

THE UNITED NATIONS AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

The types and number of governmental and nongovernmental actors has increased immensely since the creation of UN in 1945. The states and the world both face new types of security threats also. All this demands a new kind of preparedness and governance. The UN is the most central of institutions of global governance and the best embodiment of international community. The present paper attempts to explain the meaning of global governance and highlights the unique position, contribution and role of UN in promoting the same.

The paper points out that the UN is the most universal and legitimate organization, the need is to restructure and reform it so that it can take on the challenges of 21st century.

Keywords: *Global Governance, NGO's role in global governance, Security threats, Terrorism, Sustainable Development, Challenges of 21st Century*

The world has undergone a tremendous change since the creation of the United Nations. The number of member states has increased four times and there exist a correspondingly greater number and proportion of non state actors. The diversity in the types of state and non state actors is also glaring today. The worrying part is that there has been a matching increase in the number, nature and types of threats to national security and world peace alike.

The security question today involves not just defusing and reducing national security threats but risk assessment and management and to be prepared to cope with strategic complexity and ambiguity. In such a scenario there is need to structure the institutions of international governance such as to make them more strong – so that they can endure external and internal shocks, resilient – so that they can re emerge when struck by any harmful shocks and flexible and adaptable – so that they can deal with the rapidly changing nature and source of threats.

To remain relevant and viable, international organizations and the values of multilateralism entrenched in them must be in accordance with 21st century principles of governance and legitimacy. They must be capable of addressing contemporary challenges effectively. They have to realize that twenty first century requires anticipatory rather than reactive solutions.

United Nations is the fulcrum of existing multilateral order. It remains the embodiment of the international community, the focus of international expectations and the locus of collective action. Although many a times it has failed the expectations of member states but it cannot be denied that its role has been laudable in easing many tensed situations also. Its contribution in socio economic and environmental spheres is huge.

Meaning of Global Governance

Global governance includes the totality of institutions, policies, rules, practices, norms, procedures, and initiatives by which states and their citizens or humanity as a whole try to bring more stability, predictability and order in the world by confronting transnational challenges—such as climate change and environmental degradation, nuclear proliferation, and terrorism—which are beyond the capacity of a single state to solve. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stressed on the need of collective action to face “problems without passports.” Global governance is also the consequence of the sheer growth in numbers and importance of non state entities, which also have assumed new and proactive roles. Civil society actors often participate as advocates, activists, and also as policymakers. They are actively involved in shaping norms, laws, and policies at all levels of governance. Their objections and policy recommendations have definite consequences in the governmental and intergovernmental allocation of resources and the political, military, and economic actions.

The modern world is governed by an ambiguous medley of authority that is dispersed. In particular, the intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) that collectively underpin global governance are not only insufficient in number but are inadequately resourced, lack the requisite policy authority and resource-mobilization capacity, and sometimes are incoherent in their

separate policies and philosophies. Despite its shortcomings, however, the United Nations is the most universal and legitimate organization with the greatest potential for expansion.

Importance of UN

Financial, political and moral rebalancing is currently going on in the global system. From 2000 to 2010, the share of global GDP of the world's three leading emerging economies – Brazil, China and India – doubled and their share of world trade almost tripled. Their dynamism and optimism is in marked contrast to the European downturn. As power and influence gradually move out of the US-led trans-Atlantic order and shift towards Asia, Latin America and eventually also Africa, need for capable actors to lead this transition re structuring emerges.

The world is interdependent in areas as varied as financial markets, infectious diseases, climate change, terrorism, nuclear peace and safety, food and water supply, water tables, fish stocks and ecosystem resources. These issues can trigger interstate military conflicts and are also drivers of human insecurity because of the threat they pose to individual lives and welfare. The very feature that gives the United Nations its unique legitimacy viz., universal membership, also makes it an inefficient body for making, implementing and enforcing collective decisions. During the Cold War, the main axis around which world affairs rotated was East–West, today this has been replaced by a North–South axis. The Copenhagen conference on climate change was suboptimal in outcome partly because of the opposing and clashing worldviews of the global North and South.

The main challenge for the international community is how to restructure and reform the United Nations in order to reposition it at the centre of collective efforts to manage current and anticipated global problems. The paradigmatic institutions of global governance have been the G8 and the United Nations. The G6/7/8, set up in 1975, was always confined to some self-selected countries and, as such, never possessed either electoral or representative legitimacy while UN despite its many real accomplishments has struggled to be relevant and effective.

