

UN-UZBEKISTAN COOPERATION UNDER GEOSTRATEGIC TRANSFORMATION: INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT.

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Abstract *This article examines the potential role of the United Nations in the context of ongoing geostrategic transformations in the international system. While vast majority of politicians and many scholars have been extensively exploring the role of international organizations in global governance, there are still limited intentions analyze challenges and opportunities for UN from insight and share the results with wider public. The author - former UN staff with over 28 years of international experience (UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNAIDS) is trying to provide critical look to the institutional dynamics of United Nations under the current shifting geopolitical conditions.*

The study analyzes key contributions of the United Nations institutions in promotion of peace, security, sustainable development and its response to the emerging global challenges. The research employs institutionalism and global governance approaches, supported by comparative and content analysis of existing studies, including UN documents.

The findings suggest that there is still no alternative to UN in promoting and contributing to the sustainable development and international norm diffusion. At the same time, evolving geopolitical competition necessitates adaptive and more proactive engagement strategies for UN to feed to the purpose.

Keywords: *United Nations, Uzbekistan, global governance, multilateral diplomacy, international cooperation.*

1. Introduction

The international system in the XXI century is undergoing profound structural transformation characterized by intensifying geopolitical competition, the emergence of non-traditional security threats, and increasing complexity of global governance. These dynamics necessitate a reassessment of the role and effectiveness of international organizations, including the United Nations.

The United Nations has been a central institutional pillar of global governance, playing a critical role in maintaining international peace and security, promoting human rights, advancing sustainable development, and responding to natural and human made calamities. Special attention deserves the role of the United Nations specialized agencies and funds, which have been offering



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sustainable solutions to long-term issues of nations and providing

timely and crucial support to address critical rights of peoples facing multiple challenges.

As an example of success stories, the author gives a special attention to the evolving role of the UN system in advancing national development goals of Uzbekistan and promoting regional and global cooperation.

However, UN's operational environment has become increasingly complex due to power asymmetries, interstate and intrastate conflicts, and institutional constraints. In particular, the recent developments in the Middle East region raise strong debates on the role of UN as guardian of international peace and security.

Research gap: Despite a growing body of literature on international organizations in geopolitics, there is a lack of first hand systematic analysis of the roles UN and its specialized agencies, within the framework of contemporary geostrategic transformation.

Research objectives:

To substantiate current internal and external factors influencing effectiveness of United Nations system response to global challenges.

To analyze the institutional foundations, key directions, and future prospects of cooperation between Uzbekistan and the United Nations.

Research Hypotheses: Based on the theoretical framework of institutionalism and global governance, the study formulates the following hypotheses:

H1: Despite increasing critics on future role of the United Nations, the international community, especially middle power and developing countries, still has no alternative to it. The UN, a subject to a robust reform focused on strategic transformation from heavy bureaucracy to action, as still great potential to respond to global issues.

H2: The effectiveness of UN-Uzbekistan cooperation is positively correlated with Uzbekistan's increasing proactive foreign policy and its strategic use of multilateral diplomacy mechanisms.

2. Literature Review

The role of international organizations in global politics has been widely examined within the frameworks of institutionalism and global governance theory. These approaches conceptualize international organizations as mechanisms that facilitate cooperation, reduce transaction costs, and shape international norms. Karns, Johnson and Mingst emphasize the institutional dimension of global governance, highlighting the capacity of international organizations to structure state interactions. Weiss conceptualizes the UN as the central node of global governance, while also acknowledging its structural limitations.

Patrick Kofi Adu & Maxwell Boateng explore how the persistent dominance of realism, the pursuit of state interest and strategic power, has contributed to the erosion of multilateralism in the post-Cold War global order, with a particular focus on the role of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Their study shows how geopolitical rivalries and national interests have undermined collective action, rendering the UNSC increasingly ineffective and damaging the credibility of the broader UN system.

Ian Hurd contributes to understanding how international organizations generate legitimacy and normative authority. In the regional context, Cooley analyzes the interaction between global institutions and regional dynamics in Central Asia.

Richard Gowan emphasizes on some simple values that are worth protecting the United Nations as a unique stage for small and middle power countries on which to speak out on global affairs, even if their ambassadors often feel that they are shouting into the void.

The study discovers that a majority of existing researches focus on analyses of roles of main UN bodies, such secretariat, Security Council, etc. However, there is very little analyses available to explore UN as coherence organization, including substantial contributions made by its specialized agencies, foundations and affiliated organizations.

Likewise, the specific case of Uzbekistan's engagement with the UN under evolving geopolitical conditions remains underexplored, particularly in terms of institutional adaptation and strategic positioning.

3. Methodology

This study is grounded in institutionalism and global governance theory, which provide a framework for analyzing structured cooperation between states and international organizations.

