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The United Nations and Contemporary International Peace and Security: Challenges, Effectiveness and Reform in the Twenty-First Century

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ABSTRACT

Since 1945, the United Nations (UN) has been the main international body responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. The organization has been established after the Second World War, and it has been very instrumental in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, humanitarian assistance and promotion of international cooperation. But the transformation of the international political landscape, growing geopolitical competition and the rise of new non-traditional security challenges have led to questions about the United Nations ability to meet its mandate. This study critically analyzes the role of UN in the twenty first century for maintaining peace and international security. It explores its achievements in the fields of peacekeeping, collective security, conflict resolution and humanitarian action, and investigations into the institutional, political and operational obstacles to its effectiveness. The study uses a qualitative research approach that relies on secondary data obtained from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, the official reports of the United Nations and policy documents. The theoretical framework of the paper is based on the concepts of Liberal Institutionalism and Realism, which suggests that the United Nations remains to be the foundation of multilateral diplomacy and global governance, however, the effectiveness of the UN is becoming more subject to the competing strategic interests of the great powers, especially within the Security Council. The paper calls for meaningful institutional changes such as strengthening the United Nations' capacity to tackle today's security issues, and calls for the restructuring of the Security Council, better peacekeeping mechanisms, better financial sustainability, and increased international cooperation. In spite of its constraints, the United Nations is an invaluable force for peace, stability and collective security in a complex global order.

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INTRODUCTION

International peace and security are the base of a stable and prosperous international order. In the past, wars have brought about human tragedy, economic destruction, political turmoil, and humanitarian emergencies; thus, the need for institutional arrangements that can help prevent wars and foster peaceful cooperation among countries. The first and second World Wars had a dramatic impact on international awareness of the need for collective security and collective governance. The League of Nations was the first organized effort to create an international institution to keep peace, but it failed to prevent the outbreak of WWII, which showed a number of structural and political weaknesses (Claude, 1966). The international community therefore wanted to have a better functioning organization that would keep the peace through collective action, which led to the formation of the United Nations (UN) on 24 October 1945.

The United Nations is based on the concepts of sovereign equality, peaceful settlement of disputes, collective security, respect for international law, and international cooperation. Such principles are reflected in the Charter of the United Nations which makes the maintenance of international peace and security one of the United Nations' main aims (United Nations, 1945). The United Nations was more institutionalised than its predecessor, with the establishment of the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretariat, the International Court of Justice and the Trusteeship Council. The Security Council is unique among these organs in that it has the legal power to define threats to international peace, to impose sanctions, to authorize peacekeeping missions and to authorize collective military action under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations (1945) as necessary.

The effectiveness of the United Nations was hampered by the ambivalent situations of the Cold War (1947-1991) between the United States and the Soviet Union. By the frequent use of the veto by both super powers the Security Council was not able to respond effectively to many international crises. However, it still played significant roles in organizing diplomacy, monitoring ceasefire deals, aiding decolonisation, providing humanitarian aid and sending peacekeeping operations to conflict areas (Hurd, 2017). There was a lot more expectation of the role of the United Nations after the end of the Cold War. In the context of a relatively favourable international climate the organization was able to extend its peacekeeping, peacebuilding, electoral assistance programmes and humanitarian interventions to various regions of the world (Weiss, 2016).

Today, security has suffered a radical transformation in the international system. Besides traditional interstate wars, non-traditional security threats like international terrorism, cybercrime, climate change, pandemics, transnational organized crime, irregular migration, and violent extremism are accompanying the traditional security threats (Buzan & Hansen, 2009). These challenges are not national in nature, and international responses are necessary to meet them, responses which cannot be achieved through the efforts of individual nations. Multilateral institutions, including the UN, thus have grown in significance as facilitators of international cooperation, coordination in humanitarian assistance, sustainable development and international legal frameworks.

The establishment of peacekeeping operations is one of the most important achievements of the United Nations. While peacekeeping is not mentioned in the UN Charter, it has become one of the most visible and effective methods for peacekeeping in conflict-

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affected societies. The United Nations (UN) has deployed a range of peacekeeping missions since the first in 1948, including those to monitor ceasefires, protect civilians, support democratic political transitions, supervise elections, disarm former combatants and facilitate post-conflict reconstruction (Bellamy & Williams, 2022). The deployment of peacekeeping forces is known to have a positive impact on the likelihood of violence resuming and helps to promote long-term political stability in post-conflict societies (Fortna 2008). Likewise, Diehl (2014) states that peacekeeping operations are among the hallmarks of today's international conflict management.

