

UN SECURITY COUNCIL REFORM: ASSESSING INDIA'S BID FOR A PERMANENT SEAT ON THE UNSC

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ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to evaluate India's prospects for securing "a permanent seat" on the "UN Security Council" (UNSC). The paper will evaluate the chances of India's success and the major impediments it faces. In doing so, the paper will trace the evolution of "the reform process" and will delve into the positions of major negotiating blocs, including the G4, "Uniting for Consensus" (UfC), "the African group", and "the Permanent members" of "the Security Council" (P5). While there is strong support for reform of the UNSC, including expansion of its membership to reflect the contemporary geopolitical realities, there are serious difficulties in achieving a consensus. The research will underline the strong basis on which India argues its case. Considering the trajectory of ongoing intergovernmental negotiations, the research will proceed on the hypothesis that India's bid is unlikely to materialise "in the short-term" due to the entrenched positions of different groups and strong political resistance, especially from China, and ambiguity within individual members of P5 on the issue of veto power.

Key Words: UNSC reforms, P5, G4, UfC, veto power, geopolitical influence

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1. INTRODUCTION

An “overwhelming majority” of UN “member nations” are advocating for restructuring the “UN Security Council” (UNSC) to enhance its ability to tackle global “peace and security” challenges more effectively. However, serious differences persist in the positions of different groups of countries on the question of “working methods” and, more importantly, on the expansion of “the Council”.

Today, the structure of the UNSC essentially remains the same as it was at the time of its establishment in 1945, reflecting the “post-World War II” “power dynamics”. It conferred permanent seats with “veto power” to “the United States”, “the United Kingdom”, “France”, “Russia”, and “China”.¹ Over the years, the geopolitical landscape has fundamentally transformed resulting from “decolonisation” and the emergence of new economic and military powers. As a result, there have been repeated calls for reform.

The last significant change occurred in 1965, when four more “non-permanent seats” were added, bringing their total to ten. However, no changes were made “in the composition” of “permanent membership”. Since the 1990s, various reform efforts have been launched. A major development took place in 2008 when the process of the Intergovernmental negotiations (IGN) was launched. However, so far, these efforts have not yielded any results, mainly due to a lack of consensus on key issues.²

The group of four aspirants for “new permanent seats” on the UNSC, “commonly called G4” (“India, Brazil, Japan”, and Germany), have been trying to tilt the focus of

¹ Thomas G. Weiss (ed.), Sam Daws (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations* (Oxford Handbooks, 2018).

² “The UN Security Council: From the Cold War to the 21st Century,” *United Nations University (UNU)*, January 2004.

reform efforts to new permanent seats. Their efforts are resolutely opposed by the “Uniting for Consensus” (UfC) coalition, who instead demand “an expansion in” the “non-permanent category” only.³ At the same time, some regional groups, like the African group, desire permanent seats for their groups. Further, the reluctance of the P5 to dilute their “privilege and power” remains a big hurdle in achieving meaningful reform.

India has been striving for a “permanent UNSC seat” for more “than three decades”, believing it possesses “the required credentials” to join an “expanded UNSC” as a “permanent member”. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has made this an issue of “the highest priority”.

The research question of this study is “Can India’s bid for a permanent seat on the UNSC succeed?”

This research, therefore, seeks to evaluate the prospects of India’s candidature by examining factors in favour and those working against it. The research will also consider the broader debate on UNSC reform, including the positions of key global players and the prospects of changes proposed by different groups.

The study will proceed “on the hypothesis” that “India’s bid for a permanent seat on the UNSC is unlikely to succeed in the near future.” The factors that underpin this assumption are strong resistance from China, a permanent member, determined opposition by members of “Uniting for Consensus” (UfC), “institutional inertia,” and the

³ Nico Schrijver, “Reforming the UN Security Council in Pursuance of Collective Security,” *Journal of Conflict and Security Law*, Volume 12, no. Issue 1 (2007): Pages 127-138.

lack of overall consensus on core issues related to reform model among member states.

This research will employ qualitative methodology, relying on a comprehensive analysis of positions of key countries, official documents, academic publications, and policy papers of think tanks, etc. related to UNSC reform.

