

WHAT TO DO WITH THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM?

A TAXONOMY OF AVAILABLE OPTIONS

DRAFT /
Work in Progress

A FOGGS Discussion Note

prepared by Harris Gleckman & Georgios Kostakos

Setting the stage – calls to ‘fix’ the UN and global governance

There are certainly many calls to ‘fix’ the UN and start a next, better phase in global governance. These calls are coming from, or are the result of, among other things:

- the UN General Assembly thematic consultations on the recommendations included in the *Our Common Agenda* report of the Secretary-General and the related negotiations for the holding of a ‘Summit of the Future’ in 2023;
- widespread concerns flowing from the minimal role the UN has played in preventing or ending the Russia-Ukraine war;
- the changed geopolitics because of the Russia-Ukraine war and the rising tensions between the West and Russia, as well as the US and China;
- the failures in implementing climate change agreements, the Sustainable Development Goals and related intergovernmental commitments;
- the recognition of multiple global mega-crises that exceed the terms of reference, as well as the capacity, of any and all existing international organizations to address them effectively;
- the long-standing development cooperation failures involving the power of the BWIs/WTO over individual countries, especially developing ones; and last but not least
- Ukrainian President Zelensky’s recent message to the UN Security Council, which can be freely summarized as follows: *You take decisive action now, or else dissolve yourselves.*

Motivation for such calls

It is significant to note that these calls to ‘fix’ the UN and global governance emanate from diverse critiques of the current multilateral system. Some, even from within the current system, critique multilateralism for its lack of effectiveness. Among them, apparently, the UN Secretary-

General, who recently established a High-level Advisory Board (HLAB) on Effective Multilateralism. Some others find the UN's operating principles out-of-date, not surprisingly if one considers that the basic structure and modus operandi of the UN system was established in the aftermath of WWII, 77 years ago. Others are frustrated by the current system's failure to restrain the nuclear arms race and to manage conflicts involving major powers, such as when the Security Council gets paralyzed by one or more vetoes cast by its Permanent Members. All this is reflected in the decline in public respect for the UN and the growing feeling that the UN system has become irrelevant, politically at least.

Every criticism usually points, directly or indirectly, to a "cure" that is of the liking of the critic. Cures / solutions / independent proposals use similar language but often have fundamental differences underlying them. Concepts such as 'democracy', 'effectiveness', 'peace and security', 'human security' and 'rights and responsibilities' appear in most texts about the UN and the reforms it must undergo but mean different things to different people. At the same, time the language around governance debates can be hyped, as when one hears a proposal is 'revolutionary', when it only changes the emphasis of words in a document.

A framework to structure the discussion on UN and global governance reform

FOGGS would like to offer a structure to make clear the options available for UN reform and allow a number of initiatives to shine the light on themselves and attract public support. The table that follows categorizes existing reform proposals into three groups, namely "Reforming the UN for increased effectiveness", "Rethinking the UN system and its place / role in global governance" and "Drastic revamping of global governance". Under each main category there is a number of sub-categories, which are noted on the table below. The option of "business as usual", that is continuing without any reforms, is not considered here.

CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	DEFINING PROPOSALS	OTHER CONCRETE PROPOSALS	"SLOGANS"	FINANCING
Reforming the UN for increased effectiveness	Without touching the Charter	General Assembly reform; ECOSOC reform; Increased presence by TNCs, private foundations and multistakeholder groups in UN system activities	Most of the <i>Our Common Agenda</i> (OCA) proposals; proposals to increase multistakeholder governance convened by UN senior officials; stakeholder capitalism (World Economic Forum); public-private financing of the Sustainable Development Goals ; Food System Summit; internet governance	"UN 2.0" "Multistakeholderism is the way forward" in global governance	-obligatory contributions based on UN's ability-to-pay formula, plus increased expectations that firms, trade associations, business philanthropic organizations and multistakeholder groups will provide significant new resources to the UN system
	With Charter revision	Implement article 109(3) of the Charter; Remove the veto from the Security Council	Re-purpose the Trusteeship Council to oversee nature and human rights; create parliamentarian body as an adjunct to the General Assembly; transform ECOSOC from a deliberation body to one that can issue obligatory requirements	"the veto prevents peace"; "parliaments represent the people"; "parliaments are closer to the people"	n. a.
Rethinking the UN system and its place / role in	Re-build	Expand the scope and capacities of existing organizations, create new ones, and close out-of- date ones	WHO new authority deriving from a Pandemic Treaty; UN Oceans Treaty; Human Rights Council negotiations for a binding human rights and TNC treaty; the current WTO-sponsored reform package; merge or close UNCTAD and UNIDO		Expansion and creation would involve significantly increased obligatory state funding and expansion of XB funding; merging or closing would reduce the intergovernmental budget
	Re-connect	Tie back together the policy and program goals of global	Strengthen oversight of the BWIs and WTO by the UN; original spirit of the Havana Charter of 1940, which	Economic governance recommendations in the Stiglitz Commission	Would require a new funding mechanism

global governance		governance with the IFIs	envisaged a close tie between trade, economic and social governance	(2009); ‘revive the ideas behind the New International Economic Order’	
	Re-construct	Put in place institutions of global governance with the capacity to address existential mega-crises	create organizations with mandatory authority to address species extinction, inequality, nuclear war, pandemics, climate; break silos between UN system organizations; establish a Global Resilience Council	Must deal with “existential threats”; need to avoid ‘global tipping points’; “avoid nuclear war by destroying nuclear weapons”; “make resilience the center piece of governance”	Would require a new funding mechanism;
Drastic revamping of global governance	Replace the UN	Recognize that the institutional and geopolitical arrangements around the UN are or are about to become as unable to function as the League of Nations was before WWII	A General Assembly-like body to share/have authority over matters of war and peace; create a high level body to oversee all of the humanitarian, environmental, social, and gender work now carried out by the UN system	Need to have institutions and rules of law significantly strengthened to avoid wars similar to that occurring in Ukraine and a World War III	Would require a new funding mechanism
	Re-imagine global governance	Create institutional structures that redress power inequalities; bring in the regions, not only states; bring-in non-state actors more centrally	A debtors board to counter-balance the current lender board at the World Bank (a G24 proposal) / Popular national/regional elections to create a second chamber to balance government power in the General Assembly (à la European Parliament) / a registration and regulatory body for international businesses (analogous to nation/state-level registration and		Could mean a new funding formula based on regional population; formal taxation of international transactions

			regulatory bodies for their domestic economies)		
	Revolutionary approach	Complement nation-state global leadership with a series of institutions to reflect contemporary human alliances	Ecosystem-based / Gender-based / labor-based / age-based / regional-global-based governance arrangements	“Human life should be aligned with nature” / women are more than 50% of the population / youth, which are the largest age group, are under-represented in global governance	Would require a new funding mechanism

Concluding Observations

FOGGS welcomes your comments on this schematic summary of pending proposals for UN and global governance reform – info@foggs.org

This document is an initial draft and will remain a work in progress, to be updated regularly in the lead-up to the 2023 Summit of the Future.

This discussion note is issued under the FOGGS [UN 2100 \(UN to 100\) Initiative](#)