

India and the United Nations

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Introduction

Our institutions of global governance, centred on what may be called the UN system, were designed for the most part at the end of the Second World War and reflected the politico-economic realities of that age [...] There has been a sea change since then. Bipolarity has given way to multipolarity [...] It is obvious that if the system was being designed today it would be very different [...] India, as the largest democracy in the world and an emerging economy that has achieved the ability to grow rapidly [...] will continue to strive for the reform of the United Nations to make it more democratic.¹

(Manmohan Singh)

nations that are powerful and dissatisfied are usually nations that have grown to full power after the existing international order was fully established and the benefits already allocated.²

(Abramo Organski)

International organizations during a 'power transition'

Rising powers present a classic problem to the international status quo because they aspire and push to convert their lately acquired capabilities into greater recognition, prestige, and control over rules, practices and institutions that guarantee world leadership. Carving out a prominent place in international organizations, the executive arms of institutions, comes as a natural thirst for states intent on converting their hard-earned superior power into legitimized and predictable long-term domination. International Relations (IR) *constructivist* scholar Nicholas Onuf's insight that 'rules create conditions of rule'³ is, ironically, not lost upon the current era's emerging powers, which are schooled in IR *realist* doctrines of foreign policy but are not loath to harnessing multilateral organizations for further accumulation of influence and agenda-setting privilege in a range of issue areas. The pioneers of IR *liberal institutionalism*, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, had also correctly predicted in 1971 that transnational relations (cross-border interactions where at least one non-state actor like an international organization or a

multinational corporation is involved) 'may redistribute control from one state to another and benefit those governments at the centre of transnational networks to the disadvantage of those in the periphery'.⁴ Gaining voice and weight within international organizations has become both a 'symbolic' and 'substantive' measure of foreign policy success for states that are on the rise, especially those for which ambitions are not system-disruptive. Eduard Jordaan's definition of 'emerging middle powers' includes the behavioural trait of 'opting for reformist and not radical global change',⁵ and it fits a number of contemporary states like India that are trying to raise their own importance within the existing international order instead of resorting to war or forming alternative systems with their own institutions. The onus on gaining eminence in international organizations and the concomitant pressure on their present elite members to accommodate the newcomers by giving them their due is thus a ubiquitous feature in world politics today.

Since a dissatisfied rising state can find enough avenues for satiating its burning desire to be one of the major powers in the current liberal multipolar world order, its foreign policy will be attuned to maximizing opportunities to find top spots and leverage in key international organizations. This is essentially one of the elements of grand strategy for what Andrew Cooper classifies as 'the big emerging powers' like India, which have left behind fellow middle powers in the last couple of decades due to sustained economic advances.⁶ The moves that such emerging powers like India (as well as the People's Republic of China and Brazil) make at international summits are followed with interest in the media and by world governments, precisely because of the sense that a *power transition* is on and that these countries are playing it out in the portals of multilateral organizations in Geneva, New York or Washington, DC. India's approach to the UN and the responses it receives from the world body must be contextualized in this global background of movement of power towards multipolarity and the bid to democratize hitherto oligopolistic forums that rhetorically preached equality of all sovereign states. The first half of this chapter contains a history of India's relations with the UN in select security and political economy issue areas. The later part of the chapter homes in on the current scenario, wherein New Delhi is pushing desperately to be given more authority within the UN system. In the process, it aims to highlight the bitter realities of how accumulating power changes the attitude and behaviour of a state towards international organizations and vice versa.

Shifting attention, constant frustration

By virtue of being the so-called 'jewel in the crown' of the British Empire, India was one of only four non-sovereign territories that were founding members of the UN in 1945. Upon attaining independence, India brought to the UN its ideals of anti-colonialism, opposition to racial discrimination and non-alignment in the nascent Cold War, and tried to obtain a leadership position within the organization by appealing to the universal morals enshrined in the UN Charter. In the words of its globally conscious first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, India would 'endeavour to play that role in its [the UN's] councils to which her geographical position, population and contribution towards peaceful progress entitle her'.⁷ Nehru amassed *soft power* for India through diplomatic blitzes at the UN during the 1950s, immersing the Indian delegation in New York and Geneva in activities such as mediation to end the Korean War, the Vietnamese war of independence, and the second Arab–Israeli war over Suez. Nehru also committed Indian military personnel to sensitive UN peace-keeping missions in the Middle East, Africa and the Mediterranean, when the concept of multinational armies under UN aegis to preserve international peace was just taking off. Through an extremely active presence in important organs of the UN, India of the Nehru era seemed to be making up for its economic

