

# Democracy, Security and UN Reforms

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## Introduction

The issue of UN reforms has become more pertinent as several developments in the 21st century are posing serious threat to world peace and security and the UN is not responding to any of these crises or conflicting situations. Though the UN had been introduced in the mid-20th century primarily to maintain world peace and security, the changing nature of security issues and changing equations of power relations are making the UN unsuitable for the required responsibility. In the sphere of global politics, the United Nations reflects the realities of International Politics. The political and economic divisions of the international system are reflected in the voting arrangements of the Security Council, the blocs and cleavages of the General Assembly, the diverse views within the Secretariat, the differences at global conferences, and in the financial and budgetary processes. The establishment of the UN at the end of the Second World War was entwined with the outcome of the Second World War and with the failure of the League of Nations which had little approval from its member states as it was unable to prevent the Second World War. By allowing a dialogue between its members, and by holding consultations, the United Nations has become an apparatus for governments to find areas of consensus and collectively resolve problematic issues and concerns. Thus UN consists of various independent, decentralized organizations and programs, each with its own bylaws, memberships, structure and budget. Moreover, most of its resources have been dedicated towards progressing the Charter's pledge to "promote higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development". The development efforts of the UN are intensely impacting the lives and well-being of millions of people throughout the world<sup>1</sup>.

It is quite ironic that when the whole world is celebrating the International Democracy Day 2021 to review the state of Democracy in the world and to make people aware of the relevance of democracy equal rights, freedom and human rights, the story of Afghanistan after

the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 reflects clear violation of human rights including the minority rights and women dignity. Most of the democratic values like freedom, respect for human rights are embodied in the Declaration of Human Rights and also developed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. There is a clear link between Democracy and Human Rights enshrined in the article 21(3) of Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>2</sup>The International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also covers the rights of minorities and disabled. It aims to ensure equal social, political and economic rights to all. “Democracy is as much a process as a goal, and only with the full participation of and support by the international community, national governing bodies, civil society and individuals, can the ideal of democracy be made into a reality to be enjoyed by everyone, everywhere,” reads the official website of the UN.<sup>3</sup>

These rights can be ensured only in democratic states with stable and sovereign status. In any authoritarian, undemocratic, weak political system with poverty, hunger and inequalities can not ensure good governance, elections, and civil society which are essential elements of democracy. As Charles W. Pickering says- “A healthy democracy requires a decent society; it requires that we are honourable, generous, tolerant and respectful”.

Democracy is defined as the government of the people, for the people and by the people but in undemocratic regimes people or individuals have no say and they are completely suppressed. In undemocratic regimes people can neither demand their rights nor enjoy any freedom or liberty. One of the reasons for rejection of these principles of democracy by some authoritarian and democratic systems is that they consider their traditional norms and values as the basis of their political system. They perceive western democratic values as antithetical to their traditions. For instance, Islamic terrorists/Jihadis oppose any kind of rights to women or minorities as they consider them as antithetical to their values. They not only pose a threat to the democratic values to their own country but also to the rest of the world as they aim to islamisation of the whole world. The fact that the US, the most powerful and democratic country in the world failed to eliminate terrorist outfits completely from Afghanistan and withdrew after 20 years of rigorous involvement reflects the cultural difference between western democratic and non-western Islamic countries. The abstention of the UN in response to the violent activities of Taliban in Afghanistan questions the credibility and effectiveness of the UN. It appears that in the present context the

UN should be reformed to deal with newly emerging threats which are posing serious threats to world peace and security.

The outbreak of Covid19 and spread of Pandemic all over the world also raised the question about UN credibility. The Covid Pandemic was a global problem which should have been dealt with globally. However, not even a single UN meeting had taken place to respond to the problem. Throughout the pandemic, the world looked so fragmented, every country was so isolated and on its own which really questions the credibility of global institutions like WHO. The late warning of WHO to the world which caused widespread pandemic leading to severe socio-economic losses apart from health also makes it pertinent to have some effective arrangement to deal with such a crisis in future. It is very clear that some of the undemocratic regimes like China are posing a serious threat to world peace and security and the UN is absolutely unfunctional. The reason is that China being the permanent member of the UN, having influence on the majority of Afro-Asian countries in the UN, Influence their behaviour and paralyse the functioning of the UN. Therefore, China is using the UN for its own interest at the cost of international peace and security.

