

# India And Politics Of The Security Council Permanent Membership

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**Abstract:** The United Nations (UN) was created in 1945 to solve humanity's problems. The United Nations was established to save human generations from the horrors of war. The permanent five (P5) within the Security Council (SC) are the sole authority to decide on war and peace. While the UN has sometimes not been effective in dealing with the challenges before the world, there is still no consensus to include countries like India, Germany, Japan and Brazil as permanent members (Deo, 2018). It is problematic as P5 are reluctant to share its power. The slow process of reform over the years makes the situation even worse. There have been talks of the UN becoming irrelevant, discussing UNSC membership as a waste of time and looking for an alternative. These are mere talks of running from the real issue. Today, we need the UN to assist us in meeting contemporary global threats (UN, 2018). In this context, it is essential to analyse the position of India as a country suitable for a permanent seat.

**Keywords:** United Nations, Security Council, International Peace, UN Reform

## Introduction

The United Nations (UN) was created in 1945 to solve humanity's problems. It promotes social progress and provides the world's countries with a place to claim better standards of life. The UN guarantees and defends the rights of all human beings (Butler, 2012). The foundation of the UN was based on the principles of world peace and global solidarity through mutual respect for all, universal tolerance and the idea that each is equally sovereign (Thakur, 2011).

The victors of World War II shaped the nature and establishment of the UN. However, the victors of World War II were wise enough to have the Security Council (SC) within the UN. The P5 within the Security Council is the sole authority to decide on the question of war and peace. They took the privileged position in the Council, granting themselves the position of the permanent five. They were privileged mainly because of their permanent positions and veto power. The powers they wielded through the UN charter could only be changed in any form or principle by the favourable vote from each permanent five (P5). The thought of assigning the permanent position to the victors of the war was shaped by the assumption that they would maintain world peace and security and

furthermore, abide by the norms of the UN. However, today, in the name of maintaining peace and security, big powers are intervening in the territories of small countries without their permission. The Security Council is undemocratic, unrepresentative, and non-transparent, and P5 uses the veto arbitrarily. In this way, the UNSC reflects a colonial system (Shah, 2014).

While the UN has sometimes not been effective in dealing with the challenges before the world, there is still no consensus to include countries like India, Germany, Japan and Brazil as permanent members (Deo, 2018). It is problematic as P5 are reluctant to share its power. The slow process of reform over the years makes the situation even worse. There have been talks of the UN becoming irrelevant, discussing UNSC membership as a waste of time and looking for an alternative. These are mere talks of running away from the real issue. Today, we need the UN to assist us in meeting contemporary global threats (UN, 2018). In this context, it is essential to analyse the position of India as a country suitable for a permanent seat.

The article examines the question and the politics of reform. In the second part, the article delineates India's association with the UN and reform debates. The article addresses questions such as: Why is there a need to reform the Security Council? What is the politics behind Security Council permanent membership? Why India aspires to be a permanent member? What has been India's diplomacy to acquire a permanent membership? Is India legitimate enough to be in the club of permanent members? What are the challenges before India's pursuit?

## Reform: necessity or challenge?

The cold war politics has made the United Nations inoperative (Pangburn & Stein, 2015). With the end of the cold war, the question of reforming the Security Council came to dominate international relations. The reason for the reform was to make Security Council more reflective of contemporary times (Okhovat, 2011). However, surprisingly, the world's most legitimate organisation has been amended only once concerning its composition in the Security Council. The Council had been expanded from 11 to 15 members in 1963. The expansion took in the non-permanent category. From the original six, non-permanent membership was then increased to ten.<sup>1</sup>

The Council does not reflect today's world. It has led to wide criticism of the Security Council. The power structure of today's world is different from that of the year of the establishment of the UN. Also, the notion of security has changed and continues to do so (Malik, 2005). Those advocating for reform, for instance, G4, United for Consensus group and the African Union, claim that P5

<sup>1</sup> The ten non-permanent members included five states from Africa and Asia, two from Latin America, two from the Western European & Others Group (WEOG states), and one of the eastern European states.

represents the power structure of 1945 and not today's time (Blum, 2005). The member state must understand that the UN is for and by them. The effectiveness of the UN is necessary for their survival. It is in this context that question of reforming the Security Council evolves.