and military weakness through stellar institutional contributions to building the post-war world. While this strategy was never explicit, there was a realization up to the 1960s that India could only garner international recognition by investing energies in strengthening multilateral organizations like the UN rather than through typical IR *realism* self-help stratagems of bullying and exploitative behaviour that are the hallmarks of Great Powers.

None the less, Nehru's inherent internationalist faith in the UN and instinctive adherence to its principles proved costly on some occasions due to the power play inherent in an organization that had been crafted to accommodate and reward Great Powers of the time, such as his decision to refer Pakistan's intervention ("invasion") in disputed Kashmir to the UN Security Council in January 1948. The United Kingdom, which was hoping to avoid being seen as unfriendly to a Muslim state after the creation of Israel, used pressure tactics on its allies France, Canada and the USA to support the Pakistani viewpoint that Kashmir's accession to India was disputable and had to be put to the test of a plebiscite.⁸ Nehru's hope that the UN would unconditionally instruct Pakistan to vacate the one-third portion of Kashmir that its tribesmen and army had occupied fell flat in the face of geopolitical manoeuvrings and cross-issue linkage. To this day, Indian strategic commentators and rightist critics of Nehru bemoan his cardinal mistake of taking the Kashmir dispute to a UN that was packed with pro-Pakistani partisan powers.⁹ According to Brahma Chellaney, 'Nehru did not appreciate that the UN was an institution of power politics, not an impartial police force'.¹⁰ As if a double reminder were needed that India was small fry in a UN dominated by crafty Great Powers divided into two ideological camps, New Delhi was disappointed to find that Security Council members the USA, United Kingdom and France tried to prevent it from forcibly absorbing the Portuguese colony of Goa in 1961.¹¹ But for the Soviet veto in favour of India, Goa could have become enmeshed in another Kashmir-like stalemate for decades, buffeted by the changing winds of Great Power alignments and preferences that were paralysing and hijacking the UN.

Nehru could have opportunistically capitalized on Cold War polarization at the UN to secure for India a Permanent Seat on the Security Council, but missed the boat twice in the 1950s to the perpetual dismay of future generations of Indians. In 1952 Washington offered India entry as the sixth Permanent Member, in order to keep China out of contention and to leave the Kuomintang of Taiwan in its place as the UN-recognized Chinese regime. Nehru, who was anxious then to accommodate Mao Tse Tung's China, rejected the offer on the grounds that it would sow divisions between New Delhi and Beijing, and would split Third World unity against Western neo-imperialism. In 1955 Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Bulganin issued a similar offer that would have entailed bypassing Maoist China and would have made India a veto-wielding member of the Security Council. Again, Nehru insisted on a stage-by-stage admission process wherein, 'we should first concentrate on getting [communist] China admitted', and 'then the question of India might be considered separately'.¹² Whether the feelers from Washington or Moscow to promote India to a Permanent Member of the Security Council could have carried the day by obtaining consensus in the badly riven Cold War heyday is far from certain, but the burden of hindsight is wearisome for Indians who fret today about not yet succeeding in gaining entry into the 'P' (Permanent Member) category of the highest institution for overseeing world security.

Disillusionment with the UN and its perceived inability to take the side of justice, as India saw it, kept mounting after Nehru, especially in the context of India's wars with Pakistan in 1965 and 1971. An India facing increasingly hostile threats from its northern neighbours deliberately lowered its interest in the UN because the heavily politicized organization was unable to come to the rescue on New Delhi's core national security concerns. Stanley Kochanek has shown how, between 1962 and 1976, 'bilateralism became the guiding principle of Indian

foreign policy', relegating the UN to just an 'arena for maintaining such contacts'.¹³ The USSR's backing was much more crucial than a slow and rigged UN Security Council when India obtained its greatest strategic victory by breaking up Pakistan into two and carving out independent Bangladesh.

