

United Nations-Role and Future

POINTS TO DEVELOP 1. UN was born more than 60 years ago.

UN role in conflict resolution and socio-economic intervention, and its aim is to save the world from war.

Some of its successful actions, and some of its failures.

Most of its failures arose in trying to enforce peace in conflicts within nations. Causes.

Many of its successes are on the socio-economic front.

Impact of changes in world order on the role of UN and the need for that UN to reinvent itself.

7. The UN needs reform, but it remains the best arbiter of world peace.

More than fifty years ago many nations of the world, conscious of both their global responsibilities and the ever-looming threat of war, got together and pledged to free mankind from the ravages of war. Fifty nations joined hands and took an oath to abide by a charter signed by these countries on June 26, 1945. And so the UN was born as a successor to the largely powerless League of Nations. The number of the members of the UN has grown from the initial 50 to today's figure of nearly 200.

The various roles of the UN can broadly be divided in two categories. The first group consists of activities like resolving conflicts, peace-making, and peacekeeping. The second group of activities are in the socio-economic front and also include welfare programmes. In this, the UN is active through its organizations like UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP and the UNHRC. The Economic and Social Council of the UN also coordinates as many as sixteen UN related intergovernmental agencies. Some of these specialised agencies are UNESCO, ILO, WHO, IBRD, IMF and WMO.

The United Nations, which succeeded the League of Nations, resolved to save subsequent generations from the ravages of war. Other main purposes of the UN include maintenance of international peace and security, prevention through collective measures of member-nations of threats to peace, peaceful negotiations of international disputes, international cooperating in social, economic, cultural and humanitarian fields.

In the recent past, though, certain changes have occurred in the world order which have impelled many nations to call for a redefinition of the role of the UN. Let us consider the role of the UN as it has been, the emerging world order, and finally the new definitions which might enhance UN role in the future.

One of the recent and most creditable achievements of the UN has been its mission in Cambodia. The UN won laurels for itself and successfully supervised the elections and establishment of a democratic government in Cambodia. But of late some of its peacekeeping operations have not met with much success and questions have been raised regarding the future functioning of the UN.

The Arab-Israeli peace accords as well as the establishment of a multiracial democratic constitution in South Africa have taken place mostly outside the framework of the UN.

The UN-peacekeeping operations, in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia, for example, have met with little success. In fact, the UN has had to withdraw from Somalia, leaving behind chaos. Faith in the UN has been receding and its reputation as a peacemaker and peacekeeper has suffered serious setbacks due to its inability to prevent bloodshed. The UN-observed elections in Angola were soon annulled by renewal of fighting. Later negotiations, though observed and encouraged by the UN, have largely taken place through efforts of the two warring factions. The peacekeeping operations to end the Liberian civil war did not see UN participation. Clashes between rival mujahedeen groups in Afghanistan incapacitated the UN, which anyway was just playing a mediatory role in the Afghan crisis.

The United Nations, when established, was not formed with the intention to enforce peace in civil war situations. Recently though, it finds itself increasingly involved in such situations. Some of these situations are further compounded by across-the border support to warring factions in a civil war. In the case of Cyprus, for example, Turkish troops have been stationed in the northern portion under Turkey. The UN has been helpless for over 20 years in this situation, as in the incident of NATO's assault on Kosovo. Despite its vehement protests NATO, backed by the US, continued with its attack. Such incidents call into question the UN's relevance and effectiveness in today's world. But the reason does not lie solely in the UN's incapacity to deal with this new trend of internal disputes. The UN suffers from a gross lack of funds and absence of a standing forces.

In contrast, the UN has been very active and successful on the socio-economic front. It has provided adequate assistance, both financial and

otherwise, in several famine and other disaster-affected areas. UN organizations have been very active in controlling diseases and helping the economies of developing countries.

Certain changes have also occurred in the world order. The end of the cold war has entirely redefined international politics. One can perhaps for the first time think of universal world order. The United Nations itself has grown to over 190 members. The USA has emerged as the dominant military and economic power. The East-West axis has now been replaced by a North – South axis. Within the South itself, sharp economic cooperation. Democratization, economic liberalisation and market economics have nevertheless also affected political stability and led to turmoil in certain states. In this new context, it is quite clear that a single nation cannot emerge as a dominant power. The only viable way in which global participation and cooperation can be ensured depends on the emergence of the UN as truly international body with increased participation of nations from the South.

But why the need to revamp the United Nations? The main issue which has prompted the restructuring debate is the permanent membership and the attached veto power. The effective participation of the UN has often been hindered because clashes of interests have often led to vetoes being moved by one or more of the five permanent members of the Security Council. These are the USA, China, Russia, France and UK, many member nations feel that the Security Council and the United Nations have been reduced to an instrument in service of these handful of countries especially the US. This US-dominance trend has been severely criticized. Precedence awarded to West-dominating issues has resulted in a sense of bias and the very purpose of a 'United' Nations has become suspect. Amongst the developed nations. Germany and Japan have been consistently striving for a permanent seat in the Security Council. Their contentions rest on their large and powerful economies and their large monetary contributions on UN operations. India has also staked a claim to a permanent seats, basing it on regular and large Indian participation in UN operations and on its being a representative from South Asia. India's large economy also backs its claim.

Demands from certain other sections have been made to open up and modify the original UN charter. While certain demands, like the removal of the 'enemy state clause' from the charter, are justifiable, is there really a need to completely redefine the UN? On the contrary, the United Nations, with probably a few modifications, has now the potential to emerge as the best and most efficient establishment promoting peace, security and development.

To a large extent, some of the most developed nations of the world are to be blamed for the ineffectiveness of the UN in dealing with conflicts. Many of these nations, during the cold war years, have encouraged and indulged in weapon supplies to developing nations. It is these very weapons which, in many cases, have been used against UN- peacekeepers, forcing them into inactivity. The second biggest threat to world peace comes from the nuclear arsenals of many nations of the world.

Steps for increasing the efficiency of and decreasing corruption in the UN have simultaneously to be coupled with nuclear disarmament and participation of third world nations. Only then can lasting peace be achieved. The UN is still our safest institution and the best arbiter of world peace, and we should not allow it to disintegrate.