The research employs a) system analysis to assess structural interactions within and outside of UN system; b) comparative analysis to evaluate evolving cooperation patterns between the United Nations and Uzbekistan; c) content analysis of UN resolutions, reports, and policy documents and d) institutional analysis of cooperation mechanisms

Primary sources include surveys, poll reports, research papers, UN General Assembly resolutions, UN agency reports, and Uzbekistan's official policy documents.

4. Analysis

4.1 Present dynamics around the United Nations

The United Nations celebrated its 80th anniversary in 2025, which coincided with increasing trend of criticism and/skepticism about its future destiny. With clear understanding that these critics are based on goodwill aimed to re-energize the UN's potential and to enable it respond to the requirements of nowadays realities, let us deep dive to understand the root causes of on-going challenges. It is obvious that it is not feasible to explore root causes all issues within one article, and therefore the study intends to analyze major issues and achievements under the United Nations umbrella.

Ongoing dramatic geopolitical shifts pose unprecedented risks to the UN's effectiveness and multilateral rule based international order. Rising antagonisms among great powers, regional realignments and persistent conflicts around the Globe have strained the UN's ability to fulfill its mandate effectively. In particular, the United States has shown growing skepticism or opposition to UN agencies it once championed. The European Union is pursuing a more Europe-centric security strategy, signaling a shift in how Western allies engage with the UN-centered order.

The biggest concern exists around the Security Council, the U.N. organ with primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, finds itself at a gridlock. The Council members

are often unable to reach an agreement, or respective members have not implemented some agreements. The humanity has been witnessing unprecedented level of use of veto rights by permanent members. This institutional deadlock also harms the credibility of the United Nations.

Late or incomplete payment of mandatory contributions by member states to UN budget is another challenge, which has been leading to many other complications, including the liquidity crisis, a temporary suspension of credit returns and a delay in full implementation of planned interventions. According to the last information from the Committee of Contribution, as of 1 April 2026, only 98 Member States have paid their regular budget assessments in full . Furthermore, it is also alarming sign that big number of UN agencies are heavily depend from limited number of big donors, especially from US. The United States has been the top contributor to the United Nations system. In 2022, it provided a total of US\$ 18.1 billion, with further decline to US\$ 13.0 billion in 2023 . The recent enormous funding cuts and removal of funding from some United Nations system agencies by the current US administration was a big wake up call to many UN agencies and this situation urges them to diversify their resources mobilization strategies.

Apart from external factors, the scholars refer to many other deeper internal challenges within UN. It has developed its own culture, language, and ways of working.

In particular, the organization's built-in need to reflect every one's views, which results that the General Assembly resolutions often strip away meaning and value from even its best-intentioned efforts. Although some UN programmes support good governance or effective management projects, there are very serious critics about good management within UN system itself. The organization includes many public servants, including aid workers and peacekeepers, who are dedicated to its principles and perform their functions heroically, often under the most trying circumstances. Unfortunately, few of them have benefited from good management.

The most capable are rarely recognized for their skill and sacrifice. Governments, especially the great powers, insist on their own (often unqualified), nominees for the top jobs, creating a twisting at the heart of the system that undermines morale, as well as efficiency . This area for the reform that receives almost no

attention, although staff is key assets of UN system. Instead, more focus has been to cut staff cost leading to reduced number of staff "doing more with less", leading to high level of staff burnout.

In late 2025, the United Nations underwent an unprecedented downsizing, laying off roughly 30% of its workforce amid a severe financial crisis. Most affected were middle and lower-level staff - employees who often formed the backbone of the organizations field operations . These cuts has been effected unevenly among UN agencies, in particular the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) implemented a restructuring plan with 54% reduction in Secretariat staffing strength to ensure it is fit for purpose and working within current core resource forecasts . A future does not look optimistic, as the U.N. approved a \$3.45 billion budget for 2026, representing a 15 percent decrease in financial resources and a 19 percent reduction in staff positions .

However, raising global challenges, e.g. deteriorating ecological issues, including a scarcity of water resources and global warming, have been proving that many existing and emerging global issues, cannot be addressed by individual state(s) regardless of their wealth and power. In this regard, the organization still has strong values that are worth protecting.

