

UN Reforms: Challenges and Imperatives for India

Alok Kumar Gupta

Introduction

Change is the only constant phenomenon on earth. Time changes so the context of an individual, institution, and organization also changes. Global politics and governance are no exception to this rule. Since the capacities and capabilities of the nation-states of the world have undergone a change over last 75 years, the inter-national relations too have also undergone tremendous change. It is the dynamics of ever-changing capabilities, capacities and nature of individual nation-states on the globe and the dynamics of inter-state relations that has a great bearing upon the nature, structure, functions and power of the multilateral and bilateral organizations. United Nations is one such multilateral inter-governmental organization that came into existence on the ruins of the League of Nations after the Second World War. United Nations Organizations (UNO) was brought into existence with allied specialised agencies to make the global governance better and effective, so that the inter-state conflicts are resolved amicably through negotiations and discussions and there is international peace and security. However, the structure, power and functions which were envisaged in the then world had different context; and the contemporary context is different in many ways and in many senses.

Science and technology too have undergone a sea change. Those days it reduced the time to travel and brought countries of the world nearer to each other. Contemporary world is such where it is not only distance that stands reduced, rather it has brought unbelievable changes the way we communicate in real time and that too face to face. Change, which is inevitable is now obvious in almost all walks of and individual's as well as every nation-state's life. Today, most nation-states are cooperating amidst the existence of number of conflicts between or among them. Economic imperatives have been forcing them towards economic engagement in spite of border and trade related disputes. Military or hard diplomacy has given way to economic diplomacy; yet countries of the world are amassing technologically advanced weapons

alongside wealth. Changes are countless and endless as it is an on-going process. Thus, 21st century is tremendously different from the 20th century with different problems and realities that the mankind is faced with.

Under such circumstances role and relevance of UNO too have undergone change and requires to be revisited. UNO too requires to be reformed in all its aspects, to sustain its role and relevance towards minimization of conflict and maximization of cooperation among nation-states of the world. Though most members of UNO wish for injecting reform in the UNO, but they differ on the ways, means and type of reforms. It is quite obvious that every state in the international system would try to promote and protect their own national interests while advocating for reforms of this multilateral body. Hence, they also differ in their approach towards the reform of UNO. However, the fact remains, that this 75-year-old organization is in serious need of reform. It is in this context that this paper intends to decipher the challenges and imperatives for India towards reforming the UNO, as India too has been aspiring for long, a permanent seat at security council.

Why India must Strongly Advocate for Reform?

Contemporary India has a strong global personality of its own as it has come a long way in terms of achieving economic, military, political, social and cultural modernization. India, today has considerable and notable presence on the globe as well as within the comity of nations. India has many contributions towards achieving international peace and security. India's contributions to UN Peace Keeping Forces have been acknowledged at the global level. It has played considerable role through humanitarian interventions in different parts of the world whenever the need has arisen. It has been the voice of Third World countries for long, and even today the group is awaiting leadership role from India. India has achieved fair amount of scientific prowess and in the field of technology too has earned many accolades. It is one of the fastest growing economies alongside being the fourth largest economy, or third largest economy as it differs on different counts.

Most recently India demonstrated its global leadership amidst COVID-19 driven Pandemic and has been able to vaccinate nearly 70% of its population. It also could produce a vaccine (Covaxin) of its own which is gradually being accorded recognition by different countries of the world. India also demonstrated its capabilities in space science and ability to fight in space through 'Mission Shakti'.

Today, India like many other countries of the world has been facing new problems such as terrorism, proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction in its proximity, pandemics, climate crisis and related disasters, cyber-security and cyber-crime, poverty and a hostile neighbourhood. Challenges are such which India alone would be unable to address and resolve; hence an imperative of multilateral interventions becomes necessary. UNO being an epitome of multilateral world order is much needed to deal with such global and regional issues.

These achievements are to name but a few that have elevated India in the global power league and is now being accommodated on high table of the major powers of the world. Thus, India has come a long way through its journey. 21st century India is drastically different and ahead of 20th century India. This makes it imperative that India must strongly advocate for the reform of UNO as its own inclusion into the Security Council is not only a necessity but also need of the contemporary world. However, road to reform of UNO is full of challenges which requires to be addressed by India if it wishes to give due shape to the multilateral organization.

