

ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



ISRG PUBLISHERS

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – III Issue-I (January- February) 2025

Frequency: Bimonthly



THE UNITED NATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES, AND THE PATH FORWARD

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| **Received:** 21.01.2025 | **Accepted:** 03.02.2025 | **Published:** 05.02.2025

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Abstract

The United Nations (UN), established in 1945, remains a cornerstone of global governance, addressing challenges ranging from peacekeeping to sustainable development. This article examines the UN's historical evolution, its successes in peacekeeping and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and its failures in addressing crises like Rwanda and Syria. It also explores the UN's role in promoting human rights, international law, and global governance, while highlighting structural inefficiencies and proposing reforms to ensure its relevance in a multipolar world.

Keywords: Multilateralism, Global Governance, and Peacekeeping.

1.0. Introduction

The United Nations (UN), established in 1945 in the aftermath of World War II, was envisioned as a beacon of hope for a world ravaged by conflict. Its founding principles—maintaining international peace and security, promoting human rights, and fostering global cooperation—remain as relevant today as they were nearly eight decades ago (United Nations, 1945). However, the UN's journey has been marked by both remarkable achievements and significant challenges. From its pivotal role in decolonization and peacekeeping to its struggles in addressing

genocides and geopolitical tensions, the UN has continually adapted to an evolving global landscape (Weiss, 2020). This article explores the UN's impact on contemporary international relations, examining its successes, failures, and the urgent need for reform in a rapidly changing world.

1.1. Historical Background of the United Nations

The term "United Nations" was first coined in 1942 by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill during World War II. It was formally

established on October 24, 1945, when 29 nations ratified the UN Charter, replacing the failed League of Nations, which had been unable to prevent the outbreak of a second global conflict (Briney, 2019; Aggarwal, 2023). The UN was designed to address the shortcomings of its predecessor, with a broader mandate to maintain international peace, promote social progress, and foster friendly relations among nations (United Nations, 1945). Today, the UN comprises 193 member states and two observer entities, operating through six principal organs: the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice (ICJ), and Secretariat (Garg, 2023).

1.2. purpose and Evolution of the UN in Global Governance

The UN's primary purpose, as outlined in Article 1 of its Charter, is to maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations, and achieve international cooperation in solving global problems (United Nations, 1945). Over the decades, the UN's mandate has expanded significantly, reflecting the changing dynamics of international relations. During the Cold War, the UN's focus was primarily on political issues, particularly the prevention of nuclear conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union (Miller, 2015). However, the end of the Cold War in 1991 marked a shift toward addressing social and economic challenges, as evidenced by the adoption of the Human Development Report in 1994, which emphasized human security and sustainable development (UNDP, 1994). In the 21st century, the UN has played a critical role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), promoting human rights, and addressing emerging threats such as terrorism, cybercrime, and climate change (United Nations, 2015). Despite these achievements, the UN faces persistent challenges, including structural inefficiencies, geopolitical tensions, and calls for reform to reflect the realities of a multipolar world (Weiss, 2020).

2.0. The UN's Role in Contemporary International Relations

The United Nations (UN) has played a pivotal role in shaping global governance and addressing pressing challenges in the 21st century. From fostering international cooperation to maintaining peace and security, the UN's mandate has evolved to reflect the complexities of a rapidly changing world. This section examines the UN's contributions to contemporary international relations, focusing on its successes, failures, and responses to emerging global threats.

2.1. Enhancing International Cooperation: The SDGs and Multilateralism

The UN has been instrumental in promoting international cooperation through initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Adopted in 2015, the SDGs provide a comprehensive framework for addressing global challenges, including poverty, inequality, and climate change. By aligning national policies with the SDGs, member states have demonstrated a commitment to achieving sustainable development by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). The UN's role in fostering multilateralism is evident in its annual General Assembly meetings and specialized conferences, such as the Conference of the Parties (COP) on climate change, which bring together nations to address shared challenges (United Nations, 2015).