In addition to peacekeeping, the United Nations has been a key player in conflict prevention in the form of preventive diplomacy, mediation, arbitration and negotiation. The Secretary-General is regularly using the power of "good offices" diplomacy to assist in the dialogue between conflicting parties; the International Court of Justice has legal mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of international disputes between states. Additionally, multiple UN entities, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) provide humanitarian aid to millions of people impacted by armed conflict, environmental crises, and displacement (Barnett, 2011). These activities illustrate the fact that the definition of the United Nations' peace has evolved over time from a negative definition of peace as the absence of armed conflict to a broader definition that embraces not only the absence of armed conflict but also human security, sustainable development, and the protection of fundamental human rights.

Although they have accomplished these goals, the effectiveness of the United Nations has been under the microscope. The organization has revealed major institutional and political weaknesses, particularly in the wake of recent geopolitical events, such as the Russia–Ukraine conflict, the Israel–Hamas conflict, the situation in the South China Sea, and the current civil war in Sudan and other countries. During some of the deadlines of international crises, the five permanent members of the Security Council, China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States, have used the veto so often that it has hindered timely collective action (Malone, 2022). It is often said that the veto was supposed to be a way to secure cooperation by the major powers but has become a hindrance to good multilateral decision-making (see Bosco 2009).

Yet another critique is on the representativeness of the Security Council. The Council's permanent membership is based on the geopolitical realities of 1945 and not on the international order of the day. The emerging powers like India, Brazil, Germany, Japan and major African countries are still demanding more participation in the decision making process of the world. Weiss 2016 says that the legitimacy and credibility of the Security Council depends on how well it's able to evolve and adjust to new global political realities. Likewise, Hurd (2017) states that the concept of institutional legitimacy is closely related to feelings of fairness, representation, and procedural justice.

Along with the complexity of international security, traditional understanding of collective security is also under test. In the modern wars, Kaldor (2012) observes, non-state actors are becoming more prominent than interstate military conflict, identity politics, terrorism and irregular warfare. Similarly, Paris (2004) argues that far from only ending armed conflict, sustainable peace demands a more holistic approach to peacebuilding that also includes development of governance, institutions, economic recovery and reconciliation. The views

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expressed here indicates that resolving conflicts in the twenty first century is not going to be a single dimensional approach of traditional military engagements.

The vast literature on the United Nations has traditionally tended towards peacekeeping operations, Security Council politics, the role of humanitarian intervention, and institutional reforms as discrete fields of study. Less work has been done that combines these dimensions to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the United Nations in addressing traditional and new security threats in the post-Cold War twenty first century geopolitical landscape. In addition, the great-power competition, growing geopolitical fragmentation and emergence of new security challenges are demanding a new scholarly focus on the role of organization in the maintenance of international peace and security.

In the context of this background, the present study critically reviews the role of the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security, focusing on its institutional achievements, its current issues and how it might be reformed. The study aims to assess the impact of the organization's main tools and instruments (collective security, peacekeeping, humanitarian intervention, peacebuilding), as well as the political and institutional limitations on their application. The paper uses a qualitative research method and draws on the theories of Liberal Institutionalism and Realism to conclude that despite the many institutional and political problems the United Nations has to solve, it is the most legitimate and comprehensive international organization and body for the promotion of international peace, conflict resolution and multilateral cooperation. If the organisation is to be effective in meeting twenty-first century security challenges, it will need to enhance its institutional capacity by meaningful reforms.

Literature Review

Since the founding of the United Nations in 1945, it has played a pivotal role in the field of international relations. It has been studied from a variety of angles, such as realism, liberal institutionalism, constructivism, and critical security studies. There is consensus that the United Nations is the most inclusive international body dedicated to international peace and security issues, but there is much discussion about its ability to address the modern world's conflicts and new security threats.

The first scholarship originated in the notion of collective security and the role of the United Nations in the international system. Claude (1966) believes that the organization was the most ambitious that took place to replace the traditional balance-of-power system with a system based on collective responsibility for maintaining peace. Claude says the United Nations is not capable of stopping all conflicts on its own, but it does offer a framework for the states to try diplomacy, negotiation and peaceful solution of conflict. Likewise, Goodrich and Hambro (1969) pointed out that the Charter has created legal norms that remain relevant in international relations and foster the observance of international law.