Once India had tested its first 'peaceful' nuclear device in 1974, the UN's non-proliferation agenda became another irritant that forced New Delhi to view some units of the organization with distaste as fronts for imposing discriminatory regimes instead of promoting universal disarmament. The higher onus placed on preventing horizontal rather than vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons by the Security Council-affiliated International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) kept India out of rule-making and rule-obeying functions on an issue that went on gaining momentum as central to global security. As a 'nuclear pariah' that was not recognized as a weapons power and which was barred from accessing atomic fuel and technology, India could only make occasional forays at the UN by tabling aspirational proposals for universal disarmament.¹⁴ Non-proliferation continues to be a sore spot for India-UN relations because the organization's supreme minders happen all to be nuclear weapons states and are still eager to retain their oligopoly in weapons of mass destruction, the 'nuclear apartheid' argument advanced by Jaswant Singh in 1998.¹⁵ When India tested five nuclear devices in 1998, citing concerns over China's existing nuclear capabilities, the UN Security Council 'strongly deplored' the action and the General Assembly expressed 'dismay and disappointment', confirming Indian convictions that the organization was barking up the wrong tree due to the manipulation of its priorities by some P-5 (the five Permanent Members of the Security Council) members.

For several decades India has been further peeved over what it considers the UN Secretariat's propensity to 'interfere' in the Kashmir dispute, as if the latter were dancing to the tune of Pakistan's brief of internationalizing the conflict. A conventionally superior power that controls two-thirds of Kashmir, India always prized a bilateral solution to the Himalayan region's fate that would relatively favour New Delhi over Islamabad. Dragging in the UN is a threat to India, which knows from past experience that the organization could become a smokescreen for hostile Great Powers to meddle in Kashmir and revive options like 'self-determination' for Muslim residents of Kashmir. In 1998, shortly after India and Pakistan conducted tit-for-tat nuclear tests, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan deputed a three-member team to travel to South Asia and defuse tensions by encouraging dialogue. New Delhi reacted with characteristic defensiveness by declining to receive the visitors and reminding the UN that, 'there was no scope for a third-party involvement of any nature whatsoever in respect of India's relations with Pakistan'.¹⁶ Indian defiance of the UN's good offices was repeated during the 1999 quasi-war for Kargil between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, when Annan proposed deputing a special envoy to mediate. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was determined to avoid a 1948-like fiasco. He 'summarily rejected' Annan's right to interfere in the matter and ordered Indian military operations to continue until all the Pakistani intruders were flushed out.¹⁷ The memory of a UN that tended to apportion blame equally between aggressors and aggressed, either due to technical reasons of wishing to appear as a neutral international organization or owing to pushing and pulling by Great Powers with vested interests in South Asia, comes reflexively to Indian foreign policy-makers.

The continued presence of a UN Military Observer Group (UNMOGIP) along the India-Pakistan border to monitor cease-fire violations has not pleased India since 1972, when New Delhi extracted verbal promises from a war-defeated Islamabad to stick to purely bilateral avenues for mutual problems. Convinced that the UNMOGIP's *raison d'être* has expired, India restricts its activities on Indian territory and hosts it with utmost reluctance. In 2001 the thorny presence of unwelcome UN observers on the Indian side of Kashmir erupted in controversy

when their Austrian chief publicly described the valley as a tormented place, accused India and Pakistan of indulging in 'political games', and went to the extent of commenting that the USA might have to get involved to resolve the vexing issue. India responded furiously and compelled the Austrian to issue an apology for 'stepping out of mission brief' and 'causing discomfort' to the authorities in New Delhi.¹⁸ From the Indian perspective, a line had been crossed leading to a direct affront to its sovereignty.

