2008, p.13; Einsidiel & Malone, 2018, p.142). Economic sanctions were also underused in the Cold War, being imposed in only two instances as well – Southern Rhodesia and South Africa – and this was mainly because the racial policies of the governments of these "pariahs" at that time were widely condemned by the international community (Einsidiel & Malone, 2018, p.142; Weiss et al., 2017, p.55). Thus, the Council during this period was predominantly in a stalemate position that prevented it from acting efficiently in many situations. This brings us to the next part of our argument, which is whether or not the UNSC is experiencing a similar state of stalemate in the post-Cold War period.

Comparison of the Council's Record During and After the Cold War[2]

Looking at some basic Security Council figures (Table 1), the first thing that can be noticed is that there has been a significant increase in activity in the Council since the end of the Cold War. The number of formal, public and private, meetings of the Council has more than doubled after the Cold War, the total number of resolutions adopted has tripled, and the number of resolutions adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter – or the part of the Charter that is dedicated to actions by the Council related to threats to or breaches of the peace, including the authorization of forceful measures – has skyrocketed. At the same time, the use of the veto by the permanent members has decreased by almost one-quarter of the previous level. During the Cold War (1946-1989), there were 192 blocked draft resolutions (and 232 total vetoes, because in some cases two or more permanent members vetoed the same draft resolution) while in the (shorter) post-Cold War period (1990-2022) there have been 53 vetoed resolutions (and 67 total vetoes).

Period	Number of Meetings	Resolutions adopted	Chapter VII resolutions adopted	Vetoed drafts (total vetoes)

[1] See more about the debate regarding the type of institution the Security Council is in Ljupcho Stojkovki, "Collective Security, Selective Security, Concert or Something Else? What Kind of Institution is the UN Security Council?" in "Securitized World Order and New Security Spaces", forthcoming.

[2] The figures in this part are taken from the following sources: Loraine Sievers, Sam Daws, *The Procedure of the UN Security Council*, Oxford University Press, 2014, p.22, 300-310, 391-393; Peter Wallensteen, Patrick Johansson, *The UN Security Council: Decisions and Actions,* in Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone and Bruno Stagno Ugarte (eds.), *The UN Security Council in the 21st Century*, Lynne Rinner Publishers, p.29; Dag Hammrskjöld Library, *UN Security Council Meetings & Outcome Documents: Veto List,* available at https://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick ; United Nations Security Council, *Highlists of Secuirty Council Practice*, available at https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/annual-highlights ; *Chapter VII Resolutions and Resolutions by Year (1995-2022),* available at https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil/files/chapter_vii_resolutions.pdf

Cold War (1946-1989)	3080	646	22	192 (232)
Post-Cold War (1990-2022)	6836	2025	831	53 (67)

TABLE 1: UN Security Council overall basic stats

Delving into more details and observe those same numbers over shorter timescales (Table 2), it can be noticed that after the Cold War, the number of meetings has continued to rise each decade, and the number of resolutions adopted, after a sharp increase in the first decade after the end of the Cold War, remained rather constant yet significantly higher than during the Cold War. A similar pattern can be seen with regards to the increase in Chapter VII resolutions. The number of vetoes is also significantly lower than during the Cold War, yet it is evident that the use of the veto has been increasing and almost doubling each decade in the post-Cold War period, so it is necessary to scrutinize this matter further.

Period	Number of Meetings	Resolutions adopted	Chapter VII resolutions adopted	Vetoed drafts (total vetoes)
Cold War (1946-1989)	3080	646	22	192 (232)
1990-2000	1441	688	166	9 (9)
2001-2011	2444	698	336	16 (19)
2012-2022	2951	639	328	28 (39)

TABLE 2: UN Security Council basic stats by decades

If we break down the use of the veto by permanent member, we will see that all the vetoes in the post-Cold War era have been used by three of the five permanent members (P3) – USA, Russia and China (Table 3). If we analyze the use of the veto by decade in this period (Table 4), we can see that, unlike with the USA, where one cannot point to a trend in the use of its veto after the Cold War, Russia and China have significantly increased their use of the vetoes in the last decade – Russia to the same level as its Cold War average per decade, and China to its highest level ever. So, this might be a potential reason for concern. But if we look at the use of the veto pertaining to a specific crisis or issue (Table 5), we can see that out of the total number of 67 vetoes after the Cold War, 44 fall to two issues only – the ongoing Syrian war, which began in 2011, and the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian question. In other words, outside of these two issues, there have been only 23 vetoes for a 32-year period on other crises/issues.