Covid 19 had implicated human rights so severely all over the world that it became quite detrimental to the democratic values. For instance, various countries tried to control the flow of information and curbed the freedom of press and the role of civil society. Various arrests, detentions and prosecution of health workers, doctors, journalists were penalised for disseminating false information. Surveillance activities increased. It increased widespread discontentment and increased authoritarianism in various countries. The gender based violence also surged due to socio-economic pressures during lockdowns. It increased socio-economic inequalities with no institution to address the challenge.<sup>4</sup>

In the post-cold war world when the US was enjoying the unipolar power position, there were various crises and conflicts which could not be responded to by the UN. The Kosovo crisis of March 1999, 9/11 attack on US of 2001, the US action against Afghanistan in 2001, and 2003 war in Iraq have made it apparent that fundamental reform of UN's decision-making structures and its operational framework is essential. These instances reveal that the United Nations has been unable to adhere to the ideal anticipated at the time of its origin. Maurice Bertrand has argued that the UN has played only a marginal role in the maintenance of peace and has only a restricted effect in resolving global economic and social problems. He points out that there is a lot of

glumness about the efficacy of the United Nations but there has also been mounting concern in its regeneration. He explores the question whether the U.N. can be reformed and responds in negative and argues that the UN is unable to repair its managerial and structural deficiencies. There are many obstacles in the path of its recovery such as dearth of coordination between agencies due to structural decentralization, experiments-resistant Secretariat, indulgence of Secretary General on political problems ignoring managerial and economic problems, pressure from all the countries for appointment of their nations in high positions of U.N. regardless of their qualifications and the infeasibility of alteration of the Charter due to the pursuance of differing interests by its member states<sup>5</sup>.

### **Reforming the Organization**

Given the scale of the core mission of United Nations, a gap between anticipations and performance of the organization is inexorable.<sup>6</sup> UN has evolved through a continuous process of change and reform. After the end of the Cold War, a debate regarding reform of the United Nations has emerged as a prominent concern despite the lack of consensus on those reforms. With the outpouring of activity in the early 1990s, the challenges confronting the UN have become blunt with “operations, hopes and expectations far exceeding the capabilities of the system as it is now constituted”.<sup>7</sup>

The debate can be comprehended in terms of two diverging camps. The first camp comprises of the members of the Non-Aligned Movement (primarily drawn from a group of developing countries) who were disconcerted by the re-emergence of the Security Council and their weakening influence in the organization. Therefore, they started pressed firmer than ever before for broadening opportunities for augmenting their partaking in the decision-making processes of the organization as well as for greater consultation in the Bretton Woods organizations which are largely dominated by the Western countries. The second camp comprises of the Western countries, most conspicuously the U.S.A. This camp criticized the UN for its lack of efficacy and advocated for more rationalized, transparent and cost-effective structures. The first camp believes that this efficacy argument is nothing but a covering under which the Western nations are trying to deploy UN as an instrument for fulfilment of their interests<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, it can be observed that though both the developed and developing countries are agreeing on the need for reforms, they are grounding their demands on two completely different principles of participation

and efficacy. While the developing nations on the one hand are concerned about increasing their participation, and making the U.N. more democratic and accountable, the developed nations on the other hand are underlining on making the UN more effective and cost-efficient by eradicating managerial shortcomings.

### **Institutional Reforms**

USA used its veto to prevent the re-election of the then Secretary-General Boutros-Ghalion 19 November 1996, on the ground that he proved himself incapable of restructuring the organization of the UN. Notwithstanding this, we can trace the first signs of efficacious rationalization and upgrading of the management and labour structures during the term of Former Secretary- General Boutros Ghali. In order to make the Secretariat cost efficient, 2500 positions were cut and yearly expenditure surges were frozen. A new Integrated Management Information System was introduced to assist networked, computer supported personnel, issue- and budget- administration. A new Performance Appraisal system was announced for better evaluation of individual performance. This gave a noteworthy incentive to the organization's human resource management, which is especially dependent on quality and motivation of the personnel. In 1994, the Office of Internal Oversight ,was created at the advice of the Secretary General and the General Assembly created Services(OIOS) headed by Inspector-General which subjected the UN to the internal review for the first time in its history<sup>9</sup>.

Kofi Annan, the successor of Boutros-Ghali, entered the office of Secretary General under an excessive burden to reform the organization. As early as March 1997, he was able to restructure the Secretariat, by handover of one of the five core tasks of the United Nations to each of the Departments as well as some of the subsidiary organs and programmes run by the Secretariat. Executive Committees were formed for each of the fields of Peace and Security, Economic and Social Issues, Humanitarian Affairs, and Development. The subject of Human Rights Protection was designated to cut across and touch upon all the other four areas. Kofi Annan brought a 'quiet revolution' in the UN by presenting a reform programme for the renewal of the U.N. in July 1997. However, the only issue missing from the list was reform of the Security Council<sup>10</sup>.

To usher in a new leadership and management culture, a Senior Management Group composed of 29 members was formulated as a

kind of cabinet chaired by the Secretary-General and composed of convenors of the executive committees and other senior managers of the U.N. system. A Strategic Planning Unit composed of five experts was established to function as the personal labour staff of the Secretary General for the purpose of predicting global trends and impending challenges. Some other vital reforms were the formation of a new Department for Disarmament and Arms Control in the Secretariat and firming of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights by its amalgamation into the UN centre for Human Rights. This reform package was rounded out by further reduction of the Secretariat's personnel by 1000 posts as well as a five percent reduction of the budget<sup>11</sup>.

