

Is UN Security Council Seat Worth the Effort?

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Introduction

For almost a decade, there have been talks on restructuring of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and last year United Nations (UN) members agreed that they will negotiate the wording of a document to reform the Security Council and submitted written suggestions for the same. It also caught fire when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a strong contention for a permanent seat for India in UNSC.

Current permanent members of the UNSC – the US, Russia, France, the UK and China – were the victors and superpowers of Second World War (WW II). France and Republic of China (ROC) were the allies of the WW II and there were various other reasons that afforded them seats in UNSC. The defeated nations were excluded from this power structure.

Systematic failure of the UNSC in functioning and achieving its objective of securing peace and resolving conflict, such as, the misuse of UNSC resolutions by North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to bomb Libya, and the failure to end civil war in Syria etc. do pose a need for reformation. Veto has often been used by the US, Russia and China in pursuit of their own geopolitical interests and that of their allies. East-West rivalries have paralysed UNSC in realising its purpose. There has been no reform in the UNSC membership as well as its working for the last 50 years and there is an urgent need for the same.

Recent talks of reforms in United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) have again given rise to India's ambition to get itself placed as one of the permanent members of the UNSC.

Background

India's first chance for a permanent seat came in 1950s when

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both the US and the then USSR supported replacement of China with India as permanent member of the UNSC, which was rejected by then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, on the belief that replacing China would have made it a permanent enemy of India. Support for India's quest in becoming a permanent member has necessarily to come from every incumbent permanent member, unless we see a total reformation in the UN Charter. The US, the UK and France have backed India in getting a permanent seat on various occasions, including recently in the 70th session of the UNGA in New York.

India is primarily a regional power attempting to define itself in terms of global power by maintaining the relationship with other major powers like the US, China, Russia and European Union. For most part of the 20th Century, India's relations with the rest of Asia were limited but it changed with India's rising ambitions. India increased its trade within Asia by altering the economic dynamics gradually and tried to translate them into new political realities. Japan has replaced China as the dominant economic power while China has become the dominant continental power and is important for an overall stability in Asia.

According to SK Ghosh, *"This dream is pre-dated even the transfer of power from the British."*¹ In October 1946, when India was still a British colony, Nehru had the same views. While addressing the army officers, he said, *"India is today among the four great powers of the world: other three being America, Russia, and China. But in point of resources, India has greater potential than China".* He added that *"India is likely to dominate politically and economically, the Indian Ocean region"*.²

India is the largest democracy of the world with over 1 billion population. India's strategic position in Asia has always played a crucial role in its history. India's role in strengthening UN's position has always been positive. Henry Kissinger, the former Secretary of State of the US, noted that the international system in 21st century would be dominated by six nuclear powers, the US, China, Russia, Europe, Japan and probably India.³ Samuel P Huntington also shared this idea and wrote that during coming decade, *"India could move into rapid economic development and emerge as a major contender for influence in world affairs"*. He included India in eight civilisations of the world.⁴

India's significant role in peacekeeping all over the world is well known. It has been instrumental in eradicating apartheid, slavery and has helped decolonise many Asian and African countries. India has always supported the weak, suffering and oppressed humanity.

Post-Cold War Era

In the post-Cold War era, India extended its support for the expansion of UNSC and demanded for important adjustments with a permanent seat for itself in the Security Council. Its more emphasis is on the pragmatic aspects of multilateralism. India rested its claim on its track record of multilateralism as it has contributed in 41 out of 59 UN peacemaking operations and 11 out of 15 peacekeeping operations. India has been a major troop contributing country. In 1998, it became the largest troop contributor. It is a well known fact that Indian forces as the UN peace keepers have performed a wonderful job in many countries including Korea, Somalia, and Angola etc., and there was also a great demand that Indian troops should be sent to Iraq to establish and maintain peace there. Currently, India has over 7800 personnel deployed in UN-led peace operations and is a champion of the Group of 77 comprising a large number of the developing countries.⁵ These affiliations have made India as one of the largest troop contributors to the UN.

Legitimacy for India's Bid

Legitimacy for India's bid for a permanent seat in the UNSC came first from the US President Barrack Obama who announced it in his speech to the Indian Parliament during his first visit to India in November 2010.⁶ Nations that have traditionally given a cold shoulder to India's global ambitions, such as the UAE and Syria, were quick to jump on to the bandwagon and extend support for the same. Even arch-rival China said that it understood and supported India's desire to play a greater role in the UN.

