



Strange Death of the UN: The Growing Ineffectiveness of the UN in the Face of Geopolitical Commitments

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Abstract

Early in the 1990s, the US, the Cold War victor, promised a new world order that would significantly depart from the bipolar world characterized by proxy conflicts and ideological confrontations. The UN, which was supposed to be at the forefront of peaceful dispute resolution, was unable to stop the start of most wars that were mediated by individual country states. Acknowledged for choosing nonviolent methods over armed conflict, the organization has been limited to sending stern messages to the opposing sides and voicing disapproval because the Big Five essentially dictate all decisions and have their own geopolitical influence to maintain. The Big Five hardly agree on the most important choices, and in spite of years of clamour for reform, the organization has grown more resistant to changes. What was the UN once? What is the United Nations? What will the UN look like? The UN will be defined by these questions, which this thesis will address in detail.

KEY WORDS: Cold War, new world order, bipolar world, proxy conflicts, Big Five, geopolitical influence

KEY POINTS

- UN's operational history and challenges throughout the Cold War era into the present times
- The “veto problem” of the UNSC
- Outcry for reforms in the UN
- Understand how Geneva Convention and the UN work hand in hand to maintain world peace

Introduction

The thesis focuses on very dangerous periods, such as the Cold War, the Second World War, the War on Terror, and several civil and ethnic conflicts, including genocide cases. The thesis attempts to explain why the UN took action—or remained silent, as the situation may be—and how it affected the UN's capacity to maintain international peace and collective security. The thesis proposes a practical approach to diplomacy that is derived from the realpolitik school of “realism” and is not constrained by any ideology or moral principles.

Objective

The thesis seeks to investigate the influence that regional geopolitics and the related developments have on the political agendas of “global heavyweights.” The thesis additionally aims to show a connection between UN decision-making and regional power movements. Since the formation of regional organizations such as SAARC, ASEAN, and others, the developed nations and the “Big Five” have endeavored to establish more intimate ties with these power blocs. The thesis looks at how the Big Five use their UN votes to demonstrate their support for regional powers, giving them some degree of controllable order.

Research Methodology

The thesis will make use of diplomatic history to comprehend the beginnings of nation-state alliances that have impacted and continue to influence the UN. In order to comprehend the significance of humanitarian laws during times of conflict and how frequently they are broken, interpretation of provisions of these laws, such as the Hague Convention, will also be discussed. The thesis draws on a historical analysis of UN vote trends on specific wars and over a range of time periods.

Need for Study

The thesis, a critical essay on the UN's increasing incapacity to act swiftly enough, has become ever more significant in this dangerous period of world history marked by ethnic conflict, genocides, proxy wars, and unrest. The UN's ability to maintain peace and prevent conflict has been significantly weakened by the recent and ongoing hostilities in Gaza and the Ukraine. The goal of the thesis is to demonstrate how the UN's standing as a champion of stability and peace that exerts influence over the "global titans" has been damaged by attempts to manipulate it in favour of particular alliances. The "veto problem" at the UN has proven to be the largest obstacle to the peaceful settlement of disputes. The UN hasn't been able to operate as dominantly as it did in the early years following the end of the Cold War, despite its swift announcement of sanctions. Recent changes in the balance of power have forced regional powers to align themselves with the Big Five—an alliance that the Big Five will do whatever it takes, including compromising their moral and ethical standards, to maintain.

This thesis may appear to be a time voyage across numerous frightening periods of history, but it is much more than that. The thesis provides thorough observations and impact assessments of the actions/inactions of an organization that is required to navigate these periods while ensuring that no act of aggression results in the spilling of any blood. This kind of responsibility is not an easy assignment to complete. The United Nations, which bears this obligation, has had its share of brilliant and vainglorious moments.

The United Nations has been gradually bitten off by global political heavyweights who have sought to sway this institution in their favour in order to gain some authority. The League of Nations, the UN's predecessor, was founded with the same goal in mind: to maintain peace and collective security in the aftermath of a conflict that demonstrated barbarism like never before. However, that organization was doomed from the start since many big powers chose not to join, disarmament became a distant goal, and as the global economy deteriorated, peace became unattainable.

Focus switched, terrible forces were on the march, and before anybody could make sense of it, another war had broken out, this one spanning continents other than Europe. The war was more costly in every way than the previous one, and it served as a prime illustration of the League's failure. The damage of the conflict called for a better organization that included everyone's collaboration. The United Nations was established in response to this pressing necessity.

The thesis examines the UN's operational history through numerous world events. For more than four decades, the UN was essentially divided between ideological parties, undermining its legitimacy. The communist Warsaw Pact nations and the Western-backed NATO participated in a perilous game of espionage, subversion, and sabotage, setting off a chain of events that left several nations vulnerable to either party. Some opted to remain neutral. However, many people joined either camp solely to ensure their country's peace and security, as these camps' subversive activities rendered them prone to coups and hence instability and disorder.

Years of proxy warfare and war crimes defined the conflict. Following a succession of upheavals in the late 1980s, an end to the war was in sight. The war finally came to an end in 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed. With the abrupt end of the conflict, the post-Soviet economies saw different repercussions in their transition to free market economies. Many countries endured terrible shock therapy, resulting in rapid inflation and the near collapse of their markets. Their recuperation was slow, and the time of shock therapy was characterized by widespread poverty.

