

# India Perspectives on United Nations Summit of The Future

**Brigadier V Vidyashankar<sup>@</sup>**

*“We can’t build a future for our grandchildren with a system built for our grandparents”*

– Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General,  
17 Jan 2024

## **Abstract**

*The Summit of the Future was held at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York between 20 and 23 Sep 2024, which was attended by heads of more than 130 UN member states and over 4,000 participants. On 22 Sep 2024, world leaders adopted a Pact for the Future that includes a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration on Future Generations. This Pact has 56 action points under five major heads—Sustainable Development and Financing; International Peace and Security; Science, Technology, Innovation, and Digital Cooperation; Youth and Future Generations; and Transforming Global Governance. In this context, as a rising global power and a key player in the UN, Indian perceptions on the themes and purposes of the summit assume significance. This article examines and focuses on India’s stance relating to 10 of the UN summits’ 56 action points—Sustainable Development; Climate Change; Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict; Cooperation and Understanding Between Member States; Building and Sustaining Peace; Women, Peace, and Security; Adapting Peace Operations to New Realities; Addressing Terrorism; New and Emerging Technologies; and Reform of UN Security Council. Through a critical*

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<sup>@</sup>**Brigadier V Vidyashankar** is a serving officer of the Indian Army. The officer has represented India in the United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping Mission at Congo and has also headed the prestigious Centre for UN Peacekeeping, New Delhi, as its director. He has also served as a Senior Research Fellow at Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi. He has authored a number of peer reviewed publications on UN Peace Operations in various journals. Currently, he is pursuing his PhD with CLAWS-Manipal Academy of Higher Education, and his field of study is India and UN Peace Operations.

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*examination of India's engagements with the UN, its current policies, priorities, and emerging global role, this article will attempt to identify key areas of convergence and divergence between India's interests and summit's objectives. It argues that India is likely to emphasise the need for a more inclusive and equitable global governance architecture, especially as a voice of the Global South.*

## **Introduction**

The Summit of the Future was held at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York from 20 to 23 Sep 2024, which was attended by heads of more than 130 UN member states and over 4,000 participants.<sup>1</sup> Post the COVID pandemic, there was a call from many UN members to ideate on addressing the current and futuristic challenges. This, in turn, led to the preparation of Our Common Agenda Report by the UN Secretary-General in 2021, and served as the origins for the Summit of the Future.

The Common Agenda report advocated for a renewed sense of mutual trust and solidarity across nations, peoples, and generations. It argued that our economic, social, and political frameworks need to be fundamentally rethought for the purpose to serve everyone more effectively and fairly. Additionally, it suggested a commensurate rejuvenation of the multilateral system, with the Summit of the Future serving as a crucial occasion for establishing a consensus on the most important changes that are required.<sup>2</sup>

Leaders from around the globe adopted a Pact for the Future on 22 Sep 2024, which contains the Declaration on Future Generations and the Global Digital Compact. Covering five main headings—Sustainable Development and Financing; International Peace and Security; Science, Technology, Innovation, and Digital Cooperation; Youth and Future Generations; and Transforming Global Governance—this Pact contains 56 action points.

## **Indian Context**

As a rising global power and a key player in the UN, Indian perceptions on the themes and purposes of the summit assume significance. During his address to the UN summit on 23 Sep 2024, the Prime Minister of India underscored the nation's vision of creating a sustainable world for subsequent generations. India's achievements in scaling sustainable development initiatives, the importance of a

human-centric approach in a shared pursuits, India's development experience, and solidarity with the Global South were highlighted. He urged sensible laws to encourage responsible and safe technology use, pointing out that India is open to exchange of greater social interests and digital public infrastructure, and called for balanced rules to ensure the safe and responsible use of technology. He also urged for immediate reform of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and other global governance organisations, pointing out that reform is essential to relevance.<sup>3</sup>