Periodically, India also bristles at reports or remarks of UN offices that call for independent investigations into accusations of civilian killings in Kashmir by Indian army personnel. In 2008 the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) released a statement asking India to, 'comply with international human rights principles in controlling the demonstrators' during an upsurge in anti-India protests by Kashmiri Muslim outfits. New Delhi snapped back that the comments were 'uncalled for and irresponsible', and that the UN should be monitoring incidents in Kashmir where innocent civilians were being victimized by Islamist terrorists.¹⁹ In July 2010 a release that the 'secretary general is concerned over the prevailing security situation there [in the Kashmir Valley] over the past month', brought immediate comments from India that this was 'gratuitous advice', and a UN semi-retraction that this was guidance rather than a statement on the part of Bang Ki-moon, and had been taken out of context by India.²⁰

As countering terrorism turned into a central concern at the UN after the terrorist attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001, India has vigilantly opposed UN departments and branches that suggest that there are 'root causes' of terrorism, like socio-economic backwardness or identity-based discrimination and that they must be primarily redressed. In 2002 New Delhi warned the UN General Assembly against the UNHCHR's advisories seeking to provide justification for terrorist violence by causally linking it to absence of rule of law or self-determination.²¹

Comeback via counter-terrorism

As a longstanding sufferer of *jihadist* terrorism, India had drafted a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) as early as 1996 for the General Assembly committee, but it required a massive strike at the heart of the USA in 2001 for the issue to rise up the ladder of priorities. Sensing a global rule-making chance that had been denied to India in other domains of international security like nuclear weapons, New Delhi plunged headlong into redrafting its CCIT and winning consensus from other UN members to finalize a treaty that would buttress India's fight against violent *jihad* and embarrass its state sponsors. The US-led global 'war on terrorism' created a new normative environment at the UN which was amenable to stewardship on the issue by a rising power like India, which reminded everyone else that it was the worst victim of the scourge of terrorism. By March 2010 India had a 'text on the table' for adoption by the UN and was pressing for its adoption, canvassing far and wide in world capitals.²² Counter-terrorism was thus seized upon by India in the last decade when the iron was hot at the UN level, displaying an activism for multilateral outcomes in the sphere of international peace and security that was missing since Nehru's days. The greater self-confidence India had acquired since being bracketed as one of the emerging economic power centres of the world was visible in its shepherding of the UN's incipient counter-terrorism regime. With India being taken more seriously in different world forums as an Asian giant that was growing at a respectable pace, the same UN system that had seemed unfair and captured by Great Powers for ages could now become a receptive institutional venue at which New Delhi might translate its steadily building strength into global governing power.

A causal relationship between a state's increasing power and the degree of its interest in shaping the agenda of international organizations is straightforward. However, it must be

qualified by the caveat that preponderant powers might totally bypass institutional channels and not care for the collective opinion of the international community. The proclivity of the USA to go it alone in war and 'humanitarian intervention' began in President William (Bill) Clinton's second term, threatening the centrality of the UN Security Council as the ultimate arbiter of world order. Some Indian commentators, schooled in multilateral ethics, were shocked at New Delhi's apparent acquiescence at the turn of the millennium in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) bid to arrogate the term 'international community' and to undermine UN mechanisms.²³ The seeming absence of countervailing power against US unipolarity at that time may have, in fact, shaken India's customary deference to the UN on all non-India-related security problems. Washington went into unilateralist overdrive under President George W. Bush, putting paid to expectations at the end of the Cold War that a 'new world order' based on international law and organizations had arrived. However, it is worth noting that India rose in the last decade from a far lower baseline than the USA did during its post-Cold War 'unipolar moment'. The former lacked the military machine to pummel any of the sources of its external security threats into submission in the way the USA was trying in the 'war on terrorism'.