Thereafter, the thesis concentrates on the years right after the Cold War ended. More countries came to terms with a unipolar world. The United Nations met with some success in averting the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and bringing an end to the East Timor issue, but later faced losses in Somalia and Rwanda. Following the 9/11 attacks and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq under the pretext of the “Global War on Terror,” things began to shift. The people who lived in these countries suffered greatly as a result of both conflicts. Iraq became entangled in economic crisis, terrorist insurgency, and sectarian strife, among other issues.

Following intense public criticism over the false narrative that WMDs were present in Iraq and the manufactured evidence used to support this story—a move intended to increase public support for the invasion in the wake of the invasion’s failure to secure UN approval—the US withdrew from the country in 2011. Following a deal struck by the US and the Taliban to withdraw their soldiers in exchange for assurances of their safety, the Taliban emerged victors in Afghanistan. Being left out of the agreement, the Afghan government was left to fend for itself. Taliban took control of Kabul in August 2021, effectively ending the war.

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Since then, the West has faced challenges from China and Russia, whose economies are expanding. The industrialized world is becoming more interested in forming closer partnerships with regional organizations as a result of their increasing significance and strength.

The thesis also examines how slowly the UN responded to the COVID-19 epidemic, citing a number of reasons including poor state-to-state coordination and a financial crisis within the UN. The UN’s response to the genocide against the Rohingya people has also been brought up. The UN shifted from silencing the voices of its rapporteurs over human rights abuses against the Rohingyas to publicly endorsing demands for the Rohingyas’ protection while simultaneously denouncing the powerful Tatmadaw, the perpetrators of the genocide. The contentious past of UN peacekeeping personnel in Africa—who have been charged with extrajudicial executions and sexual exploitation—is also briefly mentioned.

Another significant historical event covered in the thesis is the Arab Spring, which examines the impact of the Arab World’s ambitions for democracy on the stability of the region. In Tunisia, where President Ben Ali was forced to step down and free and fair elections were held after much struggle, the protests were successful; however, same cannot be said of Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, or Syria. While the al-Khalifa family controls Bahrain, where the protests were put down, Egypt briefly had democratic rule. Field Marshal Abdel Fattah El-Sisi is the country’s autocratic dictator and has come under fire for allegedly violating human rights and suppressing opposition.

Much worse off were Syria and Yemen, which are currently engulfed in a war that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, displaced a similar number of people, and put the Yemeni people in danger of hunger due to a humanitarian crisis. Gaddafi was swiftly overthrown in Libya by a revolution, but peace has not yet been achieved. There were a number of similarities among these countries that led to protests: they were all governed by autocrats, repression of dissent, high rates of unemployment and poverty, and a large proportion of the population was young. Pent-up tensions like these created the ideal environment for revolution.

The UNWGAD's significant efforts to oppose governments' arbitrary and illegal detentions are also highlighted in the thesis. It welcomes demands from both individuals and organizations, but it avoids direct conflict with governments by handling government relations in a tricky manner.

The thesis is a critical observation on the UN's increasing incapacity to act swiftly enough, and it has gained even more significance in this dangerous period of world history marked by ethnic conflict, genocides, proxy wars, and unrest. The UN's ability to maintain peace and prevent conflict has been significantly weakened by the recent and ongoing hostilities in Gaza and the Ukraine. The goal of the thesis is to demonstrate how the UN's standing as a champion of stability and peace that exerts influence over the "global titans" has been damaged by attempts to manipulate it in favour of particular alliances. The "veto problem" at the UN has proven to be the largest obstacle to the peaceful settlement of disputes.

To preserve its partnership with Israel, the United States vetoed the cease-fire vote three times in the UN Security Council. Similarly, when Russia took four Ukrainian provinces, it vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution declaring the annexation unlawful. As strong regional organizations emerged, the developed world attempted to appease these groups in order to advance its own regional objectives. The UN has suffered significantly as a result of alliance formation, because any regional power linked with any of the Big Five nations can simply put pressure on the Big Five to veto any measures against its interest for the sake of continuance of the alliance.

In place of the kind of diplomacy that is now being used, the thesis proposes a practical kind of diplomacy. Realpolitik is a style of diplomacy in which decisions are made in reaction to current events or pressing concerns. This type of diplomacy is more flexible and linked to political realism. Among the notable individuals who have supported this type of diplomacy are Henry Kissinger and Otto von Bismarck. When the situation calls for it, this kind of diplomacy must be repeatedly practiced.

The problem with modern international politics is that alliances are maintained at any moral cost. Furthermore, morality is rarely upheld, as seen by the West's and Russia's voting patterns in Gaza and Ukraine respectively.

Realpolitik is a pragmatic approach to international relations that has the potential to address many global concerns in a number of ways. Countries are compelled by realpolitik to assess situations more realistically than idealistically. By acknowledging power dynamics, allocating resources, and establishing strategic goals, countries can create more effective strategies to address global issues. It recognizes that disputes are often sparked by power struggles and competing interests. If nations are aware of these underlying motives, they can employ diplomatic negotiations and power-balancing strategies to reduce tensions and resolve crises.

It emphasizes diplomacy as the primary tool for achieving national objectives. By building strategic alliances and engaging in savvy negotiation, nations can advance their interests and find common ground with adversaries to address common challenges such as pandemics, terrorism, and climate change. Realpolitik views security and stability as essential

components of international relations. By promoting deterrence, the balance of power, and conflict management strategies, nations can lower risks and prevent the onset of protracted wars that exacerbate international concerns. This kind of diplomacy prioritizes pragmatic goals above idealistic ones and encourages the use of realistic approaches to problem-solving.

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