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CHALLENGES TO THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Chandrakant Yatnoor

It is not surprising that the UN with large number of members has difficulty in responding adequately to the emerging challenges and problems in the 21st century. But it cannot be denied that its response does make a real difference and it may be imperfect but it was not designed to take us to heaven but it would surely save us from another hell. Ultimately, it is a ship sailing in stormy waters. But it is unfair to blame the vessel for the storm (the emerging problems and challenges), which beset it. The UN is trying to cope with the world's problems, and in the last resort, it is the political will of the Member States which will determine our success in overcoming problems and challenges of 21st century. The United Nations provides the opportunity to find solutions, it is up to the member nations to will the means for us to succeed.

The United Nations established in 1945, is the world organization having the objectives of maintaining peace and security, and promoting social and economic advancement in the world. It champions democratic principles such as "sovereign equality of nations" and "self-determination of peoples" of the world. It seeks to promote "fundamental human rights", and emphasizes dignity and worth of the human person, and equal rights of men and women. Its aim is to promote social progress and better standard of life. It urges member-states to live together in peace with one another as good neighbours and to unite their strength to maintain international peace and security. The UN is determined to "save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war"¹. Though, it would function as an effective instrument of collective security, it would not normally intervene in the domestic jurisdiction of any state. This world body was established with a lot of hopes. Its life experience so far has been a mixed one: It has to its credit both successes and failures. In some spheres and matters the UN has succeeded while in others it has failed. The United Nations is 60 years old now, has often been viewed with mixed feelings of hope and disappointment. Yet, while the League of Nations dwindled to decay during world war-II, the UN has survived through many challenging crises and a good deal of vicissitudes.

Moreover, as the United Nations entered into the 21st century and the new millennium, amidst six decades of troubling Cold War followed by the sudden transition into a new era possibility and uncertainties, it is time to reflect on the future. Hence, keeping these factors in view, the present paper makes an attempt to critically evaluate the performance of UN in 20th Century, the reasons for its failure on some spheres and the challenges UN has to confront in the 21st century.

The Performance of the United Nations in Twentieth Century :

Ever since its inception, the United Nations has been performing the most strenuous task of maintaining peace and security in the world. It has -often been called upon to prevent a dangerous situation from escalating war into persuade opposing parties to use the conference table rather than weapons, and to help restore peace when conflicts occur. Although, it has had mixed success, it is fair

to say that the UN has been more successful than the League in its peace efforts, especially in crisis which did not involve the interests of the great powers, such as the civil war in the Congo (1960-64) and the dispute between the Netherlands and Indonesia over West New Guinea. On the other hand, it has often been just as ineffective as the League of Nations in situations such as the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, 1991 Gulf War, Hungarian uprising of 1956, the 1968 Czech crisis, the Western Sahara Crisis and the Iraqi issue where the interests of the great powers seemed to be threatened. These powers, particularly the United States in the post cold war era, decided to ignore or defy the United Nations on certain issues.

The first crisis which was brought to the UN's attention was that of Iran. Iran complained of the non-withdrawal of the Red Army from her soil. The Security Council took up the case and appealed to Soviet Russia to withdraw its forces from Iran. The disputes between Syria and Lebanon, the dispute between Indonesia and Holland over the future of West New Guinea (West Irian), the Korean War (1950-53), the Suez crisis of 1956, the Congo crisis (1960-64), the Cambodian (Kampuchea) crisis (1975 onwards) the long drawn out war between Iran and Iraq (1980-88), the Afghanistan (1990-2000) tragedy, the civil war in Mozambique (1975-1992) the Cyprus question, are some of the cases successfully handled by the United Nations.²

However, in the case of Palestine, the conflict between the native Arab-Palestinians and immigrant Jews was brought before the UN in 1947. After an investigation, the UN decided to divide Arab Palestine, creating a new Jewish State of Israel. This was one of UN's most controversial decisions and it was not accepted by the majority of the native Arab States and the Palestinians. The UN has been unable to prevent a series of wars since 1948 till today between Arab-Palestinians and Jews. Similarly, in the case of Somalia the situation deteriorated into civil war in 1991 when their leader Siad Barre was overthrown. A power struggle erupted between rival supporters of General Aidid and Ali Mohammad. The situation was chaotic as food supplies and communications broke down and thousands of refugees were fleeing into neighbouring states. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) presently African Union (AU) asked for UN help, and 37,000 UN troops, mainly Americans along with others including India, arrived (December 1992) to ensure the aid distribution and to restore law and order by disarming the tribal warlords. However, the UN military operations could not succeed. The Americans withdrew their troops (March 1994) and the remaining UN troops were withdrawn in March 1995, leaving the War Lords to fight it out. Since 1991 there has been no government to speak in this country of 7 million people on the Horn of Africa. These days a transitional regime runs barely half of Mogadishu, the capital. War Lords control the rest of the country.³

