

“THE UNITED NATIONS IS THE VICTIM OF HIGH EXPECTATIONS »

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What is your assessment of the UN, which has existed for 70 years, and its actions? Because of its public image, the United Nations is often the victim of disproportionate and fanciful expectations, which lead to rather harsh judgements. If this type of approach is set aside, one could say, of course, that the U in the UN is superfluous. The nations are not united, no more than the League of Nations was a league- it was more of a jungle. All that aside, I think it's a good thing that a global organisation that includes all nations, which communicate with each other and can cooperate, exists. The world is better with the UN than without it. That goes without saying. In 1945, in the light of the failure of the League of Nations, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin's reasoning was correct; it consisted of founding a new organisation, endowing it with a Security Council and providing for a right of veto. Certain idealists like to think about doing away with this right. But without the veto system, there would no longer be a UN. Why? In the absence of the Security Council, the General Assembly would have had qualified majority voting. There would have been immense waves of populism. The USSR would have voted against everything. A virulent third worldism would have emerged. The Western countries would have all left. Nothing would have stabilised votes in the General Assembly. The idea that there should still be some sort of organisation and that it should have a head, which the League of Nations did not have, constituted an intelligent vision. With the benefit of hindsight, we note that the leaders of 1945 did much better than those after the First World War with the Treaty of Versailles or the West after the end of the USSR, when Russia was thought unworthy of consideration. The UN was thus founded with its Council, its Chapter VII, which provides for the use of force, its permanent members and its right of veto. It's better this way, even though the system was later paralysed by the cold war and the sometimes abusive use of the veto. Is the organisation well-managed? The Gates Foundation is better managed than any UN institution. We need a giant reform of the large agencies, and to combat wastefulness and appointments according to hidden nationality quotas and not by competence. If 15 or 20 agencies are tidied up and others brought closer together in order to be merged, that would be very good. But not everything needs to be binned. The multilateral system is a colossal waste of time, but if we didn't have it, it would be even more difficult to cooperate. It's like a ghastly meeting of 193 neighbours trying to decide whether to repaint the stairwell. That's the way it is. There's no magical alternative solution. How effective do you think the system is? Too much shouldn't be expected of it. The UN is not a person. The UN is not a power. It is us, collectively. You cannot say: "But what does the UN do?" It's a framework. The secretary general of the United Nations has very little room to manoeuvre if the permanent members don't agree. He cannot say: "I've decided that we're using Chapter VII." He and the specialist organisations can only work if there is agreement between the member states, particularly the five permanent members. Has the United Nations experienced a golden age? There were periods of general optimism, but not thanks to the UN. Everything was going well, so the powers that usually opposed each other played constructively together, even at the UN. This was the case during the first Gulf War. At the end of his reign, Gorbachev hoped to reform communism and the USSR. When Saddam Hussein seized Kuwaiti resources, he did not understand that, for Gorbachev, it was not worth maintaining special ties with Iraq and cutting himself off from Western countries, which he needed for perestroika to succeed. Before the end of the USSR, the Security Council agreed to tell Saddam: "Get out or we'll make you get out." It was not because the UN had started to operate well. But as the great powers wanted to work together, the natural framework was the UN. We entered a Kantian period with the idea of a treaty of perpetual peace. Do you have positive interventions by the UN in mind? The day when a joint resolution was adopted to tell the Iraqis to get out of Kuwait and the USSR did not veto it was a great moment for the organisation. But the UN benefitted from the agreement, it did not obtain or impose it. It did not have the means to impose it. The UN has never imposed its decisions on the permanent members. Can the UN be reformed? Should the right of veto be abolished? Should new countries be made permanent members of the Security Council? I should start by frankly reminding you that reform requires the agreement of the five permanent members. No power is above them. It is not the secretary general who holds the keys to reform, but the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom and France. It should be borne in mind that a veto by one of the five would put an end to reform. Despite this, some speak up every so often to demand reform, stressing that the Security Council represents the world of 1945 and is thus far from representative. Clearly, Japan, India, Germany-candidate on the quiet- an African country, a Latin American country and an Arab country should join. But every time the issue of the enlargement of the Security Council is raised, China makes it clear that it does not want Japan or India to join. We're back to the issue of the right of veto! When it came to Germany, France made it known that it was not against its candidacy. You have to earn the good fellowship prize every day. But Italy immediately created a club to oppose it. So, a proposal emerged: a seat would be created for the European Union. That seems modern but it means that France and the United Kingdom will lose their seats. Here, I'm summing up years of debates and conferences. The reality is that no plans for reform will succeed without a new Yalta Conference, with real world leaders who say yea or nay. In 2004 you wrote that "a real reform now seems out of reach". Can you confirm this diagnosis? This hasn't changed as the foundations of the world have not changed. As long as new victors cannot redesign the system, we will go round in circles. And no one would hope for a tragedy that would enable reform. The risk is that the UN will gradually be circumvented. When Giscard d'Estaing and the German chancellor Helmut Schmidt invented the G7, it was an intelligent initiative, a way to manage Western economies facing the oil crisis. Then François Mitterrand, Helmut Kohl and Jacques Delors invited Mikhail Gorbachev to participate, thus creating the G8. During the 2008 crisis, Sarkozy got George W. Bush to agree to the principle of a G20. The aim of this group is not to bypass the UN, but this may lead to that in part. It could become an acceptable substitute. But the G20 does not have the power to legitimate a military operation. That's a very big difference. Are you critical of the UNHCR? Overall, I have a positive opinion of the UNHCR, but it clearly does not have the financial means necessary. It is an organisation that is victim to the lack of coherence in its member countries' policies. It's not its fault that European policy is not clear. If the Europeans had drawn up a real asylum policy for Europe, we would not be in this situation. This was not done. It's being done now, chaotically, amid mutual insults and constant criticism.



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