### **Key Action Points of Pact of the Future—Indian Outlook**

#### **Sustainable Development.**

- Adopted by 193 member states at the UN General Assembly Summit in Sep 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which includes 169 targets.<sup>4</sup> The fundamental idea, 'Leave No One Behind', is at the heart of this worldwide plan for 2030 and aims to involve everybody in all aspects of development, including the most marginalised and vulnerable. This comprehensive agenda acknowledges that economic growth alone is no longer enough.
- In India, coordinating the SDGs, mapping initiatives relevant to the SDGs and their targets, and identifying lead and supporting ministries for each target are all tasks assigned to the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog, the Government of India's leading think tank. Furthermore, negotiations for creating national indicators for the SDGs have been spearheaded by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.<sup>6</sup> As per SDG India Index 2023-24, issued by NITI Aayog, the nation's overall SDG score for 2023–2024 is 71 (as shown in Image 1), which is a considerable improvement above the baseline report's scores of 66 in 2020–21 and 57 in 2018.<sup>7</sup> This has been due to notable advancements toward the objectives of eradicating poverty, ensuring good employment, economic expansion, addressing climate change, and preserving land.
- In terms of goal-wise performance (as shown in Image 2), there have been improvements in ensuring Zero Hunger (SDG-2), Quality of Education (SDG-4) and in Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (SDG-9), while Gender Equality (SDG-5) remains a grey area.