2. EVOLUTION OF DEBATE ON REFORM AND EXPANSION

Functioning as a “principal UN organ”, “the UNSC” is primarily tasked with safeguarding global “peace and security”. It comprises fifteen members: “five permanent members” (P5) with veto authority and “ten non-permanent members” elected for “two-year terms” without veto power. The P5’s “special status” originates from the “post-World War II” era, shaped by the war’s victors.⁴

The UNSC meets regularly to deal with “threats to international” “peace and security”. Acting under Chapter VII of the Charter, the UNSC can “impose binding obligations” on 193 “UN member states”. Traditionally, on major issues on which there is division within the P5, the Council has remained ineffective and paralysed because of the use of veto power.

Many critics, especially the G4 members, argue that “the Security Council’s” structure fails to reflect “contemporary geopolitical realities.”

As for changes in the UNSC so far:

⁴ “The UN Security Council | Council on Foreign Relations,” accessed March 18, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/background/un-security-council>.

- In 1965, the number of its “non-permanent members” went up from “six to ten”;
- “In 1971, the People’s Republic of China replaced the Republic of China (Taiwan) as a permanent member of the UNSC”.⁵
- In 1991, “the Russian Federation” took over “the Soviet seat” in the UNSC.⁶

The Indians claim that in August 1950, the US had offered to replace China with India in the UNSC permanent seats, but Prime Minister Nehru rejected the offer. In 1950, while the communists had won the civil war in 1949, China was still represented in the UNSC by the nationalists. The Indians further claim that in 1955, the Soviet Union offered an additional permanent seat to India, which Nehru again declined.⁷ Some Indian analysts regard that as a policy of “idealism”. Such proposals may have been made unilaterally, firstly by the US and then by the USSR for their respective political objectives, but India had no chance of either replacing China as a UNSC permanent member or gaining an additional seat. In both cases, a difficult process of amendment of the UN Charter was involved. The UNSC at that stage was actively involved in the Jammu and Kashmir dispute, under the agenda item “The India-Pakistan Question,” and India would have faced insurmountable opposition with no chances of success.

In December 1992, “the General Assembly” established an “open-ended working group” to examine the issue of equitable representation within “the Security Council”.

⁵ “Historical Documents - Office of the Historian,” accessed April 12, 2025, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17/d167>.

⁶ Blum, Yehuda Z., “Russia Takes Over the Soviet Union’s Seat at the United Nations,” *European Journal of International Law* Vol. 3 (No 1992).

⁷ “Not at the Cost of China: India and the United Nations Security Council, 1950 | Wilson Center,” March 11, 2015, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/not-the-cost-china-india-and-the-united-nations-security-council-1950>.

(A/55/47)⁸ More than thirty years later, this body continues to meet but has failed to produce any concrete outcomes. In October 2008, the United Nations officially sanctioned “intergovernmental negotiations” on the “question of equitable representation and the expansion of Security Council membership.” However, after nearly sixteen years of inconclusive deliberations, the deadlock remains, largely due to the absence of a consensus on adopting a single rolling text as the basis of negotiations.

Although most “UN member states” agree that “the UNSC composition” is obsolete, reform proposals invariably leave some groups of countries dissatisfied.

3. REFORM PROPOSALS

The challenges to UNSC reform are formidable, stemming from several factors, including stringent hurdles of procedure to “amend UN Charter”, serious divide in views of different groups, on “enlargement and veto”, and whether mere “enlargement of the UNSC” would improve the Council’s effectiveness.

Any modification to the UNSC’s composition requires approval from:

“Two-thirds of UN members, including the P5”.

The major blocs remain firmly entrenched in their respective positions, which are described below:

⁸ UN Report, “Report of the Open-Ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Security Council. Official Records Fifty-Fifth Session Supplement No. 47 (A/55/47),” n.d.

3.1. G4

The four countries, namely, “Brazil, Germany, India”, and Japan, that seek “new permanent seats” on the UNSC have formed a coalition commonly called G4. They have secured the support of a considerable number of countries. The G4 governments are keen to secure the same status as the current P5, with full veto power. In informal discussions, however, they have exhibited some flexibility, i.e., permanent seats without the veto.

G4 also advocates two permanent seats for Africa. This is a tactical move to gain the support of African countries and expedite the reform process.

