

The Relevance Of The United Nations Organization In The Contemporary Times: An Analytical Study

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Abstract:

The United Nations UN was created in 1945 in order to become the major instrument of international governance, with the responsibility to maintain international peace and security, promote human rights, economic and social development. Its continued relevance, especially during the time frame of 2004-2014, has been subjected to verdicts, which have invited a lot of scholarly attention due to the emergence and changes in global challenges. Thus, the current research highlights the role, successes, and shortcomings of the UN over the post-Cold War period and focuses specifically on its performance in facing the challenges of conflicts, humanitarian crisis, climate change and sustainable development. The organization has certainly done tremendous work in terms of peacekeeping, human right enhancement, economic-development programs, but with this has come repeated criticism of its inefficiencies, Security-Council stalemates and the growing ascendancy of the role of regional organizations. In an attempt to clarify such dynamics, the paper critically examines some of the UN operations and their results whether successful or unsuccessful interventions. It then proceeds to look at the difficulties of UN reform, the biggest being enlargement of the Security Council and the concomitant emergence of new world powers. Finally, the paper provides some thoughts on the future ability of the organization to adapt to the changing geopolitical realities and stay a successful arena of multilateral cooperation.

Keywords: United Nations, Global Governance, Peacekeeping, Human Rights, International Relations, Post-Cold War.

Introduction:

The United Nations (UN) was initiated in 1945 to prevent future wars in the world and also foster international cooperation. The international system that formed after World War II was divided into rival blocs and the UN was fast becoming the main platform of diplomacy and peace-building, hence establishing the post war world order. Its constitution equipped the organization with the room to reach peaceful resolution of disputes and collective measures in response to transnational issues. Today UN has 193 member states and covers a wide agenda that include majorly peacekeeping, human rights, development, and environmental protection. However, the change in the geopolitical landscape has also seen a change in the mandate of the UN. The Cold War helped to mark the entry of a new age in international relations that introduced new engines of change like the regional conflict, climate change as well as global health outbreaks. Critics argue that the institution has struggled with changes based on inefficiencies, bureaucratic sluggishness and failure to respond to complex global issues. UN Security Council has been a particular target, ranging from a disproportionate level of influence by the five permanent members using its veto, often leading to stalemates. The current analysis aims to question the relevance of the UN, including its successes and its failures at the end of the year 2014. In that way, the paper evaluates the current state of whether the organization remains in a decisive role in global governance or its powers are being withered away.

Historical Background of the United Nations:

The United Nations (UN) was founded in 1945, following World War II, with an expressed aim at preventing the occurrence of future rivalries, and supporting international collaboration. It replaced the League of Nations, a previous multilateral institution, which had already been unable to avert the emergence of fascism and the beginning of the Second World War. The original architects, who were formed by 51 countries, committed themselves to how to maintain peace, the observance of human rights as well as preserving the health of coming generations. The UN charter signed at San Francisco Conference defined the main objectives of the organization, maintenance of international peace, establishing friendly relations between nations and cooperation in solving global issues. Since the beginning of the cold war the UN played a significant role of helping to establish rapport between East and west, despite the geopolitical split that often caused an impasse in decision making process. With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990s, the organization once again became relevant. It had increased its peacekeeping missions, and the UN began dominating in solving a number of regional conflicts. With the passage of time however its success in its ability to ensure peace, counter poverty and bring sustainable development has been called into question leading to speculation on its future in the global order.