	USA	Russia	China	UK	France	Total per period
Cold War (1946-1989)	67	114	3	30	18	232
Post-Cold War (1990-2022)	19	32	16	0	0	67

TABLE 3: UN Security Council vetoes

	USA	Russia	China	UK	France	Total per period
Cold War (1946-1989)	67	114	3	30	18	232
1990-2000	5	2	2	0	0	9

2001-2011	11	5	3	0	0	19
2012-2022	3	25	11	0	0	39
Total per country	86	146	19	30	18	

TABLE 4: UN Security Council vetoes by decades

USA	Israel-Palestine (16) Nicaragua (1), Bosnia (1), foreign terrorist fighters (1)
Russia	Syria (18), Ukraine (2), Crimea (2), Myanmar (1), Zimbabwe (1), Georgia (1), Venezuela (1), North Korea (1), Cyprus (2), Bosnia (2), security implications of climate change (1)
China	Syria (10), Myanmar (1), Zimbabwe (1) Venezuela (1), North Korea (1), UNPREDEP/Macedonia (1), Guatemala (1)

TABLE 5: Post-Cold War vetoes per issue

Furthermore, even if we look at the Council's work in more detail during the last decade or so, we cannot spot a downward trend either in the Council's activity or in the use of the veto (Table 6). There is no such trend even in the short term, for instance, one or two years after a major disagreement related to some world crisis has occurred between the major powers. If we examine key years during this period, like 2012, following the aftermath of the UN-authorized intervention in Libya in late 2011, which was not to the liking of Russia and China (although they initially supported, by abstaining, the adoption of Resolution 1973 which authorized the use of force in this country), or 2014, after the Russian annexation of Crimea, or 2022, when at the beginning of this year the invasion of Ukraine began, the numbers do not decisively point to a trend of a blocked Security Council in the making.

Period 2011-2022	Number of Meetings	Resolutions adopted	Chapter VII resolutions	Draft resolutions vetoed
2022	292	54	28	4 (Russia-4;China-1)
2021	311	57	27	1 (Russia-1)
2020	350	57	26	3 (Russia-2;China-2; USA-1)
2019	258	52	26	3 (Russia-3;China-3)
2018	288	54	27	3 (Russia-2; USA-1)
2017	296	61	29	6 (Russia-5;China-1; USA -1)
2016	256	77	42	2 (Russia-2;China-1)
2015	245	64	35	2 (Russia-2)
2014	263	63	32	2 (Russia-2;China-1)
2013	193	47	24	0
2012	199	53	32	2 (Russia-2;China-2)
2011	235	66	43	2 (Russia-1;China-1; USA-1)

Table 6 – UN Security Council

Before concluding this section, it is necessary to give some clarification, or even caution, with regard to the use of statistics here. Firstly, it is obvious that the figures presented in this section are the most basic ones concerning the work of the Council, and many others could be given that could provide an even more accurate picture of the functioning of the Council – like the number of informal meetings of the Council with other states, bodies and/or stakeholders, or the adoption of other decisions by the Council, like presidential statements (which are also on the rise after the Cold War), or the number of peacekeeping missions authorized by the Council and the mandates given to these missions, etc. One could even provide some broader statistics related to the Council, like a timeline of the total number of conflicts/crises around the world annually and an examination of how many of them the UNSC has actually been involved in (which, according to some estimates, is around 50-60% of all of them).[3] However, while the use of statistics may give a more comprehensive knowledge of a matter, a sole reliance on them may also give a misleading impression. Concerning the war in Syria, for instance, despite the eighteen draft resolutions that were vetoed by Russia and (sometimes) China during the past decade, the Security Council has also adopted twenty-nine resolutions on this conflict. Yet, while this fact itself might offer a positive impression that despite the many blocked proposals there has been substantial

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[3] According to some research, the Council has been involved (meaning it has adopted a resolution) in around 60 % of civil wars after the Cold War, or, in around 50% of all armed conflicts around the world. See, for the first one, James Cockayne, Christoph Mikulaschek, Chris Perry, *The United Nations Security Council and Civil War: First Insight from a New Dataset,* International Peace Institute, New York, September, 2010; For the second estimation, see Peter Wallensteen, Patrick Johansson, *The UN Security Council: Decisions and Actions,* in Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone and Bruno Stagno Ugarte, *The UN Security Council in the 21st Century*, Lynne Rinner Publishers, p.51.

