



*Time, Power, and Resistances in Latin America:
Narratives, Democracy, and Global Reconfigurations
(English Version)*

ISBN: 978-9915-704-40-1

DOI: 10.62486/978-9915-704-40-1.Ch17

Pages: 156-166

©2026 The authors. This is an open access chapter distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) 4.0 License.

Reforming the United Nations Organization 80 years after its creation from the global south

Reforma de la organización de las Naciones Unidas a 80 años de su creación desde el sur global

Antonio Lougiani Castillo Garcidueñas¹ 

¹Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Doctorado en Ciencias Políticas y Sociales con Orientación en Relaciones Internacionales. México.

ABSTRACT

Eighty years have passed since the emergence of the United Nations. In that time, various critical junctures have taken place, yet the phenomenology of war continues without showing signs of disappearing. Despite this, the complex core of the universal organizational system has remained practically unchanged, with only limited modifications, mostly quantitative rather than qualitative. Today, the functioning of the United Nations faces a series of highly complex political processes in the international system that are reshaping its position in the global power game and in the world political system with which it interacts and from which it draws feedback. Within this complex political interaction, clear signs of its obsolescence and ineffectiveness have become evident.

Keywords: Crisis; Multilateralism; Reform; Global South.

RESUMEN

Han transcurrido ochenta años desde el surgimiento de las Naciones Unidas, diversas coyunturas acontecieron y la fenomenología de la guerra continua sin dar guisos de su desaparición; pese a lo anterior, el complejo núcleo central del sistema organizacional universal ha permanecido prácticamente inmóvil, con escasas modificaciones, las cuales se han caracterizado por ser en su mayoría cuantitativas más que cualitativas. Hoy el funcionamiento de las Naciones Unidas se enfrenta a una serie de procesos políticos de suma complejidad en el sistema internacional que alteran su posición en el juego y la dinámica de poder internacionales, así como en el sistema político mundial con el cual interactúa y se retroalimenta, en esta interacción política compleja se aprecian sus severos signos de obsolescencia e inoperancia.

Palabras clave: Crisis; Multilateralismo; Reforma; Sur Global.

INTRODUCTION

Following the imminent failure of the League of Nations due to its inability to prevent the outbreak of World War II, the United Nations was created after the holding of several high-level political summit conferences whose future impact would be decisive in the institutional design of the world, as well as its structure, functioning, organization, and its founding Charter were the result of power and domination relations, where the political will and interests of the victorious powers materialized.

Among the decision-making bodies that emerged from the United Nations' new institutional system, the Security Council's political action and leadership stand out. The Security Council is responsible for maintaining international peace and security through the legitimate use of force and the monopoly of violence, appealing to the principles of collective security and legitimate defense, thereby acquiring the characteristics of an international executive power.

The five Allied powers of World War II were included in the Security Council, namely: the United States, France, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Republic of China (from 1971 the People's Republic of China), and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, currently leaving its legitimate heir, the Russian Federation; thus inaugurating the concept of permanent membership and the right of veto, with which they acquired unique and undemocratic institutionalized political power, always with the latent possibility of activating the veto mechanism, giving the system a delegated character of hegemonic command.

A true vertical subsystem was established within the UN system, repeatedly violating, often unilaterally, the codification and principles of international constitutional law enshrined in the charter of the multilateral organization, highlighting the asymmetries and anachronisms in the dynamics of world power and decision-making processes in international organizations such as the United Nations, defining this scheme as a form of "hegemonic institutionalization of dependency" (Vakhrushev, 1974) with which it would operate from its founding origins.

The United Nations serves to legitimize the hegemony of the Great Powers and formalize the dependence of the rest of the world's countries, which are members of the largest multilateral organization that human beings have established in all of history.

Currently, various levels of hierarchical and hegemonic command urgently need to be reformed and incorporated into the Security Council's new agenda, making it possible to identify four main areas that drive the reform of this body: 1) Democratization and the right of veto, 2) expansion of permanent members; 3) Increase in the number of non-permanent members; and 4) Peacekeeping operations.