There is at present no agreement as to the true contribution of the United Nations in the settlement of international disputes. It cannot automatically redress several weaknesses such as the unilateral supremacy of the United States, lack of financial self-sufficiency or independent military support. It cannot always protect the victims of unjustified aggression like the people and leadership

of Iraq. Although, it is the UN's role as peace-keeper and international mediator which most often gets into headlines, the majority of its work is concerned with its less spectacular aims of safeguarding human (including Women and Children's) rights and encouraging economic, social, educational, scientific, environmental and cultural progress throughout the Afro-Arab Asian and Latin American World. The UN and its agencies have shown ability to aid economic, social and cultural development, and settle regional disputes to the extent possible. It has done much to give protection to people, who suffer from diseases like Malaria, small pox, AIDS and has rendered useful humanitarian services. It has provided relief to refugees. The United Nations also functions as a forum for exchanging views and identifying common ground, and as a barometer of international consensus on issues of poverty illiteracy, security, arms limitation, disarmament and international terrorism. It may not be the best or most effective international organisation but it is a basis and an attempt to guide the contemporary world in an intelligent manner. The United Nations is still the hope and conscience of 'the world, more especially of the Developing nations among its 191 members.

The Evaluation of UN in 20th Century: Heart of Gold and Limbs of Clay

Despite the noble aims and objectives mentioned in the United Nations Charter, the role of the UN today is viewed with widespread skepticism, and it is realised that this world organisation has failed to achieve its goal up to expectations. The UN also sets for itself two main objectives namely, disarmament and arms control and establishment of a New International Economic Order. But the working record of the United Nations in the past 55 years shows that the United Nations in the past 60 years shows that in respect of both these objectives, the United Nations has been a failure. In respect of disarmament, the UN General Assembly has passed several resolutions, but the fact is that not single weapon has been destroyed over the years. Even in several arms control and disarmament agreements like SALT I, SALT II, INF Treaty, MBFR accord in Europe, the NPT, the United Nations has played only a marginal role.⁴

The world has seen the Security Council and the General Assembly passing resolution after resolution, and when it comes to taking action based on these resolutions, the United Nations is severely hamstrung by denial of necessary funds by some member states that had voted for these resolutions in the first instance. The several specialized agencies like UNESCO, FAO, WHO, have been formed to serve these ends; they have not yielded the desired result due to the financial crunch. Lack of funds puts a limit to what UN can do and should attempt to do.⁵

Today, it is widely perceived that the United Nations is an association of "divided nations" who have little commitment for UN aims and objectives. The member-states and various groups of such states are primarily interested in their national or group interests which are often in conflict with the interests of the global community. The UN has been dominated by rich and powerful nations who many times ignore or violate the letter/spirit of the UN charter. The five permanent members regard

themselves as the guardian of peace and security in the world and they are not prepared to accept other UN members as their equals. When a great power is involved in a conflict, it wants to keep the conflict outside the UN jurisdiction. But it would insist on applying UN laws to a conflict between smaller nations.

Over the years, the United Nations appears to have become a mere peace-keeping machine and the General Assembly an unwieldy debating society. A plethora of UN agencies spread over different continents have become overlapping -in their operations, thus calling for better streamlining and coordination.

But in spite of all these failures it would be wrong to say that UN has been a complete failure. In many areas, notably social development and humanitarian causes, the organisation has led the way. In the past 60 years, its activities have been rewarded with Nobel Prizes for five times and this prize has also gone to six individuals for their work in the organisation. The UN has been active in relief, rehabilitation and development works all over the world.

The UN aided the birth of 100 newly independent states, encouraged development through economic cooperation, and campaigned against racial and other forms of discrimination. It has promoted respects for human rights and in 1948 established the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Through declarations and conventions, it has given rights to women and children. It has also codified and enlarged international law of the sea and protection of global commons. It has initiated joint action on supranational issues like ozone depletion, environmental protection, and terrorism. Poor countries have benefited from developmental assistance provided by the UN.

