

United Nations Reform Is not Just Israel's Concern

written by Joseph Rozen | 12.10.2026

Key Points

- The UN's dysfunction extends beyond its treatment of Israel.
- India and Japan's struggle for permanent Security Council seats exposes a system that protects entrenched privileges and obstructs change.
- Reform faces two obstacles: existing permanent members whose approval is required for Charter amendments, and rival states organized to oppose new permanent seats.
- Administrative reform leaves the central political problem unresolved. Streamlining UN operations does not redistribute power or change the mechanisms that perpetuate institutional paralysis.
- Israel should support India and Japan's reform efforts.
- Challenging individual resolutions remains necessary, but Israel also needs partners willing to address the structures that produce them.
- UN reform should become part of Israel's strategic dialogues with its Indo-Pacific partners. Support for their initiatives could help Israel move from reacting to institutional bias toward shaping a broader agenda for change.

Introduction

This September, another session of the UN General Assembly brought together leaders and ministers to address the world in front of a half-empty hall, where Israel was once again a main topic on the agenda.

Israel's problem with the United Nations gets treated as a uniquely Israeli story: automatic majorities in the General Assembly, a Human Rights Council that has passed 116 resolutions against Israel since 2006 – more than against Syria, Iran, Russia, and Venezuela combined, and a Commission of Inquiry built to reach one conclusion before it convenes.

A recent Misgav Institute report mapping of this machinery, covering the General Assembly, ECOSOC, the International Court of Justice, the Secretariat, the

Human Rights Council, the Commission of Inquiry, and the Office of the UN Special Coordinator, documents the extent and coordination of this ecosystem. In April 2024, the Council adopted another resolution calling for Israel to be held accountable for possible war crimes in Gaza, with 28 votes in favor, 13 abstentions, and six votes against, with the United States and Germany among the minority.

But the UN's dysfunction isn't an exclusive Israeli problem. It's a structural problem, and it dates to 1945. The Charter still lists the Soviet Union and the Republic of China as permanent members of the Security Council. Russia and the People's Republic took over those seats decades ago, and the text was never amended. Two of the world's most consequential democracies are now saying this as loudly as Israel ever has.

Two democracies, one frozen council

In September, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi used her first address to the UN General Assembly to call the Security Council's structure a relic of 1945, unchanged while the world around it transformed. A majority of member states, she noted, now back expanding both the permanent and non-permanent categories. She also demanded the prompt removal of the "enemy state" provisions in Articles 53, 77, and 107 of the Charter. This wartime provision lets the founding members take military action against Japan or Germany without Security Council authorization.

It is not only theoretical. After Takaichi hinted last November at Japanese intervention in a Taiwan contingency, China invoked the clause to claim legitimacy for potential military countermeasures against Japan. Beijing's Foreign Ministry pushed back the day after her speech, defending the clause as a safeguard against "fascism and militarism".

The difficulty for the UN is that member states already agreed to remove this language in the 2005 World Summit outcome. It was never implemented, because amending the Charter requires ratification by all five permanent members, including China and Russia, the two with the most reason to keep a legal lever against Japan.

Takaichi paired the demand with a call for Security Council reform, citing Russia's invasion of Ukraine as proof the Council is paralyzed. She raised it again

directly with Secretary-General António Guterres, confirming Japan's commitment to Security Council reform as "indispensable" to a credible UN.

Days earlier, at the BRICS summit, Narendra Modi had put it more bluntly: "UNSC reforms can no longer wait." The current order, he said, is a "pyramid of privilege" that must become a "platform of partnership," and he called for text-based negotiations tied to a fixed timeline rather than another open-ended committee.

Modi and Takaichi aren't improvising. India, Japan, Germany, and Brazil (the G4) have a standing, detailed proposal:

- Expand the Council from 15 members to 25 or 26, with six new permanent seats, two for Africa, two for Asia-Pacific, one each for Latin America and Western Europe;
- A built-in concession that any new permanent members would hold off on exercising veto power during a review period.

By design, it is the most realistic reform proposal on the table, engineered specifically to be harder to refuse. Four of the five existing permanent members (the US, Russia, France, and the UK) have endorsed India's bid by name. Only China has not. In November, it told reporters flatly that Japan is "unqualified" for a Security Council seat. In fact, China openly opposes Japan getting a permanent seat at the UNSC and is sabotaging India's claim behind the scenes.

Decades of red tape and stalemate

The G4 proposal isn't new. Reform has been on the General Assembly's agenda since 1992, when India and 35 other non-aligned states tabled the resolution and Japan co-sponsored it. Over three decades of working groups and negotiations, the Council's composition has not changed. The Charter itself has been amended only five times in eighty years, in just three rounds, and only once to enlarge the Security Council. The last round of amendment took place in 1973.

