UNSC & Permanent Seat for India: RSTV – Big Picture

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Context:

- Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu expressed that India has a rightful claim to the permanent membership of the United Nation’s Security Council (UNSC).
- The latest UNSC meeting on Kashmir which was initiated by China showed that India will have to show more strength to stop China from using UNSC against India’s interest.

India’s Claims:

India’s claims to a permanent seat in the UNSC are based on the following grounds:

- Represents one sixth of the global population.
- Among the founding members of the U.N.
- Always upheld its principles and credentials while some other countries consider the organisation as merely a talk shop.
- Impressive contribution towards the Peace Keeping Force (UNPKF).
- An emerging economic power.
- An independent foreign policy which is very often not in sync with that of the five permanent members of UNSC (P5). Ex.: At first, India opposed authorising the use of force in Libya and then abstained from voting on the matter.
- A substantially increasing international clout.
  - Victory at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) election in which the K lost for the first time.
  - International day of Yoga which was celebrated by 177 countries including several Islamic countries.

Other Candidates:

- G4 was created in the mid-2000s to voice a collective campaign of India, Germany, Japan and Brazil.
  - Even though India perceived herself a weak campaigner, it came out to be the strongest.
  - In 2016 Delivering a joint G4 statement, India’s Permanent Representative to the UN, Syed Akbaruddin, stated that the grouping was eager for a forward discussion on UNSC permanent membership and reforms.
- Japan:
  - A ‘fanatic’ opposition from China combine with a recent decline of the economic clout weakens the claims of Japan.
  - Chinese diplomats have informally urged India to leave G4 so that they would be able to support India alone (and not along with Japan).
- Germany:
  - Opposition from the UK, France, and other European powers such as Spain and Italy.
  - A declining economic clout within Europe.
Opposition from Africa, Latin America and Arab countries against the entry of another European country.

- **Brazil:**
  - Opposition from Argentina and Mexico (a country with a GDP comparable to that of Brazil).

- **Africa:**
  - One of the biggest stumbling block in terms of UNSC expansion, since there are internal divisions over who should be the candidate.
  - South Africa is economically powerful but Nigeria tops in terms of population. Egypt also wants to be a candidate.
  - With an African counterpart on board, G4 would have been G5.

**China’s Opposition:**

- Diplomats have blamed China for having quietly carried out a campaign to stop India’s efforts at the UNSC.
- **Pakistan Factor:**
  - China perceives Pakistan as an all-weather friend and equally important as India.
  - Since the GDP of Pakistan is around one-tenth that of India, it is impossible for them to survive without Chinese support.
  - China recently came up with the issue of Kashmir at UNSC because Pakistan made a hue and cry over it.
  - However, China-Pak relationship is weakening off late
  - China is finding it difficult to continue bailing out Pakistan because it keeps on returning to economic instability.
  - China even told Pakistan to move to IMF to take the hard course on economic recovery.
  - Xi Jinping had informally requested Narendra Modi to have a dialogue with Pakistan in order to reduce the tensions.
  - Even at the UNSC, China might have reached a level of saturation with respect to supporting Pakistan, as demonstrated by a change in stance over the Hafiz Sayeed and Kashmir issue.
  - China is more or less isolated in the UNSC as 13 to 14 members continue to support India in such matters. Even a statement was not released by UNSC over the Kashmir issue.
  - Xi’s upcoming visit to India will probably continue to maintain a diplomatic agility with India, except for an uncertainty over the Kashmir issue.
  - However, China would try to continue the conversation with India, because if Kashmir is the defining issue, the very conversation will stop.
  - China may even put pressure on Pakistan to continue dialogues with India.
  - India can leverage such opportunities.

- **Wuhan Warmth:**
  - In 2018, a landmark summit at Wuhan increased confidence in the relations between India and China.
  - However, it was only a temporary truce.
  - It was called an informal summit and did not address any differences over issues related to Dalai Lama, border dispute, Pakistan
  - It was effectively an attempt to lower the heat contributed by the Doklam crisis.
  - It also helped to concentrate more on elections (with respect to India) and an imminent trade war with U.S (with respect to China). China also reached a temporary settlement on the less important Senkaku island dispute with Japan by allowing a meeting in the Chinese soil for the first time.
  - Clearly, Wuhan was not about the two countries getting along, but about agreeing to not get into each other’s hair.
The temporary truce will probably continue because both the countries have other issues of priority; Kashmir issue and economic slowdown (for India) and trade war with U.S (for China).