G4 support for the “Common African Position” (CAP) as outlined in the “Ezulwini Consensus”⁹ and “the Sirte Declaration.”¹⁰ They regret the lack of “substantive progress” and call for immediate “text-based negotiations”. They also “extend mutual support” for each other’s bids as “new permanent members” in a “reformed Security Council.”¹¹

3.2. Uniting for Consensus (UFC)

Firmly opposed to G4 is the “Uniting for Consensus” (UFC) group, a combination of “regional rivals” of the G4, including, among others, “Argentina, Mexico, Italy”, “Poland, Pakistan, South Korea”, and Türkiye. A former “ambassador of Mexico”

⁹ “Ezulwini Consensus.Pdf,” n.d., accessed March 20, 2025, <https://old.centerforunreform.org/sites/default/files/Ezulwini%20Consensus.pdf>.

¹⁰ “SIRTE DECLARATION ON THE REFORM OF THE UNITED NATIONS,” Assembly/AU/Decl. 2 (V), July 5, 2005.

¹¹ “G4 Ministerial Joint Press Statement on the Reform of the UN Security Council,” Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, accessed April 10, 2025, <https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38344/G4+Ministerial+Joint+Press+Statement+on+the+reform+of+the+UN+Security+Council>.

explains, the UFC favours expanding the council's "elected non-permanent membership" to twenty, aiming

"to create a more egalitarian and globally representative body rather than entrenching great power dominance."¹²

Italy, as "the focal point" of the "Uniting for Consensus" (UfC) Group within the "Inter-Governmental Negotiations" (IGN) on the UN "Security Council reform", has articulated a clear and consistent position. The UfC, opposes any new "permanent national seats", arguing that such a move would perpetuate "unequal privileges" in the international system. Instead, the group advocates for a more "democratic and inclusive" enlargement of "the Security Council" through an expansion in the "non-permanent category". Back in 2014, the UfC even proposed a compromise solution reflecting an "intermediate approach" that sought to introduce long-term seats allocated to regional groups rather than individual states, with the "possibility of re-election". That formula sought to balance the aspirations of countries seeking greater participation with the principle of "equitable representation" for all UN Member States. While supporting reforms aimed at augmenting "the Council's transparency, efficiency, and regional balance", Italy and the UfC remain firmly opposed to extending veto power or establishing new permanent seats.¹³

3.4. African Union (AU)

¹² "UN Security Council Reform: What the World Thinks," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/06/un-security-council-reform-what-the-world-thinks?lang=en>.

¹³ Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, "Rappresentanza Permanente d'Italia Presso Le Nazioni Unite New York," accessed April 10, 2025, <https://italyun.esteri.it/en/>.

“The African Union” (AU), comprises 54 member states that adhere to the “2005 Ezulwini Consensus”.¹⁴ They demand “two permanent seats” with “full veto rights” for Africa, together with at least three “additional non-permanent seats”.

3.5. The P5

Apart from China, other permanent members have voiced support for “India’s bid” for “a permanent seat”. However, doubts persist about their true intentions. The P5 have been resistant to any reforms that may encroach on their “power and influence” in the UNSC. As noted by the “former Permanent Representative” of the Russian Federation to the “UN in Geneva”,

“Each of the P5 is determined to maintain its permanent seat and veto, but their positions on council reform vary”.¹⁵

Deep down, it can be argued that none of these countries truly desires to share their exclusive privilege. Nor do they want any dilution of their veto power. However, four of P5 have expressed “support for India” to have a permanent seat at the UNSC, without delving into details.

The views of P5 members are detailed below.

3.5.1. China

China has consistently called for “inclusive reforms” that “prioritise developing countries”. China has always advocated eschewing divisive measures. The objective is a more “representative, efficient, and legitimate” UNSC that effectively maintains

¹⁴ “Ezulwini Consensus.Pdf,”<https://old.centerforunreform.org/sites/default/files/Ezulwini%20Consensus.pdf>.

¹⁵ “UN Security Council Reform: What the World Thinks,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed March 11, 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/06/un-security-council-reform-what-the-world-thinks?lang=en>.

international peace. In 2005, China outlined its core principles on UNSC reform, a stance that essentially remains unchanged. It seeks better representation for “developing countries”, in particular “small and medium-sized” states. China promotes “geographic balance”, ensuring participation of “different cultures and civilizations.” Any “consensus on reform” should result from “full democratic debates”.

