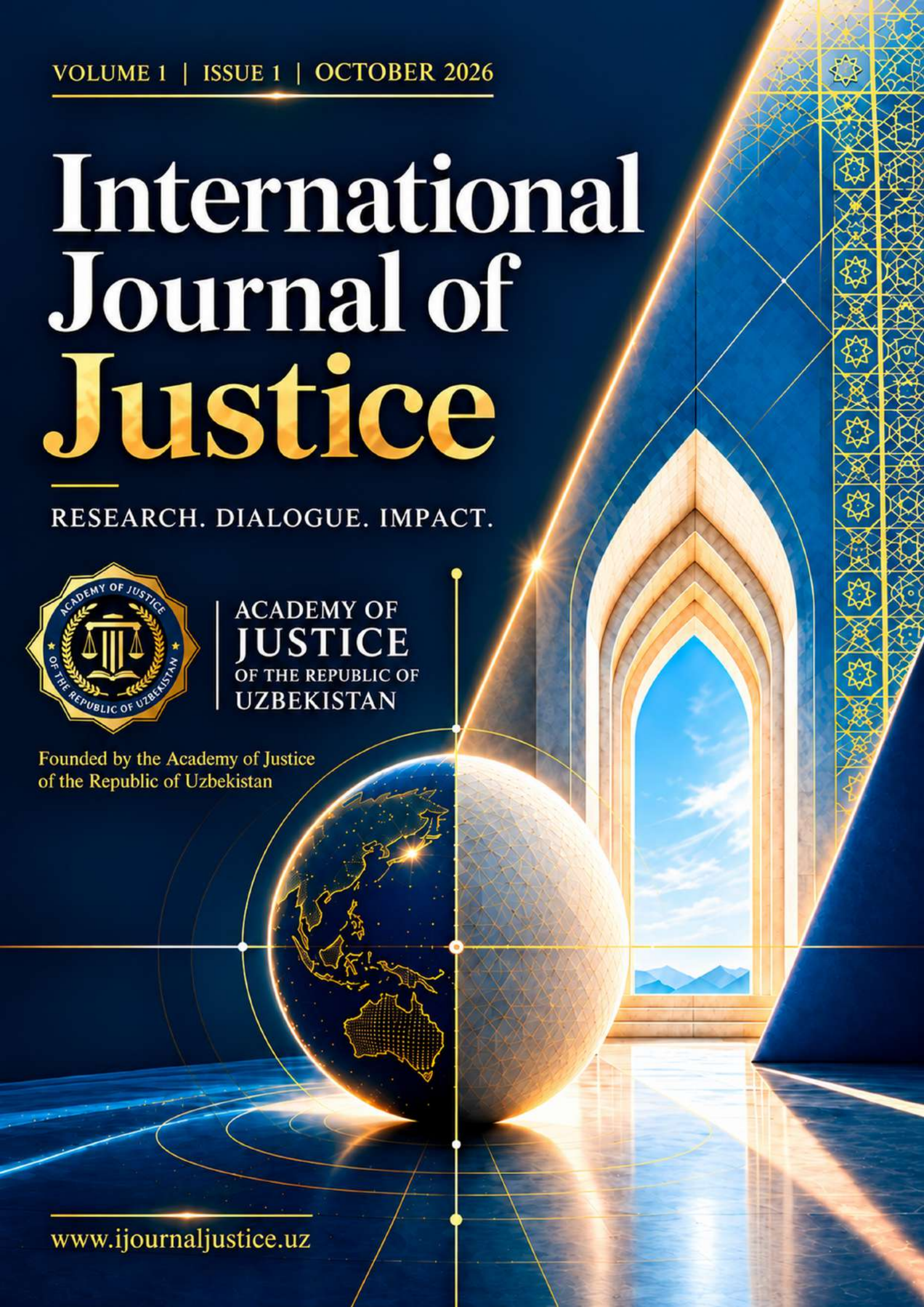
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INTERNATIONAL LAW CRISIS: UN PEACE OPERATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

