



## THE STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES AND CHALLENGES OF INDIA'S BID FOR PERMANENT MEMBERSHIP IN THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

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### Abstract

India's claim for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is rooted in its status as a major global player with significant political, economic, and military capabilities on the international stage. The demand for a permanent seat is part of India's broader effort to secure a more prominent role in global governance and decision-making processes, reflecting its aspiration for greater influence in shaping international peace and security norms. India emerged as a world leader and strong voice in third-world countries in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It is the most populous country in the world, 5<sup>th</sup> largest economy and is on its way to becoming 3<sup>rd</sup> one by 2027 and 4<sup>th</sup> strongest military power. All these conditions placed India in a position to become a determining voice in world affairs. The United Nations is a global organization with the Security Council as a substantial organ responsible for world peace and security. Ten non-permanent members who are elected every two years make up the Security Council, which is made up of five permanent members with veto power. Nine elections to the Security Council as a non-permanent member demonstrate India's standing in international politics. As a member of the G-4 group, together with Brazil, Germany, and Japan, India has been vying for permanent membership in the UN Security Council since the 1990s. When the UN General Assembly's president at the time suggested adding five new non-veto members in 1997 to represent the shifting balance of power in the world, the process accelerated. Recently, the Indian government has become assertive with the concept of New India with its fresh candidature for permanent membership in the Security Council. This paper analyses the Indian claim for permanent membership in the UN Security Council and its possibilities and constraints. The methodology of this paper will be historical, descriptive and analytical.

**Keywords:** *Security Council, Third World, Global Governance, G-4, World Peace*

### Introduction

The United Nations Organization, popularly known as UNO, is the prime global organisation on earth. Most countries, instead of large or small members climbed 193, have an equal voice in the general assembly considered the world parliament. The General Assembly (GA), Security Council (SC), Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice (ICJ), and UN Secretariat are the six main entities that make up the United Nations. All these organs are important in their roles in their respective fields to ensure international peace, security and progress. These functions include providing a forum to resolve international disputes peacefully, ensuring the protection of

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vulnerable groups like children, refugees, women, disabled, etc, ensure the development and progress of mankind.

As per the UN Charter, the Security Council holds primary responsibility for maintaining global peace and security, and all member countries are obligated to comply with its rulings. The Council was almost dormant for the first 45 years of its existence due to the Cold War, but it has been increasingly active since 1990 as the political landscape around the world began to soften (Hosli & Dörfler, 2020). In accordance with Article 33 of the Charter's Chapter VI, the Council "shall, when it deems necessary, call upon the parties" to a dispute to decide it by amicable procedures such as conversation, conciliation, mediation, arbitration, or court settlement. Additionally, it has the authority to offer suggestions to the parties in a dispute with the goal of reaching a peaceful resolution if all parties request them (Article 38). Although the General Assembly formed the first UN peacekeeping force, the Security Council, which has jurisdiction and command over them, established succeeding forces. The Council often deploys peacekeeping forces only after ceasefires have been reached; as a result, peacekeepers are not to be confused with an army engaged in combat with an enemy force but rather are lightly equipped (Kelsen, 1946, p 1106).

The special privilege of being a stable member of the UN Security Council is the veto power, which is absolute in nature to ensure the world's security. India is a strong voice of third-world nations with its strategic and global importance, and it has started claiming permanent membership in the UN Security Council to ensure the interests of the concerned nations. India began claiming permanent United Nations Security Council membership as early as 1994. When the UN General Assembly President at the time suggested adding members with influence to the Security Council in 1997 to represent shifting global power dynamics, the discussion surrounding the council's expansion gathered impetus. The urgency for UN reforms, including Security Council reforms, heightened after the Security Council did not support the US conquest of Iraq in 2003 and the corruption revelations in the UN "oil-for-food" program in Iraq. India's focus on permanent membership in the Security Council continued over the years, culminating in a significant diplomatic campaign in 2005 to secure this position (Nafey, 2005).