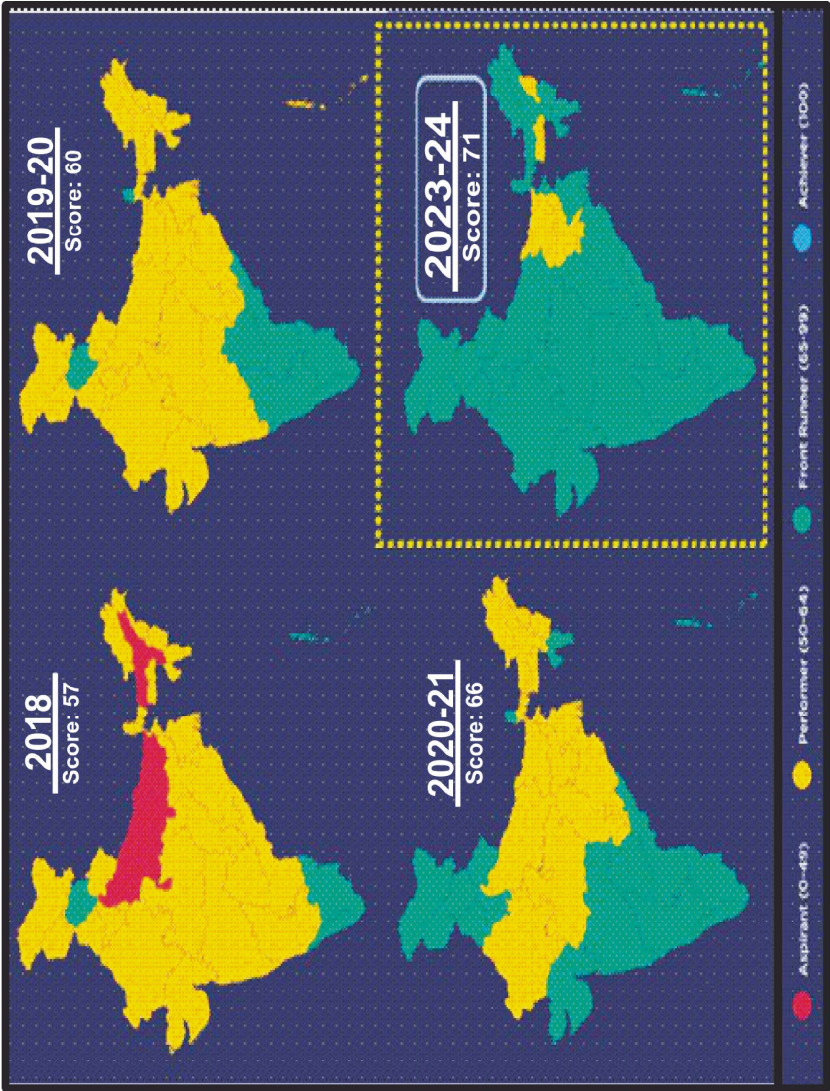


Image 1<sup>5</sup>

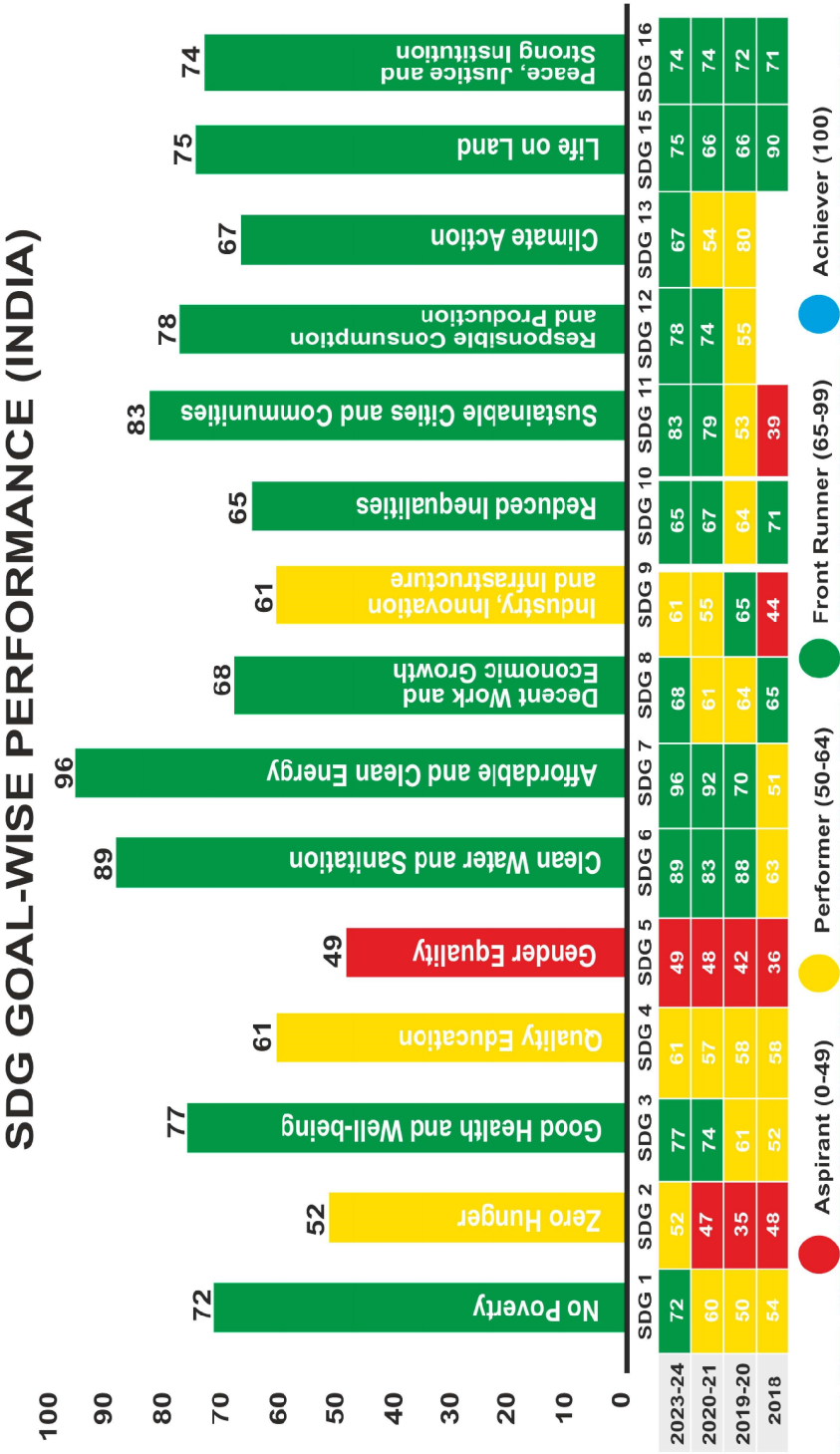


Image 2<sup>8</sup>

### **Climate Change.**

- Action 9 of the Summit of the Future deals with ‘Strengthening of actions to address climate change’. The summit decided to agree on the following—reaffirm the objective of the Paris Agreement to keep the rise in the average global temperature well below 2 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels and to work toward a 1.5 degree Celsius increase over pre-industrial levels; acknowledge the necessity of significant, quick, and long-term cuts in greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with 1.5 degrees Celsius trajectory; understand that while maintaining energy security, transitional fuels can help to ease the energy transition; stress the significance of preserving and repairing ecosystems and environment, including through increased initiatives to stop and reverse decline of forests and deforestation by 2030; and leverage and bring the new finance arrangements into action, which shall be nationally determined.<sup>9</sup>
- In India, there has been an increase of 13 points within three years (from score of 54 [performer] in 2020-21 to 67 [front runner] in 2023-24) in the SDG-13 index towards climate action (as shown in Image 3). This has been majorly due to improvement in disaster preparedness score, improvement in electricity generation through renewable sources, and compliance of industries with environmental standards.<sup>11</sup>
- It is pertinent to understand that climate change has direct impact on forests, agriculture, and human health. Further, extreme events related to climate change have manifested in terms of floods, storms and cyclones, forest fires, heat, and cold waves. Climate change is likely to exacerbate already-existing inequalities pertaining to economic elements like class and geographic location<sup>12</sup>, as well as social factors like gender and caste.<sup>13</sup> Ms Leela Nandan, Secretary to the Union Environment Ministry, has opined Indian stance at the UN Summit of the Future on 20 Sep 2024, which focusses at looking beyond reduction in emissions and adopting sustainable lifestyles, which might address many of the issues caused by climate change. Further, providing inexpensive solutions increase the likelihood of global success.<sup>14</sup>