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Abstract. *This study examines the effectiveness of the United Nations collective-security system in the twenty-first century, focusing on the relationship between Security Council decision-making, peace operations, and the implementation of international law. The relevance of the research is determined by the persistence of armed conflicts, the growing use of hybrid and cyber capabilities, and repeated disagreements among permanent members of the Security Council. The study applies formal-legal, systemic, comparative-legal, and institutional methods, supplemented by a structured review of selected UN peace operations and recent international legal and policy materials. The analysis demonstrates that the principal weakness of the present system is not the absence of international legal norms as such, but the fragmentation of mechanisms for collective implementation and the political dependence of coercive action on Security Council consensus. At the same time, the evidence does not support the conclusion that UN peace operations are generally ineffective: their contribution is more measurable in conflict containment, civilian protection, monitoring, mediation, and post-conflict institution-building than in the unilateral termination of wars. The study proposes a two-level reform approach combining feasible procedural changes in the Security Council with longer-term Charter reform, stronger mandate design, improved rapid-deployment capacity, and clearer accountability mechanisms. The findings may be used in international legal scholarship and in developing practical proposals for improving the legitimacy, responsiveness, and effectiveness of UN peace and security institutions.*

Keywords**:** *international law; United Nations; Security Council; peacekeeping; collective security; veto; institutional reform; conflict resolution.*

Introduction

The United Nations was created in the aftermath of the Second World War as the central institutional framework for maintaining international peace and security. The Charter of the United Nations, adopted on 26 June 1945 and entered into force on 24 October 1945, combines the prohibition of the threat or use of force, peaceful settlement of disputes, sovereign equality of States and collective measures against threats to peace. The Security Council was assigned primary responsibility for international peace and security, while the wider UN system was designed to connect security, human rights, development and international cooperation.

The contemporary problem is therefore not whether international law exists, but whether the institutional architecture created in 1945 can implement its legal purposes under conditions substantially different from those of the twentieth century. Armed conflicts increasingly involve non-State actors, fragmented command structures, information operations, cyber capabilities and transnational economic instruments. At the same time, political divisions among permanent members of the Security Council may prevent collective action precisely when a crisis requires rapid

and authoritative response. The 2024 Pact for the Future expressly recognizes the need to improve and democratize the working methods of the Security Council and strengthen its relationship with the General Assembly.

The research problem is formulated as follows: to what extent does the present UN institutional design limit the implementation of international law, and which reforms can increase the effectiveness of collective security without undermining the Charter-based distribution of powers?

The purpose of the study is to identify the legal and institutional factors that determine the effectiveness of UN peace and security mechanisms and to formulate feasible reform proposals. The study distinguishes between three dimensions of effectiveness: the capacity to prevent or contain violence; the capacity to implement authorized mandates; and the capacity to create conditions for durable political settlement.

The literature reflects two competing approaches. One emphasizes institutional paralysis, especially the veto and dependence on Member States for personnel and resources. Another cautions against treating the veto or peacekeeping as inherently ineffective. Recent research shows that peacekeeping can reduce conflict, while mandate fragmentation and deployment constraints can reduce implementation [7, pp. 664–680; 8; 9, pp. 671–686]. Legal scholarship likewise demonstrates that the veto should be assessed as a constitutional feature of the UN system rather than simply as a political defect [2, pp. 1089–1104; 3, pp. 3–22]. The present study combines these perspectives and argues that the crisis is best understood as a crisis of implementation capacity and institutional legitimacy rather than as a disappearance of international law.

Materials and methods

The object of the study is the institutional and legal framework of UN collective security. The subject consists of the rules governing the Security Council, the legal and operational characteristics of UN peace operations, and reform mechanisms developed by the Organization and Member States.

The formal-legal method was used to examine the Charter-based distribution of powers, particularly Articles 1, 2, 24, 25, 27, 39–42 and 51 of the Charter. The systemic method was applied to assess the interaction between the Security Council, General Assembly, Secretary-General and peace operations. The comparative-legal method was used to compare formal institutional rules with practical implementation in selected conflict settings. The institutional method was used to evaluate decision-making, mandate design, deployment capacity and accountability.

The empirical component is a structured review of selected UN operations and conflict-management cases, including Cyprus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Lebanon, Cambodia and Timor-Leste. These cases were not selected to produce a statistical estimate of all UN operations; rather, they provide contrasting examples of containment, implementation, post-conflict transition and institutional failure. This limitation is important: the conclusions concern institutional patterns and legal mechanisms, not a causal claim about every UN operation.