Reforming the Security Council is the most debated and significant issue within the United Nations. The question of reforming the Council came in the context of the UN's credibility, effectiveness and relevance. The notion of reform was based on efficiency and ensuring equitable representation of the member states (UNGA, 1993). Apart from making the UN more representative and transparent, burden-sharing also factored as a call for reform. The UNSC must adequately represent the global south and those contributing significantly to its functioning. Otherwise, it would be at risk of losing its credibility and become irrelevant (UN, 2018). The increased representation will strengthen UN.

The reform of Security Council is much needed and urgent. The world is facing contradictory challenges. These challenges are global and hence require a global response. The nature of the threat and security perception of a country has changed. The challenge before the United Nations is that its principal organ Security Council needs to be uniform. The Council is not reflective of current power dynamics. The need for restructuring the Security Council has become an agreed notion (Shah, 2014). Today, an updated Security Council needs to reflect the world's changes (UN, 2016). The reform of the Council is essential to deal with global challenges effectively. The expansion of Security Council will significantly affect the working of the UN (Blum, 2005). The reform of the UNSC is a must and a necessity for the UN to be relevant today. However, the UN charter, veto power and regional rivalry make the reform of the Security Council a challenge in itself (Malik, 2005). The reform of the Security Council is long pending (PTI, 2018). The reform issue has become complex, given the logjam it has faced over the decades regarding how to reform the prestigious Council (UN, 2018). The reform proposals, as suggested by different groups, are narrow in their perspective. They focus on getting permanent membership of the Council rather than making the Security Council more effective.

Yeshi Choedon argues that attention within the United Nations has been diverted to alternative arrangements rather than discussing the mismatch between the mandate and resources (Choedon, 2015). So, there is a need to support and empower the UN. It calls not only for contributions by member states but also for the reform of the UNSC. Here lies the commonality of interest between the UN and India.

### **Politics of Reform**

Although the official discussion on reform started in 1992, a conclusion on reform could not be reached due to divergence in interest<sup>2</sup>(Choedon, 2015). The reform initiatives<sup>3</sup> within the United Nations have not been successful in solving the critical issues (Kumar, 2016). Despite reforming the Security Council as one of its crucial agendas for two decades, the assembly has yet to come to a consensus on reforming the United Nations (UN, 2018). The lack of progress on the reform is due to the "substantive and strategic differences among those professing to share specific goals" (Murthy, 2014). The reform debate has merely made any progress. There seems to be a deadlock. The primary reason for the deadlock is that the P5 wants to maintain its status quo. This makes reform difficult. The deadlock on the reform led to the creation of the High Panel in 2004.

Expanding the Security Council (SC) was one of the panel report's most significant and eye-catching propositions on Security Council reform. The reform of the Security Council, however, is not an easy task. This is evident from the fact that even after two decades of the panel recommendation, there is no consensus on the reform proposals.

The panel discussed the criteria for permanent membership of the Security Council. What role and responsibility does a state have in the United Nations? Who should participate more in council decision-making? How be the composition of the Security Council decided? The panel made two crucial recommendations: 'contribution' and 'representativeness'. Contribution to the Organization meant contribution to finance, military, and diplomacy. Representativeness means that the UNSC reflects the power structure of today's world. It will enable Security Council to be more credible, legitimate and representative. The panel also recognised the need to make the Council more democratic and accountable.

The Council does not equitably represent the geographical distribution of the world. The responsibility of maintaining peace and order lies with the Security Council. It requires Security Council to have the capacity to take action to confront the challenges the world faces. However, it is neither representative nor takes the primary responsibility of ensuring worldwide peace and security. The panel states that the contribution made by a few P5 states in terms of military and finance is relatively less than their position in the Security Council. The permanent members have used their privileged position to serve their interests. It is against the idea of the charter. Capacity and willingness to contribute towards world peace and security goals are the primary criteria for permanent membership in the Security Council. The panel recommends that states contributing to the Security Council in terms of military, finance and diplomacy be included in the Council (UNGA, 2004). It means that states need to take responsibility for fulfilling the task of the UN.