Reform of UNO

Nature and scale of global challenges have undergone sea change over the last century. Contemporary world has thrown testing challenges before UN and other international institutions and international regimes. Hence, changing patterns of conflict and humanitarian crisis make it imperative to make UN an agile body. When the world leaders are making efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it requires collective commitment and meaningful action. Global warming with consequent Climate Change has further necessitated the reform of UN and make it more responsible for security and peace in the world, by enforcing commitment and discipline on nation-states of the world. Following are some of the major and immediate changes that are needed at earliest:

(i) Need to Expand Security Council:

UNO is a huge inter-governmental organization which requires to be reformed both in terms of its structure as well as functions. United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is the main executive body with major responsibility of maintaining international peace and security. It consists of five permanent members with veto powers and 10 non-permanent members that are elected for a term of two years on rotation basis from

different continents. Security Council requires to be reformed and expanded for several reasons such as:

Firstly, the permanent members thus far have been using their veto powers largely as an instrument to shore up their own national, regional, international and geopolitical interests. While using veto they have been found least concerned about the disastrous consequences of their act on even the victims of armed conflict, for example in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan in the recent past.

Secondly, the membership of the SC is not balanced in terms of representing the distribution of military and economic power as well as in terms of geographical representation. Therefore, it requires to be expanded to provide balance representation to the nation-states on the globe in terms of their continental, economic, and military personality and groups.

Thirdly, there has been long overdue demand from the so-called Group of 4 (G4) countries: India, Germany, Brazil and Japan, that they be provided permanent seat on the SC. This becomes essential in view of rise of many major powers on the globe, and also replacing the erstwhile major powers.

(ii) Need to Make General Assembly Increasingly Effective:

United National General Assembly (UNGA) is very apt at passing resolutions praising or condemning particular acts of states. However, all its resolutions are in the form of non-binding recommendations. This has largely made the UNGA in particular and UN in general an ineffective body. This has always been an issue as to how to give more biting power to UNGA and make its resolutions more effective through proper implementations of the same.

(iii) Need to Enhance Role of Associated Bodies:

There are number of associated or allied organizations to UNO. Most of these organizations are undermined in terms of their role and functions. As for example, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) has often been claimed to have been subjugated or overshadowed by other multilateral organizations like International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.

(iv) Need for Financial Power:

UNO has always been expected to deliver more than the capacity that it has been accorded with. It has to perform more than it has been paid

for since its inception. It has less money and many times the member countries do not even pay their commitments on time. Hence, it suffers from a permanent financial crisis. UN budget is full of constraints and ineffectiveness. Therefore, the global community requires to hammer out ways to provide more and adequate financial power and means to UNO.

(v) Need to Make Peacekeeping Operations Meaningful:

UNO has been performing the functions of peace-keeping, peace-making and peace-building in different regions of conflict. Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon of human existence on earth both between states and among communities. UN has been prohibited from using force to maintain peace and this has largely made it ineffective, even though it has made due interventions in most conflict-ridden communities and areas. Therefore, there is need to reform UNO in the direction of providing standing force of its own, and provide with power to use force through adequate structural reforms. Only then the peace keeping operations of UN would be more effective and meaningful, otherwise it is more a wastage of resources.

Challenges to India's Inclusion in Security Council

India has been one of the founding members of UNO. However, India has been playing an active role at the global level both with and without the UNO. India has been contributing to peace-keeping operations on regular basis. India has also been participating in UNGA and UNSC as per need and occasion. On the other hand, even without UN India had multilateral development agenda of its own through instrumentalities such as Non-aligned Movement, decolonization, disarmament of both conventional and weapons of mass destruction, establishment of New International Economic Order, International Solar Grid and One World Movement-LIFE on Climate Change to the world, in the more recent times are to name but a few. India mobilised immense political support globally of its advocacy and has been participating towards shaping the global discourse since its existence to till date. Hence, India has emerged as strong advocate of UN reforms. Like former UN Secretary General, India too has adopted the stand that no reform of the UNO would be completed without reforming the UNSC. Hence, India has been a great champion of equitable representation and expansion of the UNSC. However, there are number of challenges towards reforming the UNSC.

Brazil, India, Germany and Japan are four countries which support each other's bids for permanent seats on the UNSC. G-4's primary aim is the permanent member seats on the SC for G-4 plus two African Nation. G-4 nations were even willing to temporarily forgo veto power if granted permanent seat at UNSC. The veto power is more an anachronism in this age. However, G-4's bids are often opposed by the "Uniting for Consensus" movement, and particularly their economic competitors or political rivals.

"Uniting for Consensus" (UFC) is nicknamed as the "Coffee Club" and was developed in 1995 to oppose expansion of permanent seats in the UNSC, under the leadership of Italy, with Pakistan, Mexico and Egypt. Its main demand has been a consensus before any decision is reached on the form and size of the SC. It desires to expand non-permanent seats. Spain, Argentina, Turkey, Canada, South Korea later joined the Group. Presently the group has more than 50 members.