From the founding origins of this then-new institutional system, decision-makers designed the United Nations with a hierarchical, vertical, and exclusionary organizational structure, culminating in the Charter, which contains various mechanisms of exclusivity that are clearly undemocratic, limiting the balanced action of the different components of the Organization's system, mainly in cases of armed conflict that endanger international peace and security, invoking the principles of collective security and legitimate defense, requiring at all times the support and approval of the five permanent members of the Security Council.

Eighty years have passed since the United Nations emerged; various political events have occurred, and the dynamics of international politics have changed. Despite this, the complex core of power and decision-making in the universal organizational system has remained virtually unchanged, with few significant modifications, most of which have been quantitative rather than qualitative.

This has ultimately led to the United Nations' failures, keeping it submerged in a deep and urgent multidimensional crisis in recent decades, particularly in terms of legitimacy and representativeness, condemning the system to political sclerosis and structural paralysis, the main result of the failures with which its central power core, the Security Council, operates.

Today, the functioning of the United Nations faces a series of highly complex political changes and transitions that alter its position in the game of international power and its dynamics. Just as in the global political system with which it interacts and feeds back into on an ongoing basis, this complex political interaction reveals severe signs of obsolescence and ineffectiveness.

The importance of addressing this issue lies in the urgent need to make structural changes to the current institutional system of the United Nations, which primarily benefits the major powers, particularly the permanent members of the Security Council, who impose their political will and satisfy their national interests by excluding the bulk of the international community represented by the General Assembly in order to address the dilemmas and challenges of the 21st century.

The relevance of the issue for international relations and international law lies in the fact that, due to its characteristics and content, the structural and organic reform of the United Nations system is a diplomatic and international matter, as is the treatment of multilateral issues such as the one raised here. This is mainly due to the set of institutional reforms that must be made to the Charter of the United Nations as the most important multilateral legal instrument, which has served as a source of positive law at the international level as a legislative foundation, international constitutional law, both original and derivative, due to the legal concepts and principles that have emanated from its founding document.

The paralysis and ineffectiveness of the United Nations collective security and global justice system are the result and reflection of power and domination relations under which it operates, according to the hegemonic logic of the great powers and asymmetrical dependence, giving priority to the five permanent members of the Security Council over the rest of the international body. It is therefore necessary to promote a process of progressive and viable reform and the necessary changes at the core of the United Nations in order to provide solutions to armed conflicts that directly threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.

The Security Council, and in particular its permanent members, have constrained the international organization in a struggle to channel their individual political interests through the veto system, complicating its operations in maintaining international peace and security as established in the Charter of San Francisco.

The Security Council maintains a high level of political interference from its members, so that current armed conflicts are dealt with but not resolved, as in the Cold War, through remodeled bipolarity.

The permanent members first impose their interests in mediating the armed conflicts that have arisen since the Cold War, rather than reaching a consensus and drafting a resolution that would determine the end of an armed conflict. Therefore, the Security Council must be reformed in order to establish a more equitable role.

DEVELOPMENT

There have been many structural changes on the world stage that have influenced the quest for United Nations reform, such as: the considerable increase in the number of independent countries within the UN, from 51 in 1945 to 193 today; the emergence of new aspirants to world power; the increase in the world's population, the emergence and complexity of issues that have been added to the System's agenda, and the different political situations that have taken

place on the international stage since 1945, from a bipolar Cold War world to the current era of globalisation, among other factors and elements.

In this regard, we must take into consideration the major global issues that need to be addressed within the United Nations and that form a fundamental part of the process of structural and organic reform of the organization, such as disarmament, the environment, human rights, the rule of international law, the responsibility to protect, the maintenance of international peace and security, and the supremacy of the international constitutional law of the San Francisco Charter.