New Delhi's responses to repeated terrorist assaults traced to Pakistan have been marked by helpless restraint and agony rather than US-style frontal retaliation. Instead of turning the screws through proactive military moves that lacked UN sanction, New Delhi sought assurances from Washington that it would pressurize Islamabad to turn off the terrorist taps aimed at India.²⁴ Simultaneously, the Manmohan Singh Government tried to corner Pakistan at the UN level by bringing what it considered its dubious *jihad*-incubating foreign policy under the scanner of greater international scrutiny and disapproval. Lacking decisive policy instruments to silence Islamist extremism in its neighbourhood and having realized the traction of the US-Pakistani alliance for the war in Afghanistan, a power of India's medium stature saw value in championing UN-led global ripostes to the menace troubling it. Since the inter-related challenges of terrorism and warfare are not leaving the international limelight any time soon, one foresees that India's return to centre stage in this security issue area at the UN will last for some time and will roll back the post-Nehruvian decline in Indian involvement in the international organization. At the same time, the limitations of a counter-terrorism strategy that is merely institutional and not militarily punitive are nudging India into gaining an approval of sorts from the USA to prosecute retaliation on Pakistan or *jihadist* elements in Bangladesh if more spectacular terrorist attacks occur on Indian soil.²⁵ The bottom line since 1948 has been that India's security threats cannot be solved by banking on a UN that is the handmaiden of hostile or indifferent Great Powers.

South-South revival: elixir or burden?

Until now, we have chronicled the regional and global changes in power structure and normative climate that informed India's fluctuating interest in the UN's mandate to maintain international peace and security. It is equally important to examine the ups and downs in Indian-UN relations in the corollary sphere of international political economy. Assigned with the duty of accelerating the economic growth of poor countries, the UN system has spawned a wide variety of specialized agencies, funds and departments that cater to developmental themes and needs of the Global South. As a vastly populous developing country, India has been a recipient of billions of dollars of multilateral foreign aid disbursed through the UN's sub-organizations and affiliated international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for poverty reduction and improvement of life indices. From 1958 onwards, the World Bank's Aid-to-India Consortium

co-ordinated the bulk of loan transfers to India. Aid dependence on the UN family defined India's economic relationship with the world organization for decades during the country's long spell of a crawling 'Hindu rate of growth'. The fate of socialist planning of the economy until 1991, which was quixotically meant to foster self-sufficiency, was frequently tied to multilateral aid via UN pipelines. The utter failure of foreign aid-driven centralized planning was exposed by economist Shyam Kamath when he labelled India 'the World Bank's star patient' whose sickness could never be healed as long as Indian enterprises remained over-protected and uncompetitive.²⁶ Even after the Indian economy was unshackled in the last two decades, the World Bank harnessed deep connections within India's body politic, establishing direct relationships with state-level units of the Indian union and pumping in ever more aid. The anti-climax of India as a fast-growing emerging economy that is searching for a grander role in the world theatre but still stretching out a bowl as a top recipient of World Bank and UN Development Programme aid has been a national embarrassment that has not been felt by populist politicians in the country's provinces. Opinion-makers have argued forcefully for foreign exchange-flush India to disentangle itself from the international aid racket and gain in self-esteem as a rising power, but to little avail.²⁷

A small grace is that, after the global economic crash of 2008, India (along with Brazil and China) started lending huge sums to the crisis-hit IMF and pressed for a quid pro quo of greater voting shares in international financial institutions.²⁸ UN development agencies have also stressed the importance of dynamic emerging economies like India taking charge of delivering investment, technology and expertise to poorer countries of the Global South, i.e. acting as donors within South-South co-operation frameworks.²⁹

The rejuvenation of the South-South paradigm in the context of the booming BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) economies of the last decade has an altogether new meaning and edge that was lacking when the concept was unveiled at the UN after decolonization under the banner of 'Third World' solidarity. India has its own phalanx of multinational corporations that have accumulated enough capital to venture outwards and seal significant mergers and acquisitions overseas, especially in distant parts of the Global South.³⁰ The vast potential for South-South trade and sharing of technical know-how between India, China, Africa and Latin America is being fulfilled 'BRIC by brick' and has provided a tangible basis for realizing the old dream of former colonized parts of the world uniting for mutual benefit. There is also a discernible attempt on the part of bigger and more progressive economies of the Global South to engage in multilateral economic institution-crafting that falls outside the range of the Bretton Woods system and related UN agencies. Venezuela's bold ALBA initiative, which breaks with the World Bank's capitalistic model of economic development, has Asian counterparts with China in the driver's seat of various currency swap agreements and preferential trading arrangements.

