

## Viewpoint: Coronavirus exposes why the UN is unfit to mobilize international cooperation, says Council on Foreign Relations head

The United Nations has fallen far short of its goals to “maintain international peace and security,” “develop friendly relations among nations” and “achieve international cooperation in solving international problems.”

The pandemic helps illustrate why. The UN Security Council, the most important component of the UN system, has made itself largely irrelevant. China has blocked any significant role for the UN’s executive body lest it be criticized for its initial mishandling of the outbreak and be held responsible for the consequences. Meanwhile, the World Health Organization deferred to China early on and has been further weakened by the United States’ decision to withdraw from it. The result is that the major powers get the UN they want, not the one the world needs.

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Significant reform of the UN is not a realistic option, as potential changes, such as altering the composition of the Security Council to reflect the distribution of power in today’s world, would favor some countries and disadvantage others. Not surprisingly, those who stand to lose can and do block any such change.

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What makes this a crisis is that the need for international cooperation is great. We face not only the revival of great power rivalry but also multiple global challenges, from pandemics and climate change to nuclear proliferation and terrorism, for which there are no unilateral answers.

[Editor’s note: Richard Haass is President of the Council on Foreign Relations]

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