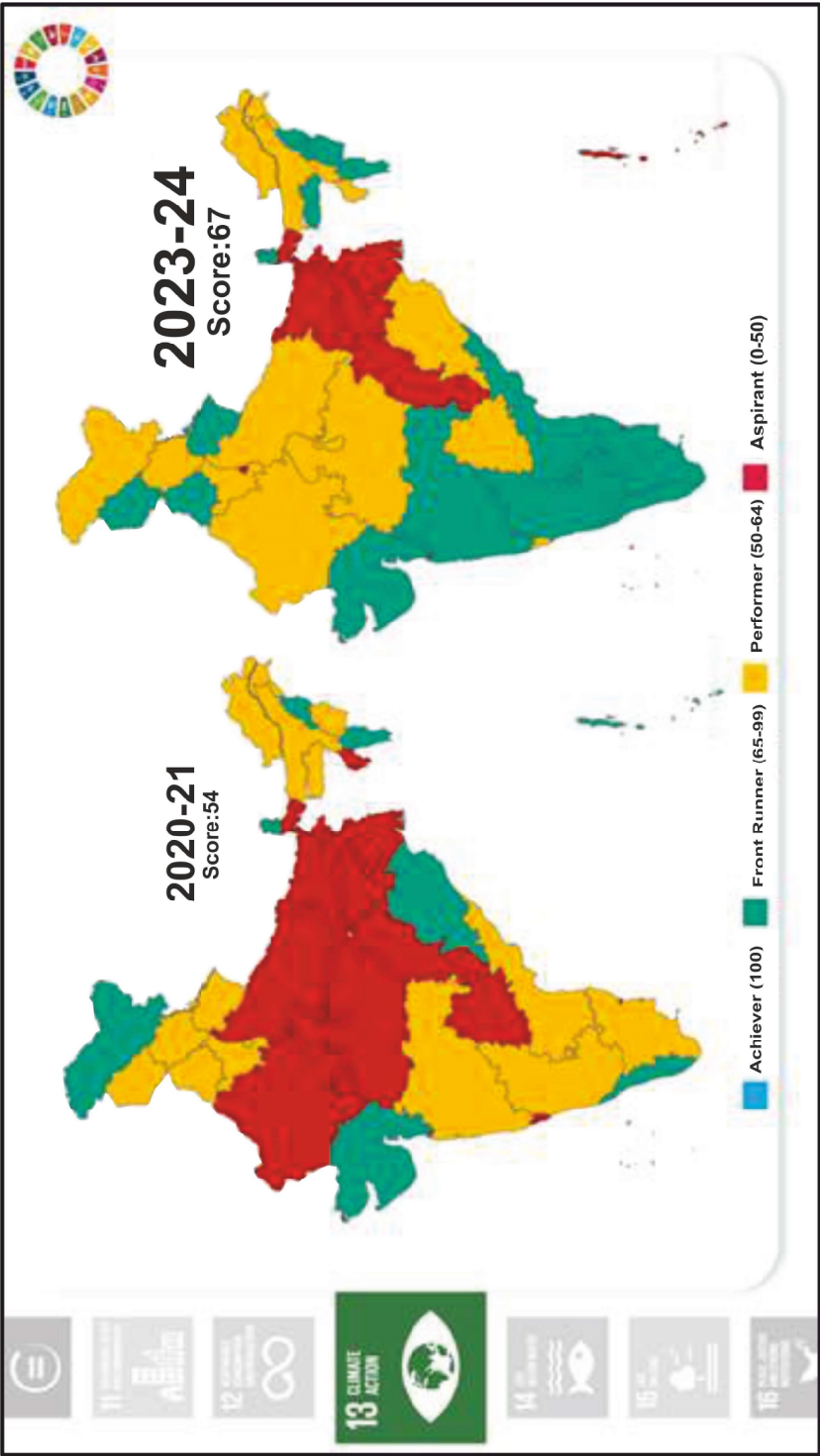


Image 3<sup>10</sup>

**Protection of Civilians (PoC) in Armed Conflict.**

- Addressing Action 14, the members of the Summit of the Future reiterated their adherence to their responsibilities towards PoC. Some of the key points include—implementing tangible productive measures for PoC; rapidly implementing obligations towards children and armed conflict; limit or abstain from using explosives in populated areas as necessary; making humanitarian aid and access safe, quick, and unhindered; and increase efforts to ensure accountability for violators of the law and to bring an end to impunity.<sup>15</sup>
- UN data obtained from UN Economic and Social Affairs (as shown in Image 4) suggests that there has been a 72 per cent increase in the conflict-related deaths of civilians. Seven out of 10 recorded civilian deaths in 2023 took place in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, however, there were notable rises in other conflict zones.<sup>17</sup>
- In 1999, the UNSC mandated for the first time, the PoC in its mission to Sierra Leone. Since then, 15 UN peacekeeping missions have been deployed with an explicit PoC mandate in the past 25 years, with five still in operation today in complex and evolving conflict settings.<sup>18</sup>
- Professor CSR Murthy, who teaches at the Center for International Politics, Organisation, and Disarmament in Jawaharlal Nehru University, argues that India bases its strategy on legal, moral, political, and policy factors when it comes to PoC during armed conflicts. Regardless of the perpetrator, India opposes use of repressive violence in armed conflicts and maintains that the principle of sovereign equality and international law should guide the protection of people. As per Prof Murthy, India's stance is that any action taken by the UNSC and the international community should be grounded in reliable and verifiable evidence, be realistic, and be proportionate to the threat to civilians.<sup>19</sup>
- Indian peacekeepers, with a history of 75 years of peacekeeping experience, have a regular and large presence in UN missions in Africa, where most of the PoC mandates have been operationalised. They have a varied experience in handling PoC requirements, as no two missions have the



