

Pak Affairs

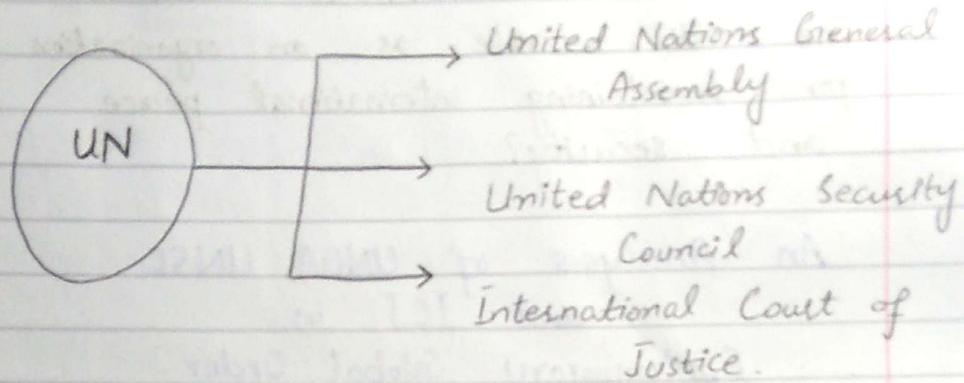
Q:- Critically analyze the major reforms and limitations of United Nations which restrict the UN's role as an organization for maintaining international peace and security?

An Analysis of UNGA, UNSC and ICJ in Contemporary Global Order

Introduction:-

The United Nations (UN), founded in 1945 to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war", stands today at a critical juncture. The geopolitical environment has shifted from a bipolar Cold War order to an increasingly fragmented multipolar system marked by great-power rivalry, climate emergencies, technological disruption, and protracted regional conflicts such as Ukraine and Gaza. Against this backdrop, UN reform has become a functional necessity. As UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated in his 2023 address to the General Assembly, "Global governance is stuck in time. If institutions do

not reflect the world as it is, they risk losing legitimacy". Reform debates revolve around three core institutional pillars.



Each reflects structural imbalances rooted in 1945 realities and requires recalibration to remain effective in the 21st century.

1. Reform of the UNGA:-

The UNGA embodies sovereign equality — "one state, one vote" — making it the most representative organ of the UN. However, its resolutions are largely recommendatory, limiting its operational impact.

1.1 Revitalization and Enhanced Authority:-

The contemporary reforms aim at strengthening the UNGA's deliberative and normative role. In recent years, the Assembly has increasingly assumed moral leadership where the UNSC is paralyzed.

Case in point:-

During the Ukraine conflict, when the Security Council was blocked by veto, the UNGA passed resolutions condemning aggression and affirming territorial integrity under the "Uniting for Peace" framework. This reflects a broader trend toward using the Assembly as a forum for collective legitimacy when great-power consensus fails. The adoption of the Pact for the Future (2024 Summit of the Future) illustrates attempts to reposition the UNGA as a platform addressing climate finance, digital governance, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It reflects growing Global South demands for equitable economic governance amid debt crises and climate vulnerability.

1.2 Procedural and Working Methods Reform

Reform proposals also include streamlining debates, improving agenda management, and enhancing follow-up mechanisms to prevent resolutions from becoming symbolic exercises. Greater synergy between UNGA and ECOSOC in implementing SDGs reflects recognition that peace today is inseparable from development and climate stability.

However, structural constraints remain. Without binding enforcement authority, UNGA reforms largely enhance moral persuasion rather than coercive capacity.

2. Reforms of the UNSC:-

The UNSC remains the most contested institution in the UN system. Its structure - five permanent members (P5) with veto power - reflects post-World War II power distribution rather than contemporary geopolitical realities.

2.1 Expansion of Membership:-

The most prominent reform proposal concerns expanding permanent and/or non-permanent membership. Emerging powers such as India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan (G4 group) demand permanent representation, while African states seek at least two permanent seats under the **Ezulwini Consensus**.

The rationale is rooted in demographic and economic transformation. Africa constitutes over 1.4 billion people yet lacks permanent representation. India, the world's most populous country and a major economic and military actor, remains excluded from permanent status. As President Emmanuel Macron stated in 2022, "A Security Council that

does not reflect today's world risks losing its authority".

Expansion debates are tied directly to current multipolar dynamics -

Rising powers perceive exclusion as a continuation of structural inequality embedded in global governance.

2.2 Reform of the Veto:-

The veto remains the core obstacle to UNSC effectiveness. Its repeated use in the Ukraine and Gaza conflicts has reinforced perceptions of double standards and paralysis. France and Mexico have proposed voluntary restraint on veto use in cases of mass atrocities. The **ACT**

(Accountability, Coherence and Transparency) **Code of Conduct**

similarly urges P5 responsibility.

Yet Charter amendment requires P5 ratification, meaning reform itself is subject to veto politics. This institutional paradox reflects what many scholars describe as "reform by the consent of the privileged."

2.3 Working Methods and Transparency:-

Incremental reforms include greater transparency in consultations, enhanced interaction with regional organizations such as the African Union, and

improved peacekeeping mandates. Contemporary crises - from Haiti to Sudan - highlight the need for flexible, regionally coordinated responses rather than great-power driven agendas.

In an era of hybrid warfare, cyber threats and climate security linkages, the UNSC's agenda has broadened beyond traditional inter-state war, necessitating adaptive reform.

3. Reform of the International Court of Justice:-

The ICJ, as the principal judicial organ of the UN, symbolizes the rule-based order. However, its jurisdiction depends largely on state consent, limiting compulsory enforcement.

3.1 Expanding Jurisdiction and Compliance:-

Recent cases - such as South Africa's genocide against Israel (2024) and Ukraine's case against Russia - have revived global attention toward the ICJ. Provisional measures ordered by the Court demonstrate its moral and legal weight, yet enforcement depends on state compliance or UNSC backing, which can be blocked by veto.

Reform proposals include encouraging broader acceptance of compulsory jurisdiction under Article 36 (2) and strengthening compliance monitoring mechanisms. The growing resort to advisory opinions on climate change — requested by small island states — illustrates how the ICJ is adapting to emerging global threats.

3.2 Judicial Representation and Accessibility:-

The calls for broader geographical and gender representation among judges reflect demands for inclusivity. As climate litigation and human rights disputes increase, the ICJ's role intersects more directly with **global governance** and **environmental justice**.

Moreover, the expanding role of international law in disputes over maritime boundaries, cyber operations, and environmental harm signals a shift toward judicialization of **global politics** — a trend that enhances the Court's relevance.

4. Reform in Light of Current Global Trends

The urgency of UN reform is deeply intertwined with contemporary structural shifts:-

- i- Multipolarity and strategic rivalry between the United States, China and Russia have strained consensus-based mechanisms.
- ii- Climate change and pandemics have revealed governance gaps requiring coordinated multilateral action.
- iii- The Global South increasingly demands equity in decision-making, particularly regarding debt relief, vaccine distribution and climate finance. UNSG Antonio Guterres captured this sentiment when he warned:

"Without reform, the institutions designed for another era will become relics of another era".

Conclusion:-

Reforms in the UNGA seek revitalization and normative leadership; UNSC reforms focus on representational equity and veto restraint; ICJ reforms emphasize legal universality and compliance. Collectively, these reform trajectories aim to reconcile institutional architecture with 21st century realities.

Yet one reality is clear, in an interconnected world facing existential threats, a reformed and revitalized UN is not a luxury but a necessity.