engagement on the part of the Council for Syria, in fact, these resolutions have not significantly contributed to stopping the war, and most of them were related to the delivery of humanitarian aid or the investigation and observance of the use of chemical weapons.[4] Finally, not all aspects of a phenomenon that is being analyzed can be captured by the help of statistics, and yet these aspects may impact the perception of that phenomenon. A classic example here, with regards to the Security Council, are the private consultations by the Council's members and the threat of veto by the permanent members expressed during these meetings.[5] In the vast majority of cases, a draft resolution is not even put to a public vote because the sponsors of that resolution are aware, after the private consultations, that it will be vetoed by a permanent member. These threats, however, are not noted anywhere officially, unlike the public vetoes, yet they are essential to understand how the Council actually works. Therefore, the use of statistics in this section should not be construed as definitive evidence in favor of the claim that the Security Council is on a good track to avoid being stuck again in the rivalry of the great powers, but more of an indicator that there does not appear to be a trend pointing to the direction of a complete paralysis or passiveness of this body as was seen during the Cold War. Why this is the case is a question that requires deliberation, which is the purpose of the next part of the paper.

Why Will the Council not be (as) Stuck, as it was During the Cold War?

There are several reasons why the UN Security Council is not and will not be (as) passive and blocked as it was during the Cold War. First of all, the 'new Cold War' is or will be different than the 'old' one because the state of the world is different than it was thirty (to eighty) years ago. The world is much more (economically) interdependent and cooperative, multipolar instead of bipolar, there are many more institutionalized and *ad hoc* fora where states can meet together, many more, different and faster, ways to communicate with each other, civil society is, in general, much more involved in political life, the overall number of interstate conflicts has decreased, etc. This increased interconnectedness has been on display in many shared global issues in the last decades –for example, the problem of climate change, the global pandemic, or the global financial crisis – and it is placing pressure on (big) states to at least sit together and discuss these issues because they affect them all. Thus, this much more connected and mutually dependent world in the post-Cold War era, within which the consequences of a major crisis in one part (or area) of the world are felt (albeit not equally) in all others, may serve as a deterrent against a major confrontation and a long blockade of the institutional arrangements (like the UNSC) where the three great powers are members.

Secondly, and related to this, the global normative framework and the expectations of the actors in world politics, including the Security Council, have changed as well, in the sense that they are much broader and higher today. In the post-Cold War period, for instance, it is (largely) indisputable that internal conflicts should be featured as items on the agenda of the Security Council in fulfilling its responsibility to maintain international peace and security. But internal wars were rarely considered during the Cold War on grounds that the Council should deal only with matters that endanger 'international' i.e. 'interstate' peace, whereas civil wars and massive human rights violations inside one country that do not have regional or global implications should be considered as an internal matter for which the country had the sovereign right to address itself. Yet, gradually, this understanding has been abandoned in favor of a broader understanding of 'international peace', where 'international' is understood to comprise not only wars between states but also the bloodshed inside a state, and 'peace' is seen not only as the absence of war ('negative' peace) but it also includes the potential root causes of wars ('positive' peace) (Wolfrum, 2012; Brooks, 2014). The shift in understanding was the result of many broader normative developments during and after the Cold War, like the growing importance of the respect of human rights by states and non-state actors propelled by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the subsequent international treaties, the impact of wars on civilians and especially women and children, the considerations of criminal justice and respect for international humanitarian law, the shift in the understanding of state sovereignty towards 'sovereignty as responsibility' and the 'Responsibility to Protect' norm, and many others.[6] This normative environment puts pressure on big powers and contributes to the expectations about the appropriate behavior of the Council today – like the 'Responsibility not to veto' initiative, which calls for permanent members of the Security Council to pledge

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[4] See for example resolutions UN Doc. S/RES/2043, 21 April 2012; UN Doc. S/RES/2165, 14 July 2014.
[5] According to the estimates of former Australian ambassador to the UN Richard Butler, around 98% of all the discussions in the Council take place out of the eyes of the general public. See Richard Butler AC, *Reform of the United Nations Security Council,* Penn State Journal of Law & International Affairs, vol.1, iss.1, April 2012, p.30.
[6] For some of these matters, see Ljupcho Stojkovski, "Sovereignty under Threat? Responsibility to Protect and the Understanding of Sovereignty", *Journal of Law and Politics*, vol.2 iss.1, pp. 13-22.

to never veto a resolution that attempts to address a situation of mass atrocities.[7] Therefore, regardless of the immediate success of any single initiative, it is not easy for any permanent member to ignore the prevailing norms or the calls for normative change completely and to return to Cold War practices and understandings.