### **Grounds of India's candidature for the permanent membership in the UNSC**

India makes multiple arguments and justifications for its permanent membership in the UN Security Council. Firstly, India is the most populous country in the world and the largest democracy in the world. It is also a regional power and an important strategic player in indo-pacific. Regional Representation: India has been advocating for a more democratic composition of the Security Council that reflects the current global scenario rather than the power dynamics of 1945. India, along with other aspirants like Brazil, Germany, and Japan (G-4), argued that the Security Council should include fresh permanent members from various regions, including Africa and Asia. Second, Contributions to International Peace: India's assertion is supported by its substantial contributions to international security and peace. India has actively participated in UN peacekeeping operations, contributing military observers, troops, and police officers to several missions. This demonstrates India's commitment to maintaining global peace. Third, Emerging Power: India's growing stature as an emerging power, evident in its economic growth, regional influence, and strategic capabilities, is a key factor in its effort for permanent membership. India's position as the world's largest democracy and its rising role in global affairs make it a strong candidate for a permanent seat (Binder, & Heupel, 2015). Fourth, Democratic Principles: India advocates for a more democratic and inclusive Security Council. The principle of 'rep by pop' suggests that India, representing one-sixth of humanity, deserves a permanent seat to ensure that the voice of its vast population is heard on matters of international security and development (Blum, 2005).

Fifth, Anti-Discrimination: India, along with the G-4 countries, has emphasized the importance of non-discrimination in Security Council reforms. Insisting on permanent membership with veto power is seen as a way to prevent discrimination against new members and ensure equality in decision-making processes. Overall, India's claim for permanent membership in the Security Council is based on its

regional significance, contributions to global peacekeeping, emerging power status, commitment to democratic principles, and the need for a more inclusive and representative international body (Sullivan, 2014). This Indian pursuit for permanent membership to the UN Security Council, what Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said that “an essay in persuasion” “lies at the heart of repeated Indian pleas for reforming the UN, the only existing universal organisation of global governance.” (Nafey 2005, p.1)

### **UN Security Council’s Role in Peacekeeping**

The evolution of the UN Security Council (UNSC) has been a subject of academic inquiry due to its pivotal role in international peace and security governance. Since its establishment in 1945, the UNSC has undergone significant changes in response to shifts in global power dynamics and the nature of wars. Academic discourse on the UNSC often revolves around the challenges of reforming its composition, working methods, and decision-making processes to adapt to the contemporary global order. Scholars have highlighted the anachronistic nature of the UNSC's current structure vis-à-vis the changing distribution of global power. The dominance of the P5 (permanent members) and the limitations on representation have been cited as obstacles to the Council's legitimacy and effectiveness. Proposals for reform, including expanding permanent and non-permanent membership categories, have been met with challenges due to diverging political interests and the entrenched position of the current permanent members (Arbour, 2014).

The academic literature on the UNSC also delves into the operational aspects of the Council, focusing on its decision-making processes, working methods, and responses to emerging security challenges. The UNSC's engagement with informal governance mechanisms, committee structures within sanctions regimes, and adaptation of working methods to enhance transparency and effectiveness reflect attempts to address the changing nature of armed conflict and global security threats. Additionally, theoretical perspectives, such as rationalist and constructivist analyses, offer insights into the UNSC's functioning. Scholars explore how precedents, institutional rules, and informal practices shape Council deliberations and outcomes. The role of non-permanent members in influencing Council decisions, the impact of evolving norms like the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), and the interplay between material power and discursive arguments in Council dynamics are subject to academic scrutiny (Dahl-Eriksen, 2019).

The academic discourse on the evolution of the UNSC underscores the complex interplay between historical legacies, contemporary power shifts, and institutional practices in shaping the Council's role in global security governance. The quest for a more inclusive, transparent, and effective Security Council remains a central theme in academic debates on international security and peace architecture (Hassler, 2010).

