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Eighty Years On

Can the United Nations Still Unite the World?

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Welcome to the fourth edition of Trends 360, the bimonthly newsletter from TRENDS Research & Advisory. Each issue unpacks critical global developments shaping the international landscape, from shifting alliances and great power rivalries to emerging policy disruptions. This month, we turn our attention to the role-or, some would argue, the diminishing role and the credibility of the United Nations.

The year 2025 marked the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), under the theme "Better Together: 80 Years and More for Peace, Development, and Human Rights." While setting the tone to place increased emphasis on the ideals the United Nations was founded upon, it also underscores a deeper reality: the ongoing decay of multilateralism on the world stage.

The United Nations stands at a crossroads between endurance and obsolescence. The distance between its founding ideals and today's fractured realities has widened to the point where many question whether the institution will survive to see its 90th anniversary. Paralysis in the Security Council, persistent funding cuts, and growing distrust among member states have left the UN struggling to assert moral or political authority. Yet amid calls for reform, the organization's survival may ultimately depend on its ability to adapt to an international order defined less by cooperation and more by competition.

A World in Turmoil

This past year, our world witnessed immense suffering and uncertainty. Over 67,000 Palestinians lost their lives as a result of Israel's two-year-long war in Gaza, a third of those killed being under the age of 18.[1] The Russia-Ukraine war continues to rage on, gradually turning into asymmetrical warfare with recent Russian incursions into NATO ally airspace, including in Poland, which prompted the Polish government to enact Article 4 of NATO, bringing the allied members even closer to military involvement in what is seemingly becoming yet another 'forever' war. Israel attacked Qatar for the first time while attempting to root out Hamas leadership based in Doha, sending shockwaves through the region. This was followed by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signing a defense agreement, extending Pakistan's nuclear umbrella over the Gulf.

Amid this grim geopolitical backdrop, the U.S. under the Trump administration, the UN's historically largest donor, has cut funding to the international body, slashing its ability to provide lifesaving aid, food, and medicine to the world's most needy.[2] Fundamental human rights, enshrined in the opening paragraph of the UN Charter's preamble, remain under attack globally, stretching from the innocent victims in Gaza living in what has been described as a 'graveyard' by UNICEF,[3] to prevailing gang violence and lawlessness in Haiti, worsening an already dire humanitarian crisis.[4] In El Fasher, Sudan, civilians continue to live under siege, suffering from famine and chronic displacement, [5] while Nigeria is again experiencing a resurgence of Boko Haram extremist attacks, both against its civilian population and the military. [6]

1 Nida Al-Mughrabi and Emma Farge, "Explainer: How many Palestinians has Israel's Gaza offensive killed?," Reuters, October 2025 ,7, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/how-many-palestinians-has-israels-gaza-offensive-killed-07-10-2025/.
2 Patrick Wintour, "UN faces $500m budget cut and %20 job losses after big drop in US funding," The Guardian, September 2025 ,18, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/18/united-nations-un-2026-budget-job-losses-us-funding-cuts.
3 United Nations, "Statement by UNICEF," [Press release], December 2024 ,6, https://www.un.org/unispal/document/statement-by-unicef-06dec24/.
4 Sevil Omer, "Haiti crisis: Facts, FAQs, and how to help," World Vision, June 2025 ,16, https://www.worldvision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/haiti-crisis-faqs
5 Mark Townsend, ""We will never, ever escape": Inside the ever-tightening siege of the Sudanese city of El Fasher," The Guardian, September 2025 ,24, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/sep/24/siege-sudan-city-el-fasher-rsf.
6 Adwoa Tenkoramaa Domena, "Nigeria's Boko Haram insurgency: Is there a way out?," DW, September 2025 ,9, https://www.dw.com/en/nigerias-boko-haram-insurgency-is-there-a-way-out/a-73930484

PREAMBLE TO THE UNITED NATIONS CHARTER "WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED[7]

to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and

to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom".