In response to the high panel recommendations, the significant responses were from the Group of four, the African Union and the United for Consensus group. India's response to the High panel report can be seen through the stance of the G4. The G4 demands a restructuring of the Security Council in both categories to be more reflective of contemporary times (Murthy, 2014).

No group has been successful with their proposals, nor have they come to a common ground on the reform of the Security Council. It has led to a deadlock on the reform of the Security Council. The complexity of the amendment of the charter has further made the reform of the Security Council difficult. The lack of willingness on the part of P5 is another major concern for the reform. While each P5 recognised the need to reform, they favour a 'more cautious approach' (UN, 2018). The P5 opposes any change in the right of veto.

<sup>2</sup> The differences remained on the five core reform issues: membership categories, the question of the veto held by the five permanent members, regional representation, the size of an enlarged Council, and Council working methods.

<sup>3</sup> The formation of OEWG in 1993, the High panel report in 2004, the formation of a Working Group for Inter-Governmental Negotiation (IGN) in 2009, and the Group of Friends on Security Council Reform can be seen as a positive development.

United States (US) support a “modest expansion” of the Security Council. The US opposes any changes in the veto right. China believes in a 'consensus-based' approach to reform (UN, 2018).

Similarly, Russia is against any alteration in the veto. Russia is in favour of reform to make the Council more representative. However, the Council needs to be compact to maintain effectiveness and efficiency. Russia believes that progress on the reform depends on the willingness of the member states. So, they are against any arbitrary guidelines or artificial deadlines. UK believes that ‘a bigger Security Council will make the decision-making process slow and cumbersome’ (UN, 2018).

The politics of reform has made the reform agenda only a myth, as no substantial success has been achieved. Given this context, the article will discuss the history of India's engagement with the UN and further analyse what merit India has of becoming a permanent member of the Security Council.

### **India and the UN**

India has supported the United Nations since its inception, believing in the ideals of democracy, peace, humanity, and prosperity. India's responses at the UN were to anticolonialism, non-alignment, and anti-racialism (Rana, 1970). Commitment to the basic provisions of the UN Charter and a global leadership role thus became the focal point of India's UN policy (Kochanek, 1980). UN charter principles share a special connection with the Indian civilisation. For instance, the incorporation of MDGs was encouraged by the idea of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" or "the whole world is one family"—the idea of a shared destiny (GOI, 2005). However, the rigidity of the charter and bypassing the charter by the big powers have been a matter of concern for our leaders (Kumar, 2017).

Historically, India has been engaged with the reform process and proposals of 1963, 1979, 1992 and 1993 (Kumar, 2017). However, it was only in the post cold war era that India became vocal about being a permanent member of the Security Council. Along with G4, India claims herself as a legitimate one for permanent membership. Time and again, the increase in membership of the UN has been cited as the principal reason for the reform of the Council. India's claim of reforming the Security Council is guided by her desire to make the UN a fully democratic and genuinely representative governing body (Muni, 2014).

However, from being successfully elected for non-permanent membership to unsuccessfully contesting for the post of security general, India is well aware of the power dynamics within the UN. Her failure to secure a seat in the permanent category of the Security Council should not be seen as a lack of Indian diplomacy but rather as the rigidity of the UN charter.

India recognises that the reformed Council must reflect the realities of contemporary times. Without reflecting on the need of contemporary times, reform of the Council would be incomplete. Indian leadership believes that the ‘reform of the UN will be incomplete without restructuring the Security Council’. The expansion of the Security Council in both categories is essential. The inclusion of developing countries in the Council is necessary to address their insecurity (PTI, 2012).