The third reason why the Council would not be completely blocked or inactive in the new Cold War is because the P3 have both shared and separate interests to keep the Council functioning. First of all, the Security Council was and remains a "fixed address for diplomacy", and a "mechanism for regular and sustained contact" between big powers on questions of international security (Bosco, 2009, p.252, 250). Sometimes the Security Council fails to adopt any measure to address an international crisis, like, for instance, during the Cuban missile crisis, but the discussions in and around the Council help to contain the crisis and to shape public opinion around the world (Bosco, 2009, pp.6, 92-97). In other instances, the Council decides to address a particular conflict but, it adopts either a mere symbolic decision, or a decision that is full of vague language that is the consequence of the compromise reached between the permanent members and, as a result, is not very helpful in practice. Nonetheless, this still demonstrates the superpowers' "common desire to avoid future clashes" between them (Bosco, 2009, p.252) and to uphold the authority of the Security Council. Moreover, all three powers like to keep this forum open even in periods when there is heightened animosity between them because they all have an interest in maintaining at least a minimum level of cooperation and coordination regarding some shared security problems like international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (Gowan, 2018, p.14). These two issues are quite important for all three great powers, so they like to use the Security Council and the UN's institutional structure to facilitate their response to them.

Besides being a forum, a channel, for discussions, at least private ones, between the (three) major powers, the UN Security Council is also the body through which they can get a validation of their agreements concerning security matters that are done outside of the Council. In 2013, for example, after chemical weapons were used against civilians in Syria for the first time, which for the Obama administration meant that a 'red line' was crossed and that the use of force is now warranted and in preparation, Russia (which supported the regime) and the USA agreed that Syria would destroy all chemical weapons and become a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the USA will stand down with its threatened attack (Gordon, 2013). This agreement was done outside of the Security Council, which until that point in the conflict had seen three blocked draft resolutions by Russia and China, but it was confirmed, in a sense, by Resolution 2118, adopted by the Council in the following days.[8] Thus, the three powers might not use the Security Council to resolve a dispute between them or address certain (aspects of a) conflict, but they will resort to this body to get a verification, a legitimation, from the international community of their arrangement since the UNSC is the body recognized as the principal authority on matters related to international peace and security.

Furthermore, if communication, cooperation or confirmation of the agreements between the P3 is unattainable in the Council for a particular crisis, the Security Council still serves as a place, or as *the* place, for "naming and shaming" the other(s). As it was indicated above, starting from 1966, it has become a practice in the Security Council for a draft resolution not to be put to a public vote directly, but for the text of the resolution to be first negotiated between the Council's members during private consultations (Sievers & Daws, 2014, p.299). If there is no agreement between member states about the draft resolution in question, in most cases it will not even be put to a public vote because it will be vetoed. Therefore, those rare instances where the P3 veto a resolution publicly are either because the sponsors of that resolution miscalculated the behavior of a vetoing permanent member (hoping that it will abstain rather than block it), or, which is more often the case, they were completely aware of the blockade yet decided to proceed publicly in order to put the global spotlight on the blocking state(s) (Ibid). Thus, having in mind the authority and responsibility conferred by the international community on the Security Council, great powers sometimes used this body as a "courtroom of world opinion" (Bosco, 2009, pp.95, 80-111) on international security matters.

Another joint interest of the P3 is their desire to keep the enormous privileges that they each have in the whole UN system by being a permanent member and a veto-holder in the Council. First of all, according to the UN Charter, they have veto power over important questions such as the maintenance of international peace and security (Chapters VI and VII of the UN Charter), the selection of the UN Secretary General (art.97), the membership of new states in the UN (art.4), and the formal amendment

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[7] See Ljupcho Stojkovski, "The Importance of the "Responsibility not to Veto" Debate" in Vasilka Sancin, ed.; "*Are we Manifestly Failing 'R2P'?*", University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Law, Ljubljana, 1st ed., 2017, pp.87-109.
[8] UN Doc. S/ RES/2118 (2013).

of the UN Charter (art.108). The long years of being a permanent member also lead to the accumulation of significant "institutional memory", which gives the permanent members a huge advantage over the elected Council members in substantive and procedural matters related to the work of the Council (Wenaweser, 2016, p. 176, 189). Finally, their permanent membership creates a so-called "cascade effect" throughout the whole UN system, so each permanent member is (virtually by default) also part of many other UN agencies and bodies (Butler, 2012: Freiesleben, 2013, p.3). This is why the P3 actively or passively resist reform of the Council in any matter, despite publicly claiming the contrary.[9] So, being part of the Council and keeping the Council operative enables them to keep utilizing these privileges.