Two significant recommendations of Kofi Annan were passed by the General Assembly in its Resolution 52/12B of 19 December 1997 passed two: first, the formation of the office of a Deputy Secretary General releasing the Secretary General of much of the managerial work and second, the conception of a Development Account into which the internal savings were to flow as a 'development dividend'. Some of the recommendations of Kofi Annan such as supplementary financing of the UN's running costs through a 'revolving credit fund', reduction of the Secretariat's workload through the automatic expiration of mandates that had not been formally renewed (the 'sunset clause') and the reintroduction of the original division of labour among the main bodies which would have reduced the influence of the General Assembly over the daily work schedule of the Secretariat<sup>12</sup> remained unimplemented.

Garies and Varwick in their analysis of the institutional reforms conclude that the Secretariat and its sub-bodies are disposed and skilled of significant reform in order to fine-tune their capabilities and capacities to the evolving challenges but the member states, in contrast lack the will and capacity to arrive at an agreement on those areas of reform for which their consensus is indispensable<sup>13</sup>.

## **Finance Reforms**

The only accomplishment with regard to finance reform that the member states can be attributed to was the restructuring of the contributions scale for the regular budget and the peacekeeping activities. After several years of distressing negotiations, a compromise solution was arrived at that took into consideration both the USA's wish to reduce its contributions and the realistic financial capacities of the undeveloped countries.<sup>14</sup> Garies and Varwick argue that though this agreement has had enduring effect on the equilibrium of the UN finances; but such a

settlement is an exception to the general trend being the member states' failure to reach compromises on the vital concerns of the future of the UN. A seamless example of this rule is the subject of the rejuvenation of the Security Council, which has been moving around unresolved for years<sup>15</sup>.

## **Reforming the Security Council**

The rejuvenation of the most powerful body of the UN i.e. Security Council constitutes one of the paramount challenges confronting the organization and can be beheld as a conclusive trial of its capability for inclusive reform of any kind. During the past few decades, it has become more and more probable that the Security Council will not only retort to mass violence, but will also respond with measures designed for protecting the civilians.<sup>16</sup> Bellamy AJ (2016) *The humanisation of security? Towards an international protection regime.*

Reform of the Security Council involves a modification to the Charter of the UN which necessitates endorsement by two-thirds of the members of the General Assembly and ratification of this vote by the Governments of two-thirds of the UN members, including the members of the Security Council.<sup>17</sup> With the emerging significance of the Security Council in the post-Cold war era, vigorous voices came both from significant financial contributors such as Japan and Germany as well as the Non-Aligned Movement for the alteration of Security Council's composition, decisional mechanisms and operating procedures. These efforts were unlike from the earlier initiatives since they intended not only at the increasing the number of non-permanent members but also advocating changes to the permanent member's circle<sup>18</sup>.

The benefits that accrue from the permanent membership of the Security Council are regarded unfitting in present times. The immense changes in international politics over the course of the last few decades such as the process of decolonization, the appearance of new states and the end of the Cold War have made the power distribution in the Security Council discordant with the new global order. The new global order is manifested in the emergence of new political groupings and new forms and centres of conflict. African and Latin American continents are not represented among the permanent members of the Security Council whereas the entire continent of Asia is represented by one country, i.e. the People's Republic of China<sup>19</sup>.

India put forward a resolution for the reform of the Security Council, which was passed by the General Assembly in November 1992. In the

resolution, it was emphasized that the 48th General Assembly should concern itself with a comprehensive discussion of this issue. Despite the fact that there is an extensive agreement on the need for reform of the Security Council and the recent years have seen a great amount of cooperation in the positions of various states, the realization of these reforms is nowhere in sight in the near future. This standoff is because of an unsettled matter, i.e. the question- who should be admitted as a permanent member?<sup>20</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

The nature of the challenges confronting the United Nations has altered considerably over the past few decades. The chief variable that contours the power that the UN exerts is the global distribution of power<sup>21</sup>. Throughout the major part of the twentieth century, the UN was constrained by the bipolar distribution of global power. The dawn of globalisation has contributed to restructuring of the working expertise of the United Nations. The process of globalisation limits the sovereign capacities of the nation's states and since the UN is the only universal organisation, it has to keep restructuring its approach, guiding principles and operational tools to respond to the challenges to collective security and human rights violations. The peak moment of power exerted by the UN emerged in the 1990s, and concurred with a moderately short-lived period of collaboration and settlement among P-5 states after the end of the Cold War. However, this left the UN crippledly reliant on on the lone enduring superpower i.e. the USA, producing the risk that hegemony of USA may make the UN as a sheer instrument of the foreign policy of USA. Nevertheless, the emergent tendency towards multipolarity was revealed most prominently, in the upsurge of China but also in the rising sway of countries such as India, Brazil and South Africa on the global politics. Although, a more balanced distribution of global power is expected to favour multilateralism and motivate states to rely more profoundly on collective security system provided by the United Nations. However, multipolarity might also lead to rising conflicts and uncertainty, making the task of international arbitration and conciliation more and more demanding.

Various reform processes have been started by the current UN Secretary-General António Guterres to successfully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>22</sup>. A consensus has been established by the member states to reorganise the United Nations development system. Although, comprehensive reforms of the organization are required, advances in working methods and practices can be initiated to begin



with the process of reforms, which we can hope to continue and gain more momentum in the future.

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## Notes

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