In 2021, China formally conveyed that,

“Hasty preparation of documents for negotiation and launching of text-based negotiations will only aggravate division and confrontation among member states and undermine the momentum of reform.”¹⁶

China supports increasing the number of “Security Council seats” “for developing countries”, in particular from Africa, but opposes any individual nation from becoming a new permanent member. While acknowledging criticism about its ineffectiveness, China believes that the UNSC remains an “indispensable stabilising force” as well as a foundation of the “international order.” Nonetheless, China believes that the reform of the UNSC is indeed a priority, as its size and structure do not correspond to the evolving global dynamics.¹⁷ In short, China opposes expanding permanent membership, particularly blocking the “ambitions of regional rivals” “India and Japan”. In line with “the UFC stance”, Beijing advocates increasing the number of elected seats by up to ten to ensure broader regional representation. Furthermore, China has prevented “text-based negotiations.”

¹⁶ “Following Debate over Text-Based Process, General Assembly Adopts Oral Decision to Continue Intergovernmental Negotiations on Security Council Reforms | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases,” accessed April 13, 2025, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/ga12435.doc.htm>.

¹⁷ “Wang Yi on the U.N. Security Council High-Level Meeting Reaching Consensus on Revitalizing Multilateralism_Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China,” accessed April 13, 2025, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjzbzd/202502/t20250219_11558897.html.

3.5.2. The United States

“The United States” voices its commitment to reform, including the expansion of both “permanent and non-permanent” seats on “the UNSC”. On 18 September 2024, the “US Ambassador” to the UN, “Linda Thomas-Greenfield”, announced US support for two permanent members from Africa and one “rotating permanent seat” among the “small island states.” The US also supports one permanent seat from “Latin America” and “the Caribbean states”, without specifying the country. The US Ambassador added that this was in addition to the US support for “permanent seats” for “India, Japan, and Germany.” On the question of veto, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield remarked,

"None of the permanent members want to give up their veto power, including us," she said. "...We think if we expand that veto power across the board, it will make the council more dysfunctional."¹⁸

3.5.3. The UK and France

Officially, the UK strongly supports UNSC reform efforts and expansion in both categories of its membership, taking the total number to mid-twenties. The UK supports a permanent seat for Africa as well as for all G4 members.¹⁹ France, more or less shares the same views.²⁰

¹⁸ “Reforming the UN Security Council with Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield,” *United States Department of State*, n.d., accessed April 13, 2025, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/briefings-foreign-press-centers/unga79/reforming-the-un-security-council/>.

¹⁹ “The UK Remains a Strong Supporter of UN Security Council Reform: UK Statement in the UN General Assembly,” GOV.UK, November 11, 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-uk-remains-a-strong-supporter-of-un-security-council-reform-uk-statement-in-the-un-general-assembly>.

²⁰ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “France and the United Nations Security Council,” France Diplomacy - Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, accessed April 13, 2025, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/france-and-the-united-nations/france-and-the-united-nations/france-and-the-united-nations-security-council/>.

Britain and France recognise their “relative vulnerability” and repeated criticism of “Europe’s overrepresentation” in the UNSC. Hence, they have been tactically among the most proactive in supporting reform. Since 2009, they have advocated for an intermediate approach or a transitional solution,²¹ proposing “a new category” of “extended-term seats” that could later be converted into permanent ones, though without veto power. G4 and the African group oppose the intermediate approach, as it spoils their case.

3.5.4. Russia

Russia supports the candidature of “India and Brazil” for “permanent seats”. Russia supports “greater representation” from “Africa, Asia, and Latin America.” It opposes increasing the number of already “overrepresented Western states.”²² Experts believe that Russia is, in fact, wary of adding permanent seats that may result in diminishing its global influence.

4. INDIA’S CASE FOR PERMANENT MEMBERSHIP

“India’s bid” to secure “a permanent seat” on “the UNSC” has been a “long-standing goal”, dating back to the early 1990s, as the country’s “economic and geopolitical” clout grew. Since then, that ambition has consistently been a foreign policy priority for succeeding governments, underscoring India’s aspirations to be recognised as a major power.

This quest “gained significant momentum” following “India’s nuclear tests” in 1998, under the “former Prime Minister” “Atal Bihari Vajpayee.” His administration aimed to

²¹ Alischa Kugel, *Reform of the Security Council - a New Approach?*, 2009.

