

The Race to UNSC's Permanent Seat

Why in news?

India's External Affairs Minister has been actively canvassing for India's candidature to UNSC permanent seat.

What is United Nations Security Council (UNSC)?

- The UNSC established under the United Nations Charter has the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security.
- According to the Charter, the United Nations has four purposes.
 - to maintain international peace and security
 - to develop friendly relations among nations
 - to cooperate in solving international problems and in promoting respect for human right
 - to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations
- The Security Council has taken permanent residence at the United Nations Headquarters in **New York** City.
- The Security Council has the power to make binding decisions on member states.
- General António Guterres is the current UN Secretary.

What about the composition of the Council?

- The Council has 15 members - 5 permanent members and 10 non- permanent members.
- **Permanent members**- China, France, Russia, the U.S. and the UK were granted the special status of Permanent Member States.
- They have a special voting power known as the "**right to veto**".
- If any one of the five permanent members cast a negative vote in the 15-member Security Council, the resolution or decision would not be approved.
- If a permanent member does not fully agree with a proposed resolution but does not wish to cast a veto, it may choose to abstain.
- **Non- permanent members**- The non- permanent members are elected by the General Assembly for 2 year terms.
- The presidency of the Security Council rotates alphabetically among 15 members every month.
- The main criterion for the eligibility is
 - Contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security
 - Equitable geographical distribution
- The geographical distribution includes
 - African Group – 3 members
 - Asia-Pacific Group – 2 members

- Latin American and Caribbean Group - 2 members
- Western European and Others Groups (WEOG) - 2 members
- Eastern European Group - 1 member



What is the need for UNSC reforms?

- **Remains unchanged since its inception-** The basic structure of the UNSC has remained almost unchanged since its foundation more than 75 years ago.
- **Questions the UNSC's effectiveness-** With profound changes in the realities of the global community, the UNSC is being questioned in terms of its legitimacy, effectiveness, and representativeness.
- **Diverse issues to be covered-** The issues have diversified over the years to include peacebuilding, conflict prevention, non-proliferation, counter-terrorism and protection of civilians.
- **Composition-** Although the number and regional composition of the members has changed, the size and the composition of the Council have remained unchanged since its foundation.
- **Issue with veto-** Russia has cast more vetoes (estimated to be 120 times or close to half of all vetoes) than the three western members of the club.
- Often P-5 countries use veto to shield their allies and target the enemies.
 - For instance, China repeatedly blocks India's efforts to include confirmed Pakistani terrorists in the sanctions list.

What were the proposed reforms in UNSC?

- The demands for reform of the UNSC is based on five key issues.
 1. Categories of membership (permanent, non-permanent)
 2. The question of the veto held by the five permanent members
 3. Regional representation
 4. The size of an enlarged Council and its working methods
 5. The relationship between Security Council and General Assembly
- Any reform of the Security Council would require the agreement of **at least two-thirds** of UN member states.

What efforts were taken to promote UNSC reforms?

- **G4 countries-** The G4 countries were created in 2004 and includes Brazil, Germany, India and Japan.
- The G4 has been calling for the enlargement of both permanent and nonpermanent categories as well as supporting each other's bids for permanent seats on the Council.
- The UN General Assembly has decided to facilitate the reform process through the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) framework on equitable representation and expansion of the UNSC.
- But it was dampened by the U.S., Russia and China being opposed to serious reform of the Council.
- **The L.69 group-** The L.69 group is of pro-reform member states, including primarily

developing countries from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific.

- The Group is bound by the firm conviction that expansion in both the permanent and non-permanent categories of membership of the UNSC is imperative to better reflect contemporary world realities.
- The group currently has 42 countries as its members including India.
- **Razali Reform Plan** -In 1997, the Razali plan was proposed by the then UN General Assembly president Ismail Razali.
- It is a proposal to enlarge the United Nations Security Council from its present 15 members to 24 members.
- Under the plan, the UNSC would have
 - Five new permanent members **without veto powers**
 - Four more non-permanent members



What about India & UNSC?

- India was recently elected as the **non-permanent member** to UNSC from the Asia-Pacific Group for a 2-year term from January 1, 2021.
- India has already held a non-permanent seat on the UNSC for 7 terms.
- **India's Chair**- At present, India is chairing the **Counterterrorism Committee**, that was formed in 2001 after the 9/11 attack in New York.
- India had chaired this committee in the UNSC in 2011-12.
- India is chairing the **Taliban Sanctions Committee (1988 Sanctions Committee)** with a focus on terrorists and their sponsors who are threatening the peace process in Afghanistan.
- India also chairs the **Libya Sanctions Committee** that implements the sanctions regime - a two-way arms embargo on Libya, an assets freeze, a travel ban, measures on illicit export of petroleum.

Why does India strive to become a permanent member of UNSC?

- In the case of India's permanent membership, it can bring a lot to the UN table with the
 - world's second-largest country by population
 - a huge world manufacturing hub
- It is also a nuclear power.
- The permanent membership will match India's capabilities with the needed power dominance.

What lies ahead?

- A group of experts suggested that a new category of semi-permanent members should be created.
- Countries would be elected for a period of 8 to 10 years and would be eligible for re-election.

References

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Quick facts

Uniting for Consensus (Coffee Club)

- This club was established in 1995 and includes the countries that oppose the expansion of permanent seats in the UNSC.
- There are 12 members including Italy, Spain, Malta, San Marino, Pakistan, South Korea, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica & Turkey.
- They do not want any expansion because there are concerns that the expansion will dilute the power.

