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UN Security Council Reform

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## UN SECURITY COUNCIL REFORM

### In News

- More than three decades after the debate first started over fundamental reforms at the United Nations (UN), the issue appears to have resurfaced afresh.

### United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

- It is **one of the UN's six main organs** and is aimed at maintaining international peace and security.
- It held its first session on 17th January 1946 in Westminster, London.
- **Headquarters: New York City.**
- **Membership:** The Council is composed of 15 Members:
  - ♦ **Permanent members with veto power:** China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- More than 50 United Nations Member States have never been Members of the Security Council.
- **UNSC elections:**
  - ♦ Each year the General Assembly **elects five non-permanent members** (out of 10 in total) **for a two-year term.**
  - ♦ The **10 non-permanent seats** are distributed **on a regional basis** as follows:
    - Five for African and Asian States.
    - One for the Eastern European States.
    - Two for the Latin American and Caribbean States;
    - Two for Western European and other States
  - ♦ To be elected to the Council, candidate countries **need a two-thirds majority of ballots of the Member States** that are present and voting in the Assembly.
  - ♦ The UNSC elections were traditionally held in the General Assembly hall with each of the 193 member states **casting its vote in a secret ballot.**
- Reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) encompasses five key issues:
  - ♦ Categories of membership,
  - ♦ The question of the veto held by the five permanent members,
  - ♦ Regional representation,
  - ♦ The size of an enlarged Council and its working methods, and
  - ♦ The Security Council-General Assembly relationship.

### Need for UN reforms

- **Non-representative Council membership:** When the UN was founded in 1945, the Council consisted of 11 members out of a total UN membership of 51 countries; in other words, some 22% of the member states were on the Security Council.
  - ♦ Today, there are 193 member-states of the UN, and only 15 members of the Council — fewer than 8%.
  - ♦ So, many more countries, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the membership, do not feel adequately represented on the body.
- **Continuing privilege:** Politically, it is untenable that the five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) enjoy their position, and the privilege of a veto over any Council resolution or decision, **merely by virtue of having won the position 76 years ago.**
- **Im-balance of Power:** The composition of the Council also gives **undue weightage to the balance of power of those days.**
  - ♦ **Europe**, for instance, which accounts for barely 5% of the world's population, still controls 33% of the seats in any given year (and that does not count Russia, another European power).
- **More financial contribution of non permanent members:** There are countries whose financial contributions to the UN outweigh those of four of the five permanent members.

- ◆ For example, Japan and Germany have for decades been the second and third largest contributors to the UN budget.
- **Unchecked conflicts:** It has been criticised that Conflicts like those in Sudan, Syria, Myanmar go largely unchecked at the UN.
  - ◆ Some countries and non-state actors benefit from the conflict economy. They launder money, sell arms, supply fuel and exploit natural resources.
  - ◆ Whereas in the past the UN has played an important role in international diplomacy over the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and the Middle East.
- **Unable to discharge basic functions:** The Security Council cannot discharge its basic function as one of the permanent members of the Security Council attacked its neighbour.
  - ◆ The Security Council should be the body to take action against the aggression. But because of the veto power, the Security Council cannot act.
  - ◆ The recent example being Russia's:
    - ◆ Russia, a veto-wielding permanent member of the UN, attacked Ukraine in February 2022.
    - ◆ Russia has vetoed UNSC resolutions on Ukraine.
    - ◆ Russia also voted against a resolution in the UNGA which called on countries not to recognise the four regions of Ukraine that Russia has claimed.
- **India's contribution & representation:** Opportunities are also denied to other states such as India, which by its sheer **size of population, share of the world economy, or contributions in kind to the UN** (through participation in peacekeeping operations, for example) have helped shape the evolution of world affairs in the seven decades since the organisation was born.

### Challenges of UN reforms

- **Demanding reforms is not beneficial for 'all':** The reform demanding states perceive that they **deserve a place on the Security Council**, and especially the countries which believe **their status in the world** ought to be recognised as being in no way inferior to the existing permanent members.
  - ◆ But, there are several who know they will not benefit from any reform.
    - For example, **the small countries** that make up more than half the UN's membership accept that reality and are content to compete occasionally for a two-year non-permanent seat on the Council.
- **Difficulties in bringing amendments:** Part of the problem is the bar to amending the UN Charter has been set rather high.
  - ◆ Any amendment requires a two-thirds majority of the overall membership, in other words 129 of the 193 states in the General Assembly, and would further have to be ratified by two-thirds of the member states.
  - ◆ The only possibility that has any chance of passing is that will
    - **Either**
    - Persuade two-thirds of the UN member-states to support it and not attract the opposition of any of the existing permanent five
    - **OR**
    - Even that of a powerful U.S. Senator who could block ratification in Washington.

### Way ahead

- As the debate keeps going round in circles for decades, gridlock continues in the Security Council.
- The UN is the only global system we have that brings all countries together on a common platform & we can not afford to let it fade into ineffectiveness and irrelevance.

## DAILY MAINS QUESTION

The Security Council is clearly ripe for reform to bring it into the second quarter of the 21st century. Analyse.

