

Namaskar PSIR daily current affairs

22nd December 2025

Topic : Multilateralism isn't dead

Context of the editorial: 80th anniversary of UN

PYQs linkage:

- Argue a case for U.N. reforms in the context of changing global milieu. 20(2014)
- Do you endorse that the United Nations needs major changes in its structures and functioning? Suggest the changes for efficient improvements. 15(2016)
- Do you agree with the view that despite the limitations in the functioning of the UN, it has distinguished and unique achievements to its credit? 15(2017)
- Discuss the significance and urgency of the UN security Council reforms. Explain the relevance of the reform proposals made by the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres for the developing countries. 20(2020)
- What are the measures undertaken by the United Nations for its reforms? 10(2022)
- Discuss the structure and functions of UN security Council. 10(2023)
- “India must strive to become a semi-permanent member of the UNSC, rather than a permanent member with the right to vote.” Comment. 10 (2024)

Theory application:

Liberal institutionalism:

- States (rational actors) cooperate because it is in their interest to do so.
- States can achieve more by working together than working separately.
- In areas of mutual interest, states' desire to make absolute gains usually wins out over concerns about relative gains.

Neo liberal institutionalism:

- They acknowledge that the existence of complex interdependence among does not automatically result in the creation of international organizations.
- Cooperation may be hard to achieve when, despite the existence of common interests, states feel that they have an incentive to defect from an agreement or fear that other states may defect.
- Key purpose of international organizations to reduce the likelihood of this, by building trust between and amongst states and accustoming them to rule-governed behaviour.

Realist:

- International politics: quest for power amongst all states, reflected in the pursuit of relative gains.
- There is little scope for the levels of cooperation and trust that would allow international organizations to develop into meaningful and significant bodies.
- Skeptical about International organization
- View them as ineffective and question their authority (Trump recent moves denouncing UN efforts such as Paris agreement and WTO dispute redressal arrangements)
- The growth of international organizations is usually undesirable because of its implications for state's sovereignty.

Critical theorists:

Frankfurt school: international bodies have internalized a neoliberal agenda and so act in the interests of global capitalism.

Feminists: highlight the gendered construction of international organization of elite men and the internationalization of masculinist ideas and policy approaches.

Concepts and keywords:

- Erosion of multilateralism, geopolitical divides, global problems “problems without passports”, sovereign equality, mutual respect, rule of law, “multilateral” arrangements, international norms, global interdependence, national sovereignty, equitable global order.

Important facts:

- UN marked its 80th Anniversary at October 24th 2025.
- USA reduced its contributions to UN programmes by 80%.

Scholar's views, statements:

- Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan called global problems “problems without passports” which require global solutions.
(Negotiated through multilateral institutions)
- Former UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold “the UN was not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell.”
- “To abandon UN, it would be to abandon the very idea of our common humanity.” Shashi Tharoor.

Brief analysis and key points from the news or editorial:

Core belief of Multilateralism:

- Global problems require global solutions, negotiated through institutions that give voice to all nations, regardless of size or power. It is a system built on sovereign equality, mutual respect and the rule of law.

Need for multilateralism in contemporary times:

- World is in desperate need of coordinated action
- Conflicts in Ukraine, Sudan (little hope of resolution)
- Acceleration of climate change, deepening inequality and technological disruption outpacing governance
- Geopolitical divides do not allow nations to effectively address global challenges.

Challenges to Multilateralism:

- Decline of US commitment (US withdrawal from Human Rights council and UNESCO, reduction of its contributions to UN by 80%, and vetoed UNSC resolutions on Gaza)
- Rise of regional blocs
- Fragmentation of diplomatic norms
- US-China increasingly pursuing bilateral or “mini-lateral” arrangements with like-minded partners.
- Russia defiance of international norms in Ukraine
- Israel’s intransigence in Gaza
- In Europe nationalist currents challenges the consensus
- Philosophical crisis: a deeper tension between global interdependence and national sovereignty
- Conservative elements rooted in place, religion and tradition, are increasingly sceptical of global elites and distant institutions. Their political

ascendancy (from Brexit to Trumpism) has reshaped the landscape in which multilateralism must operate

Issues within UN:

- UN's structure enshrines inequality (UNSC's veto power)
- UN resolutions are often non-binding
- UN enforcement mechanisms are weak
- UNGA is frequently dismissed as a forum of posturing rather than problem solving.
- UNSC is seen as reflecting the geopolitical realities of 1945, not 2025.

UN achievements (Which makes it relevant or shows its significance):

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Climate Agreement – all emerged from multilateral processes.
- UN has coordinated humanitarian relief
- It led several successful peacekeeping missions
- Helped in concluding dozens of international treaties
- Promoted global health responses
- Provided a platform for smaller nations to speak
- It remains the only forum where all nations can come together to address the world's problems.

Suggestions for reviving multilateralism

- Reforming institutions and rebuilding legitimacy
- It must speak to the concerns of ordinary citizens, not just diplomats (sociological liberalism)
- It must demonstrate that global cooperation can deliver tangible benefits—jobs, security, dignity—not just abstract norms.
- It must become less technocratic and more empathetic.
- A multilateralism that is principled yet pragmatic, inclusive yet effective. For that it requires leadership from global powers such as US and China as well as emerging powers, regional coalitions and civil society.

India's role in revival of multilateralism:

- India has an opportunity to champion a more equitable global order, rooted in the values of sovereignty, solidarity, and sustainable development.
- It can contribute its expertise and leadership to global discussions on issues raging from cyberspace to outer space.