

INTERNATIONAL HISTORY



General Assembly & The Security Council

Theme III: Safeguarding International Peace and Security

CHAPTER ANALYSIS



MASTERY

- Understanding the difference between processes and outcomes
- Memorization of critical statistics and key events
- Measuring the effectiveness of General Assembly and Security Council
- Changing political context across time



EXAM

- Managing your time well in the examination
- Clearly defining parameters for success or failure
- Evaluate processes and outcomes as yardsticks for success for the GA and SC



WEIGHTAGE

- Constitute to exactly 30% of final paper grade
- 50 mins per essay

UNPACKING THE UNITED NATIONS

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

THE SECURITY COUNCIL

UNPACKING QUESTIONS ON THE GA AND SC



General Assembly



The GA is the main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the UN. It is important to note that the GA has no enforcement or veto power within the United Nations.

GA's effectiveness can be measured in its ability to demonstrate unity within the new world order (Uniting for Peace Resolutions), and then proceed to enforce this peace (Peacekeeping financing).

Equally important to focus on the global political context as well. What can be considered effective during the Cold War may be ineffective in the post-Cold War.



The General Assembly

1. What were some of the successes of the GA during the Cold War era?
2. Were these successes fundamentally due to the GA?
3. What were some limitations of the GA?
4. Where did the GA succeed and fail in within the later years?



Early Cold War era – Uniting for Peace Resolutions

In the earliest years of the UN in the 1950s, amidst a failure of the SC to pass meaningful resolutions due to the nature of veto power, the General Assembly was able to succeed by passing the Uniting for Peace Resolutions. This ultimately culminated in action being undertaken by the United Nations.

For example, during the 1950s when the SC was unable to function due to the People's Republic of China not being present in the Security Council, the UFP resolution was passed and this provided the mandate needed for UN forces to enforce collective security in Korea.

Similarly, in 1956 during the Suez Canal Crisis, UNEF 1 (Peacekeeping force) was a direct result of the mandate provided by the GA through its UFP resolution when the SC was in a deadlock.

Limitations of this early success

However, it is crucial to note that this success was **not fundamentally driven by the GA**. It was ultimately dependent on the strength of individual members that had significant influence within the UN at the time, such as the US and the USSR.

With the failure of the SC in the Korean War, it was the US that pushed for key reforms to change the UN Charter such that should veto power ever restrict the UN SC from coming to a consensus over a security issue, the decision should move to the GA. Thus, the UFP resolution reform was a direct result of superpower interests in Korea.

The successes of the Suez Canal intervention can ultimately be chalked up to support from the USSR and US, both major players within the UN. This was driven by their post-colonial desire to end the colonial legacies of major powers influencing decisions in their ex-colonies. It was this political desire that provided the impetus for the superpowers to support collective peace enforcement.



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Success in increasing representation of Afro-Asian bloc interests

In the 1960s, there were more Afro-Asian countries slowly being incorporated into the United Nations. This resulted in a few key developments. The GA was successful in being able to pass certain motions that highlighted the unity of commitment of the international committee to world peace and development.

The GA passed Resolution 1514 “Declaration on the Grating of Independence to Colonial Countries and People”, legitimizing all anti-colonial struggles putting a moral pressure on the European colonial masters who claimed to be democratic -> accelerated the decolonization process.

The GA was also able to present a united front and push for more economic developmental aid to be pushed for third world developing nations. In 1964, they were able to make the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) into a subsidiary organ of the GA.

Limitations of this success

However, we see that these successes were only based on common denominators across the Third World countries. Where there were more complex matters, they failed to provide meaningful consensus. **In terms of scope of successes, the GA was limited.**

For example, in the late 1980s, cohesion in the G-77 and NAM (Non-aligned Movement) began to break down with the rapid growth of a number of newly industrialized countries such as the Asian Tigers like Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea. The resulting divergence in interests compromised the collective front on more complex economic issues.

Similarly, in 1992 at the environmental summit in Rio, many countries such as India ignored their bloc positions on environmental issues to follow their own national interests when participating in the Summit.

Security Council

The SC is the main body responsible for maintenance of international peace and security. It is supposed to identify threats, craft resolutions and when all else fails, resort to imposing sanctions or authorize use of force to restore international peace.

SC's success is based on its ability to gain consensus within its members, and then **enforce upon things agreed upon through active intervention.**

Post-Cold War, it is more important to measure the **quality of enforcement and intervention** stemming from the SC.





The Security Council

1. What were some successes of the Security Council during the Cold War?
2. Were the successes due to the SC itself, or the political climate that led to success of UN PKO?
3. Post-Cold War, why were there still failures in PKO?
4. Is our methodology of evaluating the success of the SC flawed? What are the founding principles of the United Nations?



Early Cold War era – Successes of the SC in peacekeeping operations

Where political will was strong between the two superpowers, the SC was **effective in enforcing peace** in turbulent arenas.

