

NEXT IAS

**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**Reforming the United
Nations: Path Forward**

www.nextias.com

REFORMING THE UNITED NATIONS: PATH FORWARD

Context

- India has urged for urgent reforms to the UN Security Council as the United Nations approaches its 80th anniversary next year, emphasizing the need to expand both its permanent and non-permanent categories to manage current global conflicts more effectively.

About the United Nations (UN)

- It was, along with its specialised agencies, funds and programmes, founded in 1945 to prevent another global conflagration like World War II by upholding the sovereign equality of all nations subscribing to the principle of collective security.
 - ♦ The main organisation came into being in January 1942 after signing the Declaration of the United Nations and endorsed the Atlantic Charter of 1941, which in turn enshrined the war aims of the United States and the United Kingdom.
- It coordinates its work with the funds, programmes, specialised agencies, and other organisations of the UN System.
- Mission: To maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations, achieve international cooperation, and be a centre for harmonising the actions of nations.

Member States of United Nations

- The UN's Membership has grown from the original 51 Member States in 1945 to the current 193 Member States.
- All UN Member States are members of the General Assembly.
 - ♦ States are admitted to membership by a decision of the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council.

Main Bodies:

- United Nations General Assembly;
- United Nations Security Council;
- United Nations Economic and Social Council;
- United Nations Trusteeship Council;
- International Court of Justice;
- UN Secretariat;

Challenges and Issues Ahead of UN

- Changing Global Dynamics: The global order is undergoing a dramatic shift with resurgent nationalism, protectionism, and the spectre of renewed interstate wars¹. The UN-led system is still the default option, but events in the 2020s are dealing a body blow.
- Security Council: The Security Council's permanent members, chosen by virtue of being 'winners' of World War II — the US, the UK, France, Russia, and later China — can hardly claim adequate representation of the world's leadership today.
 - ♦ The UNSC does not include a permanent member from the African, Australian, and South American continents, and the pillars of the multilateral order, such as the G-4 group of Brazil, India, Germany, and Japan, have been ignored for long.
- Controlling power structures and continuing privilege: The World Bank is always headed by an American citizen; 'Europe' (Western Europe, in practice) gets to nominate the head of the IMF that was established by the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference at Bretton Woods in 1944.
 - ♦ Currently, the percentage voting rights for, say, the original BRICS members (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) are 2.22, 2.59, 2.63, 6.08 and 0.63.
 - ♦ The U.S. alone commands 16.5; add to it the votes of the U.K. (4.03), Germany (5.31) and the rest of the G-7 that tends to vote with the U.S., and that percentage approaches 30.

- Im-balance of Power: The composition of the Council also gives undue weightage to the balance of power of those days.
 - ♦ Europe, for instance, which accounts for barely 5% of the world's population, still controls 33% of the seats in any given year (and that does not count Russia, another European power).
- Peacekeeping and Conflict Resolution: The UN's peacekeeping and conflict resolution efforts are often hampered by political disagreements among member states, lack of resources, and complex and evolving conflict dynamics.
 - ♦ It has been criticised that Conflicts like those in Sudan, Syria, Myanmar go largely unchecked at the UN.
 - ♦ Some countries and non-state actors benefit from the conflict economy. They launder money, sell arms, supply fuel and exploit natural resources.
 - ♦ Whereas in the past the UN has played an important role in international diplomacy over the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and the Middle East.
- Humanitarian Crises: The UN is often called upon to respond to humanitarian crises, including those caused by conflicts, natural disasters, and pandemics.
 - ♦ These crises pose significant challenges in terms of logistics, funding, and coordination.
- India's contribution & representation: Opportunities are denied to other states such as India, which by its sheer size of population, share of the world economy, or contributions in kind to the UN (through participation in peacekeeping operations, for example) have helped shape the evolution of world affairs in the seven decades since the organisation was born.
- Climate Change: The UN has added new challenges, such as climate change, to its initial goals of safeguarding peace, protecting human rights, establishing the framework for international justice, and promoting economic and social progress.
 - ♦ However, the UN's efforts to address climate change have been hampered by a lack of consensus among member states.
- Development Challenges: The UN faces significant challenges in promoting sustainable development and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
 - ♦ These challenges include poverty eradication, reducing inequality, improving health and education, and promoting economic growth.