The Challenges ahead in 21st Century :

Just as in 20th Century, the tensions and turbulence continue to disturb peace in several regions, and armed conflicts, terrorism, religious fundamentalism, and ethnic wars cause more problems for the United Nations in the 21st Century. The most pervasive division in the post-Cold War UN is the North/South split, with the developed world more focused on so-called hard threats like security issues, conflict, terrorism and the developing world emphasizing soft threats like hunger, disease, poverty. This divide is particularly frustrating since it is increasingly clear that the concerns of the developed and developing world cannot be separated. Yes, many of these problems affect some countries (especially in the developing world) more than others. But none of these problems remains neatly behind national borders. None can be tackled by national action alone. Long gone are the days when we can say, it is a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing. Today we face a range of global problems, and the problems of UN are not of temporary consequence. They have serious implications for the future of the mankind. Hence, the following problems needs serious attention.

1. Meeting New Security Threats: The end of the Cold War did not ease, but rather probably

intensified, human insecurity. The UN recognizes that dangers to international peace and security equate less with inter-state military violence, and more with other varied and multiple threats to survival. The priority reaction to altered threats must be changes and flexibility in human response. Human perceptions, priorities and institutions must adapt to situations. The necessary process of reaction is so grave, urgent and universal that it must be addressed collectively, as at the UN World Summits.

2. **Confronting Violence:** Since the end of the Cold War, while conflict between states has become rare, intra-state violence has increased. "Self-determination", ethnic and religious differences have replaced resource gain and even ideology as reasons for inter-human combat. The proliferation and lethality of new weapons alone demands the reduction and eventual elimination of mass conflict. There is a continuum of things the UN can and must do. Through prevention and mediation, varied military or other sanctions, peacekeeping, and other intervention or assistance designed to stabilize or defuse situations, the UN must act as it was designed to do - further the building of global peace. A shrinking world makes peacemaking everywhere enlightened self-interest for all.
3. **Promoting Disarmament:** The end of the Cold War brought new hope for peace dividends, but left a world awash in arms, surplus arms-making capacity, and unemployed arms professionals. Traffic increased in both scale and recipients, as prices fell. Control over the development, manufacture and deployment of lethal weapons and substances, particularly nuclear, biological and chemical, has become no longer the preserve of the superpowers and their allies. UN concern and activity has grown, but will be constrained by continued weapons research, driven by fear, greed and curiosity; global diffusion of both weapons and relevant knowledge; the increasing difficulty of verification; and the vulnerability of complex modern society to disruption. All demand global reaction.
4. **Reducing Hazardous Frustration:** With the proliferation of weapons comes the profusion of those who could and might use them. The desperation of unemployment, the anger of those masses who perceive themselves deprived in a grossly unequal but more-informed world, and the boldness of ethnic and religious certainties, sows contagious seeds of terrorism, fanaticism and martyrdom. Arming and financing extremists are the growing numbers and wealth of drug dealers and other international criminals, and new thousands of well-trained and armed international mercenaries. Miniaturization, the diffusion of lethal knowledge and components, and multi-use equipment and substances, all impede surveillance, while the vulnerability of energy- and information-dependent society makes it more susceptible to focused attack and blackmail. Counter-action must therefore involve all governments to eliminate sanctuary and safe transit. Counter-intelligence must become as airtight and coordinated as possible. Only global coverage is truly effective.

5. **Managing Mass Migrations:** Humans now move in unprecedented numbers, not simply because there are more people, but because both the need and opportunity have grown, both “push” and “pull” forces are powerful. The UN officially recognizes well over 20 million refugees forced unwillingly out of their own country. Globally, about one person in a hundred is either a refugee or “displaced”, i.e. forced unwillingly to move within their country. Other mass migrations are more ambiguous, particularly the uncontrolled flows in poorer countries from country to city. When either or both the migrant and the locus of migration is unwilling, problems are bound to arise beyond mere acculturation. These increasingly global issues can best be dealt with at the global level.
6. **Dealing with Failure and Anarchy:** The collapse of major institutions, both national and international, including numerous “failed states”, is foreseen as a delicate predicament for the international community. The UN may be the only acceptable resident physician in many cases. Two problems inevitably arise: the degree of global control and help that is tolerable yet sufficient, and the enormous cost and possibly time- scale involved. For many reasons, however, a political-security “black hole” can no longer be left unattended by an interdependent community.
7. **Alleviating Global Distress:** The avoidable frustration, hopelessness and anguish of billions of humans, brought about by absolute privation, and extreme and growing income divergence, both within and between states, must be addressed - if only for our own enlightened self-interest in global stability. The international community through the United Nations has a unique capacity, and so responsibility.
8. **Employing Human Resources Better:** Behind most sources of global instability lie two inter-related factors. First, in many places and ways, humanity already exceeds the “carrying capacity” of both its biosphere and institutions. Its rapidly increasing capabilities have enabled it to expand its global impact and numbers much faster, and to conduct activities more destabilizing, than either the ecosystem or established social arrangements can handle. Second, the global order, although knowledge-based, wastes most of the vast pool of human intelligence that might remedy or constrain these human numbers and profligate activities. Only a tiny handful of the humans now alive will ever approach their full potential. Billions live marginal lives; 30% of the world’s labour force are not productively employed; 1.5 billion are condemned to the strait-jacket of illiteracy. Moreover, 80 million are added annually to human numbers -and to growing pressures on institutions and resources. Any alleviation of expanding human pressures and wasted human capacities - through responsible development and fertility, accelerated education and competence - is the most truly global challenge facing the international community, and the UN.