It can therefore be said that in the sociology of the current international scene, new actors, problems, and processes are emerging that affect decision-making processes and international politics in general, which as a whole go beyond the actions of the United Nations system. which is why today, more than ever, it is necessary to promote and give proper continuity to the process of structural and comprehensive reform, revitalize its methods and working groups, instruments, and mechanisms, and reconfigure its deliberation and decision-making processes.

Since the birth of the United Nations, Chapter 18 of the Charter, particularly Article 108 (United Nations, 1945, Article 108), clearly stipulates that the process of reforming this international constitution requires the consensus of two-thirds of the members of the General Assembly and the support of the five permanent members of the Security Council. Therefore, the objective of this research is to scrutinize the theoretical, doctrinal, state, and regional group and caucus reform initiatives aimed at modifying the structure and operation of the two highest central and decision-making bodies of the System.

We must therefore understand that the United Nations System is the most complete institutional edifice that we as humanity have managed to build, and that without its existence, political instability and the spread of international conflicts, in short, the state of anarchy in the international system would be much greater. Finally, we must understand that the current state of the United Nations System reflects the state of international society, characterized by anarchy, disorder, and chaos, which is why it urgently needs to be reformed today.

The structural and organic reform of the United Nations is the biggest institutional change pending in the global political system, as it is essential for the implementation of various processes of change and decision-making on the international stage, such as the reform of the other bodies that make up the United Nations system, its specialized agencies, outside the United Nations sphere, the reform of the various international organizations that make up the global political map; and finally, the political reform of the world's states.

For political and social sciences, the importance of this research lies in the organic and structural problem of proposing a far-reaching reform of hegemonic power, which consists of fundamentally eradicating the institutionalized dependence that arises within it, strengthening democratization and harmonious balance within the United Nations system, as well as the international constitutional law enshrined in the Charter of San Francisco corresponding to the economic, social, political, ideological, and legal approaches involved in its analysis.

It also seeks to contribute to the debate and discussion of one of the multilateral issues of greatest common interest to humanity, which needs to be addressed and resolved through urgently needed changes based on the construction of a deep, high-level, multilateral political

dialogue, as well as permanent trans-, multi-, and interdisciplinary academic dialogue.

The importance of International Relations lies in the fact that, due to its characteristics and content, the issue of the structural and organic reform of the United Nations System is of a diplomatic and international nature, as is the treatment of multilateral issues such as those raised throughout this thesis.

Similarly, it is linked to our discipline through the subdiscipline of international organization and public international law, mainly due to the set of institutional reforms that must be made to the Charter of the United Nations as the highest form of international constitutional law, which has served as a source of positive law at the international level as an international legislative foundation, both original and derivative, as well as due to the legal concepts and principles that emanate from the Charter.

For Mexico, this issue is of vital and ongoing importance in our diplomatic and multilateral foreign policy agenda. It is worth noting that prominent Mexican diplomats and multilateralists have held key positions within the United Nations, both in the Security Council and the General Assembly, reflecting the Mexican State's national interests in consolidating itself as a global actor in international relations. Therefore, this analysis constitutes an excellent opportunity to fully align with our foreign policy objectives within the United Nations System.

In this regard, our country must continue the various high-level initiatives and negotiations in which it participates, which are involved in the process of comprehensive reform of the multilateral organization, supported by proper strategic diplomatic planning.

Mexico's multilateral foreign policy can truly benefit from the reform of the United Nations System, such as obtaining greater decision-making power by projecting and satisfying the national interests of the Mexican State in the multilateral arena, as well as those issues discussed on the international agenda, to become a more prominent political actor in the world.

This research is based on the central hypothesis that the United Nations system is the result and reflection of power relations that operate under the hegemonic logic of the great powers and asymmetrical dependence, giving priority to the five permanent members of the Security Council over the rest of the system. It is therefore necessary to promote a process of progressive reform and the necessary, viable changes at the core of the UN in order to continue reforming the rest of the organizational structure.

