

General Assembly

Topic:

Reforming UN institutions to ensure resilience and to address the rise of unilateralism and global polarisation



I. Introduction

Unilateralism is defined as a nation's approach of acting without international consensus to pursue national interests. Said actions are increasingly seen as a significant driving factor of global polarisation and an undermining towards the United Nations' multilateral framework. While the UN Charter was created to promote collective, multilateral solutions, the rise of unilateral, self-centered policies—especially from more powerful states—have weakened the rules-based international order and heightens divides. By doing so, the organisation's core mission of promoting international cooperation and security is challenged. Furthermore, resurgences of nationalist ideology and deepening geopolitical rivalries have increasingly compromised trust in collective decision making and weakened compliance to international laws.

Major global challenges, including armed conflict, economic instability, climate change and technological disruption affect countries/cooperation on an international level. However, responses to these issues are often fractured and driven by individual, national interests. Within the United Nations, these divisions have led to institutional obstacles, doubts regarding legitimacy in representation, and decreasing confidence in the organisation's ability to resolve conflicts.

II. Definition of key terms

- **Resilience:** The ability of institutions to prevent, resist, absorb, adapt, respond and recover positively, efficiently and effectively when faced with a wide range of risks, while maintaining an acceptable level of functioning without compromising long-term prospects for sustainable development, human rights, peace and security.
- **Unilateralism:** An approach in international relations where a state acts in their own benefit, without considering the interests or support of others.
- **Global Polarisation:** Involves the concentration of attitudes at opposite extremes leading to a division of societies, populations and international actors.
- **Multilateralism:** Method of international cooperation where three or more countries work together to resolve global issues, guided by shared principles and rule based, inclusive decision making.
- **Institutional Reform:** Process of reviewing, restructuring, and updating state institutions or international bodies to enhance accountability, efficiency and compliance with rules.
- **Collective Security:** A principle that all nations possess equal legal status and rights under international law, regardless of political, economic, or military power.
- **Geopolitical Rivalry:** The intense competition between nations or blocs for power, influence, security, and economic advantage.
- **Global Governance:** System of international rules, institutions, and processes through which states and non-state actors manage transnational issues.

III. Background information

The United Nations was established in 1945 with an institutional framework intended to promote collective security, international cooperation and peaceful dispute resolution. This framework has contributed to the development of international legal norms, supported decolonisation processes, coordinated humanitarian assistance and facilitated peacekeeping and development efforts across regions. However, the structure of the UN has remained relatively unchanged since the post-Second World War period despite significant changes in global power and governance.

Reforming UN institutions has become a central focus as its 80th anniversary approaches. This focus has been driven by a need to enhance resilience against a backdrop of intense geopolitical competition, deep global polarisation and rising unilateralism. The UN is increasingly struggling to resolve and address major conflicts because of a crisis of multilateralism.

One of the many ongoing discussions is the future of the Security Council and a potential reform. Specifically, a reform proposal concerning the P5's ability to veto any resolution has received major support among the remaining members. Veto powers have remained a core obstacle and source of growing frustration. P5 powers have become a significant factor in corroding trust within the UN, particularly in the inability to prevent or resolve wars and conflicts, such as in Haiti, Palestine, Sudan and Ukraine.

Debates also include expanding participation and representation into the Security Council to enhance the council's effectiveness and legitimacy. The absence of African and

Latin-American representation reflects clear global power inequality as well as a lack of contribution for the five permanent members, especially from the United States. Although the previous administration was disposed to supporting the extension of permanent representation, this is not shared by the current administration.

States' lack of respect for international law in the international system plays a meaningful role in resolving some of the world's most pressing conflicts. Unilateral actions are undermining the UN Charter, international law and the multilateral trading system. Debates on interpretation of the UN Charter are increasing, using distorted reasoning to defend State actions. Many states, in particular, The UK, have pointed this out on multiple occasions.

IV. UN Treaties:

Charter of the United Nations: Created in 1945, after the Second World War, the Charter establishes the principles of collective security, sovereign equality and peaceful dispute resolution.

