

## UN in the 21st Century: Reforms

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### I. Introduction

As a global international organization the United Nations could celebrate its 50th anniversary successfully. On the verge of the 21st century the UN is no less important institution at international level. But as a whole the structure and the system of the UN are at a critical threshold of reforms. To find out defects in the structural system of the UN is not a difficult task, but it is a gigantic task to reform the organs of the UN.

"The central dilemma to be faced in reforming the United Nations is that it is an institution with a highly unequal and diverse membership, operating in a global economic and political system which many would like to see changed in major respects, while others are determined to maintain the *status quo* at all costs."<sup>2</sup>

Though the developed countries are reluctant to go for any swift reforms of the UN, still many countries have been demanding its reforms. By the end of the 20th century the UN has been facing severe financial crisis and its ability in peace-keeping missions has been seriously questioned. Now big powers also have been showing some interest in reforming the system of UN. But how to reform? And what to reform? These are the main questions to be asked.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine various powers and functions of different organs of the UN in the light of present-day world international situations and to suggest how to improve the effectiveness of the measures taken by the UN as a whole and by the different UN organs and agencies in particular.

### II. The United Nations system: regionalism and globalism

There is no denial that the UN is the only international institution which can claim its true global character. It is the only institution of comprehensive

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<sup>2</sup> *For a Strong and Democratic United Nations: A South Perspective on UN Reform*, South centre, Geneva, 1996, p. xv.

political competence at international level. But does it challenge the sovereignty of states? Is it a threat to state sovereign powers? Can it change the territorial boundaries of its Member States? Answering these questions we have to acknowledge that the UN is not a super state. It is neither a world state. As an institution of comprehensive political competence it coordinates the global and regional trends and tendencies. Regional groups of states might have their own interests combining them for common management. Regional integration among states may consolidate their sovereign powers. But disintegration procedures may not be equally undesirable for all states. Bigger states may establish an upper hand in the absence of any regional groups.

The UN extends its cooperation at both regional and global levels. "At the regional level it leads to concern with one or other of the many dimensions of state-building bringing institutions together or creating an identitive community; but considered at the global level it implies interdependence or transnationalism, which are forms of state dissolution."<sup>3</sup>

Bi-polar world dynamics had been reflected in the activities of the UN. The development of the cold war doomed the continued collaboration among the big powers. Cooperation among the big powers is a precondition for effective UN activities. Disagreement between the US and the Soviet Union on international issues created an atmosphere of mistrust and stalemate. As a result veto power in the Security Council had been used as a device to assert their international role. The Soviet Union had been using veto power more frequently than the US. Since the early 1960s the Soviet Union became completely isolated in the Security Council. But at international level Moscow was backed by many developing countries.

Though NATO is primarily a military alliance, yet under the leadership of the USA it received both international and regional character. Participation of the USA and Canada made the NATO an international organization. Otherwise it could be regarded as a West European alliance. NATO alliance wanted to face the challenge of Warsaw Pact countries at both regional and international levels. Regional integration in Western Europe was the key to success for NATO countries. European members of the NATO were allowed to play greater role for their own integration. But the Soviet Union and its partners failed to do the same.

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<sup>3</sup> Taylor, Paul, *International Organisation in the Modern World*, Pinter Publishers, London, 1993, p. 2.

Britain and France had been representing common EC interests in the Security Council while Soviet Russia and China failed to create a unified platform. The capitalist bloc used EC positions in all the organs and the Specialized Agencies of the UN. "The capitalist bloc had been working as a kind of multi-bloc world system"<sup>4</sup> But Russian hegemony had been working single handedly. In the European front Kremlin had been losing its credibility and in other important regions it failed to organize its own blocs. Socialist internationalism preached by Moscow could not understand that in 1980s the world was no more ruled by the dynamics of 1960s. The typical bipolar world had already been replaced by multi-bloc system. The socialist bloc led by Kremlin was under represented in all UN organs and agencies.

"They seemed to mirror some of the rearrangements achieved by the United States in its diplomacy with the United Nations system and the Specialized Agencies. These gains on the disguised agenda surely facilitated the surprising concessions on the visible one."<sup>5</sup> This statement is true for all other Western big powers. Possibly the then West Germany was the only exception. The Western countries in general agreed that the Germany should not be given its proper share in the international institutions provided it is united. The Western countries were hopeful that a United Germany can never be a socialist one. A united socialist Germany could be a serious threat to West European countries. But present-day United Germany poses no direct threat to any bloc.

### **III. The UN peacekeeping operations: financial crisis**

From the very beginning of its inception, peacekeeping has been regarded as the most important function of the United Nations. Devastating Second World War emphasized the need for international peace and security. The League of Nations failed mainly because it could not prevent the Second World War. If the League could maintain peace and security at least in the European front, it might not collapse so quickly. That is why the UN Charter took the issue seriously. Article II of the Charter states that the General Assembly "may consider the general principles of co-operation in the maintenance of international peace and security. . . and may make

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<sup>4</sup> Masters, Roger, *A Multi-bloc Model of the International System*, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 55, No.4, Dec. 1961, pp. 781-797.

<sup>5</sup> *Supra* note 3, p. 73.