2.2. Maintaining International Peace and Security: Successes and Failures

The UN's primary mandate, as outlined in Article 1 of its Charter, is to maintain international peace and security. This is primarily achieved through the Security Council, which has authorized numerous peacekeeping missions in conflict zones. For instance, the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) successfully facilitated free elections and restored civil rule in the early 1990s (United Nations, 1991). Similarly, the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) played a crucial role in Namibia's transition to independence in 1989 (United Nations, 1989).

However, the UN has also faced significant failures in maintaining peace and security. The Rwandan genocide of 1994 and the Srebrenica massacre in 1995 highlighted the organization's inability to prevent large-scale atrocities. In Rwanda, the Security Council's decision to reduce troop presence under Resolution 912 exacerbated the crisis, leading to the deaths of over 800,000 people (Gambari, 2004). Similarly, the UN's failure to protect civilians in Srebrenica, despite declaring it a "safe area," remains a dark chapter in its history (Daalder, 1998).

2.3. Addressing Emerging Global Threats: Terrorism, Cybercrime, and Human Trafficking

In the post-Cold War era, the UN has expanded its focus to address emerging global threats, including terrorism, cybercrime, and human trafficking. The UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCTC) and the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) have been at the forefront of global efforts to combat terrorism, implementing sanctions against groups such as ISIL and Al-Qaida (United Nations, 2017). Additionally, the UN has taken steps to address cybercrime through initiatives like the UN Convention Against Cybercrime, which aims to promote international cooperation in combating digital threats (United Nations, 2024).

Human trafficking, a violation of human rights and a threat to global security, has also been a focus of UN efforts. The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, adopted in 2003, provides a comprehensive framework for addressing this issue (United Nations, 2003). Despite these efforts, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring the effective implementation of international agreements and addressing the root causes of these threats.

3.0. Promoting Human Rights and International Law

The United Nations (UN) has played a pivotal role in promoting human rights and advancing international law since its inception. Through its various organs, such as the Human Rights Council, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and the International Criminal Court (ICC), the UN has sought to uphold justice, protect vulnerable populations, and hold perpetrators of atrocities accountable. However, these efforts have been met with both successes and challenges, reflecting the complexities of global governance in a multipolar world.

3.1. The Human Rights Council: Achievements and Challenges

The Human Rights Council (HRC), established in 2006, replaced the Commission on Human Rights and has been instrumental in addressing human rights violations worldwide. Its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism, which assesses the human rights records of all UN member states, has enhanced transparency

and accountability (United Nations, 2006). For instance, the HRC has successfully advocated for the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples, establishing forums to amplify their voices (United Nations, 2007). Additionally, the HRC has integrated human rights into peacekeeping missions, with 14 human rights components deployed in conflict zones by 2013 (United Nations, 2013).

Despite these achievements, the HRC faces significant challenges. Critics argue that the inclusion of states with poor human rights records, such as Venezuela and China, undermines its credibility (United States Mission to the United Nations, 2020). Furthermore, the HRC has been accused of bias, particularly in its disproportionate scrutiny of Israel while overlooking violations in regions like Xinjiang and Syria (Bellamy, 2015). These issues highlight the need for reforms to ensure the HRC's impartiality and effectiveness.

3.2. The International Court of Justice (ICJ): Strengths and Limitations

The ICJ, as the principal judicial organ of the UN, has resolved numerous interstate disputes, contributing to the development of international law. Notable cases include the 1994 ruling in favor of Chad in its territorial dispute with Libya and the 2010 decision requiring Nicaragua to compensate Costa Rica for environmental damage (United Nations, 1994; United Nations, 2010). These rulings demonstrate the ICJ's ability to foster peaceful resolutions to conflicts.

However, the ICJ's effectiveness is constrained by its lack of enforcement mechanisms. States often ignore its rulings when they conflict with national interests, as seen in Kenya's rejection of the 2021 maritime border decision favoring Somalia (United Nations, 2021). Additionally, the ICJ faces funding challenges, limiting its capacity to address complex cases (Xinhua, 2019). These limitations underscore the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms and increased financial support.