Against the severity of these challenges, it's easy to dismiss UNGA's endless sessions, high-level conferences, and eloquently crafted resolutions as nothing more than empty promises forgotten once the last delegation departs. The truth of the matter is that the UN still has some wind under its sails. It remains a call to action reverberated by political and public pressures, a reminder to stakeholders and world governments that today's challenges, however difficult to build consensus around, at a bare minimum, can be mitigated through collective action. While mitigation today seems like a scapegoat, is there another option in the face of today's fragmented landscape? In the words of former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, the UN "has to evolve. It has evolved. It will need to continue to evolve. And if it didn't exist, we would invent it." [8]

7 United Nations, Charter of the United Nations: Full text, (n.d.), https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text
8 "Albright on the U.N.: 'If it didn't exist, we would invent it,'" NPR, December 2014 ,28, https://www.npr.org/373587972/28/12/2014/albright-on-the-u-n-if-it-didnt-exist-we-would-invent-it.

2025 Highlights

This year's high-level week pledged a reinvigorated commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to restoring global cooperation. Yet, in light of the current dire state of today's global landscape with political divisions, growing competition, and lack of trust among superpowers—particularly those with a permanent seat at the UN Security Council—this edition aims to shine a spotlight on the importance of collective global action. Health crises, the growing impact of climate change, peace and security, development, and the protection of human rights—all remain under attack and underfunded, but nonetheless remain the building blocks of strong, resilient societies.

At the opening of this year's general debate, UN Secretary General António Guterres goaded world leaders toward collective collaboration, stating we've entered "an age of reckless disruption and relentless human suffering" and that leaders must choose between "a world of raw power—or a world of laws. A world that is a scramble for self-interest—or a world where nations come together." [9]

Palestinian Statehood

During a joint session on promoting the two-state solution, chaired by France and Saudi Arabia on 22 September, Andorra, Belgium, Luxembourg, Malta, and Monaco, along with France, announced their intention to recognize Palestinian statehood, the defining moment of this year's UNGA. The announcement followed similar statements from the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Portugal a day earlier.

9 Secretary-General of the United Nations, Statement Summary [UNGA 80 Debate page], September 2025 ,23, https://gadebate.un.org/en/80/secretary-general-united-nations.

While statehood recognition, which came prior to the ceasefire in October, aimed at applying political pressure on Israel to end its military campaign in Gaza, there was also anticipation that the calls would halt Israel's intentions to build an additional 3,400 settlements in the occupied West Bank, announced by Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich in September.[10] Known as the "E1" project, the proposed expansion seeks to create a contiguous corridor through the West Bank, effectively severing its territorial link to East Jerusalem.[11]

10 Amjad Iraqi, "Can the world make recognition of Palestine's statehood matter?," International Crisis Group, September 2025 ,26, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/israelpalestine/can-world-make-recognition-palestines-statehood-matter.

11 Jeremy Sharon, "Smotrich rejoices as settlement plan that 'erases 2-state delusion' gets final greenlight," The Times of Israel, August 2025 ,20, https://www.timesofisrael.com/smotrich-rejoices-as-settlement-plan-that-erases-2-state-delusion-gets-final-greenlight/.

At a time when calls for Palestinian statehood have taken on renewed urgency, full UN membership, on the other hand, remains a complicated, if not impossible, battle. Palestinian UN membership would require a Security Council resolution—something the current U.S. administration would likely veto in support of Israel. Following his signature to move ahead with the settlement in E1, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu stated, "We are going to fulfill our promise that there will be no Palestinian state; this place belongs to us." [12] In an act of diplomatic defiance ahead of this year's assembly, the U.S. revoked the visa of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, forcing the leader to address the assembly via video.[13]

Although the announcements recognizing the state of Palestine carry strong symbolic weight amid the ongoing suffering in Gaza, even despite the recent ceasefire, their lasting value will depend on whether declared statehood can translate into concrete steps toward a credible and enduring two-state reality. This process, grounded in the durability of the current phase-one ceasefire, will face its true test in phase two, which envisions a new administrative framework for Gaza, the deployment of an international peacekeeping force, and the dismantling of Hamas's military capabilities.[14]

There remains much ambiguity over Gaza's future governance: who will ultimately administer the territory, whether Israel will accept the outcome of any future elections, and if it would ever permit the creation of a Gazan security force, each representing the most basic prerequisite for self-determination.