The reason is simple: Council reform requires a two-thirds vote in the General Assembly, 129 of 193 members, followed by ratification by all five permanent members, including whichever one has the most to lose from a given expansion. That alone would make reform hard. What makes it functionally frozen is a second, less-discussed obstacle: a rival coalition of states with no veto power but

plenty of votes, organized for the explicit purpose of blocking new permanent seats altogether.

That coalition is known as UfC (Uniting for Consensus), nicknamed the Coffee Club. It was founded in 1995 by Italy's UN ambassador alongside Pakistan, Mexico, and Egypt, with the immediate goal of blocking any expansion of the Security Council, and later of opposing the G4 proposal. Today it has roughly 40 member states, including Italy, Spain, Canada, Argentina, South Korea, and Pakistan.

Its position is simple – no new permanent seats for anyone, full stop, only a larger pool of longer-term elected seats. Its members' motives vary, but the pattern is clear. Pakistan blocks India, Italy and Spain block Germany, and South Korea, in the same club, has long resisted Japan. Some of these countries are encouraged by China, a permanent member. The Coffee Club doesn't even need a veto, as it has the potential to deny the two-thirds majority reform requires, and for thirty years it has had exactly that. In 2005 the G4 put its proposal forward, found Africa divided over its own seats, and chose not to force a vote it expected to lose.

This is worth dwelling on because it explains something counterintuitive. The UN is capable of real reform, just not this kind. Guterres' own UN80 Initiative, launched in 2025 for the organization's eightieth anniversary, has already delivered a 21 percent reduction in Secretariat posts, consolidated eleven administrative teams into a shared platform, and merged ten separate payroll centers into one.

That reform moved because it required no Charter amendment and no unanimous buy-in from rival blocs. It was merely executive restructuring, not political reallocation of power. Security Council membership is the opposite case, as it requires the consent of the very states with the strongest incentive to preserve the status quo.

The same disease, different symptoms

This is the thread connecting Japan and India's UN story to Israel's. In both cases, the obstacle isn't a lack of merit, economic weight, technological innovation, or financial contribution. Japan is the world's fourth-largest economy, and India is among the top six; Japan is the third-largest contributor to the UN's regular budget, at nearly 7%. The obstacle is a procedural order, built in 1945 and then

calcified by rival coalitions with every incentive to keep it exactly as it is.

For Israel, that calcification shows up as an automatic voting majority in the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council's Agenda Item 7, which singles out Israel. For India and Japan, it shows up as a Security Council veto held by an autocratic regime that has publicly disqualified one of its two largest regional rivals from the table.

Understanding this mechanism should lead to a different strategy to tackle the problem. Treating Israel's UN problem as a uniquely Israeli grievance, born of antisemitism or automatic bias alone, leads to a defensive strategy. Therefore, Israel is focused on documenting the bias, contesting each resolution, and seeking improvements in the wording of resolutions. These steps are necessary but insufficient, because they leave Israel permanently reactive, litigating outputs rather than touching the architecture that produces them. Recognizing the same structural problem in the experiences of India and Japan opens the way to a different strategy: aligning with, or at least supporting, states seeking to reform the system itself.

A potential window of opportunity

The geopolitical developments of recent years, in Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia, have sharpened the recognition that the UN in its current form is irrelevant. It is clear to India and Japan that the UN is not fulfilling its mandate, so alongside the effort to change it, they are building parallel arrangements as insurance against reliance on the UN. The Quad ran a tabletop exercise in Tokyo in September to advance its Indo-Pacific Logistics Network, and Japanese fighter jets flew from an Indian air base for the first time in the Veer Guardian 26 drill.

Israel cannot lead this change. It should back India's and Japan's efforts. Both carry significant political capital beyond the Western camp, and together with the United States they may be able to build an alternative strong enough to push the UN and China to accept reform when the alternative is breaking the framework entirely. China has traditionally favored stability and predictability over uncertainty. Presenting to China a real dilemma over the future of the UN might work.

Israel has concrete, self-interested reasons to stand with India and Japan rather than watch from the sidelines or turn the UN into an Israeli story.

First of all, the same government blocking Japan's Security Council bid is the one actively building a rival architecture, alternative development banks, parallel standard-setting bodies, trade and technology blocs, designed to bypass the US-led order that Israel depends on and that India and Japan are both, in different ways, hedging against. It does so while using and manipulating the UN to serve its own interests and work against the US.

Backing the G4 reform push costs Israel nothing; India and Japan are Israel's closest partners in the Indo-Pacific, while Germany is relatively friendly to Israel, especially compared to the two European permanent members, the UK and France. Brazil is the awkward partner, and currently a harsh critic of Israel, but a change of government could reverse its position. Moreover, they are all part of US-led frameworks. Such support will earn Israel a seat in the coalition of states actually trying to reshape the architecture.

In practical terms, this requires a shift from a defensive to a proactive approach, coordination among ministries, and the inclusion of UN reform on the agenda of Israel's strategic dialogues with its Indo-Pacific partners. Israel doesn't need the UN's current architecture rehabilitated. It needs it rebuilt. India and Japan have the foundations for the rebuilding.

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