9. **Confronting Violence:** Since the end of the Cold War, while conflict between states has become rare, intra-state violence has increased. "Self-determination", ethnic and religious differences have replaced resource gain and even ideology as reasons for inter-human combat. The proliferation and lethality of new weapons alone demands the reduction and eventual elimination of mass conflict. There is a continuum of things the UN can and must do. Through prevention and mediation, varied military or other sanctions, peacekeeping, and other intervention or assistance designed to stabilize or defuse situations, the UN must act as it was designed to do - further the building of global peace. A shrinking world makes peacemaking everywhere enlightened self-interest for.
10. **Developing Global Rights:** The formation and acceptance of universal human rights and democratic norms raises questions. While some governments argue that human rights are culturally based, in practice the body of those globally accepted is expanding. In any event, any universal code must be developed through the gradual build-up of norms. The process of formulation and acceptance is constantly underway in various UN fora, and has been for many years. Movement, though slow, is clearly forward and increasingly intrusive within states.

A severe blow to the UN, as an institution, came from the calculated slight of it by big powers and their venture to usurp its authority and role and act as arbiters of peace and security. It may be noted that until 1990s, on issues pertaining to conflict management or in undertaking peace-keeping missions, the UN acted only under chapters VI and VII of the UN charter, when a state or a group of states drew the attention of the Security Council to a pertinent situation. The UN did not involve in it automatically or unilaterally, and the quest of its intervention was decided by the Security Council. It never intervened on such situations, on the prodding of any single power, which had decided outside the UN mechanism, to intervene. But that position was altered at the behest of the United States when, in 1998, it unilaterally launched missile attack on Afghanistan and Sudan, without the authorization of the Security Council. Besides, a new pattern of unilateral intervention was set in motion after the US-led NATO forces unilaterally used force in Yugoslavia in 1999 without the approval of the Security Council. It is said that the US and other NATO powers did not even approach the UN Security Council in the matter on the apprehension that Russia and China might veto the move if they approached the Council for approval. It has in a way, given credence to the unilateral use of force by powerful countries and has expanded the scope of illegal intervention.

The slight of the UN by America and Britain had reached its high point during the US-led invasion of Iraq in April 2003, making it a turning point for the United Nations. Indeed, in the Iraq war, the Security Council was deprived of its legitimate right to apply the rules governing the use of force. When Washington found that on Iraq the UN was not playing second fiddle to US plans, President George Bush had openly belittled the UN and scorned of its role and importance. He denounced the UN as a basket case, ignored the Security Council and unilaterally took military action against Iraq.

The debates, discussion and resolutions in the UNSC prior to the invasion had no impact on US-UK schedule for launching their invasion on Iraq.

On the eve of the war on Iraq, President Bush stated publicly that he would go ahead with his military operations against Iraq whether the UNSC approves if or not. That was the level of US marginalization of the UN. The failure of the UN to stop America and Britain from invading Iraq on false pretexts, and simply on personal vendetta of President Bush, is a pointer to the credibility crisis the world body is faced with today. Indeed, after the US-UK invasion of Iraq, the credibility and prestige of the UN has plummeted to an all-time low. The Iraq war divided the Security Council, split the NATO, and made people to sit back and think how to find against the proliferating expressions of arrogance of the US, which has become unilateralist in its approach to international peace and security.

The biggest single challenge to the UN today is the emergence of the US as the lone super power, with a readiness to act alone, or in the company of willing partners, outside the UN system and international law. Washingtons, display of arrogance of power has threatened UN's credibility, and its unilateralism has constantly reduced the space for the UN. Pertinently, in the past a US President ventured to send the US police to arrest the president of a neighbouring country on some charges. No finger of proof was raised at that time against that outrage on state's sovereignty and inviolability of international borders. As US displays scant respect for the UN, the latter can hardly moderate the US hawkishness and unilateralism. A citadel of democracy, and a champion of freedom, liberty and the rule of law at home, the US, especially under George W. Bush, has now gone militaristic and imperialistic in its tone and tenor. In the circumstances, even London is free only to agree with Washington and not to disagree. It is the US wish that prevails.