No contemporary global problem can realistically be resolved without the cooperation of the three Asian giants- India, China and Japan. China and India are not members of G8, while India and Japan are not permanent members of UN Security Council. The G 20 membership had all the world's powerful actors as responsible managers of the world order as stakeholders, not merely rule-takers.

Potentially, the G20 offered the best intersection point between legitimacy, efficiency and effectiveness. There were expectations that G 20 would manage policy consensus and coordination, and mobilize the requisite political will to address global challenges. But in order to be legitimate, it still must work with and not independently of or against the United Nations. Unfortunately G20 succumbed to aimless meandering and a rhetoric-action gap where photo-ops have displaced global leadership.

In reality, the United Nations is the symbol and core of global governance. It must continue to lead efforts for the creation and maintenance of a rules-based order that specifies both the proper conduct to be followed by all state and non state international actors and procedures for reconciling differences among them. The United Nations will continue to play a central role in the development of global governance through filling five gaps in all issue-areas: knowledge (empirical and theoretical), normative, policy, institutional, and compliance (monitoring and enforcement).

For many, globalization is both desirable and irreversible. It has resulted in risings standard of living and material prosperity throughout the world. But there is growing disparity in income levels between countries and peoples. The deepening of poverty and inequality – prosperity for a few countries and some people, marginalization and exclusion for many – has implications for social and political stability among and within states. Protection of labour rights has got less attention than the protection of capital and property rights, and global rules on trade and finance are less than equitable. Globalization has also increased the transnational flows of terrorism, human and drug trafficking, organized crime, piracy, and pandemic diseases. No other body can

tackle these problems more effectively, with greater legitimacy, lesser transaction and compliance costs, and higher comfort levels for most countries than the United Nations system.

The focus should be on how to make United Nations more relevant to the new and emerging challenges. Attention has been mainly focused on structural reform in the UN Security Council. It is unrepresentative in both permanent and elected membership, unanswerable to the peoples of the world, unaccountable to the General Assembly, not subject to judicial oversight. The past record shows that those resorting to the use of force unilaterally need fear Security Council censure and punishment only rarely, while those who need international military assistance cannot rely on the Security Council for timely and effective help. Given the changing nature of armed conflicts and the fact that civilians now comprise the overwhelming victims of conflict-related violence, disease and starvation, reliable protection of civilians from conflict afflicted regions is the litmus test of the UN's credibility as the security provider.

The Security Council must reflect the new power balance in its permanent membership and represent broader constituency of interests in its elected members. The UN Security Council is the most important UN organ and its geopolitical centre of gravity. But as its importance and power increased, the power and relevance of General Assembly declined. It has to be remembered that the United Nations derives its unique legitimacy and its unrivalled convening power from its universal membership and the only UN body in which all UN member states are represented is the General Assembly. But at times this universality hampers decision-making.

Global governance encompasses the role of non governmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs themselves must acknowledge, that they are now often times actors and participants in the global policy process. With influence on decisions come responsibility for the consequences and distributional impacts of the decisions. Similarly, the private sector too must take a greater interest in issues of international governance. It should also understand its responsibility and pay its due share of the costs of the provision of global public goods like peace, security prosperity etc.

The imp of global governance has enhanced. Three factors are responsible for this.

First, there are genuine new problems, which can only be solved by collective action at global level for example tackling the problem of the widening hole in the ozone layer, managing flows of speculative capital and so on.

Secondly, there have been new and enhanced perceptions about the need to manage events internationally: the keen interest in conflict management is an example.

Thirdly, there has been new thinking on the way to approach global issues.

The UN provides the framework we need to tackle global problems. Internal, ethnic and secessionist conflicts have increased manifold since the end of the cold war. There has been a huge increase in the number of refugees and internally displaced people. Relief expenditure has increased, reaching 15% of all aid in peak years (e.g. during the Rwanda crisis in 1994). The crisis in Kosovo raised many questions concerning the contemporary conflicts and their solutions. It was a war fought over issues within a country's borders, challenging the principle of state sovereignty; prosecuted by NATO on behalf of the international community, but without UN authority; resulting in a large number of refugees across state borders; requiring a large UN and other operation for relief and rehabilitation; and with the UN political and military establishments sidelined, reduced in this case to providing formal authority for NATO and Russian peacekeepers. It appeared that there was a crisis in global governance. Intervention by regional organisations, like NATO in Europe or ECOWAS in West Africa, can be problematic. On the one hand, it recognises the need for regional powers to take some responsibility. On the other hand, it dents the credibility and exposes the political and military weakness of the UN. NATO's decision to act independently of the UN in Kosovo, was may be because it knew that China and/or Russia would veto any Security Council Resolution sanctioning intervention.