However, India has been a lot less active in proposals for forming an 'Asian Monetary Union' (AMU) or in imagining a world without neo-liberal financial institutions, due to its own post-1991 political class's proximity to free market values. New Delhi's reluctance to think outside the box, even after the existing global economic architecture failed to anticipate and mitigate the worst downturn since the Great Depression, is a product of India's deeper integration into the capitalist world system and deliberate attempt not to upset the upswing in its relations with the USA. Despite sloganeering in favour of a 'multipolar world' and 'democratization of international relations', India is no longer a radical state that can lead thought or action on ridding the Global South of foreign aid-dependency or neo-colonial forms of economic exchange with the Global North. It is now firmly within the incrementalist camp of emerging powers that seeks admission and distinction *within* extant institutions, including the UN's organs. The Indian (and

to a lesser extent Brazilian and Chinese) projection is that the international system would automatically become fairer and more democratic if emerging economies were incorporated into positions of higher responsibility in pre-existing institutions. In other words, India prefers the current global institutional status quo in terms of substantive ideological orientation, but seeks changes in form, like membership and representation.

It bears a reminder that India of the 21st century is an entirely different kettle of fish from the firebrand socialist India that used to grab the soapbox inside some UN forums to seek a leftward turn for the world organization's priorities. As one of the paladins of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), India was the first to launch policy proposals in the 1960s at the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) for just and equitable relationships between exploitative Northern states and repressed Southern states on trade in raw materials and primary commodities. India was at the forefront of adoption by the UN General Assembly in 1974 of the motto, a 'New International Economic Order', to end neo-colonial economic practices by Great Powers in the Global South. Well into the 1980s, 'to use UNCTAD and other international economic institutions for securing more beneficial economic policies in favour of the interests of developing countries [...was] a fundamental objective of India's economic diplomacy'.³¹ Since neo-Marxist dependency theory found a safe haven in UNCTAD, it was natural for socialist India to strive to be seen in the limelight in this intergovernmental body even when New Delhi had minimized involvement in the UN's Great Power-controlled security gatherings. As long as India self-identified itself as a tireless worker for justice on behalf of the Global South and an eager convener and mobilizer of the G-77 bloc inside the UN, its profile in the economic policy-making side of the organization was outstanding. Great Powers had monopolized the peace-and-security minding organs of the UN and left some freedom for articulators of the views of the Global South to give vent to their grievances via UNCTAD and the General Assembly, which were treated with contempt by Western states as glorified talking shops. India earned a reputation in these alternative UN venues up to 1991 as a moralistic grandstander that punched above its weight by using the bully pulpit. However, once the Indian economy privatized and the state jettisoned socialism in all but name, New Delhi invested less in pillorying the capitalist world system at the UN and spoke more avidly as a convert to economic globalization. In the unipolar world of the 1990s India did or said nothing at the UN that set it apart from the chorus about the inevitability of globalization and the benefits it would accrue.

This trend has accelerated in the new century, with India no longer singing the tune of New International Economic Order or burdening itself with the mantle of a born leader of the G-77 at the UN. It would be fair to argue, however, that a democratic transitioning market economy like India faces a global identity crisis that is neither socialist nor fully convinced of the virtues of untrammelled free markets. Treading a nebulous ground and unsure of itself, India has adopted a dual identity on international political economy. It shows signs of behaving like a mature capitalist Great Power that tries to promote its own corporations and trade interests world-wide through self-interested action, but retreats into the safety of numbers provided by the G-77 (as of 2010, it had UN member states) where it suits a particular issue area. For instance, India rediscovered some of its old 'Third Worldist' solidarity as a bargaining tool in multilateral negotiations for the stalled Doha Round of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Although a state that prefers to be on the right side of the USA on some foreign policy issues, India's commerce minister in 2007, Kamal Nath, dug in his heels with fellow developing countries against unfair Western subsidies at a WTO meeting, earning the ire of the US Trade Representative, Susan Schwab, as 'the villain of the piece' who scuppered the Doha Round.³² Sensing a commonality of interests with an assertive group of states from the Global South, India has not

hesitated to use the card of 'Third World' collective action to scuttle international economic deals that would hurt its exporters.