²² “On Russia’s Approaches to Reforming the UN Security Council,” accessed April 13, 2025, https://india.mid.ru/en/news/on_russia_s_approaches_to_reforming_the_un_security_council/.

portray India as a “responsible nuclear power”, “a vibrant democracy”, and a “fast-growing economy”. Later, the government of Prime Minister “Manmohan Singh” continued to actively pursue this diplomatic mission, ramping up both bilateral and multilateral efforts.

Under Prime Minister “Narendra Modi”, India's campaign has gained renewed vigour, reflecting the nation's heightened ambitions. “The Modi government” has been proactively championing India's candidacy as an extension of its rising global stature in world affairs. Through intensified diplomacy with major powers and regional coalitions, India has sought broader consensus on UNSC reform while emphasising its role as a responsible stakeholder in addressing transnational challenges.

“Peter Nadin”, in his book “UN Security Council Reform”, recognises India as a leading contender among the G4 nations,²³ though he points out major difficulties on the way of reform process.

“Manish Dabhade” in chapter entitled “India's Pursuit of United Nations Security Council Reforms” in his book “India and Global Governance,” forcefully advocates “India's claim” for a “permanent seat” on the UNSC.²⁴ He makes a number of compelling arguments, also shared by many others.

4.1. Demographic and Economic Weight of India

“Manish Dabhade” argues that India is now the world's “most populous country” and the “fifth-largest economy” by GDP. He adds that well-placed projections suggest that India could potentially become the “third-largest economy” of the world by 2030.

²³ Peter Nadin, *UN Security Council Reform* (Routledge, 2016).

²⁴ Manish Dabhade, “India's Pursuit of United Nations Security Council Reforms,” in *India and Global Governance* (Routledge India, 2022).

The author argues that while combined share of P-5 nations to the global economy has declined, India represents a fast-growing economic engine, playing a crucial role in international trade, technology, and climate finance. “Peter Nadin” also backs “India’s persuasive case, mentioning its large population, democratic credentials, steadily growing economy, as well as its substantial contributions to UN peacekeeping operations.

In his book, “The Great Convergence: Asia, the West, and the Logic of One World” a celebrated diplomat “Kishore Mahbubani”²⁵ argues that the economic centre of gravity has shifted to Asia. He underscores “India’s demographics” and its growth rate. He contends that if the UNSC remains a “Western-dominated club”, it is likely to fade into irrelevance. He thinks that India’s inclusion in the permanent member club will not be a favour but is essential.

4.2. Geopolitical Influence in a Multipolar World

Dabhade highlights India’s growing profile and influence in an “increasingly multipolar world.” He notes that while China was accommodated in the P-5, India, despite being a nuclear power, a “spacefaring nation”, and a “leader in digital governance”, remains outside this exclusive group.

Advocating reform of the UNSC, “Dr. Shashi Tharoor”, a former member of the “Indian Parliament”, and a former “UN Under Secretary General”, stated that the call of the hour is a “renewed” and by no means, a “retired” UN.²⁶ He has been arguing for “a permanent seat” for India “in the UNSC”, given its growing profile in the multipolar world.

²⁵ Kishore Mahbubani, *The Great Convergence: Asia, the West, and the Logic of One World*, 1st Trade Paper edition (PublicAffairs, 2014).

²⁶ Dr Shashi Tharoor, “Reformed UN Is Indispensable,” Observer Research Foundation, n.d.

In his book “UN Security Council Reform”, Peter Nadin acknowledges that India's growing strategic partnerships, in particular, with the US and its rising geopolitical influence, bolster its candidacy.²⁷

4.3. India's Soft Power

Patryk Kugiel, in his book “India's Soft Power- A New Foreign Policy Strategy,” states that for its claim to a permanent seat on the UNSC, India has been making good use of the strength of its soft power,²⁸ rooted in a diverse cultural heritage, economic growth, and “soft power diplomacy.” India tends to project itself as the largest democracy. Its film and media industry, especially Bollywood, spreads Indian values and narratives worldwide. India's IT prowess and its well-educated and well-entrenched diaspora, especially in the US and other Western countries, contribute to strengthening its global standing. Indian diplomacy has also made good use of the notion of “strategic autonomy” to keep good links with different global political blocs. However, for its soft power to fully translate into strategic gains, India must ensure consistency between its internal democratic values and its global image.²⁹

4.4. Contributions to UN Peacekeeping

A cornerstone of India's claim, is its lead role in “UN peacekeeping operations”. India has contributed more troops to UN missions than any P5 nation except France. Furthermore, its troops have served in some of the most volatile regions and high-risk missions. These claims are officially made by the Indian Government and articulated by its “Permanent Mission to the UN” in New York.