Most importantly, it remains as a unique stage for smaller states and/or developing countries to speak out on global affairs. Below basic facts, reflecting the United Nations system role in response to global challenges during 2025, may help to make rational conclusions. In particular it has been :

assisting and protecting 139 million people fleeing war, famine and persecution;

providing food and assistance to more than 123 million people in over 120 countries and territories;

supplying vaccines to 45% of the world's children, helping to save 3 million lives a year;

working with 194 nations to keep the global temperature rise below 1.5°C;

keeping peace with 61,000 peacekeepers in 11 operations around the world;

tackling the global water crisis affecting over 4 billion people worldwide;

protecting and promoting human rights globally and through 80 treaties/declarations;

coordinating US\$ 45 billion appeal for the humanitarian needs of 186 million people;

using diplomacy to prevent potential conflicts;

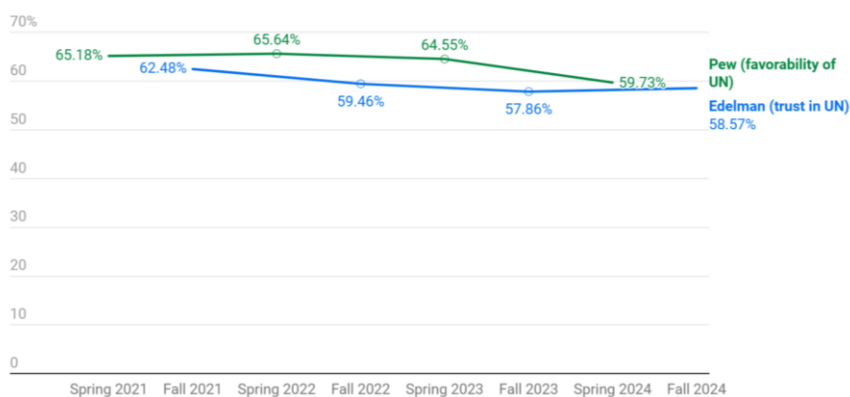
assisting some 50 countries a year with their elections;

providing over 22.5 million people with life-saving reproductive healthcare etc.

These facts show that the United Nations is still playing crucial role in development area. However, there is a growing sense that the UN is facing a legitimacy crisis amid shifts in public trust.

The existing surveys show varying perceptions about the United Nations across countries. In particular, Albert Trithart, Senior Fellow and Head of Publications at the International Peace Institute (IPI), and Felix Romier, Editorial Intern (IPI), analyzed these trends using data from 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report and Pew Research Center/2025 Spring Global Attitudes Survey .

Public Perceptions of the UN, 2021–2024



Source: Edelman Trust Barometer, Pew Research Center • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Above survey results and many other studies show that while trust had gradually eroded over the course of several decades, there

was little evidence of a major, widespread drop in trust in the UN. However, even if the overall decrease in support for the UN has been relatively small, the question of why trust has fallen in the past few years remains unanswered.

In March 2025, the Secretary-General launched the UN80 Initiative to transform the work of the UN system through identifying efficiencies, reviewing how mandates implemented, and examining potential structural changes and realigning programmes within the United Nations system.

The initiative brings various reform efforts under a single framework, based on three reinforcing workstreams supported by system-wide enablers, including shared back-office services at global and country levels, a Data Commons initiative (to track their Sustainable Development Goals data around the world. With this, the UN is able to offer a centralized repository, allowing for dynamic storytelling and targeted analysis related to global progress), a Technology Accelerator Platform, joint training and research, and strengthened pooled funding .

Understanding current realities, the majority of heads of states are supporting the reform of UN and make it fit to its purpose. In particular, H.E. Mr. Mirziyoyev, the President of Uzbekistan emphasized solidarity, open dialogue and close cooperation between the countries of the world, when the role and place of international institutions are weakening, confrontations, conflicts, and wars are intensifying, technological and social inequality is increasing, and economic and humanitarian crises are deepening . In this context, Mr. President expressed the support for the "UN80" initiatives and firm commitment to the Pact for the Future.

The President Xi , called upon to uphold the vision of global governance featuring extensive consultation and joint contribution for shared benefit, strengthen solidarity and coordination, and oppose unilateralism through firmly safeguarding the status and authority of the U.N., and ensuring its irreplaceability, key role in global governance.

In March 31 2026, The United Nations General Assembly adopted a landmark Resolution A/RES/80/251 on mandate creation, implementation and review, part of the world body's reform efforts to make it more efficient and effective. It expected that the Resolution would serve to strengthen how mandates for UN

organizations are created, implemented and reviewed - marking a major milestone under the UN80 Initiative.

4.1 Institutional Framework of Cooperation between Uzbekistan and United Nations

Nowadays, 25 UN agencies, funds and programmes are working together to support Uzbekistan to pursue its national development priorities reflected in the Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy, that are largely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. The Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the United Nations signed UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for 2026-2030 on 24th October 2025 during the commemoration of UN Day. UNSDCF aimed to support human development, reduction of inequalities and enable each citizen to utilize achieved progress results under six key cooperation areas: effective governance and justice, decent livelihoods and social protection, quality health and well-being, inclusive and equitable education, climate action and environmental sustainability, and the comprehensive development of the Aral Sea region.

The United Nations system entities have been implementing over 140 projects in Uzbekistan, with total budget of over \$215 million (regular resources only) , covering both national and sub-national levels, including Central Asia.