In addition, the Security Council has the authority to take more forceful enforcement actions than peacekeeping. These enforcement powers are found in Chapter VII of the Charter, which also gives the Council the authority to impose military and economic sanctions and the authority to decide when there has been a breach of the peace. In Article 39, the word "peace" can refer to conflicts other than those that occur between states. Boundary conflicts between states were meant to potentially threaten or disturb the peace when the Charter was drafted, which gives the Council the authority to order the employment of enforcement measures. The Security Council has placed economic penalties on several States and other parties by using its enforcement authority. Most of these sanctions programmes were put in place after the end of World War II. The Security Council may mandate the use of force to defend or re-establish peace and security under Article 42 of the Charter (Ibid, p. 1093).

However, member states that provide their forces to carry out the enforcement action are granted Chapter VII powers by the Security Council. One of these power transfers is the transfer of command and control over these forces, typically to volunteers. The Council has granted member states Chapter VII authority in order to accomplish a number of goals, such as preventing the use of force, enforcing a naval interdiction against a state, advancing humanitarian goals, safeguarding UN-designated "safe areas," and guaranteeing the execution of a peace accord (Dahl-Eriksen, 2019).

## **India's Emergence as Leader of Global South**

India's 70th anniversary of independence from two centuries of British colonial control offers a great opportunity to assess a nation that is crucial to the stability of Asia and the world at large today. India is, without a doubt, the world's largest democracy at 70 years old, and despite its continued challenges with poverty and inequality, the nation is seen as a rising force. India's GDP grew more than China's in 2015, at 7.5%. Despite not being a party to the NonProliferation Treaty (NPT), India, as a nuclear-armed state, is acknowledged as a responsible nuclear power by important players in the non-proliferation environment (Miller, & Sullivan de Estrada, 2017). Furthermore, the last three US presidents have tried to work closely with New Delhi as a strategic or economically, or both, in a nation that had previously written off India. Some predict that India will emerge as "the most important swing state" in the global economy (Nambiar, 2006).

India's main goals in applying for permanent membership in the UN Security Council are to become a major player on the world stage and secure a place at the elite table of international decision-making. This move is seen as crucial for reflecting the changing global power dynamics, recognizing India's role in global peace and security, and ensuring that the voice of one sixth of humanity is heard on international issues. India's quest for a permanent seat is also driven by its track record of multilateralism, its significant contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, and its emerging economic and geostrategic capabilities. Additionally, India views this membership as a means to address the irregularities and deformities within the existing global system, particularly in the Security Council's composition and functioning (Cohen, 2004).

## **The Proposal for UN Security Council Reform**

The United Nations Security Council (UN) has been a subject of ongoing debate and analysis regarding its potential reform. Various proposals have been put forth to address the challenges posed by the changing international order and the need for more inclusive representation. The lack of formal reform despite significant shifts in global power dynamics has raised questions about the Council's efficacy and legitimacy. The core obstacle to reforming the Council composition lies in the divergent political preferences among UN Member States. Disagreements persist over the seat groupings for extra Council seats, with some advocating for the inclusion of new permanent members while others prefer adding more non-permanent seats. The political hurdles for reform are further compounded by the high institutional hurdle for the Charter amendment, requiring a two-thirds majority and approval by all five permanent members. Efforts to reform the Council's working methods have gained traction, driven by states advocating for more inclusive and transparent practices. These reforms do not require Charter amendments and have led to gradual changes in the Council's decision-making processes. Informal governance mechanisms have emerged, enabling non-represented countries to have a voice in Council proceedings and influencing its actions.

The Security Council has adjusted its working procedures and included a wider range of actors in response to global concerns, even though formal reform of the Council is still elusive. Initiatives such as thematic focus areas, wrap-up sessions, and increased engagement with civil society have enhanced the Council's operational efficiency. Its sanctions regimes have led to the establishment of committee governance, which has produced a rule-based framework for decision-making. In summary, the Security Council reform discussion has brought to light the difficulties and complications involved in reorganising such a significant international organisation. The need to balance effectiveness, legitimacy, and inclusivity remains at the forefront of discussions on reform proposals. Despite the hurdles and diverse preferences among Member States, the Council has demonstrated adaptability in responding to changing global dynamics through informal governance mechanisms and innovative working methods (Hosli & Dörfler, 2020).