²⁷ Peter Nadin, *UN Security Council Reform*.

²⁸ Patryk Kugiel, *India's Soft Power A New Foreign Policy Strategy* (Routledge, 2024).

²⁹ Christian Wagner, “India's Soft Power: Prospects and Limitations,” *Indian Quarterly* Vol. 66, no. No 4 (n.d.): pp 333-342.

“India has a proud history of UN peacekeeping dating back to its inception in the 1950s. India has contributed nearly 195,000 troops, the largest number from any country, participated in more than 49 missions and 168 Indian peacekeepers have made the supreme sacrifice while serving in UN missions.”³⁰

Pakistan has contributed over 200,000 troops deployed in 28 countries in 46 missions.³¹In many ways, Pakistan’s contributions to UN PKOs are more than India’s.

4.5. Leadership in the Global South

The author Dabhade stresses that India, as “the largest democracy” and a fast-growing economy, has consistently championed the causes of “the Global South”, including the unequal global economic system, environmental threats, external debt and development financing the “COVID-19 pandemic”, etc. Arguing in favour of India, the author underlines that the UNSC’s current structure disproportionately favours the Western powers as well as China, leaving Africa, Latin America, and South Asia without meaningful representation.

“Responding to a question” in “the Indian Parliament”, the “Ministry of External Affairs”, new Delhi.

“The Government of India accords highest priority to getting permanent membership for India in an expanded United Nations Security Council (UNSC)”....“We have also been constantly engaging with countries of

³⁰ “49151pkeeping.Pdf,” n.d., accessed April 10, 2025, <https://www.pminewyork.gov.in/pdf/menu/49151pkeeping.pdf>.

³¹ Tariq Mehmood, “Pakistan’s Peacekeeping Contribution to United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA): Lessons Learnt,” *NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability* Vol. 4(2), no. 2021 (forthcoming).

the Global South including through the Voice of the Global South Summits.”³²

4.6. Diplomatic Legitimacy and Preventing Institutional Irrelevance

“Rohan Mukherjee”, an Indian scholar, contributed his views in “UN Security Council Reform: What the World Thinks”, a report published on June 28, 2023, by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.³³ He, among others, presents India as having a strong record of “multilateral engagement” and “adherence to international law”. He also underscores India’s role in shaping global norms on terrorism, cyber security, and climate action through the “UN General Assembly” and other forums.

5. CHALLENGES TO INDIA’S BID TO ACQUIRE A

PERMANENT SEAT

Indian leaders and diplomats have been arguing, for well over three decades, that India deserves a permanent seat on the UNSC. As an “aspirational great power”, India feels that it has been “unfairly denied” this prestigious status. Despite all-out lobbying and exerting influence, India has not been able to fulfil its dream. Following are some of the formidable challenges that India faces and which are still difficult to surmount. These include:

³² “QUESTION NO- 4238 INDIA’S LEADERSHIP IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE REFORM,” Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, accessed April 10, 2025, <https://mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/38846/QUESTION+NO+4238+INDIAS+LEADERSHIP+IN+GLOBAL+GOVERNANCE+REFORM>.

³³ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, “UN Security Council Reform.”

5.1. Opposition by China

China is firmly “opposed to India’s quest to acquire a permanent seat on the UNSC” for a combination of reasons, including “strategic, geopolitical and historical” factors. The former Indian Ambassador to China, “Ashok Kantha” (From 2014 to16), told Newsweek early last year that Beijing has been thwarting New Delhi’s candidature for a UNSC permanent seat. He added,

“China has actively obstructed any restructuring of the UNSC, and our efforts run into the Great Wall of China’s opposition.”³⁴

The Indian officials believe that China wants to jealously guard its unique status as the only developing and non-Western country among the P-5.

