

INDIA AND THE UNSC AUGUST PRESIDENCY

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BACKGROUND

In August 2021, India became the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) President for the 10th time since its establishment in 1945. It will preside again in December 2022 under its two-year term as a non-permanent member of the UNSC. Considering tension, violence and instability in many parts of the world and between many countries, India highlighted maritime security, peacekeeping and counterterrorism as the vital areas of focus. The geopolitical developments highlighted every UNSC Presidency India chaired, like the Korean Issue in the First Presidency in June 1950. In November 2012, the Palestinian question, Somalia, Libya, Sierra Leone, Bosnia and Herzegovina, women issue in general, global peace and security and others were discussed.¹ The role of the UNSC is to maintain global peace, security and stability; instead, on many occasions, the UNSC does not take cognisance of all the issues brought up in the meetings either by its Council Members or other United Nations

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1. Aarshi Tirkey, "India's UNSC journey: What the current Presidency means for the country", Observer Research Foundation, August 12, 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-unscc-journey-what-the-current-presidency-means-for-the-country/>. Accessed on September 2, 2021.

(UN) members. To resolve or address a critical issue, unanimous agreement among all the UNSC's 15 members, including the P-5 (the UK, the USA, China, Russia and France) members, is needed for any Resolution and Presidential Statement.²

To address its agenda in the UN Security Council Meeting in August, India emphasised the "5-S and NORMS" approach.³ In light of current geopolitics, such an approach will allow India to express its overall dedication and commitment towards multilateralism, the rule of law and a fair and equitable international system.⁴ India's strategy in the Security Council rested on its ethos, "the world is one family", as New Delhi intended to promote the idea of responsible and inclusive which is needed from a country as a solution considering current changing global geopolitics to ensure global peace and security.⁵ As the UN Security Council President, India advocated that the current approach and measures towards handling international terrorism need to be effective. Further, we all need a comprehensive approach to secure global peace, and technology should remain a reasonable force to protect and enhance UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) globally.⁶

As part of the UNSC Presidency, India performed dual responsibilities, first President's responsibilities, and second through T. S. Tirumurti, India's Permanent Representative to the UN. The Indian government forwarded its agenda and issues. Under its Presidency, the UNSC accepted Presidential Statements on "Enhancing Maritime Security—A Case for International Cooperation and Drawdown and closure of African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)" and a strong

2. Any meeting or discussion on the issue which is accepted either ends as a Resolution or Presidential Statement. The resolution is binding in nature, and it requires no veto from the P-5 group and 9 out of 15 votes to adopt it. On the other, the Presidential Statement requires consensus and endorsement of all the 15 members of the UNSC.

3. India's 5-S approach includes Samman (Respect), Samvad (Dialogue), Sahyog (Cooperation), Shanti (Peace) and Samriddhi (Prosperity). Whereas NORMS stands for "New Orientation for a Reformed Multilateral System".

4. Government of India, "India at the UN Security Council 2021-2022", Permanent Mission of India to the UN, August 2021, https://www.pminewyork.gov.in/pdf/menu/submenu_429110843.pdf. Accessed on September 1, 2021.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

Resolution on Afghanistan, to name a few.⁷ With the UNSC's inability to take up many controversial issues and the G4 (India, Brazil, Japan and Germany) demand to expand the P-5, August Presidency, 2020, provided India once again with an opportunity to show its leadership skills, reflect itself as a responsible stakeholder and its determination towards global governance.

INDIA: THE 5-S AND NORM APPROACH

For many years India has demanded reforms in the UN as it no longer reflects today's realities to reform the current international world order. For this purpose, India pushed its New Orientation for Reformed Multilateralism (NORM).⁸ To address India's major concern and the August Presidency a success in addressing India's concern during the Security Council meeting, India adopted the 5-S approach as its guiding principle. India's 5-S approach includes Samman (respect), Samvad (dialogue), Sahyog (cooperation), Samridhi (prosperity) and Shanti (peace).⁹ Among other reasons behind India using such a 5-S and NORM approach, it will strengthen its role as a responsible stakeholder. For long, India observed and practised International Law and has participated in various global developments and events to ensure that New Delhi's objective of global peace and security is achieved globally.¹⁰ Further,

