

# UN Security Council reform



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The UN's survival as the apex international body across three eras – Cold War, post-Cold War and the current post-post-Cold War' epoch – is a testament to the unique blend of power and morality which underpinned its creation in 24 October 1945. Unlike the League of Nations, the UN has successfully retained membership of countries that matter in might and capabilities. But at 70, it is time to ask whether this institution hailed by Columbia University's Jeffrey Sachs as *the most important political innovation of the 20th Century*, is fit for the challenges of the 21st Century. No, unless the UN's structure and modalities are reformed.

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It's much-sought after Security Council (UNSC) was redesigned slightly only in 1965 and its overhaul has been stuck in a political and bureaucratic maze with several false starts and setbacks. However, there is a ray of hope as the UN General Assembly has adopted in September a "Decision on UNSC Reforms" which puts before the world body a proposal hanging fire for 23 years. This is the first time in the history of the inter-Governmental negotiation process that a decision on UNSC reform has been adopted by means of an official document. This also indicates that most countries in the General Assembly support a restructuring of the UNSC.

#### Discussed reforms

Pertinently, meaningful reform of the Security Council is long overdue as it has been discussed since 1993. Certainly, the Council's structure reflects the frozen realities post Second World War. Since then the world has moved on and the power dynamics have changed. Notably, communism is no longer the State ideology of many countries of Europe, Africa, South America, Cuba wherein the US has even established diplomatic relations. Add to this, in the past quarter century, the global order has seen massive changes, from American unilater-

ism to the rise of multilateral institutions such as BRICS. Whereby, the developing nations now play a larger role in both international economy and politics.

Importantly, India aspires to become a permanent member of the Security Council in the near future. And if the UNSC opens its door wider, there is no reason why New Delhi should not stake a claim for entry to the body as we are the third-largest economy in Asia and the fastest-growing in the world. Further, Indian companies have for long been operating in various parts of the world and its professionals have excelled in various fields. Thus, this is the most appropriate opportunity for New Delhi.

True, India realises this and to further its aspiration South Block has devised a specific strategy with three broad elements. One, do not get entangled in the debate as to which countries should get permanent seats and focus only on getting a vote for the principle of the Council's expansion. Two, insist the UN reform agenda should be pushed through the General Assembly and not the Security Council. Three, the diplomatic process should shift from inter-Governmental negotiations to a text-based solution which would force all members to work with a draft UN reform document.

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India, of course, supports this shift to the written word.

Though the third condition has been fulfilled, the road ahead for India doesn't seem easy. Three powerful members of the UNSC - Russia, China and US - are opposed to any major restructuring of the Council.

#### Opposing changes

While Russia and US have said they would support India's UNSC bid, but when it comes to the UN proceedings, their positions represent a far cry from the promises they make at bilateral meetings. While the US favours only a *modest expansion* of the UNSC, Russia doesn't want any change in the veto arrangement.

Besides, the 13 country *Coffee Club* which includes Pakistan (led from outside by China) has canvassed countries across the world to oppose adoption of the decision on expansion of the P5 Club. Besides, the Group of 4 - India, Japan, Brazil and Germany - which are staking claims for a P5 seat, the African Union and Arab League States also feel that one of their members also deserve a seat.

Consequently, with the permanent members not on board, any consensus on reforms in the General Assembly is certain to be shot down. Nevertheless, it is high time the P5 realise that a more democratic and representative Security Council would be better-equipped to address global challenges. As it stands, there are more pressing issues to be tackled at the global level than merely preserving each other's prerogatives.

In fact, all the UN's critical decisions continue to be taken by the veto-wielding P5 members of the Security Council till date. No doubt, their geo-political rivalry has prevented the UNSC from coming up with effective mechanisms to deal with the global crises. Syria is a case in point. Even as a humanitarian tragedy is unfolding therein, there is no consensus in the Security Council as to how to tackle it. The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon also admitted recently that the UNSC had failed Syria.

#### What next?

In sum, keeping all these propositions in mind, if the UN still shies away from reforming the Security Council, the possibility of the institution being side-lined by the emerging powers cannot be ruled out. Clearly, the resolution adopted in the Ge-

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neral Assembly offers a rare chance to break this logjam. However, UNSC P5 countries have used their power only to back their favourite nations as non-permanent members. It is ironic that the judges are judging for themselves! So India - along with the other champions of reforms, namely Japan, Germany and Brazil - should continue its multilateral diplomacy to build a democratically evolved global consensus on restructuring the UNSC.

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