Even during the Wuhan summit, there were proxy struggles at Maldives, Sri Lanka, etc., regarding the affiliation (towards India and China) of the incumbent Governments in those countries.

To conclude, Indo-Chinese relationship is not strong enough to build a trust and convergence that is required by matters such as UNSC reforms.

China will continue to oppose India’s entry and probably be the last one to agree, if a consensus is reached.

Views of Other P5 Members:

- France views that it is a strategic need that India be a part of the permanent circle of UNSC.
- Russia also never refused support to India.
- USA generally holds the view that bigger countries with bigger population need to be present in the permanent council.
- US never said that they wouldn’t support India.
  - They support Japan and Brazil.
  - However, they would like India to be on their side rather than being independent.
  - Trump would not have any particular problem since the Republicans are hostile to UN as a whole and not interested in investing in such organizations.
  - Democrats, on the other hand, are more interested in the idea that multilateral structures like UNSC should reflect the existing power structure.
  - So, instead of wasting resources on ensuring Trump’s support in the context of UNSC reforms, it is better to invest the same on ensuring India’s entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), etc.
  - However, when it comes to the actual processing, none of the P5 want to expand the UNSC. They only entangle every candidates into the webs of passive statements of support and opposition.

Balance of Power:

- International institutions reflect the balance of power at the time of their creation.
  - Composition of P5 reflects the power structure of 1945.
- According to the P5 members, the original premise of the UN charter is idealistic and realistic.
  - It gave power to the five powerful countries of that time.
  - Without such an arrangement, UN would not have succeeded or even functioned.
- Ironically, multilateral institutions are forced to rely on status quo powers to actually change the status quo.
- They will not change the status quo because it will undermine their power itself.
  - At present, global power hierarchies are changing or experiencing an inflection point.
  - The west is facing an economic decline, which they are not confirming.
  - Historically, declining powers had never given up their advantages easily.

Other Challenges:

- Apart from bilateral dialogues, and committee recommendations, there is no actual movement in the direction of UNSC reforms, even though the parent organization, UN, had reformed in the past few years.
- The process must go through a systematic way which is time consuming.
- There are problems within different groups of candidates.
  - Group of 77 (a coalition of 134 developing countries within UN) prefers text based negotiations but other countries do not agree. However, out of the 122 countries who gave
their comment on text negotiations. 113 supported reforms in the UN and the UNSC.

- **Uniting for Consensus (Coffee Club)** members counter the claims raised by the G4 countries.

- The issue of expanding the UNSC and the Text Based Negotiation is expected to come up in the next **UN General Assembly session** in September.
  - Like every year, those countries with a direct stake will take up the issue of UNSC reforms forward.
  - But, the issue is **not generating as much enthusiasm** as it used to be.
  - Countries have gone through a number of motions and they have realised that it will be a much more **complicated task** than expected.

**Way Forward:**

- India has to continue its demands by **mobilising a favourable public opinion** at the global level.
  - It is important to maintain the support we receive from the majority of the UNGA and UNSC members.
- As former Prime Minister **Manmohan Singh** expressed, our priority must be to achieve a **sustained growth rate of 10% for at least ten years**, so that we will be eventually invited to be a permanent member of the UNSC.
- Hence, instead of over-investing on our **diplomatic capital**, India need to devise strategies to become a more **economically, militarily and diplomatically important** power.
- The **P5 members** need to abide by the original premises of the UN charter and agree to **reflect the present global power structure** in the composition of permanent UNSC members.

**Alternatives:**

- India was also in favour of remaining **without a veto power for an initial period** of, say ten years, if her claim for permanent membership is accepted.
- An idea of a **combined European seat** emerged in the mid-2000s.
  - But, after the initiation of **Brexit**, UK is not keen to surrender the seat, which is one of their few remaining sources of international prestige.
  - France will not agree to merge a seat with Germany either.

**Conclusion:**

- **A time will come** when India will be a permanent member of UNSC, but there is **no immediate possibility** for things moving forward in our favour.
- Our intent should be based on leveraging the sheer heft of our **economic, political and military weight** to become an inevitable part of all significant multilateral conversations.
- **International community** has started to look towards India in a way much better from what it used to be.
- If the trend continues, India would eventually be a part of the **P6**.