There is a problem of selectivity also. Some conflicts (Iraq, Kosovo) receive sustained military action by rich countries, while others (Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Angola) do not get the required attention. Again, there are real problems in confusing political and military with humanitarian interventions. There are apprehensions that humanitarian principles like neutrality and impartiality are compromised when the UN is also involved in military interventions. Accountability is also an issue.

The UN faces difficult challenges in helping to prevent conflict, and in supporting post-conflict recovery. There is need for global governance of international trade also as it is not just a source of income, but also a source of risk. Issues like limits to be placed on protection, consideration to be given to matters like environmental protection or food safety or the procedures of management of trade disputes are important. These kinds of questions have been on the international agenda since the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was created in 1947 and continue to generate debate. To some extent, the international community has found a solution to global governance problems in the trade arena, by adopting a rules-based approach under the auspices of the World Trade Organization. The World Trade Organization was established in 1995, replacing the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) as the only international organization dealing with multilateral rules governing trade between nations. The WTO is not a specialized agency of the UN, but has close cooperative arrangements and practices with the United Nations and UN agencies. WTO aims to help trade flow smoothly in a system based on multilateral rules agreed to by all its members; to impartially settle trade disputes between governments; and to provide a forum for trade negotiations. But it is widely felt that the agenda is dominated by the trade concerns of the big players, for example the delayed approach of the rich countries in reducing the protection of their agricultural sectors. Problems often arise at the interface between trade and other issues, like environmental protection or poverty reduction.

Global warming is an important global issue, which affects all people, regardless of where they live, and which requires global action to resolve. Global warming will cause threatening rise in sea levels resulting in widespread flooding and climactic instability. Heavy carbon emissions are the main cause of it and industrialised countries account for 60% of annual emissions. The UN has provided the structure for climate change talks. A Framework Convention was opened for signing at the 1992 Earth Summit. The Convention was followed by the negotiation of the Kyoto Protocol in December 1997. The 2012 United Nations Climate Change Conference held from 26 November to 8 December 2012, in Doha reached an agreement to extend the life of the Kyoto Protocol, which had been due to expire at the end of 2012. Wording adopted by the conference incorporated for the first time the concept of "loss and damage", an agreement in principle that

richer nations could be financially responsible to other nations for their failure to reduce carbon emissions

The UN performs some unique roles which ensure it a special place in global governance. They are:

- Research on cross-cutting issues
- Consensus-building, advocacy, and target-setting
- A forum for the preparation and negotiation of international treaties or conventions
- Technical co-ordination and standard-setting
- Information collection and dissemination
- Co-ordination of action among agencies, both national and international.
- Direct action (development, peace-keeping)

The UN and global governance

The core principles of globalisation with a human face are violated when developing countries are excluded from decision-making.

The question is should the UN play a larger role. Three conditions must be met for it to do so:

- (a) a clear understanding of the different roles the UN should play;
- (b) an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the UN in fulfilling those roles; and
- (c) a programme of reform which will equip the UN to play its part.

We have seen above the tasks that only UN can do. On the first, the task is to identify the comparative advantage of the UN, its ‘unique selling point’, or the list of jobs that ‘only the UN can do’. We have seen above the unique jobs of the UN.

On the second question, the capacity of the UN, the strengths and weaknesses are well known. On the positive side, a mandate clearly laid out in the UN Charter, the virtue of universality, the power of advocacy (e.g. through UN Conferences), political authority in certain circumstances, and technical expertise and co-ordination in a whole variety of sectors. On the

negative side, lack of trust, particularly from certain sectors in the US, actual or potential conflict between rich and poor countries, political and bureaucratic problems internally, and, especially recently, a chronic shortage of resources. Thirdly, the problems have begun to be tackled, especially following Kofi Annan's reform plan, 'Renewing the United Nations: A programme for reform', published in July 1997. The present Secretary General is also keen to reform the organization. Many informal reforms in fact have taken place also.

For wholesome and holistic global governance, the cooperation and participation of all sorts of intergovernmental and non governmental organisations as well as civil society groups, non state actors is required. But centrality of UN in global governance will remain for a long time to come.

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