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UN Security Council Reform Gains Momentum as Global South Demands a More Representative Multilateral Order

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Recent Developments:

- **UN Secretary-General António Guterres** called for reform of the post-Second World War global institutions during the **18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi on 13 September 2026**, arguing that global institutions must reflect the realities of the 21st century rather than those of 1945.
- Guterres' intervention came amid renewed **Global South demands for greater representation in the United Nations Security Council**, particularly for Africa and other under-represented regions.
- The **Intergovernmental Negotiations on Security Council reform** continued during the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly, with the Assembly deciding in July 2026 to continue the process during its **81st session**.
- The **G4—Brazil, Germany, India and Japan**— reiterated that a reformed Council should expand both permanent and non-permanent categories, while the **Uniting for Consensus Group** continued to oppose new permanent seats.
- India welcomed the emerging **African model for Security Council reform**, emphasising that Africa's historical under-representation in the permanent category must be addressed.

Need for Reform of the UNSC:

Changing Global Realities:

- The Security Council was created in **1945** when the United Nations had only 51 members, whereas the organisation now has **193 member states**, making the present composition less representative of contemporary global political and demographic realities.
- The Council currently has **15 members**, consisting of 5 permanent members and 10 non-permanent members, meaning that fewer than 8% of UN member states occupy Council seats at any given time.
- The post-1945 distribution of power does not adequately reflect the emergence of **Asia, Africa, Latin America and other developing regions** as major demographic, economic and political centres.

Effectiveness and Legitimacy:

- The Council's inability to achieve unified responses to several major conflicts has raised concerns regarding its **effectiveness, credibility and legitimacy**.
- Geopolitical divisions among permanent members can result in prolonged deadlock, particularly when the **veto power** prevents collective action.
- A Council perceived as unrepresentative may face difficulty generating broad international acceptance for its decisions and peace-and-security initiatives.
- Reform is therefore required not merely to increase membership but also to strengthen **accountability, representativeness, transparency and effectiveness**.

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United Nations Security Council:

Composition and Functions:

- The **United Nations Security Council** is one of the **6 principal organs of the United Nations** and has primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security.
- The Council held its first session on **17 January 1946** in Westminster, London, and its headquarters is located in **New York City**.
- The Council consists of **15 members**, including 5 permanent members—**China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States**—and 10 non-permanent members.
- The 5 permanent members possess the **veto power**, while non-permanent members do not possess an individual veto.

Election of Non-Permanent Members:

- The **United Nations General Assembly** elects 5 non-permanent members every year for **2-year terms**, while 10 non-permanent seats are distributed according to regional representation.
- **5 seats** are allocated to African and Asian States, **1 seat** to Eastern European States, **2 seats** to Latin American and Caribbean States, and **2 seats** to Western European and other States.
- A candidate country requires a **two-thirds majority of members present and voting** in the General Assembly to secure election.
- The regional allocation attempts to improve geographical representation, but it does not eliminate the structural advantage enjoyed by the 5 permanent members.

India's Case for Permanent Membership:

Demographic and Democratic Weight:

- India represents one of the world's largest populations and is the **world's largest democracy**, giving it substantial demographic and political weight in global governance.
- India supports stronger representation for **Africa, Latin America and other developing regions**, presenting its own candidature as part of a broader reform of the Global South's representation.

Economic and Strategic Weight:

- India has emerged as a major global economy with growing influence over **trade, technology, energy markets, supply chains and development finance**.
- Its expanding economic capacity provides greater resources for contributing to international peace, development and global public goods.

Defence and Nuclear Capability:

- India possesses one of the world's largest armed forces and maintains a significant defence capability relevant to international peace and security.
- India is among the countries possessing a credible **nuclear triad**, strengthening its strategic significance in the contemporary international security environment.

Contribution to UN Peacekeeping:

- India has a long-standing record of participation in **UN peacekeeping operations** and has contributed more than **270,000 personnel across 52 missions** over the years, cumulatively the largest contribution by any country according to the Ministry of External Affairs.