The reform of the UN is important to equip it to respond to the evolving needs of its members more effectively. Today the world is more interconnected and interdependent. The challenges we face are global, and so require a global solution (The Hindu, 2012). The reform of the UNSC will make it more effective, more just, and a greater force for peace and harmony in the World (Mazumdar, 2017). Given this, India has voiced a ‘result based timeline’ as crucial for reform (PTI, 2018). The ‘comprehensive reform’ of the UN has become essential to deal with the contemporary challenges (PIB, 2020)

While most of the countries are in support of the reform, it did not take place. The amendment provisions make reform difficult. While each group agrees for the reform of the Council, there is no common consensus on how to reform the Council. The reform proposals never went for voting. No group could get support for the reform and there was no clear idea of who should be in the SC (Silva, 2014). The likeliness of reform becomes less as all P5 nations, in some way, oppose the expansion in the membership of the UN (Mazumdar, 2017). Even though the issue of reform is made in the name of making the UN more effective, legitimate and credible, no reform proposal discusses how reform will help in doing so. No proposal deal with the differences on the issue of reform. The member state aspiring to be in the permanent category of the Council should adopt a gradual approach towards reform. They should first focus on acquiring a permanent seat in the Security Council, veto power, and others. The task before India and the other countries aspiring to be in the permanent category of the Council is to assure the member states that their inclusion in the Council would be effective for the Council. Further, they should assure the UN that they can maintain peace and security worldwide. It is also essential that the main aim of the reform is to make UNSC more effective and not merely an expansion of the seats. Those claiming a bid in the Council must be conscious of this.

### **Why permanent membership?**

It is good to aspire for permanent membership. However, with the global power status comes global responsibility. Also, the existing P5 needs to adjust views and create leadership space for the new states.

A place in the Security Council is a significant parameter to evaluate a country's place in the international system. India's great power aspiration guides her claim to be in the permanent category. A seat in the Council would give India a great power status that would be strategically important and broaden India's influence. It will ensure that Indian interests are protected and not become the victim of great power politics (Dabhade, 2017).

### **Significance of India**

From the beginning, India has been fully committed to assisting the United Nations in achieving its charter objective. India has consistently cooperated and contributed towards the UN goal of ensuring international peace and security. Today, India is willing and can take the responsibility expected of a permanent member (PIB, 2012). The ideas of democracy, representativeness, and the rule of law guide India's aspiration to be in the permanent category. One cannot keep a country with 1.3 billion out of the decision-making organ of the UN.

The world is in a state of turbulence. In this context, the role of India is significant. India has started acting as a ‘swing state’ in maintaining the balance of power globally (Mohan, 2006). India has become important for the stability in the Indo-pacific region (the Quad) and political modernisation of the greater Middle East. India today is a significant partner for ASEAN, SCO, and AU.

India has emerged as a substantial aid donor from being an aid recipient. Given the world's turmoil, India has done reasonably well in economic terms by maintaining an annual average growth rate of about seven per cent. It is expected that India will be the third-largest GDP by 2030. Today, India is in a position to promote economic integration around the world (Dabhade, 2017). India has become a 'key player in UN endeavours' (Muni, 2014). The UN has recognised India's role in UN PKOs as "remarkable" (PTI, 2017). As evident from the UNGA debate on 'Ways to Advance Progress on Reform', most countries nowadays support India's position in the reformed Council (UN, 2016).

However, there are a few challenges before India. The problematic political developments in the neighbourhood- the struggle for democracy, civil wars, terrorism, the future of Pakistan and the rise of China remain significant concerns for India. China has established a string of pearls around India by having bases at Coco Isles, Hambantota, Gwadar, Djibouti and Seychelles (Kapoor, 2018). China's Debtbook Diplomacy is impacting India's neighbourhood. China is also a hurdle for India at multilateral institutions like the UN and NSG. Given this, it becomes essential for India to take care of internal conflicts in its neighbouring countries and also resolve its conflict with these countries. It is essential for peace, security and prosperity in the region. Regional preeminence is vital for India's aspiration to be in the permanent category. The challenge before India is not only to defend itself but also to gain recognition as a net security provider in the region. In this context, ASEAN is central to free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific policy (The Financial Express, 2018). India's role is seen as necessary for the region's peace, stability and prosperity (Roche, 2018). Locked in a maritime dispute with China, the ASEAN countries are keen to broaden their relations with India (Chaudhury, 2018).