Analyses show that the national partners look to the UN to play the role as a convener and facilitator of a coordinated approach among partners and an honest broker using its comparative advantage, including its people-centred approach to development, ability to convene dialogue around sensitive human rights issues, access to global/ regional knowledge and best practices .

4.2 Cooperation under Geostrategic Transformation

The UN General Assembly has been serving as a key arena for advancing Uzbekistan's diplomatic initiatives. Notably, Uzbekistan has promoted:

regional cooperation in Central Asia;

international attention to the Aral Sea ecological crisis

youth & human development initiatives.

In particular, the UNGA adopted the following resolutions initiated the Republic of Uzbekistan:

- Strengthening Regional and International Cooperation to Ensure Peace, Stability and Sustainable Development in the Central Asian Region (June 2018);
- Enlightenment and Religious Tolerance (December 2018);
- Sustainable Tourism and Sustainable Development in Central Asia (January 2019);
- Declaring the Aral Sea Region a Zone of Ecological Innovations and Technologies (May 2021);
- Strengthening Connectivity between Central and South Asia (July 2022);
- Role of Parliaments in the Achievement of the SDGs (December 2022).

Uzbekistan together with multiple countries are working towards promotion of peace and stability in the region and the globe. In particular, the UN GA unanimously adopted a Resolution, on proclaiming June 10 as the International Day for Dialogue among Civilizations, which was developed jointly with People's Republic of China and many co-sponsors. This is indeed important step towards elevating civilizational diversity as a vital force for peace, mutual understanding, and global solidarity in contemporary turbulent world.

The scholars and international community acknowledge the growing role of Uzbekistan in bringing up regional issues of Central Asia requiring attention of the international community. In this context, it is worth to mention about the UN General Assembly 2024 Resolution on "Central Asia's unified resolve and cooperation to effectively address and counter drug-related challenges" , which was initiated by Uzbekistan. This initiative once again indicates Uzbekistan's active foreign policy to foster regional security, specifically aiming to strengthen cooperation in the fight against illicit drug trafficking and misuse within the Central Asian region.

Uzbekistan has been using UN platform to promote peace and stability on neighboring Afghanistan . During his address to the UN 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly the President of Republic of Uzbekistan H.E. Mr. Shavkat Mirziyoyev called upon to support the aspirations of the Afghan people for a peaceful and stable life, which requires the united efforts of the international community. He emphasized on utmost importance to prevent Afghanistan's isolation .

All above initiatives reflect a transition toward a more proactive and agenda-setting in Uzbekistan's foreign policy within UN platforms. This shift is also visible in increasing number of elections of Uzbekistan into the UN's affiliated special bodies, e.g. in 2024, Uzbekistan was elected to the ECOSOC and to the Administrative Council of ILO; and Uzbekistan's representative was elected to the Human Right Committee of the United Nations.

Following the analysis of partnership, it is possible to summarize that Uzbekistan's role in the UN shifted from 'Reactive Participation' to 'Strategic Multilateral Engagement':

Stage 1 (Pre-2017) - period of Reactive Participation characterized by:

limited initiatives;

adaptation to externally driven agendas;

fragmented engagement with UN agencies;

low visibility in global governance processes;

weak articulation of regional (Central Asian) identity

Stage 2 (2017-2020) - period of Transitional Engagement observed through:

gradual activation of diplomatic initiatives;

initial promotion of Central Asia as a regional unit;

increased participation in UN General Assembly processes;

expansion of cooperation with UN agencies, when several new UN agencies opened their representation in Uzbekistan.

Stage 3 (2021-2026) -period of Strategic Multilateral Engagement through:

active agenda-setting in UNGA (resolutions, initiatives);

positioning of Uzbekistan as a regional convener;

taking leadership on Aral Sea crisis (ecological diplomacy), regional connectivity (Central-South Asia), inter-civilizational dialogue; strengthening institutional presence (elections to UN bodies);

integration of national strategy with global development agenda under UNSDCF (2026-2030)

Following the recent developments in cooperation between Uzbekistan and the United Nations, one could make logical conclusion that Uzbekistan considers the United Nations as vital institution in global politics and supports its vital reform.

5. Conclusion

The United Nations has been facing unprecedented challenges during current rapidly changing world, when basic principles of rule-based order are being undermined by some countries. However, the big majority of member states still have trust and are committed to its reform to ensure the organization remains relevant and effective in addressing complex global challenges.

The study demonstrates that cooperation between Uzbekistan and the United Nations has evolved into a strategically significant dimension of the country's foreign policy. This transition reflects both internal policy transformation and adaptation to the demands of a changing geopolitical environment.

Uzbekistan's engagement with the UN contributes not only to national development but also to regional stability and global governance processes. Collectively, latest developments indicate a shift toward a more assertive and agenda-setting foreign policy, reinforcing Uzbekistan's profile as an emerging middle power within the UN system.

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