3.3. The International Criminal Court (ICC): Successes and Criticisms

The ICC, established in 2002, has been a cornerstone of the global fight against impunity. Its successes include the conviction of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo for using child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the establishment of ad hoc tribunals for Rwanda and Yugoslavia, which brought perpetrators of genocide to justice (ICC, 2012; United Nations, 1994; United Nations, 1993). These cases highlight the ICC's role in upholding international justice.

Nevertheless, the ICC has faced criticism for perceived bias and double standards. African nations, in particular, have accused the ICC of disproportionately targeting leaders from the Global South while ignoring violations by powerful states (The East African, 2020). Additionally, the ICC's investigations are often hampered by resource constraints and the complexities of gathering evidence in conflict zones (ICC, 2021). To address these challenges, the ICC must enhance its legitimacy by ensuring equitable representation and strengthening its investigative capabilities.

3.4. The Path Forward: Strengthening Human Rights and International Law

To remain effective, the UN must address the structural and operational challenges facing its human rights and judicial organs. Reforms should include expanding the HRC's membership to exclude states with poor human rights records, enhancing the ICJ's

enforcement mechanisms, and ensuring the ICC's independence and impartiality. By fostering greater collaboration with regional organizations and civil society, the UN can strengthen its capacity to promote human rights and uphold international law in an increasingly complex global landscape.

4.0. Global Governance and Diplomacy

The United Nations (UN) has long served as a central platform for multilateral diplomacy, fostering international cooperation and addressing global challenges. In the 21st century, its role in global governance has expanded, but it also faces significant challenges in adapting to a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape. This section explores the UN's contributions to multilateral diplomacy, its collaboration with regional organizations, and the tension between state sovereignty and international intervention.

4.1. The UN as a Platform for Multilateral Diplomacy

The UN has been instrumental in facilitating dialogue and cooperation among nations through various mechanisms, including international conferences, summits, and workshops. For instance, the annual UN General Assembly (UNGA) provides a forum for member states to discuss pressing global issues and propose solutions (United Nations, 2023). Additionally, the UN Climate Change Conference (COP) exemplifies its role in harmonizing global efforts to address environmental challenges (United Nations, 2015). These platforms enable member states to negotiate treaties, adopt resolutions, and build consensus on critical issues such as climate change, human rights, and global health.

The UN's adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 marked a significant milestone in multilateral diplomacy. The SDGs provide a comprehensive framework for addressing global challenges, from poverty and inequality to climate change and peacebuilding (United Nations, 2015). By aligning national policies with the SDGs, the UN has fostered international cooperation and encouraged states to work collectively toward common objectives. For example, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has played a key role in promoting decent work and economic growth, contributing to the realization of SDG 8 (ILO, 2023).

4.2. The Role of Regional Organizations in Complementing the UN

Regional organizations have become increasingly important in global governance, often complementing the UN's efforts in conflict resolution, peacekeeping, and economic development. Entities such as the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) bring localized expertise and resources to address regional challenges (Acharya, 2018). For example, the AU's Peace and Security Council has taken the lead in mediating conflicts in Sudan and Somalia, demonstrating its ability to act independently of the UN (African Union, 2022).

However, the growing influence of regional organizations has also raised questions about the UN's centrality in global governance. While these organizations enhance the effectiveness of regional responses, their actions sometimes diverge from UN priorities, leading to potential overlaps and tensions (Ginsberg & Penksa, 2020). To address this, the UN has sought to strengthen partnerships with regional bodies through formal mechanisms, such as the UN-AU Joint Task Force on Peace and Security (United Nations, 2023).

4.3. The Tension Between Sovereignty and Intervention: Case Studies

The tension between state sovereignty and international intervention remains a central challenge in global governance. The UN Charter enshrines the principle of sovereignty while granting the organization the mandate to maintain international peace and security (United Nations, 1945). This dual commitment often places the UN in a difficult position, particularly when addressing humanitarian crises and human rights abuses.