China is also wary of Japan, another strong contender for a permanent seat, it being a close US ally in “the Indo-Pacific”. “Professor Kanti Bajpai”, the “Wilmar Chair of Asian Studies” at the “National University of Singapore”, believes that China would also use the “Middle Power argument”. In other words, an array of middle powers that are assuming greater importance in the emerging multi-polar world will not support India or, for that matter, other G-4 countries. Chinese state media have also asserted that the US support for India is driven by its geopolitical interests. According to China Daily,

"Japan and India are the two poles of Washington's China-targeted Indo-Pacific strategy.”³⁵

³⁴ “Why China Wants to Be Asia’s Only UN Security Council Member,” Newsweek, February 15, 2024, <https://www.newsweek.com/china-india-united-nations-security-council-members-1870215>.

³⁵ “UN Security Council Reform Is Not Unilateral Action - Opinion - Chinadaily.Com.Cn,” accessed April 11, 2025, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202309/21/WS650b8482a310d2dce4bb6d8e.html>.

Speaking at a UNSC meeting in August 2024, “China’s Permanent Representative” in a veiled “criticism of India” and other G-4 members stated,

“A few countries and interest groups who pursue their own selfish and small-circle interests when it comes to Council reform.”

Against the backdrop of “escalating geopolitical competitions” and deepening polarisation, it is less likely that China would relent on its position. The “Pakistan-China strategic partnership” is also a strong factor in China’s resolute opposition to India’s claim on the UNSC.

5.2. Opposition by the Regional Countries

India’s desire for “hegemonic leadership” in South Asia faces significant challenges from within South Asia. Pakistan has unsettled disputes with India, especially the issue of Jammu and Kashmir, which derives its legitimacy from the UN Security Council resolutions. Pakistan is resolutely opposed to “India’s bid” for a “permanent seat” and plays a lead role in UfC to counter India’s moves.³⁶ India-Pakistan adversarial relations make the region a potential nuclear flashpoint. The inhuman atrocities being committed by India in the Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir are well documented by the “international human rights” organisations and by the global media.

Other South Asian countries, particularly post-Hasina Bangladesh, have concerns about India’s unfavourable policies and actions from time to time. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka walk a tightrope between India and China.³⁷ The latter is

³⁶ “Pakun.Org/Unreform,” <https://pakun.org/unreform>.

³⁷ “Sri Lanka Walks a Tightrope between India and China – DW – 12/16/2024,” Dw.Com, accessed July 21, 2025, <https://www.dw.com/en/sri-lanka-walks-a-tightrope-between-india-and-china/a-71071088>.

enhancing its influence in the region, which counters India's regional ambitions. With an increase in regional instability, India's challenges have also grown, casting a shadow on India's ambitions as a great power.

5.3. Possessive Attitude of P5 on Veto

The UfC has been very skilfully playing with the insecurity of P5 on their right to veto. Indeed, the P5 are reluctant to extend this right to other aspirants. More importantly, the P5 are inimical to any debate or discussion on their right to veto.³⁸ At the initiative of UfC, debate has now begun on the veto itself. For example, Pakistan, together with other UFC members, argues that the "issue of veto" is fundamental to any reform of "the Security Council".³⁹ The use or "threat of a veto" often leads to the "paralysis of the Council" from taking decisive action in response to threats or breaches of "international peace". It is contended that to enhance the Council's effectiveness, it is essential to either abolish the veto power vested in "the permanent members" or, at the very least, limit their use as much as possible. For this reason, the UfC countries are opposed to extending veto rights to any additional states. UfC is thus opposed to any category of permanent members. This approach increases the insecurity of P5 regarding the veto, a power they do not wish to lose. Various aspects of "veto power" are under discussion in the IGN.

5.4. India's HR Record

India has an "abysmal record" of "respect for human rights". It has been blatantly violating its domestic and "international human rights" obligations. The state of "massive HR abuses" in the "Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir", the "treatment of minorities", and the brute use of force follow consistent patterns and are well

³⁸ Huda Raza and Mahrukh Khan, *THE POLITICIZATION OF THE UN BY P-5*, 2023.