Later studies focussed on the effectiveness of the Security Council as the main body for the maintenance of international peace and security. The legitimacy of the Security Council is not just on the basis of its legal powers, but also on the basis of its willingness to be recognized and implemented by the countries that are members of the Council (Hurd 2017). But several scholars question the efficacy of the Council's functioning because of the tendency of the five permanent members to concentrate decision making. The veto power, which was designed to ensure the cooperation of the great powers, has often led to institutional paralysis at major

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international crises, as Bosco (2009) points out. Similarly, Malone (2022) holds that geopolitical competition between the permanent members remains a factor in decision-making within the Security Council, such that it hinders its prompt action in the face of armed conflicts.

Since the end of the Cold War, the body of literature on United Nations peacekeeping has grown in magnitude. While the majority of peacekeeping missions were previously devoted to the monitoring of ceasefires in between states, most peacekeeping operations today include civilian protection, electoral support, institution-building and post-conflict reconstruction. Although there are many challenges to peacekeeping, Bellamy and Williams (2022) state that peacekeeping has become one of the most effective conflict management tools the organization has. A well-designed empirical analysis of civil wars by Fortna (2008) finds that peacekeeping operations make it much less likely that a civil war will relight the flames and that they help to achieve long-term political stability. Likewise, Diehl (2014) argues that peacekeeping operations often take place in challenging political and logistical settings, but continue to be an essential tool for international conflict management.

Second, there is a significant literature exploring the intersection between peacebuilding and sustainable peace. However, Paris (2004) maintains that the only way to achieve lasting peace is to have armed conflict come to an end in conjunction with political reforms, institution-building, economic development, and reconciliation. Similarly, strengthening state institutions, fostering democratic governance, and addressing the root causes of conflict are crucial for successful peacebuilding, as highlighted in Call (2008). These studies extend the concept of international peace to include the importance of social, political, and economic development for sustainable peace.

Non-traditional security threats have also continued to broaden the academic discussions on the role of the United Nations. Buzan and Hansen (2009) believe that modern security is not limited to interstate military threats but also encompasses terrorism, cyber security, environmental security, pandemic security and transnational organized crime. Kaldor (2012) argues that today's wars have many characteristics that set them apart from traditional wars, they are conducted by non-state actors, primarily involves identity politics, and are considered as irregular warfare. International organisations should change their approach to conflict prevention and crisis management to be more holistic and collaborative in their security response in this changing landscape.

The debate on humanitarian interventions and the concept of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) has been long and rich. Evans (2008) maintains that when national governments do not meet their obligations to protect populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity, the international community has a moral and political responsibility to do so. Nevertheless, Bellamy (2009) mentions that the enactment of the Responsibility to Protect is still debatable in political circles as there are conflicting views on the concept of state sovereignty and humanitarian intervention. As such, R2P has been used in the Security Council to a large degree with political motives and not necessarily with humanitarian ones.

There are also many scholars who have studied the institutional changes that should be made to enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations. While Weiss (2016) points out that the organization is irreplaceable, it is necessary to make meaningful reform if it is to be relevant in the changing international environment. Changes that have been suggested encompass the broadening of the membership of the Security Council, the curbing of the veto during

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humanitarian crises, the enhancement of capacities of the peacekeeping missions, and the financial sustainability of the Security Council. Luck (2018) is also in agreement that institutional legitimacy requires more transparency, accountability and representativeness in the Security Council.

In recent years, the United Nations' reaction to today's crises in the international arena has become a topic of growing interest in literature. With the rise of the Russia–Ukraine war, Israel–Hamas war, Sudan and Syria's civil wars, and the escalating strategic competition among global powers, there has been a revival in the debate on the efficacy of multilateral diplomacy. Political differences among the permanent members of the United Nations often result in failure to take collective action, while the United Nations continues to deliver humanitarian aid, coordinate peacekeeping efforts, and facilitate diplomatic activities (Gowan, 2023; Malone, 2022). This led to a renewed call for institutional changes that can bring about the credibility and efficiency of the institution.