12 "'There will be no Palestinian state': PM signs plan cementing E1 settlement expansion," The Times of Israel, September 2025 ,11, https://www.timesofisrael.com/there-will-be-no-palestinian-state-pm-signs-plan-cementing-e1-settlement-expansion/.
13 "UN votes to let Palestinian leader address General Assembly by video after US visa denial," AP News, September 2025 ,24, https://apnews.com/article/un-general-assembly-palestinians-abbas-israel-aa45c5e27dad591b33d04cf24377ebd9.
14 Diyar Güldoğan, "Trump announces start of 'phase 2' of Gaza deal," Anadolu Agency, October 2025 ,14, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/trump-announces-start-of-phase-2-of-gaza-deal/3717253.

Kenyan President calls for a 'reimagined' UN

During his impassioned and candid address,[15] Kenyan President William Ruto reminded world leaders that the multipolar world we face today no longer aligns with the UN, born out of a post-war necessity. The UN, which rose from the ashes of the failed League of Nations, lacked enforcement mechanisms, crippling its legitimacy—a similar crossroad the UN faces today. President Ruto reminded us that global institutions rarely fail because of their vision, but rather they fade into irrelevance when they choose not to adapt to the times and circumstances of reality. Ruto called for the UN to be "reimagined" to better align with the needs of our time instead of becoming a 'relic of a bygone era.'[16]

Ruto's vision to maintain UN relevance is one that has long been debated and half-heartedly accepted: UN Security Council enlargement. The Kenyan president, who correctly stated that Africa continues to dominate the UNSC agenda while simultaneously providing the largest contingents of UN Peacekeeping troops, remains the only continent without a permanent seat at the table. His proposal—two permanent seats and two additional non-permanent seats on the Security Council—would serve as the reform the UN needs, not as a favor to Africa, but rather to ensure the UN's survival.

15 United Nations, "Kenya – President addresses United Nations General Debate, 80th Session," [Video], YouTube, September 2025 ,24, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryFvWZ4jVVc.
16 Ibid.

Finland calls for an end to UNSC veto

Security Council vetoes—historically a point of contention for many, particularly the global south—gained traction with a new ally at this year's UNGA: Finland. During his address, Finnish President Alexander Stubb emphasized that today's global crises are a result of the failures of the international system and that each global conflict deserves equal attention. Moreover, Stubbs underscored a critical point—the UN's response to global conflict should not be transactional.[17] More often, the world is witnessing UNSC resolutions and vetoes that suit the interests of the permanent members and far less so for the international community, which they are meant to serve.

The composition of the UN today continues to mirror the geopolitical realities of 1945. As the global order has dramatically evolved since the post-war era, so should the only global body enshrined with the responsibility of ensuring peace and security. In order to maintain the UN's legitimacy and its ability to intervene and enforce peace, reforms are no longer optional but mandatory to address the crises of today.

17 United Nations, "Finland – President addresses United Nations General Debate, 80th session," [Video], YouTube, September 2025 ,24, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLzUhjf7XQU.

Stubbs' recommendation on how to correct this recurring injustice is the removal of the veto rights for permanent members. Echoing similar calls from his 2024 UNGA speech, Stubbs pleaded that underrepresented regions deserve a stronger voice and a permanent platform—something that can only be achieved through permanent seats at the UNSC table. His boldest idea was that if any permanent member of the Security Council violates the UN charter, its voting rights should be suspended.[18]

This, in essence, is a matter of common sense. A principle widely accepted in any major business or corporation, where accountability is a non-negotiable standard. If such expectations are upheld for employees and the public, why shouldn't the world's highest decision-making body be held to the same account? It is this continued duplicity that undermines the legitimacy and bargaining power that only a body like the UN can yield.

Constraints on UN Capacity and Credibility: Operational and Structural Limitations

UNRWA Operations Halted

The UNGA established the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) in December 1949, mandated to provide assistance and protection to Palestinian refugees, assisting individuals in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, and supporting 5.9 million registered refugees in their pursuit of comprehensive human development until a just resolution to their circumstances is achieved.[19]

18 Ibid.
19 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, "Palestine Refugees," (n.d.), https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees.