In addition to the above-mentioned shared interests, each of the P3 has individual interests and concerns for its international image that it wants to promote and protect through the Council. The USA, for example, often goes to the Security Council in an attempt to multilateralize its policies regarding the use of force and to gain international legitimacy and support for them. Nevertheless, a rejection from the Council of its proposals would not prevent it from actually proceeding with them unilaterally, as was the case with the war in Iraq in 2003, since this is not in line with the USA's perception of itself as an exceptional country and as a custodian of the international order.[10] Similarly, China likes to present itself as a "responsible great power" which, together with other major powers, jointly decides about important global political questions but also takes into account the interests of small and middle states (Foot, 2014, p.1090, 1091). In order to promote and maintain this identity, China often abstains during voting in the Council and does not issue a veto alone, even though it is principally uncomfortable with certain proposed measures (like the authorization of the use of force for the protection of civilians in Libya in 2011), because Russia does not plan to block those proposals.[11] On the other hand, China, as well as Russia, has an interest in containing (or at least exposing) the USA as much as possible through the Council, so the Council's membership (and the veto) is useful in this regard. In addition to this, for Russia, the Council's permanent membership and the veto signify a commendation for its role in the Second World War and a recognition of its status as a great power, which had gradually faded since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Therefore, while it is indeed doubtful whether these three states today 'genuinely wish' to cooperate in the Council like they did after the end of the Cold War, keeping the Council active and participating in its work is wanted and needed for each of them individually and jointly, and this, in turn, prevents an atmosphere of a 'new Cold War' in this body.

In Closing

The numerous vetoes in the Security Council over the last decade in the wars in Syria, Ukraine, and most recently over the Israel-Hamas situation, might give the impression that the Council is caught up in a new Cold War. However, despite the increase in the vetoes, a complete paralysis of the Council, like in the past, is not to be expected. First of all, aside from the increase in the number of vetoes, other figures do not indicate that the Council is slowing down (or is already stuck) in its work. Moreover, not only are the socio-economic circumstances of today different than during the Cold War, but the normative environment is also more compelling, and consequently, the expectations of the Security Council are much higher than during the Cold War. Finally, the big three powers need the Security Council as a body that facilitates communication and cooperation on shared security problems, as an institution through which they can legitimize their security-related deals made outside of the Council, as the best forum for naming and shaming each other, as an exclusive club that brings them many privileges they want to keep, and as a place to promote their individual interests and identities in world politics. Therefore, the Security Council will continue to be functional for most situations that it deals with, while excluding from the picture cases related to the perceived core national interests of the P3's and their main allies'. Occasionally, even in such instances, some unforeseen positive developments could take place in the Council – like the recent adoption of the first-ever resolution on Myanmar.[12]

Should this be considered a positive, optimistic outlook for the UN Security Council and its prospects during these times? Not necessarily. In the new Cold War, to paraphrase Alexander Wendt, the Security Council is what its (permanent) members would make of it, and, so far at least, it is not a

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[9] See for this 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.

[10] See for more on this in Ljupcho Stojkovski, "Constructivist Aspects of the UN Security Council's Permanent Members' Conduct: The Case of the USA", *Political Thought* No. 57, Year 17, 2019, pp. 5-19, and the works referenced there.

[11] Out of the sixteen vetoes that China has put after the Cold War until the end of 2022, in only two of them (the situations in Guatemala in 1997 and in Macedonia in 1999, both unrelated to the subject matter but to those countries' relationships with Taiwan) it was the sole permanent member that blocked the adoption of a draft resolution and not together with Russia.

[12] See UN. Doc. S/RES/2669 (2022), 21 December 2022.

recurrence of the first Cold War. But this, of course, could change for the worse. Even if it does not change for the worse, the Council's record in maintaining international peace is far from satisfactory, and much improvement is needed anyway.

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