A literature search reveals that international scholars recognize the important role of the United Nations in fostering international peace, in conducting diplomatic negotiations, in peacekeeping, in humanitarian relief and in building international cooperation. However, these issues have been present throughout the literature as well, such as the structure of the Security Council, the veto, lack of institutional reform, financial limitations, and the escalating complexity of modern security threats. While the same issues have received extensive study separately, there are relatively few that have taken into account the accomplishments of the organization, as well as its institutional constraints and current geopolitical challenges, in evaluating its performance in respect of international peace and security in the 21st century. The present study aims to fill this void by analyzing the United Nations' changing role, the obstacles faced by its institutional architecture and the necessary reforms to enhance the United Nations' ability to meet an increasingly complex international security environment.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to examine the role of the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security in the twenty-first century. The specific objectives of the study are:

- To examine the role of the United Nations in promoting international peace and security.
- To analyse the contribution of the United Nations in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and humanitarian assistance.
- To identify the major challenges that affect the effectiveness of the United Nations in maintaining international peace.
- To evaluate the need for institutional reforms to strengthen the role of the United Nations in addressing contemporary global security challenges.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What role does the United Nations play in maintaining international peace and security?

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- How effective are the United Nations' mechanisms in preventing and resolving international conflicts?
- What are the major challenges faced by the United Nations in the twenty-first century?
- What reforms are necessary to enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security?

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative research approach and is descriptive as well as analytical in nature. The research is based entirely on secondary sources of data. Information has been collected from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, official publications of the United Nations, reports of international organizations, and other reliable academic sources. The use of secondary data is appropriate because the study seeks to analyse existing knowledge and evaluate the effectiveness of the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security rather than generating primary empirical data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The collected data have been analysed using descriptive and analytical methods. Relevant literature has been critically examined to understand the evolution of the United Nations, its role in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, collective security, humanitarian intervention, and peacebuilding. The study also considers recent international developments to assess the contemporary relevance of the United Nations in responding to evolving global security challenges.

To provide a practical dimension to the analysis, the study incorporates a case study of the United Nations' response to the Russia–Ukraine conflict. The case study illustrates both the strengths and limitations of the organization in dealing with contemporary geopolitical crises and highlights the challenges posed by great-power politics within the Security Council.

Although the study relies exclusively on secondary data, every effort has been made to consult authentic and credible sources to ensure the reliability of the findings. The conclusions drawn are therefore based on a careful analysis of scholarly literature, official documents, and internationally recognized publications.

Limitation of the Study

The study is confined to secondary sources of information and does not include primary data collected through interviews, surveys, or field investigations. It primarily focuses on the role of the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security, with particular emphasis on its institutional mechanisms, contemporary challenges, and prospects for reform. While selected recent international conflicts are discussed for illustrative purposes, the study does not attempt to provide an exhaustive analysis of every peacekeeping mission or international crisis undertaken by the United Nations.

Role of the United Nations in Maintaining International Peace and Security

The United Nations, which was founded in 1945, is the most important international organisation which helps to maintain peace and security between nations. The organization was founded after the Second World War to ensure that future wars could be avoided through collective security, peaceful settlement of conflicts and international cooperation. In the last 80 years, the United Nations' work has evolved from diplomacy to peacekeeping, peacebuilding,

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humanitarian aid, human rights and sustainable development. Despite its dubious success at times, especially in recent years, it remains a major force in the solution of traditional and non-traditional security challenges (United Nations, 1945).

The United Nations has made one of the most important roles in the peaceful settlement of international disputes. According to the UN Charter, member states are urged to settle disputes between themselves by negotiations, mediation, arbitration, judicial settlement, or other peaceful means before they take up arms. In numerous cases, the Secretary-General has served as a key diplomatic catalyst for dialogue between opposing sides and for confidence building measures. This preventive diplomacy has helped defuse tensions and lowered the risk of armed confrontation. While they do not always succeed, they show the organization's dedication to solving issues through dialogue and not military means.

The United Nations also has made significant contributions via its peacekeeping efforts. One of the most obvious instruments the organization uses for promoting peace in the world is peacekeeping. The United Nations has deployed its first peacekeeping mission in 1948 and has since seen numerous missions across Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. These missions have managed ceasefires, observed elections, safeguarded civilians, administered aid, disarmed former combatants and assisted in post-conflict reconstruction. However, peacekeeping operations in Namibia, Cambodia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone have largely been seen as successful instances of international collaboration for the restoration of political stability and for the promotion of democratic governance (Bellamy & Williams, 2022).