Controversy surrounding UNRWA began in January 2024, when the Israeli government presented the UN, the U.S., and other allies with a dossier alleging that twelve UNRWA employees had taken part in the 7 October attacks on southern Israel.[20] Consequently, around a dozen donor states promptly suspended aid to UNRWA, including the agency's two largest donors, the U.S. and Germany.

One year later, in January 2025, two Israeli laws came into effect, effectively banning UNRWA's operations within Israeli territory and barring contact with Israeli authorities.[21] While the legislation bans operations within Israeli territory, it does not halt operations within the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. This decision was met with backlash, as the legislation contravenes international humanitarian law and violates the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, a treaty that grants the UN legal protections to operate independently within member states.[22] Under Articles II and V, the Convention guarantees the UN's right to conduct its operations free from interference by national authorities.

While the U.S. and world leaders signed the Gaza peace deal in October 2025, which included provisions to permit aid following the ceasefire, UNRWA remains explicitly prohibited from operating within Israeli territory. Although a ceasefire is in place, Israel has continued to block movements through the Rafah crossing with Egypt, defying international calls to permit large-scale aid deliveries.[23]

20 Jeremy Diamond, "Israel Releases Names and Details of Alleged Involvement of UNRWA Employees in October 7 Attacks," CNN, February 2024 ,16. https://edition.cnn.com/16/02/2024/middleeast/israel-allegations-unrwa-october-7-intl.

21 "Israel's Ban on UNRWA Comes Into Effect Despite Backlash," Al Jazeera, January 2025 ,30, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/30/1/2025/israels-ban-on-unrwa-comes-into-effect-despite-backlash.

22 International Court of Justice, "Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 13 February 1946," (n.d.), https://www.icj-cij.org/other-texts/convention-on-the-privileges.

23 "Gaza Aid Deliveries Still Face Israeli Roadblocks a Week Into Ceasefire," Al Jazeera, October 2025 ,17, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/17/10/2025/gaza-aid-deliveries-still-facing-israeli-roadblocks-a-week-into-ceasefire.

UNIFIL to Be Dismantled by 2027

The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was established in March 1978 by the UNSC to oversee the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon, restore peace and security, and assist the Lebanese government in restoring its effective authority in the area, and has been renewed annually since then.[24] As of July 2025, the 10,800 peacekeepers have acted as a buffer between Israel and Lebanon since 1978, remaining after Israel ended an occupation of southern Lebanon in 2000.[25] However, the peacekeeping mission would end its operations in Lebanon by 2027, as the UNSC unanimously voted in August 2025 to extend the UN peacekeeping mission one final time, until 31 December 2026.[26]

The mission's termination was pushed by the United States and Israel, as Dorothy Shea, the U.S. envoy at the UN, made clear after the vote, "This will be the last time the United States will support an extension of UNIFIL."[27] On the Israeli side, Danny Danon, the Israeli UN representative, said, "For a change, we have some good news coming from the UN."[28] This was not surprising, as the Israeli government has historically accused UNIFIL of failing to do its job, accusing the peacekeeping mission of failing to prevent Hezbollah's military build-up in southern Lebanon.

The prohibition of UNRWA and the banning of UNIFIL have raised concerns, as the leading critic of both UN missions, Israel, appears able to obtain favorable outcomes at will, with reliable U.S. backing. This was evident in September 2025, as the U.S., for the sixth time, vetoed a UN resolution demanding an immediate, unconditional, and permanent ceasefire in Gaza and the release of hostages.[29] If such measures can be taken in Lebanon and Gaza, then what's preventing them from being used elsewhere?

24 United Nations Peacekeeping, "UNIFIL Fact Sheet," (n.d.), https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/unifil.
25 Ibid.
26 "UN Security Council Votes to Wind Down UNIFIL Mission in Lebanon After 2026," Al Jazeera, August 2025 ,28, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/28/8/2025/un-security-council-renews-unifil-mission-in-lebanon-until-end-of-2026.
27 Ibid.
28 "UN Security Council Votes to Wind Down UNIFIL Mission in Lebanon After 2026."
29 Yolande Knell, "Israel-Gaza: US Vetoes UN Call for Ceasefire for Sixth Time," BBC, September 2025 ,19, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce3yj41083no.

