



UN Reforms & India

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This article is based on **“UN and the new multilateralism”** which was published in The Indian Express on 22/09/2020. It talks about the need for reforms in the United Nations (UN) system.

The **United Nations (UN)** was set up, 75 years ago, with the principal aim of maintaining world peace and security. It has been successful in the decolonization process and preventing another World War. However, the 21st century world is very different from that 20th century and poses many new problems and realities.

The present humanitarian and economic losses associated with **Covid-19 pandemic** are comparable to that of major wars and unemployment is worse than at any time since the Great Depression 1929. This has highlighted the challenges pertaining to the multilateral UN system.

Furthermore, there has been a general trend of increasing the number of challenges that are Trans-national in character (for example, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, pandemics, climate crisis, cyber-security, and poverty). UN being the epitome of multilateral world order will be much needed in dealing with global issues.

Therefore, reforms in the UN are necessary in order to strengthen the UN’s effectiveness as a multilateral organization, bring more transparency to the institution and enhance its credibility.

Challenges Against Multilateralism in Present Times

- **Rise of New Cold War:** Conflict between the US on the one hand and China and Russia on the other has become a new reality in West-East Conflict.

- **Divided West:** Despite the enduring post-War alliances, there is a growing divergence between US and its European partners on many global issues.
 - Some of the differences between the US and the other powers is very visible in the **Iran Nuclear Deal**.
 - Further, rejection of post-War multilateralism and post-Cold War globalism is at the heart of Trump's "**America First**" foreign policy.
- **Ineffectiveness of UN:** The UN has been unable to respond effectively to the once-in-a-century global crisis triggered by the coronavirus.

At the UN Security Council, China blocked a serious discussion on the origin and sources of the crisis. While the US walked out of the **World Health Organisation** on allegation of supporting China.

Areas of UN Reform

- **Defunct UNSC:** The **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** is the UN's main executive body with the primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security.
 - However, the veto powers possessed by the UNSC's five permanent members are used as an instrument to shore up their geopolitical interests, regardless of the disastrous consequences for the victims of armed conflict. As it can be seen in Syria, Iraq, etc.
 - Further, It does not reflect today's distribution of military and economic power, nor a geographical balance. Thus, the structure of the 15-member Security Council ought to be more democratic and representative.
 - This has been long overdue on the demand, especially from the so-called Group of 4 (**G4 countries**) — Brazil, Germany, India and Japan — which advocate a permanent seat for all of them.
- **General Assembly Reforms:** The UN General Assembly(UNGA) can only make non-binding recommendations, which is another reason for ineffectiveness of the UN and another important issue of UN reform.
- **Undermining of Associated UN Bodies** The Economic and Social Council has been criticized, as it has become overshadowed by institutions such as the **IMF** and the **World Bank**, which are lacking democratic processes, transparency, and accountability.
- **UN's Financial Crisis:** It can be said that the UN has a lot to do but it has too little money, as it is in a permanent financial crisis due to the unwillingness of many members to pay their contributions on time.

As long as the UN's budget remains tightly constrained, it cannot be effective.

- **Toothless UN Peacekeeping Operation:** While the vast number of international law treaties affecting international trade, economics and human rights has proved very effective, laws prohibiting the use of force have been less so.

Thus, there is a need to include more personnel and carry out structural reforms for the UN Peacekeeping Operations.

India's Role in Reforming UN System & Way Forward

While the UNSC was dysfunctional, India developed a multilateral agenda of its own — from decolonisation and disarmament to a new international economic order — and mobilised considerable political support for it. This underlines the possibilities for shaping the global discourse in the present.

- **Reforming UNSC:** As former UN secretary general noted that “**No reform of the UN would be complete without reform of the Security Council**”. Therefore, equitable representation as well as expansion of the UNSC is the desired reform that India envisages.

However, this would be the most challenging aspect of UN reforms, as the most permanent five are generally opposed to strengthening the institution and use their power to stop any significant change.

- **Engaging With Other Multilateral Forums For UN Reforms:** Possible solutions to reform UN finances can be establishing a ‘reserve fund’ or even a ‘**world tax**’.

Also, in order to make UNGA more effective, India can propose a bicameral parliamentary assembly framework for UNGA.

- **Balancing National Interest and Multilateralism:** The primary objective of India's present multilateralism should be to ensure its territorial integrity, especially at a time when China has adopted aggressive posture on the border.
 - Here, India can leverage multilateralism to serve India's interests. Like aligning with **Quad countries** or working with mechanisms like **FATF** to mount pressure on Pakistan to stop supporting cross-border terrorism in India.
 - Further, while reclaiming its role in the **Non-Aligned Movement** (NAM), India must engage with other multilateral institutions as new rule-making as India is not at disadvantage if rule making takes place outside the UN.

Conclusion

History teaches that the fact that crises catalyse states to rise above inertia, myopia, and narrow self-interest. This can be reflected in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, conferences at Bretton Woods and San Francisco in the 1940s. The present pandemic is similar to the crisis that can lead to tectonic shift in world affairs.

Further, given the global issues, today the world needs multilateralism more than ever. Thus, it is necessary to reform the UN. In this context, **India must utilize the next two years of its non-permanent member of UNSC** for bringing much needed reforms in the system.

Key UN reforms

1997

Kofi Annan announces his plan for United Nations reform with two reform packages: "Track One" and "Track Two"

2004

Two models proposed for expanding the Security Council

2005

Kofi Annan presents his most comprehensive reform and policy agenda with his report "In Larger Freedom"
The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) is established

2006

The Human Rights Council replaces the former United Nations Commission

2007-2016

Reforms continues during Ban Ki-moon's term with the launch of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and adoption of the Paris Climate Agreement

2017-2020

Reforms envisioned by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres have been ongoing which focus on the UN's peace and security pillar

Drishti Mains Question

Given the global issues, today the world needs multilateralism more than ever.
Comment



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This editorial is based on “**Bully & Pulpit**” which was published in The Indian Express on September 21st, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.