

# BULLETIN

No. 108 (325) • December 1, 2011 • © PISM

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## India in the UN Security Council

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*India has evolved as the most serious contender for permanent membership in the reformed United Nations Security Council. Its ongoing tenure as a non-permanent member of the UNSC can be viewed as a test of whether it is a responsible power and offers a preview of its possible future policies in the main UN body. Even though India has strong demographic, economic and political arguments to support its aspirations, fulfilment of its goals depends on reform of the whole UN system. For the EU and Poland, engagement in a serious dialogue with India on UN reform could serve as the main leverage of bilateral cooperation.*

**Indian Aspirations.** A bid for permanent membership on the UN Security Council has been a constant goal of Indian foreign policy since it gained independence in 1947. The traditional arguments applied to support its claims were demography (second most-populous state), territory (seventh largest country), heritage (one of the oldest ongoing civilizations) and moral values (idealism in foreign policy). Recently, it gained additional economic and political arguments. As one of the fastest-growing countries, India became the eleventh largest economy (in nominal GDP) and has the potential to be third, after the U.S. and China, by 2030. With the fourth largest army, India joined the elite club of nuclear powers in 1998. As an emerging power it also has become an important player in major forums for global governance (G14, G20) and international negotiations (trade talks, climate change).

India claims that the current structure of the UN does not reflect the reality of the modern world and therefore lacks credibility and legitimacy for effective actions. As the world's largest democracy, it calls for more democratization of the international system. Its propositions include expansion of the UNSC in the numbers of both permanent members (from five to 11) and non-permanent members (from 10 to 14 or 15) and strengthening the role of the General Assembly. It argues new permanent members should have the same rights as the older ones (including veto power) and the structure of the SC should be regularly revisited after each 15-year period. It has traditionally backed the UN as a principle global institution and one in which it plays an active role. It is currently the third largest contributor of personnel for UN peacekeeping missions, with more than 8,400 personnel serving on 10 of 16 UN operations. With \$12.2 million in contributions in 2009 to the UN annual budget (0.45%) it was the 26<sup>th</sup> biggest source of financing for the UN.

Through its membership in the UNSC, India wants to increase its influence in international relations and gain tools to strengthen its strategic autonomy and block possible interference in its internal affairs (Kashmir). More important, the attainment of a place on a major UN body would serve as the final recognition of its global power status. Historically, a lack of an understanding of its aspirations has pushed India to seek a leading role amongst developing countries (Non-Aligned Movement, G77) and to emerge as a major critic of Western powers. After the Cold War, together with Germany, Japan and Brazil, India formed the Group of Four (G4) to support their aspirations for permanent membership.

**Non-Permanent Member.** Since 1 January 2011, India is serving its seventh two-year tenure as a non-permanent member of the UNSC. Among the main areas of interest for India in the SC are the situation in Afghanistan, international terrorism and reform of the UN. However, the real objective of India is to convince the international community that it is a responsible power capable of contributing to world peace and stability and thus deserves a seat at the UNSC.

Western powers are afraid India could strengthen anti-western opposition in the UN. For example, the coincidence of votes by India and the U.S. in the GA is among the lowest of all UN members. In 2010, it was only 25.4%, which is below the average for all countries (41.6%), and much lower than that of EU countries (e.g., Poland, 61.7%; France, 71.4%; United Kingdom, 74.2%). India's departure from a traditional approach and alignment with the West on crucial matters is still a highly sensitive issue in Indian domestic politics.

India's recent voting in the UNSC shows a balancing act between the expectations of its Western partners and India's traditional adherence to the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference. India, China and Russia abstained from voting on UNSC Resolution 1973 on imposing a no-fly zone in Libya. The same position was taken on a resolution for Syria. Contrary to the West during the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNGA, India announced its support for "Palestine as an equal member of the United Nations". This shows that once elected to the UNSC, India will not compromise its own worldview but will present conciliatory policies.

**Perspectives.** Despite these differences, India managed in 2010 to earn clear support from the leaders of the UK, France, U.S. and Russia for a place on the UNSC, so it now enjoys the backing of four out of five current permanent members of the SC. More ambivalent on the matter is China—a traditional rival to India in Asia and a close partner of Pakistan, which would prefer to maintain the status quo. Also, the support of the other permanent members is rather declaratory in nature since none has pushed vigorously for UNSC reform. A majority of countries, including Poland, look favourably on India's aspirations in the UN, but also link their support for India to general reform of the UN.

The main obstacles on the way to India's permanent membership on the UNSC are its unresolved dispute in Kashmir, opposition from Pakistan and some records of human-rights violations. Also problematic is that India is still outside the NPT regime, although the significance of this argument has considerably declined after it signed a nuclear deal with the U.S., which *de facto* recognized India as a nuclear state. For India, support for its bid for a permanent SC seat is a highly important issue and is treated as a litmus test for bilateral cooperation. But the realization of Indian aspirations is connected with structural reform of the whole UN system, which is not in sight.

**Conclusions.** The perspectives for India to attain permanent membership in the SC look rather bleak in the short term. Contrary to its high hopes, India will not use its non-permanent term at the SC to take a major step forward. However, with the rapid changes in the international system, a renewed and serious discussion about UN reform is rather inevitable. The pace of changes could be even faster because of the international financial crisis, which could transform power relations and open a window of opportunity for India. Relative to other SC aspirants, India would have the greatest chance to be promoted to an expanded SC. With most of the attributes of a global power, India could bring more credibility and legitimacy to a major UN body.

India seems to be a natural partner for the EU in strengthening effective multilateralism, and both partners should initiate a serious dialogue about reform of the UN, including expanding the SC. This would require first and foremost forging a common position of all Member States on the preferred goals of the reform, including the possibility of a place for EU representation. European support for India would improve the credibility of the EU as an attractive and significant player in world politics and would help build trust and reinvigorate their Strategic Partnership. Only then, could the EU expect India to take on more global responsibilities and be more cooperative on other global challenges (such as climate change, trade talks, terrorism or democracy promotion). Further reluctance to respond seriously to India's arguments about the UN risk alienating the country and losing a potential partner in an increasingly polycentric world order.

Poland tends to link its support for India with the evolution of a common EU position about UN reform and should be more active in bringing this discussion forward. Unanimous support for India could be major leverage to upgrade Poland–India bilateral relations. Moreover, at the regional level it is more favourable for Poland to secure a place on the Security Council for the EU. Finally, it is also in Poland's genuine interest as a medium-size country to improve the role of the UN as a principle guardian of international law and to make it more democratic, legitimate and effective. Facilitation of UN reform at both the European and global levels could eventually become a cornerstone of Polish–Indian political dialogue. In anticipation of these changes, Poland may begin cooperation with India at the UN on areas of mutual interest (non-proliferation, democracy and terrorism).