The institutional and multilateral crisis of the United Nations leads its members to resort to bilateral and even regional forums, mechanisms, and instruments to achieve their multilateral foreign policy objectives and satisfy their national interests, as an alternative to the failures, inconsistencies, contradictions, and anachronisms in the UN's functioning.

Mexico's multilateral foreign policy advocates for a truly comprehensive reform of the United Nations, as part of the reformist groups and coteries of the Global South that seek to revitalize the organization's structure and functioning from the trenches.

The reforms that have materialized in light of the multilateral organization's actions have been characterized as cosmetic, superficial, and quantitative in nature, rather than comprehensive, and have been unable to touch the nerves of undemocratic power within the

system, limit, weighing the hegemonic interests and geopolitical appetites of the Great Powers that are backed by the veto power granted to them by their undemocratic status as permanent members of the Security Council. Unfortunately, qualitative factors and elements were not taken into consideration, so these few changes have fallen far short of resolving the major issues of common interest to humanity (Contreras, 2007, p. 147).

We must recognize the outstanding leadership of the former Egyptian Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who passed away in 2016 and was the main architect of the debate that has come to be known as the process of structural and organic reform of the United Nations system.

We owe him the initiative to raise the issue of reform before the post-Cold War international community, using his political authority as the first spokesperson to highlight the major institutional, structural, and organizational problems in the international context, demonstrating his diplomatic skills and political dialogue in bringing together the common interests and shared values of the members of the United Nations System in multilateral negotiations.

The lack of vision and political action on the part of his predecessors became apparent, as they lacked the political and diplomatic skills necessary to deal with the two superpowers of the time, which kept the world political system in a balance of terror resulting from the bipolar conflict of the Cold War. In this context, the United Nations system found its hands tied when it came to limiting and challenging the hegemonic interests of both poles of power.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali's political message was clear: the Secretary-General's perception of the international context in which he proposed the start of multilateral negotiations on the reform of the United Nations highlighted the many changes taking place in the global political system and, in particular, in the international institutions of the United Nations.

In his speech, the Secretary-General argued that the balance of world power was being reconfigured, the emergence of a new international order that formally and definitively buried the bipolar world of the Cold War, replaced by the emergence of new actors aspiring to become poles of world power, to consolidate themselves as regional and international hegemonies, joining the key decision-making processes at the highest level in international politics.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali pointed out that the maintenance of international peace and security, far from having achieved its goal during the Cold War, served as a rhetorical shield to justify the greatest atrocities and military interventions around the world, crowning the supremacy of the two superpowers of the time in third countries where they knowingly committed flagrant and systematic violations not only of international peace and security but also of human rights.

The structure and organization of the United Nations required, more than ever, a comprehensive reform that would put human and economic development at the center of the table, replacing the politics of power, characterized by relations of power and domination, breaking the hegemonic and institutionalized dependence that the United Nations had become, and reinvesting the equation in international cooperation for development, human development, and the common interests of humanity.

Unfortunately, the long-term vision proposed by the Egyptian Secretary-General was soon marginalized as a result of the imposition of the hegemonic interests of the United States,

whose ambitions to assume the role of the sole and undisputed global hyperpower led to the domination of the entire spectrum of world affairs, boasting the discourse of unipolarity after the implosion of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the Socialist Bloc.

In this sense, the entire structure, organization, and institutions of the United Nations system have been undergoing the most profound multidimensional crisis—multilateral, legitimacy, and representativeness—since its founding to the present day.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali's most significant contribution to the United Nations reform process is found in his report entitled "An Agenda for Peace" (Boutros-Ghali, 1992), in which he revisits the thesis of "preventive diplomacy," which, according to the Secretary-General's vision, called for multilateralism as the ideal instrument for the peaceful resolution of the disputes that afflict humanity. In this regard, Boutros Boutros-Ghali identified that the prevailing tensions in the world constituted hotbeds of conflict and violence in the making, thereby posing serious threats to the maintenance of international peace and security. Therefore, as a first step, the reform of the United Nations should focus the debate on the maintenance of international peace and security as the most sensitive and important aspects of common interest to humanity (Franco, 1997, pp. 152 and 153).

