



## CHOOSING BETWEEN ALLIES AND UNSC SEAT: INDIA'S CATCH 22 SITUATION

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“We have every intention to stay on. This can be done in two ways — seek re-election quickly and through Security Council reform. We will do both,”<sup>i</sup> This statement was made by India’s then Ambassador to UN, Mr. Hardeep Singh Puri when India’s two year term as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council ended last December. India had gained the UNSC non-permanent membership after a lapse of 19 years (last in 1991-92). India had been able to secure seven terms as non-permanent member of UNSC till now.

On the contrary to the statement made by Ambassador, India unfortunately, seems to be in a predicament over announcing its candidature for UNSC elections in coming years due to the lack of foresight and poor planning from Indian diplomats. At the moment it seems India will have to wait again for quite some time before it returns as a non-permanent member to UNSC.

Candidature have been announced by countries till 2038 for either of the two seats allotted to the Asia-Pacific group and interestingly, India finds itself competing with friends and partners for the same. As only one seat is vacated each year from the Asia-Pacific group every year, only one country can make it to UNSC. In such a scenario, it remains to be seen whether India would go ahead in announcing its candidature or would support other countries with which it shares important strategic ties. In any the case, India is likely to be at a loss unless some fine diplomacy is displayed from India’s side.

India’s plans for contesting the 2019 elections, targeting the 2020-21 term, have run into trouble as Vietnam, which has announced its candidature for 2019 elections, has declined New Delhi's request to stand down, and instead offered to support India's permanent membership and

to sign the G-4 draft on UNSC expansion.<sup>ii</sup> India, in 2010 election had got Kazakhstan to withdraw its candidature but the possibility of any such action by Vietnam is very low. If India goes ahead for a voting against Vietnam for UNSC seat then it risks jeopardising its bilateral relations which is critical for India. Also, the memory of 1996 election against Japan is likely to be a psychological factor, which it lost humiliatingly by 142 to 40 votes.

The problem doesn't end there, in the following year; India would have to contend with Afghanistan which has already bid for a non-permanent seat in 2020 elections. It would be difficult for India to get Afghanistan to stand down in its maiden attempt for a UNSC seat. Next in the list is the United Arab Emirates (UAE) which will be a candidate in 2021 elections. According to the law, an Arab country has to be elected to Security Council alternatively from Asia bloc and Africa bloc in the council, which puts an obligation on India not to oppose UAE's bid. Then it is Mongolia which announced its candidature for the 2022 elections in order to make it to the UNSC for the first time. While Pakistan, currently holding one of the Asia-Pacific slots, has already announced its candidature for the 2023 elections and because Pakistan supported India in 2010 elections, it would expect India to reciprocate.<sup>iii</sup>

In such a complex and murky situation, the question arises that how important it is for India to obtain a UNSC non-permanent member seat? No doubt, UNSC membership confers a special status to a state and is an important forum which provides state the opportunity to project power, help others, gather IoUs (abbreviation of I owe you) and ensures participation in decision making. But most of these privileges are enjoyed only by the five permanent members. So in reality, being a non-permanent member doesn't make much difference. The recent event where Saudi Arabia turned down the seat that was offered to it points toward that.

At present, the best option for India is to press for the expansion and reform of UNSC along with other G4 members. The UNSC hasn't seen a single reform since its establishment in 1946. The geopolitical environment has changed significantly now and the new powers must be accommodated. There is already a push from the west to make a strong case for Germany's inclusion as a permanent member by including Germany in the negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program. Brazil has also succeeded in garnering support for its bid. Japan being an US ally is likely to get support from at least three of the permanent members. Ample time has passed

since US President Barack Obama made the declaration in the address to the Indian Parliament that the US will ensure that India is included as a permanent member in an expanded UNSC.

While US, UK, France and Russia have already expressed support for India's bid for permanent seat, China is opposed to India's bid and is also totally against Japan's bid for a permanent seat in UNSC.

Re-election as a non-permanent member doesn't fulfill New Delhi's ambitions of being recognised as a rising world power. Now it depends on India and other aspirants of the UNSC permanent seat that how soon they can get United Nations to reform the security council so that new world powers could have a say in the decisions taken by the UNSC and claim their world power status in the most important organ of the United Nations.

*(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies CAPS)*

#### ENDNOTES:-

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<sup>i</sup> India ends 2-year eventful UNSC term; vows to return: Hindustan times: 21 December 2012. See article at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-ends-eventful-2-year-uns-c-term-vows-to-return/article1-979173.aspx>

<sup>ii</sup> Finesse needed: The Indian Express: 6 October 2013. See article at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/finesse-needed/1179240/>

<sup>iii</sup> India's troubled UN Security Council bid: Daily Excelsior:24 October 2013. See article at <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/indias-troubled-un-security-council-bid/>