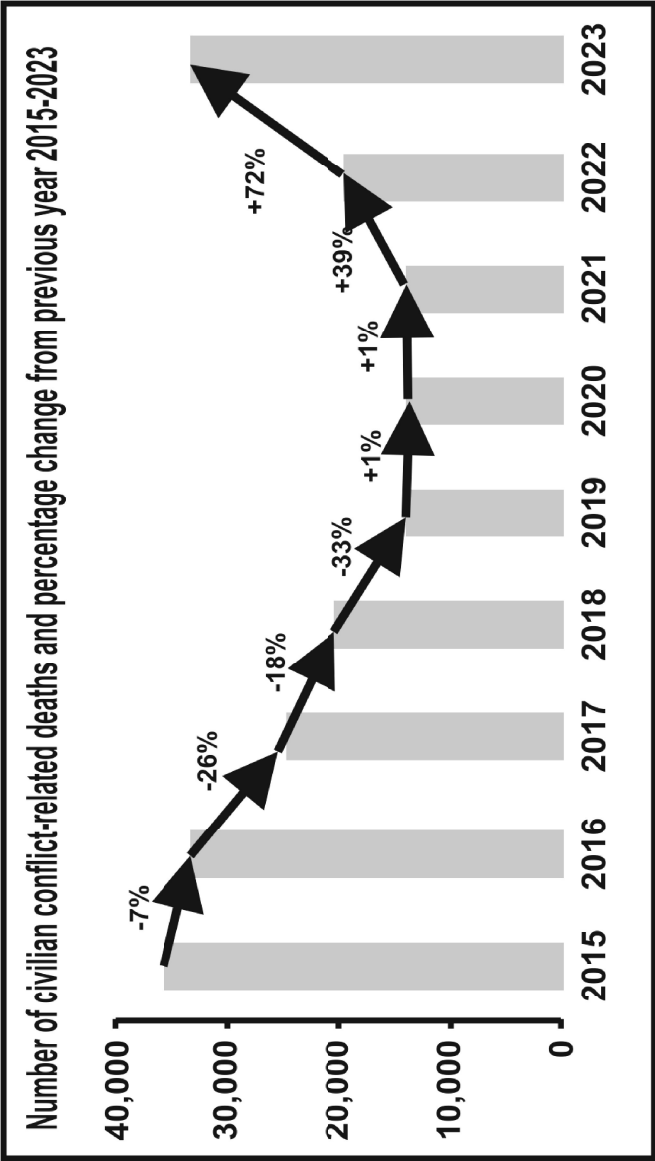


Image 4<sup>16</sup>

same PoC requirements, and are determined by the prevailing conflict scenario of that state. Indian approach to proactively train its peacekeepers on PoC requirements have ensured a consistent track record for conduct and discipline of its troops while engaging with civilians, employment of Female Engagement Teams, and enabling host nations through training and capacity building of their security forces.

### **Cooperation and Understanding Between Member States.**

- The Summit of the Future deals with reaffirming the dedication of UN members to peaceful settlement of disputes. It acknowledges the importance of the UN partnership with regional and sub-regional organisations in preventing and resolving conflicts and disputes between member states, in line with the Charter. Action 16 of the Summit reaffirms its commitment to international law and the UN Charter, resolving disputes through dialogues, seeking collective efforts in resolving threats related to world peace and security, and use the Office of Secretary-General to facilitate and lead preventive diplomacy and mediation.<sup>20</sup>
- As per the Permanent Mission of India in New York, India consistently pushes for equitable solutions through communication and cooperation with all member states of the UN, highlighting multilateralism as the primary strategy for addressing global issues like peacebuilding, sustainable development, climate change, and human rights.<sup>21</sup> A fundamental part of India's approach to the UN is its call for 'Reformed Multilateralism' to effectively address current challenges. Through various international forums, India actively supports and participates in South-South cooperation, observing it as an essential forum for addressing the wants and needs of fellow developing nations. It particularly uses initiatives such as India-UN Development Partnership Fund to support projects aimed at eradicating poverty, promoting gender equality, and facilitating access to education in the developing world.<sup>22</sup>
- On 17 Aug 2024, India held the third Voice of Global South Summit virtually, with the theme 'An Empowered Global South for a Sustainable Future'. The Summit was an extension to the global forum of India's idea of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*

(One Earth, One Family, One Future). During the summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi proposed a comprehensive four-fold Global Development Compact that would include the following components—technology sharing; trade for development; building capacity for sustainable growth; and project-specific grants and concessional financing.<sup>23</sup>