³⁹ "Pakun.Org/Unreform."

documented by International Human Rights bodies as well as “intergovernmental human rights” bodies of the UN and other organisations.⁴⁰

5.5. Strong Opposition by UFC

“Uniting for Consensus” (UfC), a strong coalition led by Italy and Pakistan, comprising countries such as Canada, Mexico, Spain, South Korea, and Türkiye have been putting their weight behind reinforcing “the General Assembly's role” and seeking expansion in the “non-permanent category” only. UfC argues that the addition of non-permanent members will make the UN more democratic, “accountable and representative” by accommodating additional regional voices in the “decision-making process.” Within UfC “Pakistan’s Permanent Representative” has remarked that,

“Adding new permanent members will statistically multiply the prospects of paralysis in the Council. The problem cannot be the solution.”

The UNSC’s permanent membership was created by the “victors of WWII” as a condition for the “creation of UN.” Today, there is no such compulsion for creating any new “centres of privilege” within the UN.⁴¹

5.6. Doubts about India's Alignment with the West's Priorities

The US, the UK and France have, in principle, voiced support for India’s candidature for a “permanent UNSC seat”. However, doubts linger over whether these permanent members would truly push for such reforms when it counts. Historically,

⁴⁰ “Why India’s Engagement on Human Rights Matters to Its UNSC Bid,” <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2024/10/why-should-indias-human-rights-record-matter-in-its-bid-for-a-permanent-seat-on-the-un-security-council/>.

⁴¹ “Statement by Ambassador Munir Akram, Permanent Representative of Pakistan during the Annual Debate on Agenda Item 122: Entitled ‘Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Security Council,’” n.d.

the P-5 nations have been unwilling to share veto power. As Nicholas Burns, a former senior US diplomat, stated in 2008:

"We support keeping the veto as it is and oppose extending it to new permanent members."⁴²

Ashley Tellis, a leading US expert on South Asia, argued in *Foreign Affairs* that India's strategic alignment with the US is not guaranteed. Citing the Ukraine war, he noted that "India's interests don't always align with ours."⁴³

At her "Senate confirmation hearings" in early 2021, the US Ambassador-designate Linda Thomas-Greenfield commented on the likelihood of India, Germany, and Japan obtaining permanent UNSC seats. While she recognized that "valid arguments exist in favour of this," she noted, "There are also regional disagreements over whether they should serve as their region's representatives."⁴⁴

⁴² "UNSC_CSR59.Pdf," https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2010/11/UNSC_CSR59.pdf.

⁴³ Ashley J. Tellis, "America's Bad Bet on India," *Foreign Affairs*, May 1, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/india/americas-bad-bet-india-modi>.

⁴⁴ "- NOMINATION OF HON. LINDA THOMAS- GREENFIELD TO BE UNITED STATES. REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UNITED NATIONS," accessed March 25, 2025, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-117shrg45209/html/CHRG-117shrg45209.htm>.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

While the policies being followed by Pakistan to deny India a permanent seat on the UNSC are well-considered, well-coordinated, and effective, the following policy considerations are reiterated:

1. Pakistan may continue to play a leading role in the UfC Group.
2. Close liaison with China on all moves on reform and restructuring of the UNSC is of vital importance.
3. Pakistan and like-minded countries should remain extra vigilant about India making any inroads in the African Group of countries and members of the League of Arab States.
4. Pakistan, along with UfC countries, may continue to agitate the insecurities of the P-5 countries on their right to veto. The UfC may push for debate on the discriminatory right to veto.
5. Pakistan may continue to adhere to its principled stance that reform of the Security Council should make it “more representative, democratic, effective, legitimate and accountable to the general membership.”

7. CONCLUSION

The research confirms the veracity of the hypothesis that in the short run, India's efforts for "a permanent seat" on "the UNSC" are unlikely to succeed. The paper has in detail, elaborated the factors that support this contention. Briefly, these include, China's resolute opposition; opposition by regional countries, in particular Pakistan which plays a lead role in UfC; The protective attitude of P5 on their right to veto, on the one hand, they do not wish any dilution of their veto right, and on the other they do not wish to share it with potential new permanent members, fearing that that it will make the UNSC more dysfunctional; India's dismal record on human rights and lingering doubts about India's alignment with the West. Having said that, the resistance to "India's bid" for a "UNSC permanent seat" is formidable but not insurmountable. India may have to demonstrate "strategic patience" and wait for a major global strategic shift that sees India and China on the same side of the fence. This in the near future, appears unlikely.

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