UN Structure and Functioning:

The United Nations is structured in terms of six main organs that have been defined with a specific role in the international system. The General Assembly provides a discussion platform whereby all member states are equally represented as they deliberate and discuss issues revolving around peace and security to economic development and human rights. The task of ensuring the international peace and security is entrusted to the Security Council, there are five permanent representative members who are China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and the United States and there are ten members who can be elected rotating members. The five permanent members have the rights of veto where they can become a source of political stalemate. International Court of Justice hears the cases between states and provides international legal opinions about legal questions. The Secretariat which is headed by the Secretary-General of the UN runs the day to day activities of the organization and coordinates tasks in peacekeeping and humanitarian aid. The economic and social council co-ordinates economic and social activities and the Trusteeship council which is more or less moribund was first formed to handle trust territories. These organs are supplemented by others specialized agencies like the World Health Organization, UNESCO and UNICEF among others which are focused in individual areas i.e. health, education and welfare of children. This complex, multidimensional composition also allows the organization to handle a wide range of issues facing the world but at the same time can be bogged down with inefficiencies and slow decision making mechanisms especially when differing interests on the same issue emerge among the member states.

Challenges to UN Relevance:

The significance of United Nations has been challenged more and more, due to a number of closely incorporated issues. First of all, there is political stalemate in the UN Security Council. The veto power of the five permanent committee members oftentimes disables the organizational abilities to deal effectively with the crises. The civil war in Syria proves this fact, in spite of the common demand to intervene, the Security Council did nothing constructive due to the vetoes of both Russia and China. Another huge challenge is the financial burden placed on the member states. A product of any voluntary contribution of member states, the UN has to work according to a limited budget created by the disproportionate or inadequate contributions, and hence, restricting its capability to achieve its international mandates. The conflict-resolving role of the institution has in its turn been criticized. Although the UN undertakes many peacekeeping operations, they have failed in many times to stop a conflict and halt underlying political tensions as is evident in the case of Rwanda and Bosnia. Besides, the emergence and development of regional organizations and the mushrooming of bilateral agreements have raised some eyebrows on whether the UN still maintained its primacy as the most suitable platform to present global matters. The growing power of other countries like China and India which

are transforming the global power balance has further highlighted this issue of the role of the UN that may not be able to reflect the interests of the emerging economies. Combined, these difficulties strengthen the need of reform; however, the political will to make any significant change continues to be weak.

The UN Role in Key Global Issues (Post-Cold War to 2014):

The involvement of the United Nations in global issues after the cold war has seen a mixed history of achievements and failures. The peacekeeping activities by the organization escalated during the 1990s, and the peacekeeping missions were sent to Bosnia, Rwanda and East Timor. The East Timor intervention was otherwise successful but the failure of UN troops to avert the Rwandan genocide of 1994 revealed serious shortfalls. At the same time, there was parallel nature to the humanitarian efforts: limitations on aid activities continued to be a significant problem even with the continued input of organizations (including the UNHCR and UNICEF), as their activities were limited by the politics involved. The World Health Organization (WHO) promoted programmes against HIV/AIDS and other illnesses, although there was a rather generalized slow pace in response in the international community at the expense of insufficient funding. The UN has also aimed at promoting environmental sustainability and development using the means of the Kyoto Protocol, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that established the goals to reduce poverty, hunger and disease by the year 2015. Nevertheless, the environmental policy has been irregular and a number of the most influential states have been unwilling to bind themselves by signing up to climate agreements. Lastly, the Iraq War in 2003 once again challenged the authority and relevance of the UN as a US-led fight was opposed by individual members of the Security Council and demonstrated the difficulty of reaching UN agreement in the age of unilateralism by powerful states.

Criticism and Debate on the UN's Effectiveness:

A wide literature has evidenced the United Nations to be the target of a consistent criticism in relation to its efficiency in handling contemporary global issues. The most important part of this debate is the institutional construction of the veto system in the Security Council. The unrestricted authority given to the five permanent members is usually used to create stalemate, which hinders the ability of the UN to come up with prompt and concrete solutions about emerging international issues like the ongoing conflict in Syria and the Israel-Palestine crisis. These stumbling blocks have created a lot of suspicions on the credibility of UN and its effectiveness in reducing global security risks. In an associated line of criticism, the inefficiency of bureaucracy has been cited to highlight the slow response of the organization in meeting emergency conditions. Such a trend has created the mentality that UN is a burdensome organization that is poorly prepared to discuss the fast-changing world dynamics. In addition, collapse of peacekeeping missions as was depicted in the case of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, demonstrates that at some point, UN missions are incapable of protecting civilians and resolving conflict. Also, the scholars have pointed at the relative unresponsiveness of the organization to the emergent phenomena like terrorism and cyber warfare. Another problematic arises due to the poor adherence of the UN in adhering to human rights especially when countries with poor track records are highly influential in the institution. Finally, the fact that the organization has continued to be unable to reform itself particularly amid the emerging structural and decision-making needs of the twenty-first century has further widened the debate about the need of serious institutional reform.