### **Building and Sustaining Peace.**

- Action 18 of the Summit of the Future focuses on building for and ensuring sustainable peace. Key points include commitment towards reduction in all forms of violence, strengthening national prevention strategies, addressing risks associated with hate speeches, disinformation and misinformation, and expanding the resources available to UN peacebuilding commission.<sup>24</sup>
- India plays a significant role in building and sustaining peace globally, primarily through its substantial contribution to UN peacekeeping missions, where it is one of the largest troop contributors, whose peacekeepers are considered to be highly trained and disciplined in maintaining international peace and security. Since the founding of Peacebuilding Commission in Dec 2005, India has also been a part of the same and has made contributions to the Peacebuilding Fund totalling around USD 6 mn till date, with the last tranche of contribution of USD 150,000 pledged in 2021.<sup>25</sup> Further, for the 2025–26 term, India has been re-elected to the UN Peacebuilding Commission, which has 31 members.

### **Women, Peace, and Security (WPS).**

- Action 19 of the Pact of the Future focuses on women as agents for peace, committing the efforts of its members towards empowerment of women and gender equality, undertake steps to eliminate threat to the safety and rights of women, by facilitating their meaningful participation in peace processes and in peace operations.<sup>26</sup>
- With its substantial contributions to UN peacekeeping missions, where it has sent a sizable number of female peacekeepers, India actively advances the WPS agenda on a global scale, emphasising the value of women's involvement in efforts to resolve conflicts and build peace. In addition to

deploying the first all-female police unit from 2007 to 2015, India has committed to provide more for UN peace operations and has since deployed a Female Engagement Team as part of the Rapidly Deployable Battalion in the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo.<sup>27</sup> Two Indian women peacekeepers, Major Suman Gawani (2019) and Major Radhika Sen (2023) have been awarded the prestigious Military Gender Advocate of the Year award.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK), India, has been actively involved in educating incoming peacekeepers on gender-sensitive subjects and has collaborated with UN Women India to create a course for female military officers. On 24-25 Feb 2025, the CUNPK hosted a two-day seminar on 'Conference on Women Peacekeepers from the Global South', which was attended by peacekeepers from 35 nations.<sup>29</sup>

### **Adapting Peace Operations to New Realities.**

- Action 21 of the Pact of the Future aims to address the following key issues— ensure that peace operations are based on and directed by political strategies, carried out with realistic, achievable, and well-defined mandates, exit strategies, and workable transition plans; review all forms of future peace operations; ensure safety and security of peace operations; and address root causes of conflict.<sup>30</sup>
- In 2021, India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar opined during an UNSC open debate on technology and peacekeeping that the execution of peacekeeping responsibilities is made harder by the lack of resources. The problem gets more complicated when such mandates are extended on a 'As is needed basis'. Asymmetric risks, such as landmines and improvised explosive devices, have increased in frequency against peacekeepers in recent years. Peacekeeping in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century needs to be rooted in a robust innovation and technology ecosystem that can help UN peacekeeping missions carry out their mandates.<sup>31</sup> India believes that the global community needs to understand how the nature and purpose of modern peacekeeping missions are changing rapidly. The mandates given by the UNSC to UN peacekeeping missions must be grounded in reality and aligned with the resources allocated to the operation.

Participation from nations that provide troops and police is essential at every level and in every facet of mission preparation. When UN peacekeeping operations are mandated in post-conflict countries, there should be more financial and human resources available for peacebuilding.<sup>32</sup>

### **Addressing Terrorism.**

- Action 23 of the Pact of the Future unanimously condemned terrorism of all forms and manifest. Towards addressing terrorism, the Pact agreed to the following— adopt whole of society and whole of government approach to combat violent extremism and terrorism; prevent misuse of emerging technologies; and coordinate counter-terrorism efforts.<sup>33</sup>
- India has consistently led international counterterrorism initiatives. Bharat undertook the lead to pilot a draft Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism in 1996, long before UNSC Resolution 1373<sup>34</sup> of 2001 was adopted.<sup>35</sup> India is involved in all significant international initiatives related to terrorism and has signed and ratified all of the key agreements and protocols on the subject that the UN has adopted.
- New Delhi has also laid great significance to the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism's (UNOCT) mission and efforts to strengthen member states' ability to combat terrorism. In support of its initiatives to counter this menace since 2018, India has contributed USD 2.55 mn so far to the UN Counter-Terrorism Trust Fund, the most recent being USD 500,000 in 2024. India's contribution would help UNOCT's international initiatives, primarily the Countering Terrorist Travel Program and the Countering Financing of Terrorism.<sup>36</sup> They are intended to increase the eastern and southern African Member States' ability to tackle the serious problems of terrorism financing and stopping terrorists' travel and movement.