The study also uses recent UN policy documents, including the Pact for the Future adopted on 22 September 2024 and General Assembly resolution A/RES/76/262 of 26 April

2022 concerning a standing mandate for a General Assembly debate when a veto is cast in the Security Council. Recent peer-reviewed scholarship on veto power, mandate implementation, peacekeeping effectiveness and the rule of law is used for comparison [3, pp. 3–22; 4, pp. 462–470; 7, pp. 664–680].

The reliability of the conclusions is strengthened by triangulation between primary legal materials, official UN materials and peer-reviewed academic research. At the same time, official UN assessments are not treated as independent proof of effectiveness; academic research is used to test broader claims about peacekeeping outcomes.

Results

The legal architecture remains valid, but implementation is politically fragmented.

The first result is that the basic legal architecture of collective security remains operational. The Charter gives the Security Council primary responsibility for international peace and security and requires Member States to carry out Council decisions under Article 25. Chapter VII provides a legal framework for determining threats to peace and adopting measures, including sanctions and, under specified conditions, authorization of force. Consequently, describing the international legal system as having "no enforcement mechanism" is inaccurate. The more precise conclusion is that enforcement mechanisms are institutionally concentrated and politically conditioned [6, pp. 395–432].

The Security Council's dependence on the agreement of permanent members is therefore a structural feature. Article 27 of the Charter requires an affirmative vote of nine members for substantive decisions, including the concurring votes of the permanent members. In practice, a negative vote by one permanent member can prevent adoption of a substantive draft resolution. The legal consequence is not that international law ceases to exist, but that a collective institutional response may be unavailable.

A second result follows: the effectiveness of international law should be separated from the effectiveness of a particular institution. International norms may continue to regulate State conduct even where the Security Council is unable to adopt a resolution. Judicial bodies, treaty mechanisms, diplomatic processes, regional organizations and the General Assembly may still contribute to implementation. The institutional crisis is therefore narrower and more accurately described as a crisis of collective enforcement and coordinated response.

The veto creates both a protection mechanism and a paralysis mechanism

The veto is frequently identified as the principal obstacle to Security Council effectiveness. However, a balanced legal assessment shows that it has two functions. First, it protects the participation of the major powers in the collective-security system and makes it less likely that the Organization will authorize coercive action directly against a permanent member or against an interest it considers vital. Second, the same feature can block collective action in situations involving serious humanitarian consequences.

Recent scholarship has proposed a more nuanced interpretation of Article 27(3), including renewed attention to the requirement that a party to a dispute should abstain in specified Chapter VI situations [3, pp. 3–22]. This illustrates that reform does not necessarily begin with formal amendment of the Charter. Some improvements can be pursued through interpretation, working

methods, procedural commitments and political practice.

General Assembly resolution A/RES/76/262, adopted on 26 April 2022, established a standing mandate for a General Assembly debate when a veto is cast in the Security Council. The mechanism does not abolish the veto and does not transfer Chapter VII powers to the General Assembly. Its significance lies in increasing transparency and political accountability by ensuring that the wider membership has an opportunity to debate the consequences of a veto.

The 2024 Pact for the Future further supports improvement of Security Council working methods and calls for credible, timely and decisive action to prevent or end genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. This indicates a gradual shift from purely structural reform toward procedural accountability.

Peacekeeping is more effective as conflict containment than as unilateral conflict termination.

The third result concerns the effectiveness of UN peace operations. The original article treated several missions mainly as examples of success or failure. A more accurate analytical approach is to distinguish the task performed by the mission from the final political outcome of the conflict.

The evidence from peer-reviewed research shows that UN peacekeeping can reduce violence and increase the probability of stabilization. Statistical research has identified substantial conflict-reducing effects, while other studies demonstrate that mandate fragmentation is negatively associated with mandate implementation, especially for peacebuilding tasks [7, pp. 664–680; 8; 10]. This means that an operation may be successful in protecting civilians or reducing violence even if it does not produce a final political settlement.

The current UN framework identifies three core principles: consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate. These principles explain why peacekeeping should not be confused with peace enforcement. A peacekeeping operation is not designed simply to defeat one party militarily; its legitimacy depends upon a political process and an operational mandate.

Mandate fragmentation and deployment capacity are major institutional constraints.

A recurring practical limitation is the gap between the expectations placed upon a mission and the resources and mandate actually provided. Modern mandates may simultaneously require civilian protection, electoral support, disarmament, rule-of-law assistance, institution-building, monitoring and mediation. When these tasks are not sufficiently prioritized, the mission can become overstretched.

