

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 15 marks

Do you endorse that the United Nations needs major changes in its structures and functioning? Suggest the changes for efficient improvements.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 **Hammar skjöld's** minimum test (save humanity from hell) → Rwanda / Srebrenica / Darfur fall below even that → endorse major change

R2 **Joel Ng:** legitimacy = representation + effectiveness → UN short on both → so structures and functioning both need change

Body flow

Council's composition frozen at 1945 → no permanent seat for Africa / Latin America → veto converts P5 rivalry into paralysis (Syria, Ukraine) → same fault runs into functioning: no standing army, borrowed troops, slow deployment, funding shortfalls → **Barnett:** reactive, not preventive → hence remedies on both tracks → **structure:** expand both categories (Africa, Latin America, India), **Annan's** 24-member plan, restrain the veto, greater decision-making weight for the General Assembly → **functioning:** peacekeeping → peacebuilding, quicker deployment, **Sachs** on merging/closing overlapping programmes, Secretariat transparency + independent oversight

Counter-view

Weiss: entrenched interests will not concede reform without a burden-sharing bargain → UN80 (2026): posts cut 21%, Council composition untouched → efficiency can be administered, representation must be conceded → **Guterres** himself: status quo "untenable"

Conclusion routes

R1 **Vajpayee:** UN only as effective as members allow → reform begins at the top, in the Council, or the body goes moribund

R2 managerial reform without Council reform leaves the veto intact → representation remains the test of a credible UN

Dag Hammarskjöld said the UN "was not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell". Rwanda, Srebrenica and Darfur compel an endorsement of major change.

Joel NG argues, legitimacy rests on representation & effectiveness; the UN is short on both. The fault lies in the Security Council, whose composition mirrors 1945. Whenever a PS interest is engaged, as in Syria & Ukraine, the council fails.

Functioning follows no standing army, borrowed troops, slow deployment, chronic funding shortfalls. Michael Barnett argues that the UN acts reactively instead of building preventive capacity.

Structurally, enlarge both categories of membership to seat Africa, Latin America and India, taking Kofi Annan's 24-member plan as the base.

Restrain the veto, and give the General Assembly greater decision-making weight.

Jeffery Sachs would merge or close overlapping programmes; the secretariat needs transparency & independent oversight.

Thomas Weir cautions that entrenched interests will not concede this without a bargain on burden-sharing. The UN80 Initiative shows the limit. Secretariat posts are down 21% in 2026, but the council's composition is untouched and Antonio Guterres calls the status quo "untenable".

As Atal Bihari Vajpayee said, "the UN can only be as effective as its members allow it to be." Reform must begin at the top, in the Council, or the body goes moribund.