A number of UN members are challenging the legitimacy of the Security Council and demanding its reform as a cost of the post Cold War rebirth of the organisation. Surprisingly, there hasn't been much political agitation in Washington regarding the potential reorganisation of what could be the maximum

influential cosmopolitan organisation in the world. Neither the Democrats' solution nor the Republicans' "Contract with America" include council reorganisation. While the UN is brought up in official Washington, the conversation tends to be more narrowly focused on how to keep the cost of UN peace operations under control and maintain the separation of powers guaranteed by the constitution while using them (Alvarez, 1995).

At least since the early 1990s, there has been talk about UN changes; however, based on national viewpoints and perceived interests, different countries have given this idea varying interpretations. For India, it had effectively meant membership in the Security Council indefinitely, at least since 1994. When Razali Ismail, the president of the UN General Assembly at the time, proposed adding five more non-veto holders to the Security Council in 1997 to reflect the changing global power dynamics, the debate over the body's expansion really got going. Associated states committed to stepping up their efforts "to achieve a comprehensive reform of the Security Council in all its aspects" in the 2000 Millennium Declaration. The UN Security Council's refusal to back the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the revelation of corruption in the UN oil-for-food programme in Iraq served as stark reminders of the need for reforms, particularly in the body's legislative branch. In a historic speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2003, Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated that the UN had "reached a fork in the road" and that urgent reforms were needed to face the security concerns and transitions of the twenty-first century. In December 2003, he formed the 15-person High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change. The panel made over one hundred recommendations for reforms to the way UN institutions and norms operate in its report from December 2004 (Hosli & Dörfler, 2020).

Proposes reforms before the UN Security Council: The current reform proposals before the Security Council involve various models that aim to address the encounters posed by the changing international order and the evolving nature of conflicts. The proposals include adding new permanent members, expanding non-permanent members, and introducing alternative reform models. As an example, the Group of Four (G4) recommends the permanent membership of Brazil, India, Germany, Japan, and two African nations. The L69 model, which includes Brazil, India, several African countries, and small island states, advocates a similar strategy to that of the African Group, which suggests extending both permanent and non-permanent seat categories. The "Uniting for Consensus" (UfC) group, on the other hand, is in favour of expanding non-permanent seats while opposing permanent seat increase. These proposals underscore the divergent political inclinations among UN Member States, highlighting the complexity of achieving consensus on Security Council reform (Chapnick, 2019).

### **Opposition of Coffee Club's Countries**

The movement known as Uniting for Consensus (UfC) opposed the UN Security Council's expansion of permanent seats. The Uniting for Consensus (UfC) movement, also referred to as the "Coffee Club," was a prominent group that opposed the UN Security Council (UNSC) permanent seat enlargement in the 1990s. This coalition, spearheaded by Italy under the leadership of Ambassador Francesco Paolo Fulci, sought to challenge the proposals for permanent seats put forth by the G4 nations: "Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan". Established in 1995, the UfC movement advocates for achieving consensus before making decisions on the structure and size of the UNSC, emphasizing the expansion of non-permanent seats rather than permanent ones. Initially founded by Italy, Pakistan, Mexico, and Egypt, the UfC group quickly garnered support from a diverse array of countries, including Spain, Argentina, Turkey, and Canada. Over time, the coalition expanded to encompass approximately 50 countries from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The core argument of the UfC posits that increasing the number of permanent seats would exacerbate disparities among member states and perpetuate a cascade of privileges. The new permanent members would gain advantages in the election processes within various specific organs of the United Nations System (Magalhaes Barreto Silva, 2014).

