



Towards a Representative and Effective United Nations

This editorial is based on “[UN@80: Reforms essential for continued relevance](#)” which was published in The Hindustan Times on 20/09/2025. The article brings into picture the UN’s 80th anniversary marked by crises and the urgent need for Security Council reform, with India’s leadership emerging as pivotal to its future relevance.

For Prelims: [United Nations](#), [Security Council](#), [Global South](#), [Darfur](#), [Peacekeeping mission](#), [2024 G20 summit](#), [BRICS](#), [African Union](#).

For Mains: Major Contemporary Challenges Confronting the United Nations, Role India can Play in Driving UN Reforms

As the [United Nations](#) marks **80 years**, it confronts profound challenges, ranging from geopolitical conflicts to climate and technological disruptions, that expose the limits of a system designed for a different era. Structural inefficiencies and an outdated [Security Council](#) framework threaten its credibility, making reforms, particularly greater [Global South](#) representation, imperative. In this context, **India’s advocacy for multilateral transformation assumes critical importance.**

What are the Major Contemporary Challenges Confronting the United Nations?

- **Ineffective Veto Power in the Security Council:** The veto power held by the five permanent members (P5) of the UN Security Council is arguably its single biggest flaw.
 - It allows any one of them to unilaterally block a resolution, even if the vast majority of member states support it.
 - This creates a system where the self-interest of a single powerful nation can override the collective will of the international community, often leading to diplomatic paralysis during major crises.
 - For example, Russia has repeatedly used its veto power to block resolutions aimed at ending the war in Ukraine, while the United States has used its veto power at least 34 times to block UN Security Council resolutions that were critical of Israel.
- **Outdated Structure and Unrepresentative Membership:** The UN's structure, particularly the Security Council, reflects the geopolitical power balance of 1945, not the 21st century.
 - The P5- China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US, are the victors of World War II, resulting in an over-concentration of power.
 - Today, rising powers like India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan lack permanent membership, leading to an unrepresentative body with limited Global South representation and alienating major global players.
 - Recently, even the United Nations Secretary-general Antonio Guterres called for reforming

the UN security council (UNSC) to better reflect current global realities, with India emerging as a pivotal voice in the multilateral system.

- **Inability to Address Modern Conflicts and Humanitarian Crises:** The UN has shown a consistent inability to effectively prevent or respond to large-scale conflicts and humanitarian disasters, often due to the Security Council's internal divisions.
 - Its [peacekeeping missions](#) are frequently under-resourced and given mandates that are too weak to be effective, as seen in Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990s.
 - In recent years, the UN's inaction in places like Syria, Sudan, and Myanmar highlights this systemic failure, with an estimated 300,000 civilians killed in [Darfur](#) alone since 2003, despite the UN's presence.
- **Financial Dependence and Inequitable Funding:** The UN is heavily dependent on a few major donor countries, primarily the United States, which provides a disproportionately large share of its budget.
 - This creates a leverage point for these nations, allowing them to exert pressure and influence over the organization's policies and operations.
 - The [United States](#) alone contributes approximately 22% of the UN's regular budget and a significant portion of its peacekeeping budget, and it has threatened to reduce or cap its contributions to compel policy changes.
- **Bureaucratic Inefficiency and Lack of Accountability:** The UN is widely criticized for its sprawling, complex bureaucracy, which is often slow to respond to crises and suffers from a lack of transparency and accountability.
 - Multiple reports have documented instances of corruption, sexual misconduct by peacekeepers, and the misuse of funds within various UN agencies.
 - For instance, a recent UNDP Annual Audit reported 434 new investigations, the highest ever, with a significant number relating to procurement fraud and sexual misconduct, eroding public trust and undermining the organization's credibility.
- **Erosion of Sovereignty and National Interests:** Some nations, particularly those with a more nationalist or isolationist stance, view the UN as a threat to their national sovereignty and a vehicle for globalist agendas.
 - They argue that UN resolutions and international laws can force countries to adopt policies that are against their national interests, such as those related to climate change, immigration, and human rights.
 - A recent speech by the U.S. President at the UN General Assembly called the organization "feckless" and urged nations to prioritize "strong borders and traditional energy sources".
- **Competing Global and Regional Institutions:** The rise of other powerful global and regional organizations, such as the [G20](#), [BRICS](#), and the [African Union](#), has provided alternative forums for international cooperation, often bypassing the UN.
 - These groups are seen by many as more agile and representative of contemporary power dynamics.
 - For instance, the G20 has taken a leading role in coordinating the global response to economic crises, a function that was historically within the UN's purview, further sidelining the UN's role in global governance.

What Role can India Play in Driving UN Reforms?

- **Championing a Democratic Security Council:** India, as a member of the G4 group (Brazil, Germany, and Japan), can lead the charge for a more inclusive Security Council.
 - It can articulate a reform model that expands both the permanent and non-permanent categories to reflect current geopolitical realities.
 - This approach, which has received broad support from UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, would correct the historical injustice of an anachronistic P5.
 - The G4 nations have proposed expanding the UN Security Council from 15 to 25-26 members, adding six new permanent seats: two for Africa, two for Asia-Pacific, one for Latin America and the Caribbean, and one for Western Europe and other states.
- **Advocating for the Global South:** India's position as a leader of the developing world gives it a unique platform to push for reforms that prioritize the interests of the Global South.
 - By consistently raising issues like sustainable development, climate justice, and equitable economic growth in UN forums, India can demonstrate the need for a UN that is not dominated by the priorities of the P5.