But the nature of peacekeeping has evolved significantly over time. Previous missions were mainly concerned with the monitoring of ceasefire agreements between states, while modern missions are increasingly concerned with the protection of the civilian population, the strengthening of state institutions, the promotion of the rule of law and the assistance to nation-building. As a result, peacekeepers frequently deploy in highly dynamic settings where the political settlements are weak and armed groups stay active. Yet, despite these potentially formidable obstacles, research indicates that peacekeeping efforts have played a much more significant role in helping to lower the likelihood of renewed violence and build conditions for perpetuating peace (Fortna, 2008).

The principle of collective security is an other contribution of the United Nations. The Security Council has the power to declare an international threat to peace, impose sanctions, use Chapter VII of the UN Charter to authorize peacekeeping operations, and as needed, collective military action. The Security Council has tried to solve problems related to nuclear proliferation, international terrorism, civil wars, international law violations, etc. by using legally binding resolutions. Economic sanctions, arms embargoes and diplomacy have often been used to deter aggression and promote peace in conflict.

The United Nations' humanitarian role has become its foremost role during armed conflict and natural disasters. War-affected people rely on humanitarian coordination by the UN via different agencies for millions of people. Food, healthcare, education, emergency shelter and protection is provided to refugees and IDPs by organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Not only do these humanitarian responses help to reduce the immediate human suffering, but they also play a role in the long-term peace process, helping to avoid further instability in conflict-prone societies (Barnett, 2011).

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Peacebuilding by the United Nations has also contributed to the strengthening of international peace. Experience has shown that ending armed conflict does not necessarily guarantee lasting peace. Risks to the possibility of renewed violence can be triggered by political instability, weak institutional capacity, poverty, ethnic divisions, and economic inequality. To tackle such issues, the United Nations has made a special effort to emphasize post-conflict reconstruction and support democratic institutions, judicial reform, electoral processes, security sector reform, and socio-economic development. The organization's appreciation that ending hostilities is not enough to bring about sustainable peace led it to establish the Peacebuilding Commission in 2005.

The organization has also played an important role in the creation and development of international law and global norms on use of force. The United Nations has encouraged the observance of international legal principles, including by means of international treaties, conventions and Security Council resolutions through the International Court of Justice. All these legal instruments have helped to increase responsibility, foster peaceful settlement of disputes, and give greater emphasis to multilateral cooperation to resolve international conflicts. The norm influence of the UN has existed for decades and is the basis for enforcing international cooperation, but it depends on the cooperation of member states.

In recent years, the United Nations' roles have grown significantly as a result of the non-traditional nature of security threats. International terrorism, cybercrime, climate change, pandemics, food insecurity and transnational organized crime have become a growing threat to world peace and security. These challenges can only be effectively addressed through joint effort of the states being faced individually. Rather, they need concerted international efforts with information sharing, capacity development, humanitarian cooperation and multilateral diplomacy. In this regard, the United Nations (UN) has played a significant coordinating role, establishing a forum for discussion, helping to develop international agreements, and fostering community responses to these complicated issues (Buzan & Hansen, 2009).

The United Nations has made great strides, but in large part its effectiveness rests on the political will of its member states. The organization has no own military power or police authority. Consequently, the deployment of Security Council resolutions, peacekeeping, sanctions and humanitarian programmes relies heavily on the member states' readiness to supply the necessary financial resources, military personnel, logistical assistance and political support. This relationship can restrict its ability to rapidly respond to new situations in crisis.

However, the United Nations is still an essential element in the modern international system. No other international body has the same universal membership, legal status, institutional history or capacity to act as a facilitator for the world's international conflicts and humanitarian crises. Its work in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding, and promotion of international cooperation has kept it as the foundation of the global collective security system although its institutional shortcomings have been called into question. Institutional reform and greater political cooperation are needed to enable the United Nations to meet the growing twenty first century security challenges.

Challenges Faced by the United Nations in Maintaining International Peace and Security

Since the creation of the United Nations in 1945, the UN has been one of the most important instruments for the maintenance of international peace and security. However, it has faced some institutional, political, financial and operational challenges which have hindered it

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to be effective in tackling current global crises. The UN is the most relevant and relevant multilateral organization for crisis management, but it is facing new challenges of the new geopolitical landscape, the new security threats, and different national interests of member States.

The structure of the United Nations' Security Council and how it makes decisions is a major challenge facing the UN. The Council was founded shortly after the Second World War began to promote peace in the world by collective action. The five permanent members, however, have, on many occasions, led to political deadlock. The veto power allows any one of the permanent members to veto any resolution, even if the majority of the member states vote in favor. As a result, wars over the strategic interests of great powers rarely are resolved since it is hard to reach a consensus in politics. The often-used veto has undermined the credibility of the Security Council and the confidence in its impartial role in international crisis situations is lost (Bosco, 2009; Fassbender, 2003).