UK and France have backed the G-4's bid. Japan has support from USA and UK. All Permanent i.e., P-5 have supported India's bid, however China's support is conditional. China says it will support India if, India did not associate its bid with Japan. Japan's bid is opposed by China and South Korea. Their argument is that Japan still needs to make additional atonement for war crimes committed during World War II. Namibia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Poland, Norway, Denmark, Spain, Italy, Netherlands is opposing Germany's bid. Colombia, Argentina, and Mexico are opposing Brazil's bid. Pakistan is opposing India's bid. Therefore, as of now it seems to be most challenging aspect of UN reforms because the P-5 are generally opposed to strengthening the institutions and use their power to stop any significant change within the UN system.

Imperatives for India

Given above combination and permutations of support to India's bid for permanent seat at UNSC, India needs to hone its diplomacy and rope-in the most able diplomats to the task of hammering consensus on India's bid. India has been once again elected to non-permanent seat of UNSC in June 2020. This was a diplomatic triumph as it was the lone contestant for the Asia-Pacific seat. Therefore, given India's strong international personality in the contemporary world India could gear-up itself towards global champion of UNSC reform as it is the key to all other reforms within the UN system. India must develop a broader vision of reforming the UN. The political and economic architecture of

the global order have undergone tremendous changes since the UN was conceived in the aftermath of World War II. India must understand that UN today is not reflecting the current trajectory, especially in the strategic and economic arenas. 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has further posed challenges before the UN system. Climate change as discussed above is another biggest problem that the mankind is faced with. Amidst all such global issues India needs to groom itself and gear-up to assume global leadership role through the instrumentality of UNO and other multilateral organizations.

UNO was conceived with an idea to groom it into 'World State'. Theoretical position is that 'World State' could come into existence through two ways: first, through a democratic means of developing inter-governmental organization like UNO and making it increasingly powerful and rule-oriented; secondly, through conquest wherein the most powerful states on the globe may emerge as 'world state' like USA or erstwhile Russia. However, the second proposition being undemocratic would not be acceptable to anyone, and would not sustain for long as now also number of challenges have emerged both from within the USA system and from outside like China and Russia, to power and status of USA. Therefore, the most feasible and viable mechanism is the democratic processes of evolving a 'world state' by strengthening UNO and its agencies.

India could provide strong leadership to such an advocacy through its clout within the third world countries. India could prepare a blue-print of UN reforms including a bicameral legislature, retaining the UN Secretary General and other office bearers. India could also evolve mechanism for ensuring permanent financial power through imposition of 'world tax' on international trade and businesses along with other inter-governmental and inter-state activities and transactions.

Conclusion

UNO is faced with new and unprecedented challenges in the contemporary world. Hence, this multilateral framework requires an overhauling to make it relevant in the context of present time and coming future. It did play a considerable role, yet may be its performance was not up to the mark. The lessons that the world community may have learned out of the functioning of the multilateral framework, based on that the reform must be initiated to make it increasingly effective, and truly representative of the global community, so that it evolves into a world state and be able to make collective response to global

humanitarian issues, and achieve the goal of international peace and security. India has a world to win through the UN reforms, provided India gears-up itself into that direction.

References

- [1] “UN Reform” *The World Campaign*, Available on: <https://betterworldcampaign.org/un-101/un-reform/>
- [2] “United to Reform”, *United Nations*, Available at: <https://reform.un.org>
- [3] “Reform of the United Nations”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, Available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/un/pamph96/reform.html>
- [4] “The Structural Reform of the UN”, Available at: [file:///C:/Users/hp/Downloads/http___www.aphref.aph.gov.au_house_committee_jfadt_u_nations_unchap9%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/hp/Downloads/http___www.aphref.aph.gov.au_house_committee_jfadt_u_nations_unchap9%20(1).pdf)
- [5] “UN Reform and Innovation”, *United Nations Foundation*, Available at: https://unfoundation.org/what-we-do/issues/un-reform-and-innovation/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAhf2MBhDNARIsAKXU5GQYpL9O5aB3GTnXFlypcngTShiy_VeJ4JnHJukd3g7Zjogzl5qUh3AaAlQqEALw_wcB
- [6] “A push for reform: On UN reforms”, *The Hindu*, September 18, 2020. Available at: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/a-push-for-reform-the-hindu-editorial-on-un-reforms/article32633648.ece>
- [7] “Reform of the United Nations”, *Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of the Germany to the United Nations*, Available at: <https://new-york-un.diplo.de/un-en/whatwedo/reform-of-the-united-nations/949390>
- [8] “UN Reform” *Global Policy Forum*, Available at: <https://archive.globalpolicy.org/un-reform.html>