There are differences as well as common interests between the US and India in their current relations. This relationship rests on several pillars. One common interest is the convergence of fundamental values such as democracy and rule of law. The other is the driving force behind the rapprochement as *realpolitik*. The vivid expression of this was the Indo-US nuclear deal in 2006 for

the transfer of nuclear technology. The deal is the US's recognition of India's new geopolitical significance and bridging the chasm of the Cold War. US-India nuclear deal took years to materialise, much due to the India's hesitation in accepting American conditions. This reflects an Indian view point of limited partnership rather than an alliance with the US. Both countries recognise the importance of new partnership. For India, it provides leverage against China and confirmation as a major power in future. The strategic interests of the two countries are increasingly congruent in different areas including terrorism and proliferation.

But nowhere is the importance of Game Theory and the principle that 'for everything you gain at the negotiating table, you have to give something back' more evident than in diplomatic dealings – a fact that India seems to have overlooked.

Next came the visit of President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, who arrived in India on 03 Dec 2010, and was successful in selling the still-untested Areva nuclear reactors to India at a cost of US \$22 billion.⁷ The project has been plagued by financial overruns and delays in the other locations where it is being built, and Areva has been criticised for grossly under-estimating the cost of producing a single unit of electricity. Given the severe energy crisis in India and the importance of reducing the country's reliance on fossil fuels, nuclear energy is indeed the answer. But buying an untested nuclear reactor in return for a statement of support is too great a risk to take – and too great a concession to make.

India's trade-offs for the UNSC seat didn't stop there. Having set the mood very carefully on the first day of his Dec 15-17 visit to India by supporting India's aspiration of a greater role in the UN, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, had very skillfully skirted the issues of disputed borders with India, stapled visas for Kashmiris and Arunachalis and control of Arunachal and Tibet. In the end, the Chinese Premier's statement didn't amount to unequivocal support for India's bid for a permanent seat – only India's greater participation. Buoyed by this apparent diplomatic victory, Indian officials went about inking US \$16 billion in economic deals with China.

As the so-called BRIC countries i.e. Brazil, Russia, India, and China, have grown more and more influential in the world

economy, their administrators and myriad pundits have inevitably concluded that they and other rising powers should also become more important actors in global politics. The insistence by Brazil and India for permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council, a similar push by China and Brazil for a greater say on climate change talks and on IMF and World Bank voting shares, and a greater voice for South Africa in all of these arenas are just a few examples of the BRICs' growing boldness.

The emerging powers are not ready for prime role as yet. And never has this been clearer than now, with revolution sweeping the Middle East. It is the traditional powers in the West that will determine the international response to this crisis — not because they are favored by global institutions, but because their word is backed by military and diplomatic weight. In contrast, the world's rising economies lack the ability - and the values - to project their power on the world stage.

Let's back up a bit. By now, the growing economic clout of the new regional powers is indisputable. Their political strength, however, is less obvious. More importantly, their entry into the halls of world governance would not necessarily strengthen the developing international legal regime. These new powers lack the same commitment as the older ones to supranational institutions and universal values such as human rights, the collective defence of democracy, a robust climate change framework, nuclear nonproliferation, and so forth. Hence, permanent seats on the Security Council for Brazil, India and South Africa, coupled with greater participation by China, Pakistan, Indonesia, and even Mexico in international agencies or bodies, might weaken the very foundations of the liberal democratic order — although in this regard, their entrance would also make international bodies more globally representative.

Reasons for India to be Permanent Member of the UNSC

What if India does go on to become permanent member of UNSC, serving as an independent entity rather than being guided by the Big Five existing members? What would India achieve?

The question of India's influence in the Security Council addresses the issue at the core of Security Council effectiveness, namely its influence in the international arena especially in

maintaining international peace and security. India still would have immense influence on a veto-less Council. Having had consistently good relations with Russia, India will have considerable influence over Russian positions. The need to include India now is also intensified by the fact that China is soon likely to be the second new superpower in the world. Therefore, India would act as a counterweight to China that would give it significant influence with the US, the EU and China's neighbours, including Japan. Finally, India would still be the most influential Third World State.

India believes its permanent membership of the Council would moderate the arbitrariness of the present permanent members in decision-making matters, particularly to do with international peace and security. Indeed, India wants to be involved in the steering and have a say in these matters. India is keen to see an empowered UN that can take on the world policeman role, which some feel seems to have been usurped by the US unilateralism at the present time.⁸ Moreover, India sees itself as the champion of the developing world and is keen to establish development as central to the UN's agenda.⁹ Mr Kofi Annan has been quoted as saying that India's has been one of the most eloquent voices helping shape the UN agenda on behalf of the developing world.¹⁰

India's UNSC reform strategy has two main components. Garnering support in the UN General Assembly and reducing resistance in the UN Security Council. Through India's continued leadership in the G77, it hopes to assure widespread support in the UN General Assembly. India's strong stance on defending sovereignty and criticising "the responsibility to protect" can be understood in this context. At the same time, India's recent rapprochement with China, its historic nuclear deal with the United States, and its continued historic friendship with Russia are all meant to assure that none of the permanent members would block India's entry.