Another critical problem is related to the representativeness of the Security Council. The current structure does not mirror the realities of the twenty-first century, but rather the international political order that came into existence in 1945. The United Nations (UN) has grown from 51 member states to 193, and the world's political and economic balance has shifted significantly over that period of time. The emerging powers, including India, Brazil, Germany, Japan and a number of African countries, still call for a more representative Security Council, reflecting the dynamics of today's world. For a number of scholars, meaningful institutional reform is needed to enhance the legitimacy, accountability and efficacy of the Council in terms of peacekeeping (Blum 2005; von Freiesleben 2008).

The United Nations faces another challenge with the nature of the armed conflict. Today's conflicts are more about non-state actors, extremist groups, private military companies, cyber attacks and transnational terrorist networks than about state versus state wars. These can be long-standing, fractured, and motivated by ethnic, religious, or doctrinal differences. The developments have hindered the efforts of the United Nations to solve the conflict as a lot of its institutions were developed to solve interstate conflicts and not complex internal conflict (Kaldor, 2012). That means that peacekeeping missions often find themselves in situations where their usual mandates are not enough.

The lack of funds also continues to pose a threat to the capacity of the organization to function. Financial support from member states is crucial to the success of peacekeeping missions, humanitarian programmes and peacebuilding efforts. For various reasons, including a delay in the assessed contributions, the burden-sharing is unequal, and the costs of operation are rising, budgetary pressures have been substantial. Restricted financial resources can impact on the deployment of personnel, acquisition of equipment and the long-term development and reconstruction programmes. Howard (2008) pointed out that in addition to military personnel, member states must also support sustainable peacekeeping operations with the necessary logistics, training and funds.

The operating context of peacekeeping operations is becoming more challenging. Previous peacekeeping missions tracked the implementation of ceasefire deals between states, but contemporary missions are often deployed in areas of ongoing conflict even when peacekeeping forces are present. Peacekeepers are required to ensure protection of civilians, to assist in democratic institutions, humanitarian relief, and to foster political reconciliation at the same time. These multi-dimensional responsibilities frequently go beyond the capability of

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peacekeeping missions and pose a serious risk of security to peacekeepers. Doyle and Sambanis (2006) state that peacekeeping operations have been most effective when they have been given clear mandates, adequate resources and uninterrupted political backing by the international community.

A second problem has to do with the implementation of humanitarian intervention. The United Nations has declared that it is committed to protecting civilian populations from such mass atrocities as genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity, but debates often ensue as to when such actions should be taken by the international community. The doctrine of state sovereignty is still one of the pillars of international law, and in many parts of the world, governments are still hesitant to endorse foreign interference in matters of state. “Between humanitarian obligations and respect for sovereignty there is one of the most problematic issues in modern international relations," notes Welsh (2006). In the face of a humanitarian crisis, political disagreements have often caused collective action to be delayed.

The growing geopolitical rivalry has further complicated the operation of the United Nations. The rivalry between the major powers has increased in the last decade, including conflict between Western countries and Russia in the UN Security Council and the erosion of the effectiveness of multilateral diplomacy. Influential states often compete against each other strategically, affecting various aspects of voting, peace talks, and humanitarian efforts. Strong states may not always work together, and consensus will be harder to come by if they are not willing to do so. This polarization is now making it less possible for the United Nations to react swiftly and effectively to international crises (Roberts & Zaum,2008).

The United Nations has also faced challenges from worldwide problems like forced migration, food insecurity, cyber insecurity, pandemics and climate change. These challenges cannot be neatly classified as international security issues and can only be solved through concerted efforts from governments, international organizations, civil society and regional institutions. According to Acharya (2014), international organizations should be more flexible and responsive to new and emerging transnational threats in the evolution of the global governance. The United Nations has a big job ahead of it in adapting current institutional structures to meet these fast-evolving challenges.

In spite of this, the UN still has an exclusive place in the international system. It is the only institution in the world with universal membership, with legal authority, with diplomatic legitimacy, and with a lot of institutional experience that is essential for dialogue, coordination of humanitarian assistance and international cooperation. Yet this must be supplemented by widespread institutional change, increased political will by its member states, long-term financing, and flexibility in dealing with the evolving nature of international warfare. Otherwise the organization will have to deal with major challenges in the execution of its main tasks of maintaining international peace and security in the face of an increasingly complex international landscape.

