

# 2024 Dorothy Schneider United Nations Day Essay Contest

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## Introduction

The United Nations d/b/a the UN was constructed in 1945 with the primary goals of sustaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations between nations based explicitly on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, cultivating global connections, and taking action to coordinate the efforts of member states. (United Nations, Chapter 1 Article 1). In 2024, 79 years later, the United Nations has been operating to maintain these goals but continues to face significant challenges in promoting self-determination, particularly in regions where sovereignty, territorial integrity, and geo-political interests conflict with the aspirations of various groups (International Crisis Group, 2022).

## Challenges the United Nations Encounters with the Implementation of Self-Determination

In recent years, major powers and United Nations Security Council members often vested interests in maintaining the status quo in certain regions. (Wolff and Weller, 2005, p. 12; Macklem, 2006, p. 502) Which can and has led to the immobilization of the UN when these countries veto resolutions or block actions that support self-determination. The most recent example of this is Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which became a pivotal moment in European security. Since gaining independence three decades ago, Ukraine has sought to establish itself as a sovereign nation, aiming to strengthen ties with Western organizations like the European Union and NATO. The country's western regions, home to a predominantly nationalist, Ukrainian-speaking population, generally supported closer integration with Europe, while predominantly Russian-speaking eastern regions leaned toward stronger connections with Russia (Johnathan

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Masters, 2023). Although the United Nations Secretary-General emphasized the need to honor Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity and called for a just peace based on the United Nations Charter and international law, Russia has remained unstoppable (Andrews Byers, 2024). Under the pre-text of self-determination for Russian speaking populations, demonstrates how self-determination claims can be manipulated. Russia's veto power has hindered the United Nations' condemnation of Russia in the Security Council.

Additionally, in several regions, governments resist self-determination movements, particularly where there are ethnic, cultural, or religious differences. Authoritarian regimes often suppress such movements violently, making the United Nations involvement difficult without clear international consensus or intervention mandates. In Myanmar, the military has suppressed the Rohingya people's rights, including their self-determination. In February 2021, a military coup overturned Myanmar's new democratic government. This granted the military a quarter of reserved seats in all legislative bodies, veto power over constitutional amendments, and control over key ministries such as defense, border affairs, and home affairs. The military also shielded itself from accountability for past human rights violations by holding most seats on the National Defense and Security Council (Zahed, 2021b). The Myanmar military coup misuse of law, particularly the 1982 Citizenship Law enforced in 1987. Stripped the Rohingya of their citizenship rights, leaving them stateless and effectively revoking their recognition as a minority group in the country (Parashar & Alam, 2019). Despite the United Nations' condemnation and efforts, the military coup's persistence and the international community's limited leverage have stalled progress (SC/15652, 2024).

Lastly, historical legacies, such as colonial borders and longstanding territorial disputes, complicate self-determination movements, as different groups may lay claim to the same land based on differing historical narratives. Since October 7, 2023, armed conflict between Israeli and

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Hamas-led Palestinian military groups has been taking place in the Gaza Strip (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Israel-Palestine competing national claims have made the issue of Palestinian self-determination in the occupied territories a long-standing and intractable problem for the United Nations. In the Israel-Palestine conflict, competing national claims from both Israelis and Palestinians have made the issue of Palestinian self-determination extraordinarily complex and contentious, as both sides have conflicting views on the extent of Palestinian statehood and the borders of potential Palestinian territory. They are leading to ongoing political tension and violence. Recent escalations in 2024 between Israel and Palestine highlight the complexity of resolving such deep-rooted conflicts.

### **Solutions for the United Nations**

Economic interests often dictate geo-political stances on self-determination. By neutralizing incentives for Major Powers, the UN can create international frameworks that neutralize these financial incentives, such as global sanctions on resource exploitation in conflict zones—suggesting that strengthening global sanctions against states or corporations that exploit resources in contested areas could reduce financial and power struggle incentives that drive geo-political opposition to self-determination.

Similarly, self-determination claims should be firmly rooted in human rights principles, ensuring that any movement for self-determination does not come at the cost of minority rights or broader human rights violations. They propose that the UN tie recognition of self-determination to strict adherence to human rights standards, penalizing groups or states that violate these in pursuing independence or control.

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Furthermore, the UN should prioritize conflict prevention through early mediation efforts and proactive diplomacy before disputes escalate into violence. This would require reinforcing the UN's mediation capacity. Through enhanced mediation and conflict resolution mechanisms, offering to expand the UN's role, special representatives can function in regions experiencing self-determination conflicts, reduce violence, and improve the likelihood of peaceful resolutions.

### **Conclusion**

The United Nations' effort to promote self-determination remains charged with challenges in 2024, as geo-political interests, the complexity of modern nation-states, and the difficulty of gaining international solidarity often hinder progress. By reforming internal processes, engaging regional officials, supporting human rights-based solutions, and neutralizing economic incentives, the UN can create a more effective framework for advancing the self-determination of peoples worldwide.

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