

India and the 'UN@75'

In 1945, representatives of 50 countries, including India, met in San Francisco at the United Nations Conference on International Organization to draw up the United Nations Charter. The Charter was signed on 26 June 1945 by the representatives of these 50 countries. The United Nations Organisation officially came into existence on 24 October 1945, when the Charter had been ratified by the five permanent members of the UNSC and by a majority of other signatories. Thus, United Nations Day is celebrated on 24 October each year.

The UN, which celebrates its 75th anniversary in 2020, has already outlived its predecessor by half a century. For its sheer survival, and for becoming a truly global organisation with a wide range of activities, the UN can consider itself a successful organisation despite its limitations. A critical evaluation of the organisation against the benchmark of its stated principles and purposes, and the expectations from it in the world today is essential to assess how well it has performed, and can be expected to perform, in the years leading up to its centenary.

The UN was set up to save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war. It was also expected to promote international cooperation to solve social, economic, cultural, and humanitarian problems, and encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. This was a tall order, and the performance of any international organisation with such a vast mandate would necessarily be chequered.

How has the UN fared in its primary goal of maintaining international peace and security? With the permanent five lacking consensus about providing the Security Council with an army, the UN had to improvise to fulfil its mandate. It settled for peacekeeping operations, and occasionally resorted to authorising member states to take military action on its behalf. Has peacekeeping been a satisfactory instrument for maintaining international peace and security? What has been the experience with military actions taken by member states on the authority of the Security Council?

The brief period of cooperation among the permanent five that followed the end of the Cold War is long over. The Security Council is once again frequently deadlocked by the threat or use of the veto. The veto had been the most strongly opposed provision of the draft UN Charter at the San Francisco

Conference. It was to have been reviewed, along with the rest of the Charter, after 10 years. However, this was not done. Should the review take place now?

The UN's activities in other fields have gained considerable salience, and the greater part of its budget is allocated for them. In which of these fields can the UN claim to have been successful? Sustainable development? Human Rights? The environment? Humanitarian assistance? Trade Promotion? Disarmament? The codification of international law?

India has taken its responsibilities as a founding member of the UN very seriously. In the early years, it was instrumental in forging the non-aligned movement, and reorienting the UN towards promoting decolonisation, abolishing racial discrimination, and strengthening its activities in promoting development and an equitable international order. How has India performed in the years after the Cold War when the UN saw a virtual explosion in its activities? What have been India's initiatives in the UN in recent years?

India has been vigorously pursuing the goal of the reform of the UN, with a permanent seat for itself in an expanded Security Council. How essential are these reforms? And, what are the prospects of realising them? Will the addition of more permanent and non-permanent members make the Security Council more effective? Will it make it more transparent and democratic?

India has now spent nearly three decades trying for a permanent seat in a reformed Security Council. Is a permanent seat likely in the foreseeable future? How has this campaign impacted India's foreign policy? How will a permanent seat help India promote its foreign policy objectives? Does it need to re-think its goal or change its strategy?



These are some of the questions that were posed to a few experts/strategic analysts. The views of eight such analysts, who responded to our invitation, are published in this edition of the Journal.

Reviews of 2 books on the theme of this special issue, authored by two distinguished members of the Association, published earlier, are also included.