The adoption of the "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) principle in 2005 marked a significant shift in international norms, emphasizing the obligation of states to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity (Evans, 2008). However, the implementation of R2P has been contentious. For example, the UN-sanctioned intervention in Libya in 2011 initially succeeded in protecting civilians but later led to prolonged instability due to the lack of a comprehensive post-conflict strategy (Bellamy & Williams, 2011). In contrast, the UN's response to the Syrian crisis highlights the limitations of R2P, as vetoes by permanent members of the Security Council paralyzed efforts to address widespread atrocities (Weiss, 2020).

4.4. Adapting to a Multipolar World

The rise of emerging powers and the increasing influence of non-state actors have reshaped the global order, challenging the UN's traditional structures and decision-making processes. Countries such as China, India, and Brazil have called for reforms to the Security Council to reflect current geopolitical realities (Mohan, 2021). Proposals include expanding the Council's membership and limiting the use of veto power, particularly in cases involving mass atrocities (Acharya, 2018).

To remain relevant, the UN must also enhance its collaboration with non-state actors, including multinational corporations, NGOs, and transnational networks. These actors play a critical role in addressing global challenges such as climate change, cybercrime, and pandemics (Cockayne, 2017). By fostering partnerships and incorporating diverse perspectives, the UN can strengthen its capacity to respond to complex and interconnected issues.

5.0. Development and Humanitarian Assistance

The United Nations (UN) has long been a cornerstone of global efforts to address humanitarian crises and promote sustainable development. Through its specialized agencies, funds, and programs, the UN has coordinated responses to disasters, conflicts, and health emergencies while advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This section examines the UN's role in humanitarian response, its contributions to sustainable development, and its challenges in achieving these objectives.

5.1. Coordinating Global Responses to Humanitarian Crisis

The UN plays a pivotal role in coordinating international responses to humanitarian emergencies. The **Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)** is central to these efforts, mobilizing resources, coordinating logistics, and ensuring timely delivery of aid to affected populations (United Nations, 2023). For instance, during the 2010 Haiti earthquake, OCHA facilitated the delivery of food, water, and medical supplies to millions, demonstrating the UN's capacity to respond to large-scale disasters (United Nations, 2013).

The **Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)**, established in 1992, further enhances coordination among UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders. During the Ebola outbreak in West Africa (2014–2016), the IASC's collaborative approach enabled a comprehensive response that contained the virus and saved countless lives (World Health Organization [WHO], 2017). However, challenges such as funding gaps and logistical constraints often hinder the effectiveness of these efforts.

5.2. The UN's Role in Sustainable Development: Progress and Challenges

The adoption of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** in 2015 marked a significant milestone in global development efforts. The 17 SDGs provide a comprehensive framework for addressing poverty, inequality, climate change, and other pressing challenges (United Nations, 2015). The UN has been instrumental in mobilizing global action, facilitating partnerships, and monitoring progress toward these goals.

For example, the **World Food Programme (WFP)** has addressed food insecurity by providing emergency food assistance to over 128 million people in 2022 alone (WFP, 2023). Similarly, the **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** has improved child health and education outcomes through initiatives like the "No Lost Generation" program, which supports children affected by the Syrian conflict (UNICEF, 2023). Despite these successes, the COVID-19 pandemic has reversed progress on several SDGs, particularly in developing countries, underscoring the need for renewed commitment and innovation (United Nations, 2023).

5.3. Case Studies: Disaster Relief and Post-Conflict Reconstruction

The UN's humanitarian and development efforts are best illustrated through case studies of disaster relief and post-conflict reconstruction. Below are recent examples that highlight the UN's role in addressing contemporary challenges:

5.3.1. Covid-19 Pandemic Response (2020-Present)

The COVID-19 pandemic posed an unprecedented global health and socio-economic crisis. The UN, through the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, played a central role in coordinating the international response. The WHO provided technical guidance, facilitated the distribution of medical supplies, and supported vaccine development through initiatives like **COVAX**, which aimed to ensure equitable access to vaccines (WHO, 2021). Despite these efforts, vaccine inequity and logistical challenges in low-income countries highlighted the limitations of global cooperation.