The UfC's membership predominantly comprises middle-sized states that oppose the elevation of larger regional powers to permanent membership status within the UNSC. Italy, Spain, Australia, Canada, South Korea, Argentina, and Pakistan are notable UfC members. There are various reasons why these states are

against the G4 proposals. For example, Pakistan opposes India's ambitions, and Italy and Spain challenge Germany's push for permanent membership. In a similar vein, Australia rejects Japan's candidature, while Argentina opposes Brazil's. Furthermore, South Korea and Canada oppose the idea of developing nations—which frequently receive their aid—gaining more authority within the UN system. The UfC movement underscores the importance of equitable representation and aims to prevent the entrenchment of privileges that could arise from the expansion of permanent UNSC seats. By advocating for an increase in non-permanent seats, the UfC seeks to promote a more balanced and democratic international system within the United Nations (Abdoli et al., 2018).

The difficulties in Indian position for permanent membership in the UN Security Council stem from a variety of factors: First, Opposition from Other Countries: India faces opposition from countries like Pakistan, Argentina, and Colombia, who have their own reservations about India gaining a permanent seat. Second, Regional Geo-Politics: Japan opposed India's bid due to historical tensions, and China's influence in Asia and Africa complicated matters for India.

US Position: The US had its own reservations and expectations from India, tying India's UN Security Council bid to broader strategic partnerships and alignments. Third, Dilution of Demands: The G-4 had to thin their demand for veto power to accommodate other positions, which could potentially weaken India's stance (Schrijver, 2007).

Forth, Strategic Considerations: India had to navigate complex strategic considerations in dealing with other major powers, like the US and Russia. African Conundrum: Securing African support was crucial, and the dynamics within the African Union added complexity to India's bid. Finally, Tactical Dilemmas: India had to balance tactical manoeuvres, like adjusting demands for veto power, to maintain support and consensus among various stakeholders.

These factors collectively present challenges for India in its pursuit of permanent participation in the UN Security Council. (Nafey, 2005).

## **Conclusion**

India's desire for global leadership and more fair representation in international decision-making bodies is reflected in its bid for a permanent seat on the UNSC. The challenges and complexities of Security Council reform underscore the need for innovative approaches and inclusive dialogue to address the evolving dynamics of global power and conflict resolution.

India, along with other aspirant nations like Brazil, Germany, and Japan, have articulated their desire for permanent membership in the UNSC based on their contributions to peacekeeping missions, their economic prowess, and their demographic significance. India, in particular, has been a significant contributor to UN peacekeeping missions, demonstrating its commitment to collective security and peacebuilding efforts beyond its national borders.

The obstacles to Indian claim for a permanent seat on the UNSC are multifaceted. The existing permanent members, known as the P5 (Russia, United States, China, France, and the United Kingdom), have historically resisted any changes to the Council's composition that would dilute their veto power or influence. The political preferences among UN member states diverge on the question of additional permanent seats, with various proposals advocating for different seat categories and levels of representation.

Formal reform of the UNSC is a complex and challenging endeavor, as it requires amending the UN Charter and obtaining the consensus of all member states, including the P5. The high institutional hurdle for change, coupled with divergent interests and power dynamics among member states, has contributed to the prolonged debate and lack of consensus on Security Council reform. Despite the formal obstacles, India and other aspirant nations have sought to increase their influence and representation through informal avenues within the UNSC. This includes active participation as non-permanent members,

engagement in peacebuilding efforts, and leveraging their expertise in specific thematic areas to influence Council decisions. The issue of Security Council reform and the adding of new permanent members is a complex one, with various proposals and competing interests. Some countries, like the US, have expressed concerns about maintaining their power and veto privileges. While India has been on the Security Council as elected non-permanent member, its aspirations for permanent membership may face resistance from other states that have regional rivalries or differing preferences for Council expansion. The Security Council has been adapting its working methods and practices, but formal reform has been challenging due to the high institutional hurdles and the need for consensus among Member States. India, as a key player in global affairs, will likely continue to advocate for reform and seek ways to increase its influence within the UN system, even without formal permanent membership.

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