The UN-centred G-77 has thus found new non-UN bases in organizations like the WTO, which are arguably more consequential than UNCTAD or the General Assembly in the current age. If India's huffing and puffing inside the UN against an iniquitous world economy fetched some brownie points for it as a spokesperson for the Global South, it is today able to garner more attention and grudging respect from Great Powers at the WTO. The formation of small logjam-breaking diplomatic conclaves at the WTO like the G-4 (USA, EU, Brazil and India), speak to India's relatively enhanced status. Unlike the UN, where international laws are often bent to accommodate the whims of Great Powers, rules-based organizations like the WTO offer India a better chance to convert its economic preferences into policy. Indian trade lawyers have won several cases at the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) against mightier forces like the USA and EU, an unthinkable outcome had the conflict raged inside the UN system. On trade issues, the trend of India devoting ever more resources to the WTO while downsizing its South-South advocacy inside the UN system is set to intensify as the country's trade profile and interests broaden.

However, the new issue domain of global environment policy that has risen up the ranks of key international concerns over the last decade necessitates a renewed engagement by India with the concerned segments of the UN. Unlike the WTO, there is no UN-independent international organization or regime to regulate and reverse the ticking time bomb of climate change. Inter-state efforts to co-ordinate a reduction in carbon emissions and transfer green technology to poor countries are being spearheaded by a UN Secretariat (the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change—UNFCCC) located in Germany and informed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which was established by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). The structure of global environmental decision-making and India's own position as a rapidly growing emerging economy predicted to expand its carbon footprint thus propelled New Delhi to engage wholeheartedly with the relevant UN offices. In 2010 the relationship between India and the IPCC hit rough weather, despite the fact that the Panel's head was an Indian scientist, R.K. Pachauri, who had been nominated by the Government of India and had been backed by the USA in 2002. India's environment minister, Jairam Ramesh, openly questioned the IPCC's projection of early disappearance of the Himalayan glaciers as 'not based on an iota of scientific evidence', and as scare tactics for which the Panel 'has to do a lot of answering'.³³ The Indian rebuff came close on the heels of an incident of compromised e-mails from the Panel's experts, which strengthened climate sceptics' claims that exaggeration and alarmism were being deployed by UN scientists to rush states into committing to deeper carbon emission cuts. As an important hold-out, along with China, on agreeing to mandatory emission cuts for developing countries, India is wary of scientific claims that entail severe adjustment costs and loss of competitiveness for its growing industries.

As in the case of trade talks, the Indian line is to adhere to the Global South position that there must be 'differentiated responsibilities' between the advanced industrialized polluters and late industrializers whose right to economic development should not be constrained by any international treaty. However, India finds itself in an odd bind when it invokes a joint Global South stance on climate change because the G-77 is itself split on this topic. Small island nations and least developed sub-Saharan African states are anxious for an ambitious international agreement that would force richer developing countries to cut emissions. When the BASIC group (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) entered into a face-saving Copenhagen Accord with the USA in December 2009 at the failed UN climate change Copenhagen Conference, and justified it as 'good for the entire developing world', the rest of the G-77 slammed what

they considered a betrayal by their erstwhile leaders.³⁴ So, while India attempts to wear multiple hats at the UN, including that of Third World frontbencher on an *à la carte* basis, the strategy can backfire due to the complexity of new global problems and the differential rates of economic growth within the Global South. Ambiguity about India as a genuine representative of the G-77 at the UN is perhaps inevitable, but it is sure to leave New Delhi without a bell-wether portfolio in the organization.

