



AT 76, IS THE UN STILL RELEVANT IN THE CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL ENVIRONMENT?

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As the United Nations turns 76 years, it is caught in a dilemma of the relevance of its existence and the ability to lead as a global organization. The UN was conceived as a means to save future generations from the scourge of war,¹ However, for many nations, it has failed to achieve that. The world has entered a new era of global politics where different existing and rising powers are in competition against the post–World War II multilateral order after which the UN was created and was considered an anchor. Today the UN is facing multifaceted challenges from all directions including politics encompassing bilateral relations. The world is going through a rapid transformation with increasing palpable shifts in the geopolitical environment as well as multiple other threats including a raging pandemic, and climate change.

The United Nations stands at a crossroads bedeviled by a litany of challenges, including gross underfunding, bloated bureaucracy, disunity, and geopolitical rivalry among the permanent members of the Security Council.² The present geopolitical realities have created conditions for the UN to limit its role in the settlement of multiple issues like that of Kashmir and Palestine. Despite the growing need for settlement on multiple issues and conflicts in a judicial and reformed manner, the resolution through the UN has become extremely problematic due to the bureaucratic deficiencies

¹ UN Charter, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

² "The UN at Seventy-Five: How to make it Relevant Again," *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 14, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/article/un-seventy-five-how-make-it-relevant-again>

and lack of political will in the system. Furthermore, the weak role of the UN Security Council has resulted in the decline of the UN's authority and it is perceived as an unnecessary international body.³

It has come face to face with unprecedented strain on its international organs and institutions that initially were created to undertake global cooperation on multilateral issues as well as manage international conflict. Against the backdrop of the global pandemic, the spectre of climate change, and active conflict on continents across the globe; the legitimate debate over criticism and questions surrounds the UN on its relevance and need for reforms.

Pakistan and the UN:

Pakistan has a long history with the United Nations and has been one of the most proactive contributors to its peacekeeping missions throughout the globe in the shape of troops and police. Over the decades' Pakistani personnel have served in over 41 peacekeeping missions in 23 countries across the globe⁴ and have held their flag high with numerous sacrifices on the job. Moreover, Pakistan is active at multiple levels including; Infantry Battalion, Logistic Battalion and Level 2 hospital to Rapid Deployment Level as well as Engineer and Signal Company, Aviation, Air, Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit (EOD), and Tactical Unmanned Aerial System Unit (TUASU) and Three Formed Police Units; Canine and Riverine Platoon and 50 Military observers and Staff Officers to United Nations Headquarters.⁵ Pakistan currently serves in 7 UN operations and contributes one of the largest uniformed personnel to the UN. Furthermore, Pakistan has pledged gender parity by increasing women officers as Staff and Medical Officers, and Forces Nursing Services along with the exchange of women instructors, hosting international women seminars and Female Military Officers Course; whilst also increasing its training of officers in Observer, Staff Offices and Protection of Civilian Courses, IED Courses, as well as increased provision of training teams to other Troop Contributing Countries and the UN Training Centres.⁶

Challenges:

The most daunting challenge for the UN is to maintain the relevance of its already established systemic mechanisms for peace and conflict resolutions and not let it fall victim to the geopolitical changes and transitions. Due to the shift in the power configuration within the P5 countries and the

³ Monika Milinauskyste, "Is the United Nations Relevant?" February 11, 2021, <https://www.e-ir.info/2011/02/11/is-the-united-nations-relevant/>

⁴ United Nations Peacekeeping, Pakistan, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/pakistan>

⁵ Providing For Peacekeeping, <https://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/capabilities-summits/united-nations-peacekeeping-pledge-counter/>

⁶ Providing For Peacekeeping, <https://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/capabilities-summits/united-nations-peacekeeping-pledge-counter/>

emergence of new forces not represented in P5, the UN may well become a stage for conflicting interests soon⁷ and without an overarching neutral and humanitarian approach, the very premise of the UN will become a question. As P5 countries along with other rising powers move towards populism, nationalism, and unilateralism at the cost of multilateralism, the UN is falling short on effectively performing its role and responding to multiple crises that have engulfed the world.