India seeks to alter some of the UNSC's rules and decision-making procedures, but adheres to its principles, ultimately strengthening the UNSC. Its strategy is therefore not merely "revisionist", as is often claimed,¹¹ but it constitutes revisionist integration. The fact that India is one of the few member states that has been elected six times to the body underlines the importance of the entity for the Indian Government.¹² The Indian Government bemoans that governance structures, particularly in the UNSC,

have not been able to keep up with contemporary realities. Indian politicians believe that India should have been granted a permanent seat on the UNSC in 1945.¹³ After failing to obtain a seat in 2005, when India was part of the G-4 (together with Germany, Japan and Brazil), the Indian Government is determined to continuously push for expanding the Council, even though short-term success is unlikely. China is seen as a crucial gate keeper in India's attempt to advance in the UN Security Council, and this together with an appreciation of China's growing economic importance is one of the reasons that India aims to improve relations with China, despite an ongoing border dispute in Arunachal Pradesh.

The US, China and Russia did not contribute to the text, a move which was seen as an attempt to thwart India's bid for permanent membership of the global body. Though the US and Russia have been supporting India's bid, China has been against any expansion of the Security Council. Besides the above permanent members that oppose the G-4 contention, a group called the Uniting for Consensus (UFC), comprising 13 countries like, Pakistan, Italy, South Korea, and Colombia, etc have been opposing the move. The UFC demands a 25-member Security Council with more non-permanent members instead of a few more permanent members.

Another question that remains unanswered is that whether new members in the Security Council would be given the veto at all, which the US and Russia have made very clear they would not favour.

Global Reality of World Politics

In 2010, India managed to earn clear support from the leaders of the United Kingdom, France, the United States and Russia for a place in the UNSC, so now it enjoys the backing of four out of the five current permanent members of the UNSC. More ambivalent on the matter is China – a traditional rival to India in Asia and a close partner of Pakistan, which would prefer to maintain the status quo. Also, the support of other permanent members is rather declaratory in nature since none has pushed vigorously for UNSC reform. A majority of countries, including Poland, look favourably on India's aspirations in the United Nations, but also link their support for India to general reform of the UN.

So, it's worth asking: as a permanent member of the UNSC, would India gain any advantages other than the exercise of Veto? Some would argue that a permanent seat would give India leverage with other nations outside the Security Council, which might ask for India's help in lobbying within it.

This is hardly a compelling argument, for two reasons. Firstly, the UN's relevance in dealing with conflicts has been undermined by the US attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq. Second, nations are more likely to spend their efforts lobbying the most influential members of the Council rather than its newest members.

Currently, India's interests are being served well by Russia in the Security Council. India need not make a permanent seat its top policy goal while that friendship remains solid and without cracks. The country might be better served by exploiting the rapid pace of economic growth to negotiate technology transfer and canvas support for bilateral issues. It's an approach that is unlikely to achieve short-term glory, but will ultimately serve the country better in the medium and long term.

Despite China's and Brazil's military and naval buildup, and India's and Pakistan's possession of nuclear weapons, they still lack the ability to project power the way countries such as France and Britain can when NATO or the UN Security Council so decides. One can agree with such interventions or oppose them, but at this juncture only countries such as these and the United States have the wherewithal to actually do something in crises such as Libya.

The main obstacles on the way to India's permanent membership on the UNSC are its unresolved dispute in Kashmir, opposition from Pakistan and some allegations of human rights violations. Also, problematic is that India is still outside the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) regime; although the significance of this argument has considerably declined after it signed a nuclear deal with the United States, which de facto recognised India as a nuclear state. For India, support for its bid for a permanent UNSC seat is a highly important issue and is treated as a litmus test for bilateral cooperation. But the realisation of Indian aspirations is connected with the structural reform of the whole UN system, which is not in sight.

Conclusion

For India, the chances of getting into the permanent membership of the UN Security Council are very high; but the chances of getting veto power are highly doubtful. Ideally one loves to have such a power, but a permanent position in the Security Council even without a veto is not a bad idea. A Security Council seat even without a veto can definitely change the course of India's destiny drastically. India, in the first instance, should accept a berth on the Security Council and then lobby hard to achieve equal status in the Council with the permanent five veto-wielding nations.

Endnotes

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¹¹ See, for example, "Our size, our potential strength, our traditions and heritage do not allow us to become a client state." Paul, T.V. and Hall, John A., *International Order and the Future of World Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999.

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