The Security Council's Structural Dilemma

As mentioned earlier, reforming the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is not a new concept. This is largely owing to the imbalance of authority within the so-called "equal diplomatic arena" of the UNSC, where the five permanent members (P5) hold the right to veto all substantive resolutions. The veto provision exacerbates inequality, as countries with good relations to those wielding "veto power" (e.g., Israel and the U.S.) are able to evade prosecution while those suffering are unable to get equal support, as the hierarchy of power rests with the P5. It goes without saying that the principle of sovereign equality in Article (1)2 of the UN Charter is threatened by its veto provision, as members of the Security Council are never seen on an equal basis when the P5 can reject any decision made by the consensus of other countries combined.[30]

French President Emmanuel Macron, at the 80th UNGA, cautioned that fragmentation in the global order is "halting our collective capacity to resolve the major conflicts of our time and preventing us from addressing global challenges."[31] This call was met with support from leaders and representatives at the annual meeting, especially in a time of multilateral decline marked by tensions.

30 United Nations, "Chapter I: Purposes and Principles (Articles 2-1)," (n.d.), https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-1.
31 Edith M. Lederer, Jennifer Peltz, and Farnoush Amiri, "Guterres Pleas for World to Choose Peace Over War and Unity Over Self-interests," AP News, September 2025 ,24, https://apnews.com/article/un-general-assembly-opens-fb91931e273432bc8725e9e9860f9844.

While President Ruto's call for a veto provision for African nations was commendable, it does not address the core inequality within the UNSC. Conversely, President Stubbs' proposal to abolish veto power would give all nations an equal opportunity to participate in the Security Council, preventing veto holders from monopolizing power. While countries initially joined the UN in the hope that their voices could be heard and treated equally, the veto provision has hindered international cooperation, as good resolutions can be easily discarded.[32] However, the abolishment of the veto seems far-fetched, as the veto power creates inequality but also keeps everything in a gridlock, as history has shown us time and again: great powers have a habit of disagreeing with each other often, either out of interest or retaliation against one another.

The Erosion of Law and Multilateralism: When Power Blocks Law

Although the International Criminal Court (ICC) operates independently from the UN, it functions as part of the international legal architecture that the UN helped establish to uphold accountability and human rights. On 6 February 2025, President Trump issued an Executive Order authorizing sanctions against the ICC and its chief prosecutor, with the intention of halting the “baseless” court-issued arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, issued in November 2024.[33] Since then, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has implemented additional sanctions targeting individuals within the ICC and foreign non-governmental organizations involved in the ICC warrant.[34]

32 Monika Khatiwada, “The Controversy of Veto Power in the United Nations Security Council,” June 2024, https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.17256.07684.
33 The White House, “Imposing Sanctions on the International Criminal Court,” February 2025 ,6, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/02/2025/imposing-sanctions-on-the-international-criminal-court/.
34 U.S. Department of State, “ICC Sanctions,” (n.d.), https://www.state.gov/icc-sanctions.

The ICC, established as a "court of last resort," has the authority to prosecute for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes when states are unable or unwilling to investigate or prosecute individuals. While intended to serve as a beacon of hope for accountability and a means to prevent the abuse of power, these U.S. sanctions aim to hinder justice and coerce the ICC into abandoning its pursuit of impartial and independent justice for all victims it is committed to serving, which include Palestine, Ukraine, Myanmar, and other cases.

While the United States is content to support the edifice of international law from a distance, it has decided not to accede to the Rome Statute of the ICC as a means to prevent the tribunal from being used to prosecute Americans.[35] The U.S. is not alone in this, as great powers like China and Russia have also abstained from membership. This leads to the most common critique of the international legal order: its lack of enforceability. Responsibility for determining whether and how international law is enforced falls on the users of the system and those who rely on it. Thus, international law, and those who practice it, are regularly dismissed as irrelevant precisely because they are seen as powerless, incapable of constraining the strong, deterring aggression, or delivering justice when it matters most.[36]

The enforcement of international laws remains limited due to the principle of state sovereignty, which affirms that each state exercises supreme authority within its own territory and is not subject to any higher power without its consent. This concept, rooted in the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, remains both the foundation and the undoing of the international legal order.[37]

35 Eve Sampson, "Why Some Countries Won't Join the I.C.C," The New York Times, November 2024 ,21, https://www.nytimes.com/21/11/2024/world/middleeast/us-icc-member-countries.html.