The final frontier

India's concerted bid to be admitted as a veto-wielding 'P' member of the Security Council is the single most watched issue within the country when it comes to the UN organization as a whole. As the sanctum sanctorum and prime custodian of international law with more political powers than any other entity in the international system, the Security Council is a bull's eye for India to target. The demand for India's inclusion in a reformed Security Council keeps getting shriller as the country persists with large personnel contributions to UN peace-keeping missions and leapfrogs out of mediocre economic performance into an Asian giant with a pluralistic democratic political system to boot. However, entrenched resistance and mixed signals of existing P-5 members doused high hopes that India's long battle to be made a permanent member with veto power might finally fructify in around 2006.³⁵

Since then, the process of enlargement has got stuck, with the USA never openly supporting India's candidature, and China reluctant to give a free pass to rivals like India or Japan to walk in with power parity. Apart from the stonewalling of some P-5 veto holders, Indian diplomacy has also struggled to secure endorsements from the prerequisite two-thirds of members of the General Assembly to carve out new permanent seats. All has not been smooth sailing for the G-4 frontrunners (India, Brazil, Germany and Japan) in cobbling together adequate bloc votes from within and beyond their own regions. Stefan Schirm has coined a telling phrase for the G-4's vain hunt: 'leaders in search of followers', i.e. rising powers that fail to convince their respective neighbouring states and regional organizations that their elevation will be a win-win proposition that would benefit said neighbouring states.³⁶ Pakistan and the rest of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) countries remain barriers to India's race to find its cherished spot at the horseshoe table in New York, an objective reality that New Delhi cannot easily overcome.

Some diplomatic insiders suggest that India needs to show greater flexibility on key security issues for its Permanent Membership drive to regain momentum. Hints were dropped by US Senator John Kerry in the run up to the 2006 time-line for Security Council enlargement, that India must sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) for Washington to approve New Delhi's candidacy.³⁷ A former US arms control official repeated Kerry's arguments in 2009 that, 'resuming nuclear testing or not signing the CTBT [Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty] could affect its [India's] chances for a permanent seat in the UNSC'.³⁸ A former US career diplomat, Howard Schaffer, also recommended in 2009 that India's crusade for the seat should be seconded by the USA, 'in return for New Delhi agreeing to genuine and enforceable concessions on the Kashmir issue'.³⁹ More generically, the USA has hedged its bets on India as a reliable pro-Western partner and does not wish to encourage India's permanent entry into the Security Council without the assurance that it will side with US positions as assuredly as the United Kingdom and France do. For the same reason, the USA voted against India's high-profile candidate for the post of UN Secretary-General in 2006, Shashi Tharoor, and expended its diplomatic might to lobby for a putatively more pliable South Korean nominee, Ban Ki-moon.⁴⁰ The notion that there is a price to be paid in terms of national security or foreign policy

autonomy for getting into the Security Council is unpalatable to India, which, as we saw earlier in this chapter, prioritizes territorial integrity over and above platitudes about adhering to UN resolutions or advice. Admittedly, India's home affairs minister, P. Chidambaram, has exuded confidence that the country's persistent diplomacy and economic vigour will propel it into the Security Council in this decade.⁴¹ However, a more likely scenario is that India drops this ball for a more propitious moment and concentrates on other, more open international organizations that promise quicker returns and responsiveness to New Delhi's growing clout.

Conclusions

A UN Security Council without the constant attendance of India might be an anomaly that is eventually corrected, but the plenitude of international institutions in the contemporary world's thickset governance architecture means there is life outside the UN. India will do commendably if, while waiting for its red letter day in New York, it participates with gusto in new security and economic institutions like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the East Asia Summit (EAS), which are sprouting in its *extended neighbourhood*. How India shuffles its deck at the G-20—which has been declared the premier international institution to manage the global economy—is going to be more widely followed than India's routine omissions and commissions inside the UN. The vicissitudes of international alliances, configurations and structures since colonized India's Ramaswamy Mudaliar signed the UN Charter in June 1945 prove beyond a doubt that the surest route to the hub of global policy-making emanates from a combination of national power accumulation and prescient foreign policy planning that dovetails the prevailing institutional ethos. If India understands its own capacities, grows in self-awareness of its peculiar strengths, and executes pointed actions that carry it from the semi-periphery to the centre of international institutions, the icing on the cake of a Permanent Seat in the UN Security Council will be the beginning, not the end, of a national quest to shape global governance for the planet.

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