Research on UN peacekeeping has shown that fragmented mandates are associated with weaker implementation [7, pp. 664–680]. Another line of research demonstrates that rapid deployment depends on the incentives and capabilities of troop-contributing countries because the UN does not possess a permanent standing army [9, pp. 671–686]. Consequently, the Organization may have a legally valid mandate without having the operational capacity to implement it rapidly.

This finding changes the reform agenda. Merely expanding the formal authority of the Security Council is insufficient. Institutional effectiveness also depends on predictable financing, rapidly available personnel,

interoperable capabilities, reliable intelligence and realistic mandates.

Selected cases demonstrate different types of UN effectiveness.

The comparative review demonstrates four patterns. First, some operations contributed to the termination or stabilization of armed conflict and enabled political transition, as illustrated by Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Cambodia and Timor-Leste. Second, some operations primarily contained violence without resolving the underlying political dispute, as in Cyprus and Lebanon. Third, some missions experienced serious limitations when the political and military environment exceeded the mandate or willingness of Member States to act, with Rwanda and Somalia providing particularly important lessons. Fourth, the UN can contribute to post-conflict institution-building even when it is not the principal actor ending the conflict.

Table 1 summarizes selected cases not as a ranking, but as a functional classification.

New technologies require institutional adaptation rather than abandonment of existing law

The fourth major result is that technological change creates regulatory pressure but does not make the Charter obsolete. Cyber operations, autonomous systems, artificial intelligence, disinformation and private military capabilities complicate attribution, verification and proportionality. Nevertheless, the core principles of sovereignty, non-intervention, non-use of force and peaceful settlement remain relevant.

The more urgent problem is institutional capacity to establish facts quickly and credibly. In contemporary crises, the interval between an incident and a political response may be shorter than the time required for traditional fact-finding. UN peace operations and the wider UN system therefore require improved real-time observation, digital verification, open-source analysis and protection against information manipulation. Technological modernization should, however, remain subject to international legal standards and should not become a substitute for political settlement.

The principal reform problem is therefore institutional, not purely normative.

The results permit the central conclusion of the study to be formulated more precisely: the UN does not suffer from a complete normative vacuum. Rather, it suffers from a mismatch between universal legal objectives and fragmented institutional capacity. Four gaps are particularly significant: decision-making paralysis; insufficient rapid-deployment capacity; mandate-resource mismatch; and weak accountability for failures of collective action.

This diagnosis allows reform proposals to be separated into realistic short-term measures and long-term structural measures. Short-term measures include improved working methods, greater transparency after vetoes, stronger interaction with the General Assembly, more realistic mandates and improved deployment arrangements. Long-term measures concern the composition and powers of the Security Council and therefore require the Charter amendment procedures.

Discussion

The findings partly confirm and partly qualify the common argument that the UN is experiencing a “crisis of international law.” The argument is persuasive if the term is used to describe a crisis of institutional implementation. It is less persuasive if it

implies that international law has lost its normative force.

First, the veto should not be characterized exclusively as an illegitimate privilege. The historical structure of the Charter reflects the political bargain that made the collective-security system possible. Legal scholarship has therefore warned against assuming that abolishing or radically restricting the veto would automatically increase stability [2, pp. 1089–1104; 4, pp. 462–470]. At the same time, the veto becomes problematic when it prevents the Council from responding to grave violations while providing no adequate accountability mechanism. The appropriate objective is consequently not the elimination of the veto by rhetoric, but the reduction of its destabilizing effects through procedural restraints, transparency and political accountability.

Second, the study supports the literature showing that peacekeeping can work. The original article's formulation that the UN "lacks enforcement mechanisms" was too broad. The UN has coercive legal mechanisms under Chapter VII, but their activation depends on the Council's political decision and their implementation depends heavily on Member States. The distinction is important because it prevents an empirical limitation from being mistaken for a legal absence [6, pp. 395–432].

Third, the comparison of Kosovo and Crimea in the original version illustrated concerns about selective application of international law but risked presenting highly complex and contested cases as if they were legally identical. The revised approach therefore treats such comparisons as evidence of perceived inconsistency rather than proof that identical legal situations receive identical treatment. This distinction improves methodological neutrality and avoids reducing international law to geopolitical narratives.