Recent Efforts at Reform and Adaptation (Pre-2014):

Over the past few years, the United Nations has been engaging in different reform initiatives to make the organization consistent with emerging global realities. The reformation of the Security Council tops the list of these efforts with people debating over the single power of veto by the permanent members of the council. Therefore, suggestions to expand the Council particularly by incorporating permanent seats to the regions already under-represented like Africa and Latin America have become eminent. However, such ideas are met with continued oppositions by the traditional permanent members thus making constructive progress impossible. UN has also embarked in efforts to make the peacekeeping more effective. First of them is the development of stronger mandates of the peacekeepers and a more developed ability to protect the civilian population. As example, among the UN peacekeeping operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo and

Mali, positive results concerning operation effectiveness are reported, though the challenges are still immense. Within the sphere of development, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have implemented a holistic approach to poverty, education and health care but unevenly with a lot of unmet needs still remaining. UN has also managed to develop its engagement in preventive diplomacy practices in areas that are more threatened with conflicts. Despite these endeavors, systematic reformation has been unachievable and the organization is still facing the burden of adjusting the organization and practices to adapt to the current global issues.

The Future of the United Nations:

The United Nations is still trying to find its way forward, with the world facing more challenges than before, not only because they require flexibility in finding solutions but also because they require a long-lasting dedication to their mandate of ensuring peace and cooperation in the world. The first among the areas that need reform is the Security Council that has still some inequities in its membership, such as the unvarying usage of the veto power, which limit effective decision-making. Emergent powers, who repeatedly champion the idea of Council expansion (e.g., India, Brazil and South Africa), have yet to achieve progressive changes on the substantive level in significant measure due to the fact that political bargaining is yet to conclude. The issue of funding of the UN is connected to the one described above: the more needs the organization must meet, the more evident the necessity of: sound and sufficient funding of the UN. The ability of the institution to address the ongoing and upcoming challenges in global health, such as those witnessed in the previous response of the institution in response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the response to the Ebola crisis will be determining of the legitimacy of the institution. The focus of climate change in its agenda will be also maintained as the United Nations is likely to be at the forefront of the coordinated initiatives of global stakeholders to reduce emissions and achieve sustainable development. Lastly, consolidation of regional blocks and further spread of bilateral diplomacy may spell out the end to the unique existence of the UN in world governance. However, this does not seem to be the case because the organization seems to be only going to be relevant up to the moment that it shows an active will to transform and adapt to the demands of an ever fluid international order.

Conclusion:

The United Nations has remained in the center stage of global governance since its birth but its relevance and effectiveness has increasingly come into question. Despite the fact that the organization recorded remarkable accomplishments in the areas of peacekeeping, humanitarian intervention, development, it is still weighed down by endemic political stalemates, bureaucratic paralysis, and failure in adapting to the changing global power configurations. The impediments, offered by reforming its institutional structure and authority making processes especially on the Security Council, still obstruct its ability to take decisive actions on top of the international agenda. The future of the UN will be associated with timely responsiveness to issues in the world, to the extent that some global issues, such as climate change, terrorism, and pandemics, are becoming increasingly salient. Though the organisation is not the single remedy to all the problems the world faces, it certainly cannot be ignored in the manner it keeps the globe connected and nurtures international cooperation and peace. However, it will require significant transformation and the renewed pledge to multilateralism to remain relevant in the twenty first century.

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