Case Study: The United Nations Response to the Russia–Ukraine Conflict

The Russia – Ukraine conflict has become one of the biggest international security crises of the 21st century. In 2014, tensions between the two countries had been rising since the annexation of Crimea, but when Russia invaded Ukraine on a large scale on 24 February 2022 the conflict escalated to a new level. Thousands of civilians have died, infrastructure has been destroyed, millions of people have been displaced, and there are significant disruptions to

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global food and energy security as a consequence of the war. The conflict has also been one of the biggest challenges the United Nations has faced since the UN's formation, to keep the peace and security of the world, in a war between a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

Right at the beginning of the war conflict the United Nations urged restraint, respect for international law and peaceful settlement of conflicts. The Secretary-General has called for an immediate ceasefire on a number of occasions and stressed the importance of respecting international humanitarian law, particularly to safeguard civilians. During Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly, several resolutions were adopted condemning the use of force against Ukraine and reiterating the rules of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, and their political independence. Even if resolutions of the General Assembly were not legally binding, they indicated the opinions of a significant number of states of the international community and strengthened the normative principles in the UN Charter (United Nations General Assembly, 2022).

However, the Security Council failed to take effective steps to implement its resolutions due to the veto power of the Russian membership in the council as a permanent member. This situation once more revealed one of the basic institutional shortcomings of the United Nations, namely that the body's decisions were made without taking into account the views and opinions of the people who were most deeply affected by them. The Security Council has the primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security but its effectiveness is constrained when one of the permanent members is involved in a conflict directly. Consequently, the Council broke down along geopolitical lines, reflecting how collective security mechanisms can be hindered by geopolitical interests (Patrick, 2023).

In spite of these political restrictions, there were several humanitarian functions performed by the various agencies of the United Nations during the conflict. The UNHCR, which coordinated the response of officials from neighbouring countries, provided assistance to millions of refugees fleeing to those countries, and the WFP provided emergency food assistance to conflict-affected populations. UNICEF scaled up child protection and child school attendance and healthcare programmes, as well as psychological support programmes. In conclusion, the humanitarian work showcased the UN's capacity to be a key player in mitigating the human suffering that occurs during humanitarian crises, despite not always being able to stop armed conflict. (UNHCR, 2023).

The United Nations also made a significant contribution in supporting international diplomacy in relation to food security in the world. Together with Türkiye, the organisation worked to negotiate the Black Sea Grain Initiative in 2022. The pact allowed the shipment of millions of tonnes of Ukraine's grain to the Black Sea to help maintain food security in the world and alleviate pressure on grain-importing developing nations during the conflict. While the agreement ran into troubling later on, it demonstrated how the United Nations can help lead peace efforts even in the most polarized geopolitical environments (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2023).

The war has also prompted much in the way of scholarly discussion of the future usefulness of the United Nations. The failure of the Security Council to take urgent action highlights the acute need for institutional reform, including in the context of mass humanitarian crises, where the veto was used.The inability of the Security Council to take action decisively calls for institutional reform, in particular with regard to the use of the veto in mass humanitarian crises. Some argue that the United Nations should not settle conflicts between

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big military powers, given the fact that the institution was created as a political body. Rather, they contend that the organization's effectiveness in preventing wars also should be judged on its performance in humanitarian assistance, diplomacy, and the maintenance of international legal principles (Krasno, 2023).

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is a good example of the United Nations' capabilities and limitations. On one hand, it could not stop the outbreak of war nor could it get the Security Council to take collective action due to differences in geopolitical views.On the other hand, it was unable to stop the outbreak of war, and failed to persuade the Security Council to take collective action, because of geopolitical divisions. At the same time it was able to organise humanitarian support, to engage diplomatically, to champion international law, and to co-ordinate international action to mitigate the humanitarian impact of the conflict. Thus, the case has shown that the United Nations is not only necessary to the international system, but also that the political cooperation of its member states, especially the permanent members of the Security Council, is essential to the effectiveness of the UN.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that the United Nations has a particular and irreplaceable role in the international system, although it is facing new institutional and political challenges. It has been serving since 1945 as a forum of institutional cooperation among states for the prevention of armed conflict, the peaceful settlement of disputes, peacekeeping and the response to humanitarian emergencies. The results show that the United Nations has been very effective in many areas, but the effectiveness is tied to the international political system.