The Iraq war has shown that the international rules governing the use of force have broken down completely in the full glare of an open debate in the UN and outside. A democratic country has assumed the role of a Frankenstein and sadistically displayed its overkill capacity against a country which was emancipated by 12 years of strigent UN sanctions. It also destroyed the foot prints of an old civilization. However, the fact remains that the UN has failed to prevent unnecessary wars the big powers have, time and again, unilaterally imposed on small countries on some pretext. In the present unipolar world, if the lone super power acts on its own, individually or in group but without the UN authorization, on major international peace and security issues, it raises serious question marks on the survival of the UN as a credible organization. We should not be blind to the fact that the lone super power is 'seeking world domination as Adolf Hitler Sought for Germany in the 1930s. It can lead to disastrous consequences for the UN, and for peace and stability in the world. Today, we are faced with a rampout America, moving aggressively around and ready to take on anybody who would stand in its way. If history is any guide, such behaviour can lead to a new "coalition of concerned", as a countervailing force, as it took place in the 1930s and early 1940s in Europe against Germany. However, as countries increasingly loose their faith in UN as a guarantor of their safety and security, while they

pretend that they still count on UN, they make their own arrangements and alliances for their security.

Another major factor responsible for the loss of autonomy of the UN and the distortion of its priorities has been the growing voluntarization of the funding of its activities, i.e., the progressive replacement of funding through the assessed budget by funding through voluntary contributions. The major powers have used this device to impose their priorities on the UN organizations, and to take full control of its budgeting, accounting and administrative apparatus. Most of the changes that have had the effect of weakening the UN have been carried out in the name of reforms. These reforms have been essentially of an administrative, budgetary and financial character. They have been well targeted and have had major negative impacts on the work, performance and direction of the UN. On the other hand, reforms of a substantive and structural nature, warranted by the changes in the world situation and suggested by various commissions and High-level Expert Groups that deliberated on the subject and reported in the early and mid 1990s, have not been allowed to surface in the deliberations of the UN system.

Before to conclude, one has to take into consideration a few crucial points, which cannot be neglected.

- * First, the major powers have been engaged in systematically undermining the legitimacy and in whittling down the character, role and functions of the United Nations.
- * Second, the antidote to unilateralism is not the multipolarity of the powerful but genuinely participatory and democratic multilateralism.
- * Third, it is not possible to strengthen the UN and make it function more effectively in the security field when it has been rendered hollow in all other aspects. The need of the hour, therefore, is to strengthen the UN in a comprehensive holistic manner.
- * Fourth, proposals for the renewal of the multilateral system should be based on a set of principles and shared objectives and not on expediency or practicability in terms of their acceptability to a particular nation or a group of nations.

Recommendations for strengthening of United Nations :

- * Strict adherence to International law and commonly shared human values.
- * Establishment of the position of the UN as the centerpiece of the multilateral system.
- * New mandate and enhanced capability in the area of human security.
- * Democratization of the UN structure and the way of its functioning.
- * Enhancing the UN capabilities in particular the capability of the General Assembly.
- * Financing of UN organizations. It is a time to terminate the prolonged financial blackmail

against the UN by big powers, and

- * Enhancing the UN capacity to mount peacemaking and peacekeeping operations.

CONCLUSION

Now, the UN is 60 years old, it has passed through difficulties and crises. There have been achievements, but failures are more. But the survival of the UN has never been a question mark. That has been a big achievement of the world body. That has kept the hopes of member countries alive in confronting the challenges emerging in the new world order in 21st century. If the UN wants to remain credible, effective and enduring, it has to change in tune with the changing times. In the new context, it cannot continue to function effectively with absolute structures of a bygone era, and needs new structures based on principles of equality and solidarity.

It is not surprising that the UN with large number of members has difficulty in responding adequately to the emerging challenges and problems in the 21st century. But it cannot be denied that its response does make a real difference and it may be imperfect but it was not designed to take us to heaven but it would surely save us from another hell. Ultimately, it is a ship sailing in stormy waters. But it is unfair to blame the vessel for the storm (the emerging problems and challenges), which beset it. The UN is trying to cope with the world's problems, and in the last resort, it is the political will of the Member States which will determine our success in overcoming problems and challenges of 21st century. The United Nations provides the opportunity to find solutions, it is up to the member nations to will the means for us to succeed.

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