36 Devika Hovell, "The Center Cannot Hold: ICC Sanctions, Rogue Turns, and the Unmaking of Legal Order," Fordham International Law Journal 48 (August 2025): 1105. https://www.fordhamilj.org/volume-48-issue-7/8/2025/5/the-center-cannot-hold-icc-sanctions-rogue-turns-and-the-unmaking-of-legal-order.

37 "Peace of Westphalia," ScienceDirect (n.d.), https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/peace-of-westphalia.

While sovereignty ensures equality, it simultaneously shields governments from accountability. Thus, abiding by treaties and international law remains voluntary, as encroachment on national sovereignty risks political confrontation.

Changing World Order

Some contend that the multipolar world order has already collapsed or is perilously close to doing so. Once central to international cooperation, the UN and other IGOs that were founded after World War II are increasingly unable to fulfill their mandates or adapt to the shifting world order. Unsurprisingly, since returning to the White House, President Donald Trump has demonstrated a decline in multilateralism through continuous cuts to UN funding and peacekeeping initiatives, placing tariffs that undermine the World Trade Organization (WTO), and exhibiting his “America First” policy to the world.

Despite its decline, multilateralism remains essential, as transnational issues such as climate change, migration, global health, and digital governance cannot be effectively managed through unilateral or bilateral actions alone. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relies on a functioning multilateral order capable of coordinating efforts across economic, environmental, and humanitarian spheres. When discussing improvements to the multilateral system, there is a consensus on increasing participation from non-state actors and boosting representation from the Global South. Middle powers such as Brazil, India, and South Africa, all members of BRICS, seek greater influence in a more equitable multilateral system designed to benefit all. Nevertheless, the international system of states is complex, and while an outdated and inferior multilateral system persists, it remains worth defending.[38]

Moving Forward: How Can the UN Remain Relevant?

As the United Nations enters a period of transition, with Secretary-General António Guterres set to leave office in 15 months, the question of reform grows increasingly urgent. Should the UN wait for new leadership to drive change, or must reform begin now to preserve its continuity and credibility? Even if a majority of the Permanent Five (P5) members of the Security Council were to express enthusiasm for reform, any amendment to the UN Charter would still require unanimous approval. Given today's fractured global landscape and intensifying U.S.-China rivalry, achieving such consensus appears highly improbable, if not entirely futile. Much will depend on whether the organization can demonstrate tangible influence at a time when global governance is increasingly sidelined by bilateralism and national interest.

38 Jo Inge Bekkevold, "The Golden Age of Multilateralism Is Over," Foreign Policy, September 2025 ,12, https://foreignpolicy.com/12/09/2025/unga-2025-united-nations-multilateralism-dead-geopolitics-international-relations/.

This growing prioritization of bilateral negotiations and security guarantees reflects a wider shift: states are pursuing self-interest over shared solutions. Yet, this is not the first crisis of multilateralism the UN has faced. From paralysis during the Cold War to irrelevance during the Iraq invasion, the organization has repeatedly been tested and survived. Today, even amid skepticism, the UN continues to matter. While U.S. policy may oscillate between rhetorical support and funding cuts, the institution remains indispensable in regions overlooked by major powers, where it mitigates crises and prevents escalation.

The UN's value lies not in its perfection but in its persistence as the last remaining forum where dialogue, however imperfect, can still bridge divisions and sustain the faint yet enduring hope for collective peace. The question, then, is not whether the UN is still fit for purpose; there is no other institution like it, and no viable alternative. Rather, the real questions are: How relevant does the world want the UN to be? How efficient? And can it truly function without political interference?

The glue that continues to hold the UN together is the shared belief among most member states in its core values: a commitment to common norms, multilateral cooperation, and a rules-based international order. While the UN may not appear fully fit for purpose today, this is a momentary crisis, not a terminal one. But unless member states show the political will to reform and adapt, the UN risks sliding into irrelevance, not by deliberate design, but by gradual neglect.

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