5.3.2. Ukraine Crisis (2022-Present)

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 triggered one of the largest humanitarian crises in Europe since World War II. The UN, through OCHA and UNHCR, mobilized a rapid response to provide food, shelter, and medical aid to millions of displaced Ukrainians. By mid-2023, the UN had delivered aid to over 13 million people within Ukraine and supported neighboring countries hosting refugees (UNHCR, 2023). However, the crisis also exposed the Security Council's paralysis due to geopolitical divisions, limiting the UN's ability to mediate the conflict.

5.3.3. Afghanistan Humanitarian Crisis (2021-Present)

Following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, the country faced a severe humanitarian crisis, with millions at risk of famine. The UN launched a massive aid operation, with the WFP

providing food assistance to over 23 million people in 2022 (WFP, 2023). The UN also worked to ensure the continuation of essential services, such as healthcare and education, particularly for women and girls. However, restrictions imposed by the Taliban and funding shortfalls have hampered these efforts.

5.3.4. Horn of Africa Drought (2020-Present)

The Horn of Africa has experienced its worst drought in decades, affecting over 36 million people across Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. The UN, through agencies like the WFP and UNICEF, has provided emergency food and water supplies while supporting long-term resilience-building initiatives (UNICEF, 2023). Despite these efforts, the scale of the crisis and limited funding have strained the UN's capacity to respond effectively.

5.3.5. Turkey-Syria Earthquake (2023)

In February 2023, a devastating earthquake struck Türkiye and Syria, killing over 50,000 people and displacing millions. The UN, in collaboration with local authorities and NGOs, launched a rapid response to provide emergency shelter, medical care, and food aid. The UN also facilitated cross-border aid deliveries to conflict-affected areas in Syria, overcoming significant logistical and political challenges (OCHA, 2023).

5.4. Challenges and the Way Forward

Despite its achievements, the UN faces significant challenges in delivering humanitarian assistance and promoting sustainable development. Funding shortfalls, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and political obstacles often hinder its efforts. Moreover, the increasing frequency and severity of disasters, driven by climate change, demand a more proactive and coordinated approach.

To address these challenges, the UN must strengthen partnerships with regional organizations, NGOs, and the private sector. Enhancing transparency, accountability, and innovation in its operations will also be critical. As the world grapples with emerging threats like pandemics and climate change, the UN's ability to adapt and evolve will determine its effectiveness in achieving its humanitarian and development goals.

6.0. The UN in a Changing Global Order

The United Nations (UN) has long been a cornerstone of global governance, designed to maintain peace, foster international cooperation, and address transnational challenges. However, the evolving global order—marked by the rise of emerging powers, the growing influence of regional organizations, and the complex interplay between sovereignty and intervention—has tested the UN's structure, authority, and relevance. This section examines the implications of these changes on the UN's effectiveness and explores pathways for reform and adaptation in a multipolar world.

6.1. The Rise of Emerging Powers and Calls for UN Reform

The ascent of emerging economies such as China, India, Brazil, and South Africa has fundamentally altered the global balance of power. These nations, alongside other significant players from the Global South, have increasingly contested the UN's traditional Western-dominated framework, particularly the composition and decision-making processes of the Security Council (SC). The SC's five permanent members (P5)—the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom—were determined in the aftermath of World War II, reflecting the geopolitical realities of that era (United Nations, 1945). Critics argue that this structure no

longer represents the dynamics of a multipolar world and is increasingly unfit for purpose (Weiss, 2020).

Emerging powers have advocated for a reformed SC to include permanent representation from Africa, Latin America, and Asia. For instance, India has highlighted its contributions to UN peacekeeping missions and its growing economic and geopolitical influence as justifications for permanent membership (Mohan, 2021). Similarly, the African Union (AU) has underscored the importance of redressing historical injustices by including African representation in the SC (African Union, 2022). These calls for reform highlight the need for a more inclusive and representative global governance structure.

