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Changing World Order, India & UNSC

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This article is based on “India’s UNSC opportunity” which was published in The Indian Express on 05/01/2021. It talks about the changing world order and new challenges and how India should leverage its **two-year tenure of Non-Permanent Membership at UNSC**.

Since the end of the Cold War, India has entered the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** for the third time. However, the current world order is very different from India’s earlier stints in UNSC viz. 1991-92 and 2011-12.

The challenge emanating from the current world order is whether a peaceful consensus can bring about the redistribution of power between various superpowers.

In this context, India should leverage this two-year tenure as a non-permanent member of UNSC, to promote national interests and global peace.

Changing World Order in the Recent Times

- **New Cold-War:** With the **collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991**, the world order turned from being bi-polar to unipolar. However, the current world order is without a systemic equilibrium, which is essential to the maintenance of international stability.
 - This is due to the emergence of a **New Cold War** between US & China, which amounts to a struggle for a new distribution of power—political, economic and military.
 - Moreover, the differences between the US, China and Russia have become intractable.
- **Retrenchment of US:** The prominent feature of the current world order is the US’s retrenchment from global affairs. This can be reflected by the withdrawal of the US the **Paris Climate deal, JCPOA**, etc.

This retrenchment has led to a severe blow to multilateralism and globalisation.

- **Indo-Pacific as a New Sub-System:** The rise of China has been redrawing the balance of power in the South-China Sea. This has led to countries like US, India, Japan, etc., colluding in framing **Indo-Pacific as a new sub-system in international affairs.**

Indo-Pacific refers to the Indian and the Pacific Oceans between the east coast of Africa and the American west coast and their several littoral countries.

- **Declining Role of UN:** The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is the UN's main executive body responsible for maintaining international peace and security. However, the veto powers possessed by the UNSC's five permanent members are used as an instrument to shore up their geopolitical interests, regardless of the disastrous consequences for the victims of armed conflict as can be seen in Syria, Iraq, etc.

Current Challenges For Indian Foreign Policy

- **Aggressive China:** At the end of the Cold War, India ought to strengthen cooperation with China on the multilateral front with a view that it would also help generate the conditions for resolving the boundary dispute and expand the areas of bilateral cooperation.
 - However, this strategy has been proved counter-effective as China now has assumed an aggressive posture towards India. It can be seen in recent Galwan Valley Clashes.
 - Moreover, China protects Pakistan from the international pressures that India has sought to mobilise at various fora.
- **Compromising Non-Alignment:** To counter China, India has colluded with like-minded countries, forming Quad grouping (US, India, Japan, Australia). However, this convergence with the US has tarnished India's image of non-alignment and deteriorated relations with traditional partners like Russia.

Way Forward: Leveraging Non-Permanent Membership

- **Becoming Part of the Great Game:** The UNSC offers room for sustained diplomatic interaction between the major powers, minimising tensions and creating new opportunities for cooperation.
 - Much like the US and USSR that cooperated on nuclear proliferation issues at the height of the Cold War, the US and China could explore potential common ground even amidst their broad-based confrontation.
 - In this context, India can carve out a larger role for itself amid renewed great power rivalry.
 - Further, as India now joins the UNSC amid a continuing military standoff, India can now expose the Chinese aggression in the Ladakh region.

- **UNSC Reforms:** Making the UNSC more “representative” has been one of India’s demands since the end of the Cold War.
 - In this context, India should continue its partnership with **G4 (Brazil, Germany and Japan)** countries to expand the UNSC and become a permanent member.
- **Deepening International Collaboration:** The engagement with peace and security issues at the UNSC will allow India to strengthen its new coalitions such as the Quad.
 - Moreover, India could also use the UNSC tenure to deepen collaboration with its European partners like France and Germany in the security arena.
 - India must also sustain an intensive dialogue with Russia on all international issues, notwithstanding Russia’s worsening problems with the West and closer ties to China.
- **Engaging With Global South:** India needs to revitalise its engagement with its traditional partners in the “global south” by articulating their peace and security concerns in the UNSC. In this context, two sub-groups of the global south should be of particular interest.
 - **Small Island States:** The numerous small island states worldwide face existential challenges from global warming and rising sea levels.
 - They also struggle to exercise control over their large maritime estates.
 - Supporting the sovereignty and survivability of the island states is a crucial political task for India.
 - **Africa:** Nearly half of UNSC meetings, 60% of its documents, and 70% of its resolutions are about peace and security in Africa.
 - The continent has three seats in the UNSC (Kenya, Niger and Tunisia) and there is regular consultation between the UNSC and the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU).
 - The UNSC tenure is a good moment for India to intensify India’s engagement on peace and security issues in Africa at bilateral, regional and global levels.

Conclusion

India’s foreign policy approach has also shifted from the reactive to the proactive. That, in turn, should make India’s new stint at the UNSC more purposeful and pragmatic.

Purposefulness is about tightly integrating its UNSC engagement with India’s broader national goals. Pragmatism demands adapting to the changed conditions at the UNSC and avoiding overly ambitious goals.

Drishti Mains Question

In the context of changing world order and new challenges, India’s foreign policy should leverage India’s new stint at the UNSC more purposefully and pragmatically. Discuss.



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This editorial is based on “**Black and grey: On Pakistan's actions against terrorists**” which was published in The Hindu on January 5th, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.