The central discursive and institutional logic of the United Nations reform process must be sufficiently consistent in the articulation and narrative of the discourse and implementation of this set of reformist policies so that the message conveyed to all components of the Organization is that of a necessary and urgent reconfiguration of this multilateral system in order to face the challenges of the 21st century and revitalize both its structure and its organization.

This does not mean, from the perspective of the permanent members of the Security Council, a loss of hegemonic powers inherited from a world order inaugurated 80 years ago, but rather the undeniable obsolescence of the institutionalized world political system on which the United Nations was founded, as well as the current crisis of international institutions characterized by their inability to address and resolve the major problems facing humanity today.

CONCLUSIONS

We can identify the political actions of the different secretaries-general, starting with the Egyptian Boutros Boutros-Ghali, whose administrative management of the United Nations reform process was characterized by his political leadership through the implementation of a new political project championed from a vision of the Global South as the peoples most historically marginalized in the decision-making processes of the United Nations.

Along the same lines, we must also take into consideration the management of Ghanaian Kofi Annan, characterized by a policy of continuity and the strengthening of the project, orchestrated by his membership and representation of the countries of the Global South as common denominators.

Complementing the above, in 1997 a reformist proposal called the Razali Plan (Razali Reform Paper, 1997), which takes up the concept of openness as the articulating axis for reforming the Security Council promptly, encouraging its openness and democratization, which this body still requires today through the incorporation of the Global South into the composition of the Council, constituting an approach that has been completely valid for practically thirty years since it was first proposed.

The contributions from this perspective add extremely important elements to the debate on reform in the specific case of the Security Council, as they put on the table of multilateral negotiations the consideration and incorporation of the agenda and paradigm for development. This approach revisits the multilateral discussion of the persistent division between the industrialized North and the developing Global South, which obviously involves adopting the concept of security as a multidimensional phenomenon that affects various aspects, including the maintenance of international peace and security (Contreras, 2007).

Returning to the precedent set by the Razali Plan, proposed by then-Secretary-General Kofi Annan, it contextualizes and explicitly addresses the unfinished business of the development paradigm by incorporating concepts such as sustained and sustainable development at the heart of United Nations reform.

The permanent members of the Security Council do not have the political will to promote genuine reform of the United Nations, so instead, the implementation of joint anti-systemic and counter-hegemonic action by the peripheral countries of the United Nations is proposed, based on elements in the search for a scheme of openness and true democratization that places at the center of the multilateral organization the voices that have historically remained marginalized in key decision-making processes that have an impact beyond the organization itself, that is, the global political system.

The openness and democratization that must take place within the Security Council, regardless of the new categories proposed, must be based on equitable, “rotating” geographical representation of the peoples of the world.

Since its founding to the present day, the UNSC has been composed of developed countries and not of countries from the Global South or developing countries. Therefore, in opening up this body, geographical representation and the genuine inclusion of the Latin American, African, Arab, Asian, and Pacific peoples in decision-making processes must be guaranteed.

As part of the initiatives to reform the United Nations system following the so-called Global South pronouncement, which includes developing countries, the joint action undertaken by the Non-Aligned Movement, the Group of 77 (G-77), and the Rio Group stands out. After the end of the bipolar political system of the Cold War, from whose international context the agenda of this Group of countries draws its inspiration, they have spoken out in the General Assembly in favor of a common position on the process of reforming the United Nations system, in particular the opening up and democratization of the Security Council, as part of the comprehensive and institutional reform demanded by the multilateral organization (Argueta, 2004, pp. 133 and 134).