Fourth, peacekeeping effectiveness should not be assessed solely by whether a mission achieves a final settlement. Empirical research indicates that missions may reduce violence, increase cooperation and strengthen the rule of law without resolving every political cause of conflict [8; 10; 13, pp. 51–68]. The relevant question is whether the mission achieved the tasks that its mandate, resources and political context made realistically possible.

The principal scientific contribution of the study is a functional model of UN effectiveness consisting of three levels: institutional authorization, operational implementation and political sustainability. Failure at any level can reduce overall effectiveness. A legally valid resolution without resources is ineffective operationally; a well-resourced mission without political support cannot ensure a sustainable settlement; and a political settlement without institutional implementation may collapse.

The study also identifies a practical barrier to reform: the most ambitious reforms require the consent of the very States whose institutional privileges would be affected. Recent reform debates therefore emphasize the tension between formally ambitious proposals and politically feasible procedural reforms [2, pp. 1089–1104]. This supports a two-track strategy. The first track should implement changes that do not require Charter amendment. The second should continue long-term negotiations on Council representation and veto arrangements.

On this basis, five practical proposals are advanced. First, veto use should be accompanied by a structured legal and political

explanation identifying the principal reasons and the relationship of the draft resolution to the Charter. Second, the General Assembly's post-veto debate mechanism should be used systematically to increase transparency. Third, peacekeeping mandates should be shorter, prioritized and linked to measurable benchmarks and transition plans. Fourth, the UN should strengthen pre-authorized rapid-deployment capacities through predictable arrangements with troop- and police-contributing States. Fifth, the Organization should establish stronger independent assessment of mandate implementation and civilian-protection performance.

These proposals do not eliminate political disagreement. Their purpose is narrower: to reduce the institutional cost of disagreement while preserving the Charter's basic structure. This is preferable to a theoretical reform model that assumes political consensus where none currently exists.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the crisis of the contemporary international legal order should not be understood as the disappearance of international law. The central difficulty lies in the gap between universal legal obligations and the institutional mechanisms available for collective implementation.

The Security Council remains the principal organ responsible for international peace and security, but its decision-making system can be paralyzed by disagreement among permanent members. The veto is simultaneously a constitutive element of the post-1945 security architecture and a potential source of institutional paralysis. Recent procedural developments, including General Assembly resolution A/RES/76/262 and the 2024 Pact for the Future, show that meaningful improvement is possible even without immediate Charter amendment.

UN peace operations should likewise be assessed according to the tasks they are legally and operationally capable of performing. Their strongest contribution is often conflict containment, civilian protection, monitoring, mediation and institutional transition rather than the direct military termination of conflict. The evidence therefore supports neither an idealized view of peacekeeping nor the conclusion that peacekeeping is inherently ineffective.

The principal reform priority should be to narrow the gap between mandate, resources and political support. Security Council mandates should be realistic, prioritized and accompanied by clear transition strategies. Rapid-deployment capacity should be strengthened through predictable arrangements with Member States. The General Assembly should continue to enhance transparency following vetoes, while longer-term negotiations should address representation and other structural issues.

The adaptation of international law to cyber operations, artificial intelligence, information warfare and other emerging technologies should proceed through clarification and institutional capacity-building rather than abandonment of established principles. The Charter's principles remain relevant; what requires modernization is the ability of international institutions to apply them quickly, consistently and credibly.

The proposed reform model is therefore incremental but structural: improve Security Council working methods in the short term, strengthen peace-operation capacity and accountability, and pursue Charter reform as a long-term political-legal project. Such an

approach preserves the universal character of the UN while addressing the institutional weaknesses that currently limit the effectiveness of collective security.

Table 1. Selected UN peace operations and principal institutional outcomes

Case	Operation	Period	Principal contribution
Cyprus	UNFICYP	1964–present	Long-term containment and monitoring
Bosnia and Herzegovina	UNPROFOR and subsequent international arrangements	1992–1995	Humanitarian and security functions; broader political settlement
Croatia	UNTAES	1996–1998	Transitional administration and reintegration
Sierra Leone	UNAMSIL	1999–2005	Peace implementation and stabilization
Liberia	UNMIL	2003–2018	Security, peacebuilding and institutional support
Mozambique	ONUMOZ	1992–1994	Support during transition from civil war
Rwanda	UNAMIR	1993–1996	Severe protection failure during genocide
Timor-Leste	UNTAET	1999–2002	Transitional administration and institution-building

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