Key Areas of Reforms

- The UN reform agenda centres around three key areas: development, management, and peace and security.
- Development Reform: The 2030 Agenda requires bold changes to the UN development system for the emergence of a new generation of country teams, centred on a strategic UN Development Assistance Framework and led by an impartial, independent, and empowered resident coordinator.
- Management Reform: This involves simplifying processes, working toward gender parity, streamlining human resources procedures, and generally creating a more efficient organisation.
- Peace and Security Reform: This involves restructuring peace and security operations to better meet modern-day challenges.
- Security Council Reforms: The Security Council's permanent members can hardly claim adequate representation of the world's leadership today.
 - ♦ The UNSC does not include a permanent member from the African, Australian, and South American continents, and the pillars of the multilateral order, such as the G-4 group of Brazil, India, Germany, and Japan, have been ignored for long.
 - ♦ Other, more representative options exist, and that has been the crux of the battle for change.

India's Role in UN Reforms

- India has been at the forefront of demanding reform in the UN, particularly its principal organ, the Security Council, for decades.
- India's Permanent Representative at the UN, speaking at the Intergovernmental Negotiations on Security Council Reform, stressed that 'equity' must be the cornerstone of global efforts to reform the 15-nation UN body.

India's Role in the Governance of Global South

- India has been at the forefront of demanding reform in the UN, particularly its principal organ, the Security Council, for decades.
- India has been at the forefront during the UN's tumultuous years of struggle against colonialism and apartheid.
- India's status as a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 cemented its position within the UN system as a leading advocate of the concerns and aspirations of developing countries and the creation of a more equitable international economic and political order.

Feasibility of Reforms

- Demanding reforms is not beneficial for 'all': The reform demanding states perceive that they deserve a place on the Security Council, and especially the countries which believe their status in the world ought to be recognised as being in no way inferior to the existing permanent members.
 - ♦ For example, the small countries that make up more than half the UN's membership accept that reality and are content to compete occasionally for a two-year non-permanent seat on the Council.
- Difficulties in bringing amendments: Part of the problem is the bar to amending the UN Charter has been set rather high.
 - ♦ Any amendment requires a two-thirds majority of the overall membership, in other words 129 of the 193 states in the General Assembly, and would further have to be ratified by two-thirds of the member states.
 - ♦ The only possibility that has any chance of passing is that it will either persuade two-thirds of the UN member-states to support it and not attract the opposition of any of the existing permanent five, or even that of a powerful U.S. Senator who could block ratification in Washington.
- Replacing the UN System: The organisations and groupings outside the UN, like China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), OECD, Quad etc are all ad hoc and tend to serve limited interests rather than universal values.
 - ♦ Some function as clubs (such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the European Union, G-7, G-20, and the World Economic Forum). Others are limited alliances envisaged as maintaining regional security (such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization).
 - ♦ Without global treaties and legal obligations binding them, they are essentially only as effective as their last summit.

Conclusion

- The UN has played a pivotal role in maintaining global order and peace. However, the changing dynamics of the world order and the rise of new powers necessitate a reevaluation and reform of the UN system. The UN must adapt to these changes to continue to effectively fulfil its mandate in the 21st century.
- The UN must adapt to these changes to continue to effectively fulfil its mandate in the 21st century. The success of these reforms could pave the way for a more equitable and effective UN, better equipped to address the challenges of the modern world.

Mains Practice Question

[Q] Do you think that there is a need to reform in the United Nations (UN) in the current geopolitical situation? How does it affect India's interest?

