Need for Institutional Reforms of UN

Mains: *GSII – International relations*

Why in News?

The recent events highlights the need for UN reforms to address Security Council paralysis, unequal representation and declining effectiveness in maintaining international peace and security.

What are the Major Structural Challenges Facing the UN?

- **Security Council Paralysis and Veto Power** –
  - **Article 24** – Assigns the Security Council primary responsibility for *maintaining international peace* and security.
  - **Article 27** – Allows any one of the *five permanent members (P5) to veto substantive resolutions*, irrespective of majority support.
  - **Article 27(3)** – Requires a party to a dispute to *abstain from voting* on certain decisions under Chapter VI and Article 52(3).
    - **Example** – Gaza Ceasefire Resolution (September 2025)
  - The US vetoed it, demonstrating how national interests can override collective security objectives.
- **Unequal Representation and Democratic Deficit**
  - **Africa**, despite being central to the Security Council's peace and security agenda, has no permanent seat.
  - **Latin America** and the **Caribbean** also lack permanent representation.
  - **China** is the only permanent member from the Asia-Pacific group.
  - The Council's composition reflects the geopolitical realities of 1945 rather than contemporary global power distribution.
- **Weak Enforcement and Accountability**
  - Powerful nations often prioritise strategic interests over international commitments.
  - Dependence on member states for financial resources, political support and enforcement capacity restricts independent action.
  - **Rwanda** and **Srebrenica** demonstrate the consequences of inadequate mandates, resources and political will.

What Mechanisms Exist to Address Security Council Paralysis?

- **General Assembly's Complementary Role –** The General Assembly can deliberate and recommend collective measures when the Security Council fails to act.

- The ICJ, in its 1962 advisory opinion in Certain Expenses of the United Nations, recognised that the Security Council's responsibility for international peace and security is not exclusive.

International Court of Justice (ICJ)—*often called the World Court—is the main judicial organ of the United Nations.*

- **Important Institutional Mechanisms**
- **Uniting for Peace Resolution (1950)** – Enables the General Assembly to recommend collective measures when the Security Council is paralysed due to a lack of unanimity among permanent members.
- **Resolution 76/262 (2022)** – Provides for a General Assembly debate within 10 working days whenever a permanent member exercises its veto, subject to an existing emergency special session.
- However, these mechanisms facilitate scrutiny and recommendations rather than compel enforcement.

What are the Major Proposals for UN Reform?

- **Security Council Expansion –**
  - **India**, **Brazil**, **Germany** and **Japan (G4)** advocate permanent membership and comprehensive Security Council expansion.
  - The African Union's **Ezulwini Consensus** demands at least two permanent and five non-permanent African seats.
  - The African Union opposes the veto in principle but demands equal veto privileges for new permanent members as long as the existing veto continues.
- **Veto Reform**
  - Introduce voluntary restraint on veto use in situations involving genocide, crimes against humanity and serious violations of international humanitarian law.
  - Strengthen transparency and accountability in the exercise of veto powers.
- **Structural and Charter Reforms –**
  - **Article 108** - Amendments require a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly and ratification by two-thirds of UN members, including all five permanent members.
  - Existing permanent members retain the power to approve changes that could dilute their own privileges, making reform difficult.

What Should Be the Way Forward?

- **Representative Governance** – Expand permanent and non-permanent membership to reflect contemporary geopolitical realities.
- **Responsible Veto Exercise** – Promote voluntary veto restraint in situations involving mass atrocities and serious humanitarian violations.
- **Strengthen General Assembly** – Enhance its deliberative and recommendatory role during Security Council paralysis.
- **Institutional Accountability** – Improve transparency, democratic decision-making

and accountability within the UN system.

- **Operational Effectiveness** – Provide adequate mandates, financial resources and political support for peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.
- **Global Cooperation** – Strengthen coordination in humanitarian assistance, sustainable development, human rights and cross-border challenges.

What lies ahead?

- The UN must evolve from a forum of diplomatic commitments into an institution capable of delivering collective action.
- Its credibility depends on representative decision-making, accountability and the willingness of member states to uphold international principles over narrow national interests.

Reference

[The Hindu| United Nations must do more than survive]