### Way ahead

India's support for the expansion in both categories reflects the desire to make the Security Council more effective. India has shown the desire 'to improve the working methods' of the Council. It believes that the time has come to normalise the intergovernmental negotiation process. The reform process demands more dialogue and discussions, and therefore the G4, while making its claim, is also respectful of other perspectives on the reform (UN, 2018). Given this, there is a need to have more dialogues on the bilateral level. Dialogue is the spirit of democracy. To make the high table more democratic, aspiring nations should engage in dialogue with other nations bilaterally. Civil societies and academia should engage more and more to discuss the solution to existing antagonism in order to make the reform process a reality. To make the UN effective in real sense, voices from all over the world must be included in decision-making. A privileged few cannot have the stamp to decide for the rest of humanity. Furthermore, the criteria for membership are faulty. There is no clarity as to what a significant contribution would mean. Also, this is not justified for membership as those weighing less will be out of the decision-making organ. India should take a leadership role in this direction. This calls for the Nehruvian vision of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). India was vital in democratising the world order through the process of decolonisation, the anti-racial struggle and the NAM (Muni, 2014).

The issue of reform evolved to make the UN more representative, effective, credible, and legitimate. The aspiring members must deal with how an expansion in the Security Council will make the UN more effective, credible and legitimate. Making people aware of the UN is another area for India to work on. The data shows that 43% of Indians are unaware of the UN (Poushter, 2016).

The UN is going through a resource crunch. Under such circumstances, Indian diplomacy should convince the opposing factions how a permanent membership for India will be effective for the UN. This requires that aspiration becomes a priority agenda, and India proactively engages with the reform questions by redesigning its relationship with Pakistan and China. The challenge before India and the others is to make the P5 accept their proposals. India should focus on getting the majority of the UNGA to pass the reform proposal. Once this is passed, it will be difficult for the P5 to go against the majority decision (Choedon, 2015). The ideal solution could be to increase the permanent membership and abolish the use of veto so that the reform process would advance. Once the veto power is gone, P5 will not overrule the draft resolutions (UN, 2018). This hopefully will bring positive results on the issue of reform. The demographic advantage, rapid economic growth, the world's largest democracy, a no-first-use policy of nuclear doctrine, and contribution to PKOs, makes India the appropriate state to shoulder such a responsibility.

### Conclusion

The international peace and security issue needs to be discussed, debated and concluded by considering the whole of the United Nations. The Council exercising the binding power and veto gives it an undue advantage and does not solve the purpose of the UN. An undemocratic organ cannot take democratic decisions on behalf of all. The 5+ 10 cannot decide what peace and security are to the world. The idea is that G4 and other aspiring members are as crucial for international peace and security as permanent five. So, the decision-making body must include all those sharing the burden for the betterment of humankind and not only those contributing significantly, as what is significant before P5 is unclear. Today's problems are global in nature, requiring a global solution. This calls for the participation of all the members, as their needs and context are different. If the Security Council is not reformed, it is ultimately P5 who will be the loser. Overall, an expanded Security Council will undoubtedly make the decisions more legitimate, whether efficient or not. As support grows, P5 objection will lessen.

India should gradually go for permanent membership. Another option would be to draft a resolution to make UNGA recommendations binding. This way, the hegemony of the P5 within the UN can be dismantled. India cannot and should not do this alone. As in the past, India should play a leadership role for the developing countries and, in the name of making the UN democratic in a real sense, should come with the said resolution. This, hopefully, will solve the reform issue. India is working significantly to cope with the adversaries. India's defence diplomacy with the US, France, Israel and ASEAN countries is noteworthy. India has established strategic relations with west Asian countries and is also working closely with Central Asian countries against the problem of terrorism. India's membership in Asian security organisations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is 'a major milestone' (The Hindu, 2017). Today, India is better positioned to influence organisations such as AIIB, BRICS, G20 and New Development Bank (Deo, 2018). Indian economy is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. A land of 1.3 billion people with the potential of high human resources (highly skilled IT professionals and labour) and a large market, India deserves to be in the High table.

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