- Indian peacekeepers have served in difficult conflict environments and suffered significant casualties, demonstrating India's contribution to maintaining international peace and security.
- India therefore argues that countries making substantial contributions to UN peacekeeping should have a stronger role in decision-making within the Council.

Voice of the Global South:

- India has promoted the interests of developing countries through initiatives such as the **International Solar Alliance, Global Biofuels Alliance, G20 Presidency and Global South engagement**.
- Its leadership in these platforms strengthens its claim to represent developing-country perspectives in global institutions.
- India's maritime role in the Indian Ocean and its commitment to the **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea** further support its argument for a greater role in global governance.

India, BRICS and UNSC Reform:

BRICS Position:

- **BRICS** has consistently supported reform of global governance institutions and greater representation for developing countries.
- India's 2026 BRICS Chairship has placed greater emphasis on strengthening **multilateralism and reforming global institutions** to reflect contemporary realities.
- Russia and China, both permanent members of the Security Council, have expressed support for the aspirations of **India and Brazil** to play a greater role in the United Nations, including the Security Council.
- Guterres' 2026 intervention at the BRICS Summit added greater political visibility to the argument that institutions created after the Second World War must adapt to current global realities.

Challenges to UNSC Reform:

Complex Amendment Procedure:

- Any formal amendment to the **United Nations Charter** requires approval by a two-thirds majority of the General Assembly and ratification by two-thirds of UN members, including **all 5 permanent members**.
- This requirement gives every existing permanent member an effective ability to block institutional reform through non-ratification.

Rival Reform Models:

- The **G4** supports expansion of both permanent and non-permanent categories and seeks permanent seats for Brazil, Germany, India and Japan.
- The **Uniting for Consensus Group**, led prominently by Italy, opposes the creation of new permanent seats and instead supports an expanded elected membership with greater rotation. Its model proposes expansion of the Council up to **27 members**, primarily through non-permanent seats.
- The African position seeks meaningful and permanent representation for Africa, reflecting the continent's historical exclusion from the permanent category.
- These competing models have made consensus difficult despite broad recognition that the existing Council requires reform.

Veto Question:

- A major unresolved issue is whether new permanent members should receive **veto power**.
- Extending veto power could make the Council even more difficult to operate, while denying it to new permanent members could create a second tier of permanent membership.

- India has therefore supported comprehensive reform while recognising that the **veto question requires broad negotiations among member states**.

Way Forward:

Building a Representative Multilateral Order:

- Reform negotiations should move from repeated general statements towards **text-based negotiations** capable of producing concrete institutional outcomes.
- The interests of the **G4, African Group, Uniting for Consensus Group and wider Global South** should be reconciled through flexible and inclusive negotiations.
- Any reformed Council should strengthen **regional representation, accountability, transparency and effectiveness** while preserving its capacity to respond rapidly to threats to international peace and security.
- India should continue building coalitions with **African and developing countries** and use platforms such as BRICS, G20 and the L.69 Group to advance comprehensive reform.
- The reform process should seek to transform the existing concentration of privilege into a **more inclusive partnership-based multilateral system** in which contemporary geopolitical, demographic and economic realities are adequately represented.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Multidimensional Significance:

- **Key Concept:** The central issue is the mismatch between the **1945 institutional structure** and the **21st-century distribution of global power**.
- **Mains Argument:** India's claim is strengthened by the combination of **demographic weight, democratic credentials, economic capability, military capacity, nuclear capability, peacekeeping contribution and Global South leadership**.
- **Critical Perspective:** UNSC reform is not simply about adding permanent members; it also requires addressing the **veto, regional representation, accountability, legitimacy and effectiveness** of the Council.
- **Way Forward Phrase:** The objective should be to transform the existing **"pyramid of privilege"** into a **"platform of partnership"** through representative, inclusive and effective multilateralism.
- **Current Affairs Link:** The continuation of **Intergovernmental Negotiations into the 81st General Assembly session in 2026** shows that UNSC reform remains an active but unresolved issue in contemporary global governance.