

AT THE HIGH TABLE: ON INDIA'S NON-PERMANENT SEAT AT UNSC

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: UNO and its various Agencies

By winning the unanimous endorsement of the [55-nation Asia-Pacific Group at the United Nations Security Council](#), India has cleared an important hurdle in its quest for a non-permanent seat for 2021-22. The decision of the grouping this week was taken as India was the sole candidate for the post. In the next step, all 193 members of the UN General Assembly will vote for five non-permanent seats in June 2020, when India will need to show the support of at least 129 countries to go through to the UNSC. It will then occupy the seat at the UNSC for a two-year period, as it has previously on seven occasions since 1950-51. There are several reasons why India decided to pursue its candidature for 2021-22. The government at the time had felt it was necessary to have India's voice at the high table as many times as possible, and therefore began the process for another seat shortly after it had ended its previous tenure in 2011-2012. By rotation, that seat would have reached India only in the 2030s, and India had to reach out to Afghanistan, which had put in its bid already for the 2021-22 slot, to request it to withdraw. Afghanistan did so because of the special relationship between the two countries. India has a unique role to play at the UNSC, given the near-complete polarisation among the permanent members (P-5 nations), with the U.S., the U.K. and France on one side, and Russia and China on the other. India's ability to work with both sides is well known. The year 2022 also has a sentimental value attached to it, as it marks the 75th year of India's Independence, and a place at the UNSC would no doubt add to the planned celebrations that year. Since 2013, when it first announced the bid, the government has run a quiet but consistent campaign towards this goal.

It is significant that despite the poor state of [bilateral relations with Pakistan](#), and the many challenges India has faced from China at the UN, both the countries graciously agreed to the nomination. From this point on, it is necessary for the government to think beyond the campaign for the UNSC, and work out a comprehensive strategy for what it plans to do with the seat. In the past, India has earned a reputation for 'fence-sitting' by abstaining on votes when it was required to take a considered stand on principle, and the seat will be a chance to undo that image. Given the twin challenges of a rising China, and the U.S. receding from its UN responsibilities, India must consider how it will strengthen the multilateral world order amid frequent unilateral moves by both the world powers. An even bigger challenge will be to nudge all five permanent members on the one issue they have unitedly resisted: towards the reform and expansion of the UNSC, which would include India's claim to a permanent seat at the high table.

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