6.2. The Role of Regional Organizations and Non-State Actors

The rise of regional organizations has introduced new dynamics into global governance. Entities like the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have assumed roles traditionally associated with the UN, including conflict resolution, peacekeeping, and economic development. These organizations bring localized expertise and resources to address regional issues, often resulting in more efficient and culturally sensitive solutions (Acharya, 2018).

For example, the AU's interventions in conflicts such as those in Sudan and Somalia have demonstrated its ability to act independently of the UN. The AU's Peace and Security Council has increasingly taken the lead in mediating African conflicts, challenging the UN's centrality in global peacekeeping efforts (African Union, 2022). Similarly, the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) has enabled coordinated responses to crises, though it sometimes diverges from UN priorities, leading to potential overlap and tension (Ginsberg & Penksa, 2020).

Beyond states and regional organizations, non-state actors, including multinational corporations, NGOs, and transnational criminal networks, have gained prominence in global affairs. NGOs often collaborate with the UN to provide humanitarian aid and advocate for human rights, while multinational corporations influence global economic policies. However, these actors can also undermine the UN's authority. For instance, transnational criminal networks contribute to the proliferation of illicit arms and human trafficking, exacerbating conflicts and complicating peacebuilding efforts (Cockayne, 2017).

6.3. The Tension between Sovereignty and Intervention

The tension between state sovereignty and international intervention is a longstanding issue in global governance. The UN Charter enshrines the principle of sovereignty while granting the organization the mandate to maintain international peace and security (United Nations, 1945). This dual commitment often places the UN in a precarious position, particularly when addressing humanitarian crises and human rights abuses.

The adoption of the "responsibility to protect" (R2P) principle in 2005 marked a significant shift in international norms. R2P asserts that states have an obligation to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. When a state fails to fulfill this duty, the international community is empowered to intervene (Evans, 2008). However, the implementation of R2P has been contentious, with critics arguing that it can serve as a pretext for external intervention motivated by political or economic interests (Bellamy, 2015).

The application of R2P in Libya in 2011 illustrates its potential and pitfalls. The UN-sanctioned military intervention, led by NATO, aimed to protect civilians from government forces under Muammar Gaddafi. While the intervention initially succeeded in averting mass atrocities, the subsequent lack of a comprehensive post-conflict strategy led to prolonged instability, raising questions about the UN's capacity to balance intervention with long-term peacebuilding (Bellamy & Williams, 2011). In contrast, the UN's response to the Syrian crisis highlights the limitations of R2P in the face of geopolitical constraints. Despite widespread atrocities, the Security Council has been paralyzed by vetoes from P5 members, reflecting the enduring tension between state sovereignty and collective responsibility (Weiss, 2020).

6.4. Adapting to a Multipolar World

To maintain its relevance, the UN must address structural inefficiencies and enhance its inclusivity. Reforming the Security Council is a critical first step. Expanding its membership to include permanent representation from underrepresented regions would not only improve its legitimacy but also ensure more equitable decision-making (Mohan, 2021). Additionally, the UN should strengthen its General Assembly, which serves as the most democratic organ of the organization. By empowering the General Assembly to play a more prominent role in global governance, the UN can better reflect the diverse perspectives of its Member States (Ginsberg & Penksa, 2020).

Given the increasing influence of regional organizations and non-state actors, the UN must prioritize collaboration. Establishing formal mechanisms for partnership with entities like the AU and the EU would enhance coordination and reduce duplication of efforts. Similarly, engaging with NGOs and the private sector could provide innovative solutions to complex challenges such as climate change and global health crises (Acharya, 2018).

In an era of rising nationalism and unilateralism, the UN must reaffirm its commitment to multilateralism. By fostering dialogue and building consensus among Member States, the UN can strengthen the global rules-based order and ensure collective action on pressing issues (Weiss, 2020).