UN80 Initiative: Launched in 2025 to transform how the UN works, focusing on enhancing the agility, responsiveness and resilience of the UN system, incurring better and more inclusive decision making.

Pact for the Future: Adopted in 2024, this pact outlines actions to revive multilateralism, improve global governance and reaffirm the UN Charter.

Our Common Agenda: Since 2021, the Agenda has been a vision for the future of global cooperation, serving as a blueprint for the UN80 reforms, focusing on strengthening human rights, peace, and sustainable development.

Leadership for peace: A Security Council statement from 2024, to limit unilateralism by pushing for stronger compliance to international law and increased mediation.

UN 2.0: A framework proposed in 2026 to modernise UN operations by integrating data, innovation, and digital technology, reducing administrative division, and improving effectiveness

Regional Organization Partnerships: The UN is expanding formal partnerships with groups like the African Union, European Union, and ASEAN to strengthen regional resilience against unilateral actions and promote decentralised peacebuilding

V. Countries and groups involved

G4 Nations (Brazil, Germany, India and Japan): Fighting for permanent membership in the Security council, arguing that the current P5 structure (USA, China, Russia, UK and France) is outdated.

African Union: demands for two permanent seats with veto power for two African nations as well as non-permanent seating to reflect its 54 member states

L.69 Group (42 nations from Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, led by India): advocate for expanding both permanent and non-permanent seats to at least 25-26 members to rectify “historical injustices”, specifically for small island developing states.

ACT Group (26 nations, led by Switzerland): advocate for the Veto initiative, requiring permanent members to justify their vetoes before the General Assembly to limit unilateral obstruction.

BRICS+ (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, +):

USA: The formal withdrawal from the WHO in January 2026 is seen by many as a primary example of the unilateralism that the UN reforms are currently trying to mitigate. Backs the expansion of permanent seating if those countries are Japan, India or Germany.

Russia: Despite participating in the Pact for the Future, Russia remains the most critic of “interference” in state sovereignty, recently proposing amendments to limit the UN’s new digital and future generation mandates. Supports expansion that favors African and other developing nations but disagrees with perceived Western dominance.

China: Supports expansion for African and other developing nations however expresses discomfort with the possible Western dominance in the current structure, especially with influence from G4 nations (especially Japan and Germany).

UK/France: Support the bids from G4 and are in accord of expansion of the Security Council.

VI. Possible Solutions

Reforming the UN Security Council: To combat ineffectiveness and the lack of representation, several reforms are proposed,

- Increasing the UNSC to around 25-26 members, adding permanent and non-permanent seats for Africa and the G4 nations
- Veto restrictions/regulation such as:
 - Calling on permanent members (P5) to refrain from using veto powers in cases of mass atrocities,
 - Allowing a ‘supermajority’ of the General Assembly to override a Security Council veto,
 - Requiring any permanent member who casts a veto to publicly explain their reasoning before the General Assembly.

Enhancing Operational Resilience and Efficiency: Modernising the UN for the 21st century following the aims of the UN80 Initiative,

- Structural realignment and cuts with a 15% reduction to the 2026 core budget (potentially cutting 2,460 jobs) to streamline operation and enhance efficiency,
- Considering merging agencies with overlapping mandates (such as human rights and humanitarian action) to create a more unified structure,
- Addressing the liquidity crisis caused by a lack of member state payments by pushing for mandatory and timely contributions.

Addressing Global Polarisation and Unilateralism:

- Strengthening General Assembly authority by empowering the Assembly to act as a check on an ‘immobilized’ Security Council,
- Shifting towards greater collaboration with regional organisations, such as the African Union, to enhance the legitimacy of peace operations,
- Encouraging ‘minilateral’ treaties and flexible, topic specific coalitions to bypass deadlock on specific issues like AI regulation or climate change.

Improving Accountability and Legitimacy:

- Implementing stricter, independent reviews for bodies like the Human Rights Council
- Utilising AI to review resolutions and, according to the UN 2.0 agenda, implementing better data governance.

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