The key results of the study are that the principle of collective security has been incorporated into the United Nations framework. The organization has established mechanisms within the Security Council, General Assembly, International Court of Justice, and specialized agencies which encourage diplomacy, negotiation, mediation, and multilateral cooperation. Peacekeeping, humanitarian aid and post-conflict peace-building have become significant elements of international peace. These mechanisms have helped bring peace to many conflict-affected areas, saved the lives of civilians and facilitated political transitions.

But the study also shows that the effectiveness of the institutions is often limited by the geopolitical realities. Political deadlock in the Security Council, the primary body responsible for maintaining international peace and security, is a regular occurrence, as a result of differences among the five permanent members. The veto has been invoked on a number of occasions when major powers or important policy issues were at stake, blocking collective action. The capacity of the United Nations to act decisively therefore lies more in the willingness of important states to work together in the process of multilateral diplomacy than in the mandate of law.

The analysis also indicates that current security issues are very different from those that had been present at the time of the founding of the United Nations. Even though war across the state lines is still relevant, civil war, terrorism, cyberattacks, climate change, pandemics, forced migration and transnational organized crime pose a growing threat to international peace. These multi-faceted problems must be addressed with a holistic response that encompasses political, economic, humanitarian, environmental and security aspects. The growing mandate of the United Nations thus requires ongoing institutional adjustments and collaboration with regional organisations, governments and civil society.

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The United Nations is a powerful, yet flawed organization, as demonstrated by the Russia–Ukraine conflict studied in this research. The organization was instrumental in refugee protection, emergency relief and diplomacy, showing its humanitarian side on one hand.On the other hand, the organisation's humanitarian aspect can be seen by how it was involved in refugee protection, emergency relief and diplomacy. Conversely, the Council of the Security Council's divisions hampered its powers to take collective enforcement action. This case serves as a reminder of the importance of both institutional design and the political will of member states to respect the principles of the UN Charter for effective United Nations work.

It also notes that the importance of the United Nations in resolving armed conflicts should not be judged on the basis of its capability to have stopped all such conflicts. Instead, its more comprehensive service is in offering an international forum for discussion, the creation of international law standards, humanitarian cooperation and peaceful conflict resolution. In many cases, the intervention of the organization is one of prevention, diplomacy, or humanitarianism, not of coersion. While less conspicuous than military operations, these functions are nonetheless vital to maintaining international peace.

The results point to the fact that the United Nations remains the keystone of the modern multi-lateral system in general. While institutional changes, especially of the Security Council are needed, the Security Council has a strong role in the global security challenges. The effectiveness of the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security will depend on how well the member states can strengthen political cooperation, how well the institutions are responsive, and how well they adapt to new threats.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the United Nations was to protect the future generations from the destruction caused by war for international peace and collective security and international cooperation. Today, the organization is still at the forefront of the international community's response to conflict, crises, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction, and has remained as active as ever since it was established almost 80 years ago. It is the most comprehensive international organization devoted to the maintenance of peace and security because it is universal, has legal validity, and has an institutional structure. The present study discussed the role of the United Nations in maintaining peace and security in the world, their institutional mechanisms, the achievements of the United Nations and the challenges it faced in the modern world. The findings show that the organization has made valuable contributions in the fields of preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding and promotion of international law. These activities have contributed to the reduction of violence, the protection of civilians in many conflict areas, the facilitation of political dialogue and reconstruction in many conflict-affected areas worldwide.

Concurrently, the research shows that the United Nations is confronted with significant challenges to be overcome to be effective. The system of the Security Council remains a hindrance to prompt collective response to many international crises, especially its veto power vested in the five permanent members. Budgetary limitations, political differences and shifting global security risks add to the difficulties facing the organization in carrying out its mandate. New security threats – such as threats from non-state actors, cyber threats, threats from terrorism and threats from climate change and humanitarian crises – are becoming more and more central to contemporary conflicts, making the approaches to collective security more abstract than before. The case of Russia–Ukraine exemplifies the two-faced nature of the

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United Nations. The organization faced political constraints in terms of the implementation of binding Security Council actions, but continued to deliver humanitarian assistance, promote diplomatic efforts, and defend the principles of international law via its agencies and through the General Assembly. This is a proof of the effectiveness of the United Nations is not only in the prevention of war but also in co-ordinating international cooperation and reducing the humanitarian effects of war.

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