7.0. Criticisms and Calls for Reform

The United Nations (UN) has long been a symbol of international cooperation, but it has faced sustained criticism regarding its structure, decision-making processes, and overall effectiveness. These criticisms primarily target its principal organs—the Security Council and the General Assembly—as well as other bodies like the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Human Rights Council. Calls for reform have grown louder, advocating changes to the Security Council's composition, the General Assembly's authority, and mechanisms to strengthen accountability and transparency. However, entrenched interests, particularly among powerful states, pose significant barriers to meaningful reform.

7.1. Structural Imbalances: The Security Council and Veto Power

The UN Security Council (SC), tasked with maintaining international peace and security, has been criticized for its structural imbalance. The SC comprises 15 members, of which five are permanent (the P5): the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom. These members wield veto power, granting them disproportionate influence over the Council's decisions. The veto has frequently been used to block resolutions,

often for political reasons rather than global security concerns, effectively paralyzing the SC's ability to act in critical situations (Weiss, 2020). For instance, the SC's swift action in the Libyan conflict in 2011 under the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine contrasts sharply with its inaction during the Syrian civil war, largely due to vetoes by Russia and China (Bellamy, 2015).

Reform Proposals:

- **Expanding Membership:** Emerging powers such as India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan (collectively referred to as the G4) have advocated for a more equitable SC that includes permanent representation from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Expanding the SC's membership to include more non-permanent seats or creating a new category of semi-permanent members has been proposed as a way to better reflect the current global power distribution (Acharya, 2018).
- **Limiting Veto Power:** Many view the veto as an anachronistic mechanism that undermines the principles of equality and collective security. Proposals include requiring multiple P5 members to concur for a veto to take effect or allowing the General Assembly to override a veto under specific circumstances (Mohan, 2021).

Challenges:

- **Resistance from P5 Members:** The P5, in particular, have shown reluctance to support changes that could dilute their influence. Any amendment to the UN Charter requires the consent of two-thirds of the General Assembly and all P5 members, effectively granting the P5 a veto over reform efforts (Weiss, 2020).
- **Divergent Perspectives:** The diversity of interests among UN Member States further complicates reform efforts. While developing nations often prioritize equitable representation and resource distribution, developed countries may focus on issues such as climate change and global security (Acharya, 2018).

7.2. Inefficiencies in the General Assembly and ECOSOC

The General Assembly (GA), comprising all 193 UN member states, is often lauded as the most democratic organ of the UN. However, its resolutions are non-binding, limiting its ability to influence global governance. While the GA serves as a platform for dialogue, it lacks enforcement mechanisms to translate its decisions into action, rendering it ineffective in addressing pressing global issues (Ginsberg & Penksa, 2020). The GA's bureaucratic and procedural inefficiencies further undermine its effectiveness. Decision-making within the Assembly can be slow and cumbersome, often delaying responses to urgent crises such as pandemics, conflicts, and climate disasters (Weiss, 2020).

Reform Proposals:

- **Enhancing Authority:** Strengthening the GA has been a central theme in discussions of UN reform. Proposals include granting the GA increased authority to initiate investigations, impose sanctions, or hold states accountable for violations of international law (Acharya, 2018).
- **Streamlining Decision-Making:** Streamlining the GA's decision-making processes and enhancing transparency

could improve its responsiveness and impact. This includes adopting digital tools for virtual voting and real-time collaboration (Ginsberg & Penksa, 2020).

Challenges:

- **Bureaucratic Resistance:** Implementing reforms within the GA faces resistance from entrenched bureaucratic structures and member states wary of ceding control.
- **Resource Constraints:** Enhancing the GA's authority and efficiency requires significant financial and human resources, which may be challenging to secure in the current geopolitical climate.

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is responsible for coordinating economic and social development efforts globally. However, it has faced criticism for its limited impact and inability to address global inequalities effectively. ECOSOC's fragmented approach and lack of coordination with other UN agencies have hindered its ability to implement sustainable development initiatives (United Nations, 2015).

Reform Proposals:

- **Improving Coordination:** Enhancing coordination between ECOSOC and other UN agencies, as well as with regional organizations, could improve its effectiveness in addressing global inequalities (Acharya, 2018).
- **Focusing on Key Issues:** Prioritizing key issues such as climate change, poverty alleviation, and global health could help ECOSOC make a more significant impact.

