ATLAS PROTOCOL

Strategic Reflection Paper

THE FUTURE OF THE UNITED NATIONS VETO POWER

Between Historical Necessity and Civilizational Evolution

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Executive Summary

The veto power held by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council has shaped international governance since 1945.

Originally designed to prevent direct confrontation between the major victorious powers of the Second World War, the veto has contributed both to global stability and to institutional paralysis.

The question facing humanity in the twenty-first century is no longer whether the veto served a historical purpose.

The question is whether a governance mechanism designed for the geopolitical realities of 1945 remains fully adequate for an increasingly interconnected world characterized by multipolarity, transnational risks and systemic interdependence.

Atlas Protocol assesses that the complete abolition of the veto remains highly unlikely in the foreseeable future. However, gradual evolution, limitation and increasing political accountability of veto use appear both possible and increasingly necessary.

I. Historical Function

The architects of the United Nations recognized a fundamental reality:

No global institution could survive if the world's strongest military powers were systematically overruled.

The veto therefore constituted a political compromise intended to ensure that major powers remained inside the international system rather than outside it.

In this respect, the veto has arguably fulfilled one of its primary objectives:

Since 1945, no direct military confrontation has occurred between the major nuclear powers.

Yet the same mechanism has also repeatedly prevented collective action during humanitarian crises, regional conflicts and emerging global emergencies.

II. The Structural Dilemma

The Security Council embodies a permanent tension between:

Power legitimacy (the reality of geopolitical power)

and

Normative legitimacy (the principle of sovereign equality among states).

The veto reflects power.

The United Nations Charter reflects equality.

As global interdependence deepens, this tension becomes increasingly visible.

Many states now question whether five countries should indefinitely possess exceptional decision-making authority over issues affecting all humanity.

III. Obstacles To Abolition

The complete elimination of veto rights faces formidable barriers.

According to Article 108 of the United Nations Charter, any amendment requires:

- Approval by two-thirds of the General Assembly.
- Ratification by two-thirds of UN member states.
- Ratification by all five permanent members.

In practical terms, this means that the permanent members themselves possess effective control over any reform affecting their own privileges.

Consequently, full abolition remains politically improbable.

IV. Plausible Evolution Pathways

Atlas Protocol identifies five realistic reform trajectories.

1. Voluntary Veto Restraint

Permanent members could voluntarily agree not to use the veto in situations involving:

- genocide;
- crimes against humanity;
- war crimes;
- large-scale humanitarian catastrophes.

This approach is already supported by several international initiatives.

2. Mandatory Public Justification

Every veto could require:

- a formal legal justification;
- a strategic explanation;
- public presentation before the General Assembly.

Transparency increases political accountability.

3. Delayed Veto Mechanisms

A veto could trigger:

- mandatory mediation periods;
- emergency diplomatic consultations;
- automatic General Assembly review.

Such mechanisms would slow escalation while preserving great-power safeguards.

4. Qualified Override Procedures

Future institutional evolution could allow overwhelming majorities of UN member states to override a veto under narrowly defined humanitarian circumstances.

This would fundamentally alter current power balances and would require broad international consensus.

5. Transition Towards Layered Global Governance

Long-term evolution may gradually shift global decision-making away from purely state-centric structures toward hybrid systems integrating:

- states;
- regional organizations;
- scientific institutions;
- civil society;

- independent verification bodies.

V. Atlas Protocol Assessment

Atlas Protocol does not advocate abrupt abolition of veto rights.

History demonstrates that durable governance systems require both legitimacy and power acceptance.

However, the current system increasingly struggles to address transnational challenges including:

- climate disruption;
- artificial intelligence;
- cyber conflict;
- pandemics;
- mass migration;
- systemic economic shocks.

These risks do not respect borders.

Future governance structures must therefore evolve beyond purely geopolitical logic.

The challenge is not to eliminate power.

The challenge is to align power with responsibility.

VI. Strategic Conclusion

The central governance question of the twenty-first century may not be:

“Should the veto disappear?”

but rather:

“How can humanity preserve strategic stability while increasing global legitimacy?”

Atlas Protocol assesses that the future most likely lies between two extremes:

Neither permanent unrestricted veto power,

nor unrestricted majority rule.

The most resilient path will likely emerge through gradual constitutional evolution, increased transparency, conditional restraint and stronger global accountability mechanisms.

Civilizations rarely transform through revolution alone.

More often, they evolve through successive layers of adaptation.

The future of the veto may ultimately follow the same path.

Atlas Protocol Institute

"In an increasingly interconnected world, trust is no longer a soft value. It is strategic infrastructure."