



Introduction

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is the Organization's primary policy-making body. This organ comprises all 193 member states and offers a unique platform for multilateral debate on a wide range of global issues outlined in the UN Charter, with each member state having one equal vote. The UNGA plays a key role in major decision-making such as appointing the Secretary-General (on the Security Council's recommendation), electing non-permanent Security Council members, and approving the UN budget. The Assembly provides recommendations to Member States on international issues within its scope, including political, economic, humanitarian, social, and legal matters.

Topic I: Strengthening the protection of civilians during armed conflicts

Sovereign states are obligated to protect civilians within their borders during armed conflicts. When host governments are incapable of fulfilling this duty, United Nations peacekeeping operations step in to support national authorities. Guided by the Department of Peace Operations' Protection of Civilians Policy (2023), the UN maintains active deployments in conflict zones worldwide to mitigate mass displacement, targeted violence, and humanitarian crises. Protection mandates operate through three distinct pillars: political engagement, direct physical protection, and the establishment of a protective environment that minimizes systemic threats to civilians.

Despite established operational frameworks, modern combat increasingly takes place in densely populated urban environments, exposing civilians to asymmetric warfare, sieges, and critical infrastructure destruction. Because the UN General Assembly does not possess the mandate to deploy offensive military force, its focus centers on whole-of-mission strategies, including coordinating diplomatic envoys, humanitarian agencies, and peacekeeping contingents to safeguard vulnerable populations. Strengthening civilian protection requires resolving persistent structural obstacles, including troop shortfalls, host-state resistance, and restricted access for aid organizations, while balancing immediate threat response and long-term security stabilization.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can UN operations improve communication and cooperation between military, civilian, and humanitarian actors during active conflicts?



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2. What specific rules or policies should international bodies enforce to protect innocent civilians and key facilities during urban combat operations?
3. In what ways can peacebuilding missions provide immediate physical protection while simultaneously helping a nation rebuild its legal and government systems?

Topic II: Strengthening compliance with international law and United Nations resolutions

The United Nations Charter grants the General Assembly explicit authority to initiate studies and issue recommendations that advance the codification, progressive development, and observance of international law. Legal matters are formally funneled through the General Assembly's Sixth Committee before reaching the plenary body. However, unlike the Security Council, the General Assembly lacks the constitutional authority to deploy binding economic sanctions or military enforcement mechanisms. Instead, it relies on global standard-setting, diplomatic consensus, and moral authority to encourage adherence to international conventions, treaties, and court rulings.

The credibility of the multilateral legal architecture faces recurring challenges from selective compliance, jurisdictional limitations, and state impunity. When states ignore rulings from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or exploit procedural veto power within the Security Council, the universal application of international law is compromised. To counter structural paralysis, the General Assembly can utilize alternative diplomatic pathways, such as the "Uniting for Peace" resolution framework, to address systemic non-compliance. Strengthening adherence requires establishing diplomatic monitoring systems, elevating the political costs of non-compliance, and ensuring accountability across all sovereign states regardless of geopolitical influence.

Questions to Consider:

1. What institutional measures can the UN put in place to ensure that international law applies equally to high-influence and smaller states?
2. How can the General Assembly use its diplomatic powers to act when a Security Council veto blocks action on a crisis?
3. How can the international community implement frameworks to increase the political and economic friction associated with non-compliance?



Topic III: Balancing state sovereignty with humanitarian intervention principles

The tension between preserving state sovereignty and preventing human suffering remains a central debate in modern international relations. Article 2(7) of the UN Charter strictly prohibits international intervention in matters essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state. However, widespread human rights catastrophes during the 1990s prompted a re-examination of absolute non-interference, culminating in the formal endorsement of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine at the 2005 UN World Summit.

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) shifts the definition of state sovereignty from an absolute right of non-interference to an active responsibility to safeguard citizens from mass atrocities, including genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. The framework rests on three pillars: a state's primary duty to protect its own people, the global community's role in helping build that protective capacity, and the necessity of direct international action if a government fails to act. Effectively applying R2P requires establishing clear triggers for intervention while preventing powerful nations from using humanitarian concerns as a cover for political interference or regime change.

Questions to Consider:

1. What criteria should signal to the international community that a state is unwilling or unable to protect its citizens under R2P?
2. How can UN mandates prevent powerful nations from using humanitarian intervention as an excuse to push their own political agendas or enforce regime change?
3. What can the UN do to help vulnerable nations strengthen their legal and security systems before crisis strikes?