



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

How America breathes new life into the UN?



There is hope for the United Nations to emerge from its long-term marginalisation in solving global crises thanks to the person who has been the biggest threat to its survival for years—Donald Trump.

Paradoxically, the United States under Trump, a staunch opponent of multilateralism, seems to have the potential to revive the United Nations' role on the international scene. Certainly, in a new form—not in the format that has existed for 80 years.

This week, as rarely in recent years, the UN was a main arena for important international decisions. For example, the US voted with Russia in the General Assembly and remained in a large **minority**, which was shocking for much of the world, especially for Western allies and Ukraine, which was the subject of the decision.

At the same time, the US insisted on the UN resolutions not to mention the word "aggression" in connection with the three-year anniversary of the Russian attack on Ukraine.

These interventions in the General Assembly and a little later in the UN Security Council also triggered an avalanche of anger in the US Congress, where Democratic Party representatives called on their Republican colleagues, rather unsuccessfully, to admit that Russia had attacked Ukraine and not the other way round.

New US strategy

This week's decisions regarding Ukraine indicate that the US strategy in the future will be anything but geared towards marginalising the UN, let alone withdrawing from the world organisation.

Trump's return to the White House has given many reasons to all those who were pessimistic about the future of the UN system. His first term was characterised by major steps away from UN mechanisms, such as the withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement in 2018.

The Trump administration also left the UN Human Rights Council during his first term. The US ambassador to the UN at the time, Nikki Haley, **said** the UNHRC was a "hypocritical and self-serving organisation."

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Although Ms Haley is no longer part of it, her reasoning remained more or less the same in the current presidential administration's decision to leave the UNHRC in early February, after President Joe Biden brought the US back into the fold of the organisation in 2021.

In the first days of the new president's term, the US stopped funding the World Health Organization and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

By early May, the US will **analyse** the purpose of its membership in UNESCO, and by early August, it will review its participation in all other organisations of the UN system "to determine which organisations, conventions and treaties are contrary to the interests of the United States and whether such organisations, conventions or treaties can be reformed."

Unblocking the Security Council

While this major review is underway, the US is showing that it still wants to be present at the second level of the UN's work, where political decisions are made, modelled, and coordinated on a global level.

Donald Trump has shown that he does not want to give up this aspect of the UN's work because, simply, it could be useful for his model of foreign policy based on one-to-one agreements.

The International Crisis Group **noted** that the resolution on the three-year anniversary of

Russia's aggression against Ukraine, passed by the UN Security Council last Monday, was the first resolution on Ukraine since 2015.

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The unblocking of the decision-making on Ukraine in the UN Security Council came at the cost of a division between the US and European allies, as five European members of the Security Council abstained from voting on the US resolution.

However, this was an important moment for the functioning of the UN, as the change in relations between the historical rivals, the USA and Russia, had a positive effect on the functioning of the Security Council, which had been blocked for years by mutual vetoes.

Support for deals with China

The negotiations and votes on decisions related to Ukraine have shown that Trump's diplomacy will use the UN to support its bilateral operations around the world, which will undoubtedly continue to be a priority.

It will be very important for the success of some of these actions, whether they are verified or characterised in some other way by engagement with the UN.

For instance, it is reasonable to anticipate that Moscow will insist on the UN's verification of the peace agreements on Ukraine. The USA has demonstrated that this does not pose an issue.



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The same can be expected for the American approach in other crisis regions. Washington will need some kind of evidence of broad legitimacy for its agreements, and the UN is the best place for this.

Moreover, the US can use the UN as a venue to return its influence to the Global South, as most of these countries see it as the only place where they have a voice and can influence decisions.

Washington can also offer them UN verification of agreements if they ask for it and, on the other hand, allow the US to more easily assert its interests, which it will represent through bilateral agreements.

America needs the UN above all in its relations with China, as Beijing sees the international order created by the UN as an irreplaceable framework for regulating all international affairs.

This will not prevent China from negotiating directly with Washington and overcoming problems, but for its international image as a guardian of multilateralism, the UN verification of agreements with America will be crucial for China.

Although President Trump and his administration are not among the protectors of the UN system, their extreme pragmatism will make them very active in it.

This will be encouraging for supporters of the post-WWII global order, even if the US's

motives for maintaining the vitality of the UN
are quite different.