The innovation of the reform proposals of the Non-Aligned Movement stands out for its position in favor of improving the methods and groups on the General Assembly’s work agenda, based on limitations and co-decision with the Security Council. In this regard, I find particularly valuable the reforms it proposes to resolve the Assembly’s bureaucratic problems, so we can also group the Non-Aligned Movement’s proposals under the administrative reform of the General Assembly (Argueta, 2004, pp. 133 and 134).

The package of reforms to the United Nations proposed by the Global South is comprehensive, as it addresses fundamental structural and organizational problems, such as the veto right, as

discussed above.

We can classify the proposals of the Global South as having a marked tendency to abolish this hegemonic, anachronistic, and undemocratic privilege in order to achieve a true institutional redesign of the United Nations and bring about its openness and democratization. In addition to having as the cornerstone of their proposal the principle of equitable geographical distribution and legal and sovereign equality, as well as the eradication of the persistent division between developed and developing countries.

An innovative aspect of the proposals from the Global South is clearly evident in relation to decision-making in the Security Council between the categories of permanent and non-permanent membership, as they propose implementing a mechanism to supervise and monitor the balance, harmony, and coexistence between these categories.

If no agreement can be reached in the decision-making process, efforts must be made to achieve the total and definitive elimination of permanent membership, with a view to achieving true democratization in the structure and organization of the Security Council, in particular, and the United Nations system in general.

The Global South formulates a critical and objective approach to anti-systemic counter-hegemony, considering the voices of the least benefited and marginalized countries in the decision-making process, in particular the Group of developing countries belonging to regional groups and coteries in the Global South.

The reformist proposals of the Global South strive to combat exclusion, encouraging the inclusion of subordinates in the decision-making processes of the United Nations, thus committing to emancipatory resistance against the permanent members of the Security Council, constituting themselves as a movement from below, that is, of the peripheral countries in this multilateral organization, ultimately pronouncing a categorical rejection of neocolonialism and promoting a passive revolution of the peripheries.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Argueta, I. (2004). *La reforma a la Organización de las Naciones Unidas: El caso del Consejo de Seguridad y sus implicaciones para el nuevo equilibrio de poder internacional en la posguerra fría* [Tesis de licenciatura]. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.
- Boutros-Ghali, B. (1992). *Un programa de paz*. Departamento de Información Pública de las Naciones Unidas.
- Contreras, A. I. (2007). *El Consejo de Seguridad, funciones y problemática del cumplimiento de su objetivo en la solución de conflictos bélicos* [Tesis de licenciatura]. Colegio Partenón.
- Organización de las Naciones Unidas. (s. f.). *Carta de las Naciones Unidas*. <http://www.un.org/es/charter-united-nations/>
- Razali, T. S. (s. f.). *Razali reform paper*. <https://archive.globalpolicy.org/security-council/security-council-reform/41310-razalireform-paper.html>
- Vakhrushev, V. V. (1974). *El neocolonialismo y sus métodos*. Editorial Progreso.

FUNDING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: Antonio Lougiani Castillo Garcidueñas.

Data curation: Antonio Lougiani Castillo Garcidueñas.

Formal analysis: Antonio Lougiani Castillo Garcidueñas.

Research: Antonio Lougiani Castillo Garcidueñas.

Methodology: Antonio Lougiani Castillo Garcidueñas.

Project management: Antonio Lougiani Castillo Garcidueñas.

Resources: Antonio Lougiani Castillo Garcidueñas.

Software: Antonio Lougiani Castillo Garcidueñas.

Supervision: Antonio Lougiani Castillo Garcidueñas.

Validation: Antonio Lougiani Castillo Garcidueñas.

Visualization: Antonio Lougiani Castillo Garcidueñas.

Writing - original draft: Antonio Lougiani Castillo Garcidueñas.

Writing - review and editing: Antonio Lougiani Castillo Garcidueñas.