### **New and Emerging Technologies.**

- Action 27 of the Pact of the Future acknowledges that our combined efforts to uphold global peace and security face both opportunities and challenges due to the rapid advancement of technology. Some key decisions include— advocating additional actions and suitable international

discussions to stop a weapons race in space in all of its facets; advance urgently the discussion regarding deadly autonomous weapons systems in collaboration with governmental experts on the same; narrow the digital divide and make sure every state can profit from digital technologies in a safe and secure manner; and evaluate the current and possible threats related to the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in military applications.<sup>37</sup>

- India takes an active role in discussions and initiatives related to emerging technologies at the UN, frequently promoting its own digital public infrastructure as a model for inclusive development. India is a strong advocate for responsible development and equitable access to emerging technologies within the UN, highlighting the need for global collaboration to ensure that these technologies benefit all nations, with a particular focus on ethical AI, digital inclusion, and robust governance frameworks to prevent potential harms.<sup>38</sup>

- In Aug 2021, the UNSC adopted a statement acknowledging the value of technology in peacekeeping, while India was serving as its president. It had led to the introduction of Unite Aware, a digital platform created by India in partnership with the UN with the goal of giving UN soldiers terrain-related information to ensure their safety and security. In the realm of space, through the UNISPACE+50 initiative, which includes a capacity-building program on small satellite building, India is attempting to share its experience with partner nations who are interested in space travel. Also, through the Centre for Space Science and Technology Education in Asia and the Pacific, which is linked with the UN, India also contributes its resources and knowledge in the application of space science and technology.<sup>39</sup>

### **Reform of United Nations Security Council.**

- Action 27 of the Pact of the Future has dealt with the reform of UNSC. There has been a growing need to make the UNSC more effective through equitable representation of members. Some key points highlighted are—prioritise redressing historical injustices against Africa while simultaneously improving the representation of regions such

as Asia-Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean; increase the strength of the UNSC to better reflect the conditions of contemporary world; an expanded council's membership should balance its effectiveness and representativeness; and increase efforts to come to a consensus over the veto's future, including talks about restricting its application and scope.

- India believes that the process of implementing UNSC reforms should not be viewed as an exercise ad-infinitum.<sup>40</sup> It believes that the existing UNSC structure does not reflect the contemporary realities of a changed world order. The last expansion of UNSC was carried out in 1965, in the non-permanent category. During UN General Assembly Plenary in Nov 2024, India's Permanent Representative to the UN has expressed concern that attempts to 'Mere Tinker' with the current UNSC structure could permanently delay important aspects like increasing permanent membership and addressing the underrepresentation of Asia, Africa, and Latin America to a 'Very distant future'. Three key issues were highlighted—the Global South's under representation, certain nations' insistence on consensus, and the ineffectiveness of the processes involving intergovernmental negotiations.<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusion

As India envisions its role for the future, it must recognise the complexity of a world that is becoming more interconnected. The UN Summit of the Future presents a pivotal opportunity for India to reaffirm its commitment to multilateralism, while advocating for reforms that address the needs of the Global South. India has the potential to contribute to the development of a more sustainable, inclusive, and fair global order by utilising its distinct combination of traditional knowledge, resilient democracy, and technological innovation. India's development experience, characterised by growth in its economy, poverty alleviation, and social empowerment provides significant insights. As an advocate for the Global South, India can be a major force in advancing technology transfer, capacity building, and South-South collaboration. In addition, India's dedication to sustainable development, renewable energy, and climate action can serve as an example for a worldwide response to today's urgent issues.

## Endnotes

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