Challenges:

- **Fragmentation:** The fragmented nature of ECOSOC's mandate and operations makes it difficult to achieve cohesive and impactful outcomes.
- **Political Will:** Achieving meaningful reform requires strong political will and commitment from member states, which may be lacking in the current geopolitical environment.

7.3. Proposals for Reform: Enhancing Accountability and Transparency

Improving the transparency of decision-making processes across all UN bodies is essential to address perceptions of bias and inefficiency. Establishing independent oversight mechanisms to monitor the implementation of resolutions and evaluate the performance of UN organs could enhance accountability. Moreover, regular reporting and public disclosure of activities could build trust among Member States and the global public (Ginsberg & Penksa, 2020).

Reform Proposals:

- **Independent Oversight:** Establishing independent oversight mechanisms to monitor the implementation of resolutions and evaluate the performance of UN organs could enhance accountability (Acharya, 2018).
- **Public Disclosure:** Regular reporting and public disclosure of activities could build trust among Member States and the global public.

Challenges:

- **Resistance from Member States:** Implementing transparency and accountability measures may face resistance from member states wary of external scrutiny.
- **Resource Constraints:** Establishing and maintaining independent oversight mechanisms requires significant financial and human resources, which may be challenging to secure.

7.4. Addressing Emerging Challenges

The UN must also adapt to address contemporary global issues such as climate change, cyber security, and pandemics. Enhancing the capacity of specialized agencies like the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to respond to these challenges is critical. Strengthening coordination among agencies and Member States can ensure a more unified and effective response (United Nations, 2021).

Reform Proposals:

- **Capacity Building:** Enhancing the capacity of specialized agencies like WHO and UNEP to respond to emerging challenges is critical (Acharya, 2018).
- **Strengthening Coordination:** Strengthening coordination among agencies and Member States can ensure a more unified and effective response.

Challenges:

- **Resource Allocation:** Allocating sufficient resources to address emerging challenges requires strong political will and commitment from member states.
- **Coordination:** Achieving effective coordination among diverse agencies and member states is a complex and challenging task.

8.0. Conclusion

The United Nations (UN) has played a pivotal role in shaping contemporary international relations, from its peacekeeping missions to its advocacy for sustainable development and human rights. However, as the global order evolves into a multipolar system, the UN must address its structural inefficiencies and adapt to emerging challenges to remain relevant. Reforming the Security Council, enhancing the General Assembly's authority, and fostering greater collaboration with regional organizations are critical steps toward ensuring the UN's continued effectiveness (Weiss, 2020; Mohan, 2021).

The UN's successes, such as the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its peacekeeping efforts in countries like Namibia and Cambodia, underscore its enduring relevance (United Nations, 2015; United Nations, 1989). However, its failures in Rwanda, Srebrenica, and Syria highlight the need for structural and operational reforms to address geopolitical constraints and power imbalances (Gambari, 2004; Bellamy, 2015). The rise of emerging powers, such as China and India, and the increasing influence of non-state actors further complicate the UN's ability to maintain global peace and security (Acharya, 2018; Fung, 2022).

To remain a cornerstone of global governance, the UN must embrace reforms that reflect contemporary geopolitical realities.

Expanding the Security Council to include representation from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, limiting the use of veto power, and strengthening accountability mechanisms are essential steps (Mohan, 2021; African Union, 2022). Additionally, the UN must enhance its collaboration with regional organizations, such as the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU), to address conflicts and humanitarian crises more effectively (Ginsberg & Penksa, 2020).

In an era defined by complex global challenges, such as climate change, cybercrime, and pandemics, the UN's ability to evolve will determine its capacity to fulfill its founding mandate: promoting peace, security, and prosperity for all (United Nations, 2021; Weiss, 2020). By reaffirming its commitment to multilateralism and fostering inclusive dialogue, the UN can continue to serve as a beacon of hope in an increasingly interconnected world.

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