7. Presidential Statement. "Statement by the President of the Security Council", Permanent Mission of India to the UN, August 9, 2021, <https://www.pminewyork.gov.in/IndiaatUNSC?id=NDMyMA>. Accessed on August 29, 2021. See also, Presidential Statement, "Presidential Statement on the drawdown and closure of African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)", Permanent Mission of India to the UN, August 1, 2021, <https://www.pminewyork.gov.in/IndiaatUNSC?id=NDMxNQ>. Accessed on August 31, 2021. Amit Chaturvedi, "India ends month-long UNSC presidency: A look at key achievements", *Hindustan Times*, September 1, 2021, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-ends-month-long-unscc-presidency-a-look-at-key-achievements-101630480786987.html>. Accessed on September 2, 2021.

8. Rekha Dixit, "Five S points to guide India at UNSC", *The Week*, June 19, 2020, <https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2020/06/19/Five-S-points-to-guide-India-at-UNSC.html>. Accessed on August 28, 2021.

9. Government of India, "Launch of brochure outlining India's priorities as part of campaign for UNSC elected seat", Ministry of External Affairs—Government of India, June 5, 2021, https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/32735/Launch_of_brochure_outlining_Indias_priorities_as_part_of_campaign_for_UNSC_elected_seat. Accessed on October 1, 2021.

10. Rekha Dixit, n. 8.

India's External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar stated that India has a long history as a voice of moderation and has always supported dialogue and communication to address any global or regional challenge within International Law.¹¹ In such situation, India's NORM and 5-S approach, as Jaishankar argued, will act as an asset under the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, and the current complex global economic and political situations concurrently have reduced countries' response to any local, regional and global threat or challenges.¹²

THE P-5 AND THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL CHALLENGES

After France, India took over the UNSC Presidency in August¹³ and subsequently advocated maritime security, peacekeeping and counterterrorism issues as its prime focus for the month. At the beginning of the Presidency, while acknowledging the seriousness of such issues and the events taking place around the globe in general, Tirumurti highlighted that rising conflict had put high pressure on the United Nations' (UN) resources when the UNSC was itself divided on many critical issues.¹⁴ Unlike during the early post-Cold War era, today the P-5 either vetoed or altered the text of the statement on many critical issues, which shows a divided UN Security Council. Syed Akbaruddin, India's renowned former Permanent Representative to the United Nations, argues that the UN Security Council is disorganised. He further states that contestation between states and great power competition has only grown vis-à-vis securing collaboration among Security Council members, especially permanent members, to address any challenge.¹⁵

11. Government of India, "Launch of brochure outlining India's priorities as part of campaign for UNSC elected seat", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, June 5, 2021, https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/32735/Launch_of_brochure_outlining_Indias_priorities_as_part_of_campaign_for_UNSC_elected_seat. Accessed on October 1, 2021.

12. Ibid.

13. The Presidency rotates alphabetically among the P-5 and ten non-permanent members of the Security Council every month.

14. Devirupa Mitra, "UNSC Watch: India's Presidency Begins against Backdrop of Limited Council Activism", *The Wire*, August 2, 2021, <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/unsc-watch-india-presidency-backdrop-limited-council-activism>. Accessed on August 31, 2021.

15. Ibid.

To address the issue, the Biden administration promised to re-embrace multilateralism into the Security Council. However, we witnessed mixed outcomes instead with the Security Council issuing no statement, or its text was altered to favour a particular P-5 member's vested interest. For example, during the recent Israel-Hamas violent clash, the inaction from the US, and subsequently the UN Security Council did not provide any statement on the issue. Further, recently, to extend sanctions against the Central African Republic (CAR), objection from Russia subsequently altered the text of the Security Council statement.¹⁶ In the wake of the construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea, the Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea, rapid PLA modernisation, expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative and a Chinese military base in Djibouti has already challenged the US-led and favoured maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region. In this regard, to address the issue of pirates, illicit trafficking and terrorists using the seas to commit crimes that a country faces in the seas and oceans in the Indo-Pacific region, along with addressing the question of China's rise in the region, a Presidential Statement on the Maritime Security issue was passed once the word China was omitted from the statement.¹⁷