During the Korean War in the 1950s, it was ultimately the SC that was responsible in ensuring that there was sufficient enforcement ability of troops on the ground to carry out peace enforcement.

Similarly, during the Suez Canal Crisis in 1956, the concrete actions taken up by UNEF 1 (peace enforcement) was due to the backing of the US and USSR who provided the imperative and resources for the UFP bill passed by the General Assembly to materialize into concrete boots on the ground.

Limitations of this early successes

However, we see that this success was limited in scope and is **fundamentally attributed to political will and political climate surrounding the United Nations**. When political will was lacking, such as a deadlock of superpower interests, peacekeeping actions would ultimately fail. In fact, we would see that sometimes the political interests completely even supersede utility of the UN entirely.

In the same time period, the UN failed to take meaningful action in Hungary during the Hungarian uprising as the USSR backed Kadar government managed to stop UN observers from entering even after 5 resolutions were passed by the GA under Uniting for Peace.

Worse still, the UN itself was completely bypassed in the midst of the most pressing security issues of the time at the height of the Cold War conflict. For example, during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the superpowers did not even utilize the SC or the UN as an intermediary platform for discussion.



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Successes in the Post-CW era

With the end of the Cold War, there was ushered optimism that a UN without the impediment of a crippled SC would be able to lead to more effective peacekeeping outcomes. To some extent, this did happen.

In 1991, during the Gulf War in Kuwait, the UN was able to enforce peacekeeping actions on the ground, with overwhelming support from the US and the UK. This ultimately culminated in Operation Desert Shield where the UN peacekeeping forces were able to act decisively against the invading Iraqi forces in Kuwait.

Limitations of this success

Yet, we continue to see that the successes of UN PKO on a whole were still limited. While PKO in the Gulf War was a success, this success was not replicated in the majority of other conflicts around the world. Ultimately, we see that effectiveness of the SC was still contingent on the political will of contributing nations.

For example, in Somalia, while the US was initially willing to intervene and assist in PKO, peacekeeping forces were met with significant local hostilities resulting in the death of troops deployed. This resulted in a wane in interest by major supporting nations of the UN towards PKO, since they were effectively sending soldiers to fight in areas that held no strategic interests for the nations themselves.

Eventually, this culminated in a lack of actual enforcement power on the ground in other conflicts such as in Bosnia and Rwanda, attributing to the lack of political incentive for the nations within the SC to contribute to UN peacekeeping efforts.



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Evaluating success/failures of the SC as a whole

While it is easy to argue that the SC failed miserably in resolving conflicts where it mattered during the CW, it is tenable to argue that the SC had not completely failed in its agenda within the UN.

The veto gave the P-5 nations the necessary power needed to cripple the effectiveness of the UN. However, if we interpret it another way, the veto was a success because they kept the P-5 to operating generally within the parameters of the United Nations.

Based on the 4th tenet of UN founding principles (To be a center for harmonizing the actions of nations to achieve these goals), we arguably can see the **veto not as a flaw, but a fundamental feature of the UN SC**. Therefore, any discussion of security issues despite the outcomes can be considered as a success for the UN, so long as we are not focused on ONLY the outcomes of peacekeeping operations derived from the Security Council.



Sample Essay Question

Assess the view that the General Assembly has been ineffective since its inception in 1945.

What does this question require? -> An analysis of the effectiveness of the General Assembly since its inception. Again, "inception" hints that you might be required to evaluate the structural flaws of the GA from the UN Charter.

Timelines? -> More coherent to split effectiveness of the GA to CW and post-CW era.

Measuring effectiveness? -> Ability to pass resolutions amidst failure of SC, ability to enforce outcomes and ability to come to consensus on important agendas.

Potential angles of analysis

1. Fundamentality
2. Scope of success
3. Change/Continuity over time

Sample Introduction

This question requires an evaluation of the effectiveness of the GA in relation to its inception in the UN from 1945. In this essay, the effectiveness of the GA will be measured in 3 ways; its' ability to pass resolutions amidst paralysis of the SC, its' ability to enforce outcomes on PKO derived from resolutions passed and its' ability to come to consensus on important agendas. In the Cold War era, the GA proved effective in its ability to pass resolutions where the SC was in paralysis through its Uniting for Peace Resolution. However, this success was limited, because the quality of intervention was fundamentally dependent on the political context of superpower interests within the UN in the first place. Furthermore, many of its successes were only brief anomalies compared to the rest of its failures in intervening in superpower conflicts. In its role in coming to consensus on important agendas, we see that there was some success found by the GA as they brought to the fore crucial issues that plagued the Afro-Asian bloc. Yet, this success was limited in scope and over time, as we see that the successes were only brief and represented only the lowest common denominator of shared interests between the various developing countries. As such, this essay postulates that as a representative, policy-making body of the UN, the GA has been generally ineffective since its inception and any successes they had were limited and not contingent upon the GA itself.

Measuring effectiveness clearly

Awareness of timelines and political context

Identifying evaluative handles clearly and coherently

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