In recent times, the stalemate to the relevance of the UN is also driven by its inability to resolve long-standing issues like the Kashmir dispute and the Palestine conflict as the organization has repeatedly fallen victim to the internal politics of the Veto Power nations, affecting its objectivity. While the role of the UN as an organization has deteriorated over the years especially in lieu of solving the crisis, it shouldn't be used as a scapegoat for political failures, and criticism should be turned on to states that promise and underfund humanitarian operations.

The politicization of the UN at an internal level also comes through the budgets funded by countries which result in discord over priorities and actions and organizational outcomes. Currently, the United States at 22 percent is the single largest financial contributor to the UN followed by China at 12 percent⁸ leading to increased influence on organizational processes and the ability to conduct diplomacy at other organs in the UN. This further reaffirms a particular country's leadership agenda and influence while at many times like the US which can use its position as the largest financial contributor to push for certain UN reforms.⁹

Recommendations:

The quality of peace and conflict resolution cannot merely be achieved by deploying peacekeeping forces or by displacing violence and crisis to a certain category. The UN as a global organization has to gauge back to a holistic endeavour instead of giving in to internal tensions and maintain a neutral outlook to conflicts, parties involved, and the global security order. The UN should task itself and its organs of reviving the principles of multilateralism to address the most urgent threats faced today including; climate change, nuclear proliferation, and mitigation of conflicts driven by food insecurity and drought. Moreover, increased focus should be paid to generate the political will as the

⁷ Muharrem Hilmi Özev, and Aydin Erdoğan (Eds), "The United Nations and Its Conflict Resolution Role," *Istanbul University Press*, May 2019, <https://cdn.istanbul.edu.tr/FileHandler2.ashx?f=the-un-and-its-conflict-resolution-role.pdf>

⁸ Luisa Blanchfield, "United Nations Issues: U.S. Funding to the U.N. System," *Congressional Research Service*, July 8, 2021, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF10354.pdf>

⁹ "US Funding to the United Nations System: Overview and Selected Policy Issues," *Congressional Research Service*, April 25, 2018, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R45206.pdf>

activeness of the UN members and their adherence to its action agenda is the prime medium to determine UN's future effectiveness as well as its capacity to catalyze action.¹⁰

In the present world, the definition of security has changed and evolved as nontraditional issues like climate change and the Covid-19 crisis have taken over the traditional security threats. Global issues should now reflect more on contemporary global realities which are different from the ones created in the aftermath of World War II. While there are many plans to envision a new United Nations, at the end of the day, we must work with the institution that we have. Moreover, it is important to remember that the different agencies of the UN have often been greater than its governing mechanism, the General Assembly and the Security Council. In fighting a pandemic or addressing ongoing human migration, food insecurity, or the global conflicts that require peacekeepers, the organization remains an effective operation that must continue its mission of security and development worldwide.

All member states in the UN should adhere to proper and adequate resourcing of the UN and its organs to deemphasize the influence of one, failing to do so will lead to the continuation of the current status quo. To be relevant, it is important to maintain relevance through multiple and genuine reforms while keeping in mind the current geopolitical dynamics and the most pressing challenges. In addition, more inclusive, representative, transparent, and effective, reforms should be undertaken at the Security Council level to demonstrate greater cooperation and consensus-building. all these are critical to the United Nations' overall success in the future.¹¹

¹⁰ Monika Milinauskyte, "Is the United Nations Relevant?" February 11, 2021, <https://www.e-ir.info/2011/02/11/is-the-united-nations-relevant/>

¹¹ "The UN at Seventy-Five: How to make it Relevant Again," *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 14, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/article/un-seventy-five-how-make-it-relevant-again>