Considering global development and the lack of unanimity among the P-5, Richard Cowen rightly pointed out that the critical role of Security Council members in crisis management has only shrunk. Beyond big power friction, today, diplomats primarily focus more on debates that have low outcomes.¹⁸ While acknowledging the UNSC limitation, it also provided great power, regional power, and other countries to effectively mitigate tensions and counter various issues. In this regard, Cowen further reiterates, stating that the Security Council will remain mute—considering the US veto, stand and history on Israel-Palestine issue—in the coming years is hypothetical

16. Ibid.

17. Presidential Statement, "Statement by the President of the Security Council", Permanent Mission of India to the UN, August 9, 2021, <https://www.pminewyork.gov.in/IndiaatUNSC?id=NDMyMA>. Accessed on August 29, 2021.

18. Richard Gowan, "Learning to Live with a Limited Security Council", International Crisis Group, July 29, 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/learning-live-limited-security-council>. Accessed on September 3, 2021.

because even in the past, the Security Council did showcase its worth and effectiveness on various issues.¹⁹

UNSC AUGUST PRESIDENCY: SOME KEY HIGHLIGHTS

During the August Presidency, we saw many historic firsts. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi presided over the Security Council's maritime security meeting and became the country's first Prime Minister to chair any UN Security Council meeting.²⁰ During the August Presidency, India achieved a Presidential Statement on Maritime Security and a strong Resolution on the Afghanistan issue, a diplomatic win for India at the Security Council. Furthermore, Tirumurti states, among other "historic firsts", to address the accountability issues for crimes against peacekeepers, India drafted a resolution sponsored by 80 UN countries, including all the P-5 countries, a rare incident.²¹ He further mentioned that the UN Security Council also held its first Open Debate, which discussed how technology can aid peacekeepers in its operation. The debate was subsequently adopted as a Presidential Statement highlighting the relevance and role of technology in PKOs.²²

The issue of Maritime Security, UN Peacekeeping, and counterterrorism were on India's agenda. Presidency allows India a valuable platform to express its concern, viewpoint, and suggestions on the aforementioned critical issues.²³ A UN Security Council Presidential Statement on the Maritime Security issue is an achievement. The statement illustrated the seriousness of pirates, illicit trafficking, and terrorists using the seas to commit crimes in the

19. Ibid.

20. PTI, "India's Month-long Presidency of Powerful UNSC ends with 'Substantive' Outcomes on Key Global Issues", *The Week*, September 1, 2021, <https://www.theweek.in/news/world/2021/09/01/india-month-long-presidency-of-powerful-unscc-ends-with-substantive-outcomes-on-key-global-issues.html>. Accessed on September 5, 2021.

21. PTI, "India's Presidency of UNSC ends with 'Substantive' Outcomes on Key Global Issues", *The Hindu*, September 1, 2021, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indias-presidency-of-unscc-ends-with-substantive-outcomes-on-key-global-issues/article36219690.ece>. Accessed on September 3, 2021.

22. Ibid.

23. Government of India, "India at The UN Security Council 2021-2022", Permanent Mission of India to the UN, August 2021, https://www.pminewyork.gov.in/pdf/menu/submenu_429110843.pdf. Accessed on September 1, 2021.

INDIA AND ENHANCING MARITIME SECURITY—A CASE FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

It was the first time the Prime Minister of India attended the UNSC monthly meeting. In his address speech, PM Narendra Modi emphasised that with oceans being our shared maritime heritage and an important part of our global trade, we should be responsible and concerned as the future of our planet depends upon these oceans.²⁹ In recent times, the issue of climate change and its impact on our daily lives, maritime disputes between countries, and pirates and terrorists misusing sea lanes, he articulated, are a few challenges affecting our shared maritime heritage. Therefore, PM Modi argued that today's world requires cooperation and mutual understanding to develop a combined framework so that our heritage is well preserved and protected. To illustrate India's perspective on the issue and being a responsible stakeholder in global politics, he stated that New Delhi is working towards preserving our shared maritime heritage within a collective approach to enhance global maritime security.