- For instance, at the [2024 G20 summit](#), India successfully secured permanent membership for the African Union, a move that showcased its commitment to amplifying the voice of the Global South on the global stage.
- **Promoting Multilateralism and Dialogue:** In an era of increasing great-power competition and diplomatic gridlock, India can serve as a voice of reason, promoting dialogue and diplomatic solutions to international conflicts.
 - Its principled stance on issues like the [Russia-Ukraine war](#), where it has advocated for an end to hostilities through negotiation rather than a military solution, has been noted by world leaders.
 - The Indian Prime Minister's statement that "this is not an era of war" at the 2022 SCO summit has been widely referenced by UN officials as a call for a return to diplomacy.
- **Contributing as a Major Peacekeeper:** India has a long and distinguished history as a major contributor to UN peacekeeping missions, having deployed over 290,000 troops to more than 50 missions since 1950.
 - This immense sacrifice and commitment on the ground lends significant moral and political weight to its demand for a greater say in UN decision-making. As of 2024, India remains among the largest troop-contributing nations, with over 5,000 personnel deployed in active missions, far exceeding the combined contributions of most P5 members.
- **Strengthening Counter-Terrorism Frameworks:** As a nation that has long been a victim of terrorism, India can play a leading role in strengthening the UN's counter-terrorism framework and ensuring accountability.
 - It can push for a comprehensive convention on international terrorism and advocate for the Security Council to take decisive action against states that sponsor or harbor terrorist groups.
 - India has already deepened its cooperation on counter-terrorism efforts by engaging 26 countries through Joint Working Groups on Counter Terrorism.

What Measures are Needed for Effective and Inclusive UN Reforms?

- **Phased Restructuring of the Security Council:** Instead of an all-or-nothing approach, a phased, two-step reform of the Security Council is needed to overcome political gridlock.
 - The first phase would involve expanding the non-permanent membership with longer, more renewable terms for key regional powers, giving them a more sustained voice without challenging the P5's veto.
 - The second phase, to be triggered after a defined period of demonstrable effectiveness, would introduce a new category of semi-permanent members who would have a greater say on agenda-setting, thus creating a legitimate pathway to potential permanent membership without requiring a complete overhaul of the Charter immediately.
- **Differentiated Veto Mechanism:** To mitigate the paralysis caused by the P5 veto, a new mechanism could be introduced where a veto on a resolution addressing genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity could be overridden.
 - This "differentiated veto" would require a supermajority vote in the General Assembly, such as two-thirds of all member states, to suspend the veto for that specific resolution.
 - This would ensure that the UN is not rendered impotent in the face of mass atrocities while still preserving the P5's core power in other areas of international relations.
- **Financial Reform and Diversification:** The current funding model, which is heavily reliant on a few major powers, must be diversified to ensure the UN's financial independence and reduce political leverage.
 - This could involve introducing an internationally levied "solidarity tax" on specific global transactions, such as financial speculation or carbon emissions.
 - The funds would be managed in a transparent trust, dedicated to core UN operations and peacekeeping missions, thus establishing a sustainable and equitable financial foundation for the organization that is not beholden to a handful of donors.
- **Overhaul of Bureaucratic and Administrative Structures:** A top-to-bottom administrative and management overhaul is needed to create a more agile, transparent, and responsive UN.
 - This includes decentralizing decision-making authority from New York headquarters to regional hubs, streamlining the overlapping mandates of various agencies, and implementing a robust, independent performance evaluation system for all senior officials.

- A strict code of conduct and a new, independent oversight body with the authority to investigate and prosecute corruption and misconduct, including among peacekeepers, would restore trust and accountability.
- **Enhanced Role of Global South in Agenda-Setting:** The UN can create issue-specific representative forums where the Global South collectively contributes to the agenda before it reaches the General Assembly or Security Council.
 - Such pre-decision consultative platforms would institutionalize inclusivity in climate, trade, digital governance, and health security debates.
 - It prevents domination by developed nations and integrates diverse developmental perspectives. By ensuring agenda parity, this reform promotes equitable norm-setting. It strengthens the UN's universal mandate.
- **Strengthening Accountability and Transparency Mechanisms:** Reforms must establish an independent oversight body within the UN to evaluate effectiveness, spending, and fairness in decision-making.
 - **Mandatory performance reviews of peacekeeping operations**, humanitarian interventions, and sanctions regimes will curb misuse and inefficiency.
 - Greater financial transparency in voluntary contributions can reduce donor-driven biases.
 - By enhancing accountability, the UN can rebuild credibility and trust among smaller nations. This ensures decisions are more rule-based than power-based.

Conclusion:

As **Kofi Annan (Former UN Secretary General)** said **“I firmly believe that the council should be reformed: it cannot continue as it is. The world has changed and the UN should change and adapt”**. The United Nations stands at a historic crossroads, where **reform is no longer optional but essential for its relevance and legitimacy**. By embracing inclusivity, accountability, and adaptability, it can transform into a truly representative global institution. India's proactive engagement offers a pathway to bridge divides and amplify the voices of the Global South.

Drishti Mains Question:

In the light of rising multipolarity and emerging powers, discuss how the UN can balance representation and decision-making authority among developed and developing nations.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

With reference to the “United Nations Credentials Committee”, consider the following statements: (2022)

1. It is a committee set up by the UN Security Council and works under its supervision.
2. It traditionally meets in March, June and September every year
3. It assesses the credentials of all UN members before submitting a report to the General Assembly for approval.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (2022)

- (a) 3 only
- (b) 1 and 3
- (c) 2 and 3
- (d) 1 and 2

Ans: (a)

Q. With reference to the United Nations, consider the following statements: (2009)

1. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN consists of 24 member States.
2. It is elected by a 2/3rd majority of the General Assembly for a 3-year term.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (b)

Mains:

Q. What are the main functions of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)? Explain different functional commissions attached to it. (2017)

Q. Discuss the impediments India is facing in its pursuit of a permanent seat in the UN Security Council (2015)

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