Looking into the challenges our oceans face today, UN member states should promote a collective and preservative mindset to address such challenges.³⁰ To promote global trade and strengthen globalisation, current trade barriers should be removed to expand the scope of maritime trade. Under current prevailing circumstances, PM Modi stressed the need to protect global governance and maritime disputes and global peace and stability governed under United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The issue of pirates and terrorists misusing sea lanes should be dealt with by the UN members collectively. Considering current climate change events —like forest fire in the US, Turkey and Australia or flood in Germany and others -become prevalent in 2021, with 70 per cent of the world covered with water, he stressed that we should address natural disasters and avoid man-made disasters like an oil spill. The global community should act fast to preserve the global maritime environment and its resources. Today there is a need for reliable maritime connectivity among

29. PM Narendra Modi, "UNSC Open Debate on Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Maritime Security", Permanent Mission of India to the UN, August 9, 2021, <https://www.pminewyork.gov.in/IndiaatUNSC?id=NDMyMQ>. Accessed on September 1, 2021.

30. Ibid.

countries, and New Delhi on various occasion in the past pointed out that new infrastructure projects are required to increase maritime trade. Further, we need to address countries' physical sustainability and absorption capacity, which require formulating global norms and standards to utilise such projects. In his concluding remarks, PM Narendra Modi suggested that UN member states incorporate such suggestions to develop a global roadmap for maritime security cooperation.³¹

India stated it is high time to enhance global maritime security because the maritime challenges a country faces have only worsened in the recent past. The Presidential Statement highlighted that transnational organised crimes, trafficking of illegal items, smuggling of migrants, pirates, and terrorists misusing sea lanes are matters of great concern for the world. Such activities largely resulted in the loss of lives and impacted energy security, international trade, and the global economy.³² Accordingly, the Security Council calls upon all member states to ratify and implement various United Nation's conventions and protocol on narcotics, migrants' issue, transnational organised crimes and safety of maritime navigation from the threat of pirates and terrorist activities. It further stresses that all regional and subregional organisations continue assisting UN member states in building and strengthening each other's capacities to secure and enhance global maritime security.

CONCLUSION

Considering the statement and resolution India achieved on maritime security, counterterrorism, and UN peacekeeping issues, such developments and initiatives reflect India's leadership skills and negotiation ability, a remarkable achievement. Meanwhile, in the UNSC, the President alone does not decide the agenda for Security Council meetings. Therefore, agreement on these issues in the UNSC meetings should be considered a victory for Indian Diplomacy considering international politics, today. Further, the takeaway from

31. Ibid.

32.1 Presidential Statement, "Statement by the President of the Security Council", Permanent Mission of India to the UN, August 9, 2021, <https://www.pminewyork.gov.in/IndiaatUNSC?id=NDMyMA>. Accessed on August 29, 2021.

August Presidency is that both Russia and China abstain together on any issue. Acknowledgement of such a pattern will only help future Security Council Presidents to address any issue judiciously.³³

Meanwhile, August was the most productive month of the UN Security Council in the recent past. Among other developments, we witnessed four additional Presidential Statements on PKOs, another remarkable achievement. The August development was a victory for Indian Diplomacy, as New Delhi approached the Presidency assisted by its “5-S and NORM”. Such a strategic approach provided India with the needed window to push its critical issues forward at the UNSC. As India’s August UNSC Presidency coincided with the Taliban swift takeover of Afghanistan, Tirumurti, in the first UNSC Statement on the situation in Afghanistan, asserted it provides both challenges and opportunities to the international community. Therefore, he argued the international community should strengthen the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and collectively push for peace, stability, security, and gender equality in Afghanistan to better the situation of Afghans.

Some of the initiatives taken in August were historical firsts in recent UNSC history, and India’s leadership was appreciated globally. Being UNSC President, India was able to use the opportunity and project itself as a responsible stakeholder in international politics. Further, it provided needed public visibility to issues like maritime security, counterterrorism, and the application of technology in all UN PKOs and missions. The United Nations Security Council August Presidency set a high standard for the remaining countries to chair the upcoming UN Security Council Presidency in 2021.

33. Gurjit Singh, n. 25.