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Q18

Discuss the impediments India is facing in its pursuit of a permanent seat in UNSC.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · GS II · 12 marks · International Institutions

Important International institutions, agencies and fora - their structure, mandate.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the impediments India is facing in its pursuit of a permanent seat in UNSC

Revision summary

A permanent seat needs a UN Charter amendment and P5 consent.

China is the sharpest great-power impediment; the United States has not driven a text.

G4 unity creates more opponents, including **Uniting for Consensus** and Pakistan.

Africa wants its own permanent seats under Ezulwini, so a G4-only deal will not pass easily.

Veto, Council size and the lack of text-based negotiations keep the bid as diplomacy, not drafting.

Introduction

- **The United Nations Security Council still reflects 1945:** five permanent members with a veto, and ten elected members. India seeks a permanent seat as a large democracy, a regular troop contributor, and a voice of the Global South. The demand is old; the impediments are structural, not a shortage of Indian talking points. Reform needs the P5, two-thirds of the General Assembly, and domestic ratifications. Each of those doors has a keeper who is in no hurry.

Body

Charter and procedure impediments

- **Articles 108 and 109** of the UN Charter make amendment hard. A permanent-seat change is a Charter amendment, not a General Assembly resolution that can be passed by a simple majority of the willing.
- The P5 must all agree. Any one of China, the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom or France can stop a text that dilutes their veto club.
- Even after a Charter text, national ratifications take years. There is no clock that forces New York to finish the job.

P5 and great-power politics

- China is the hardest single veto-wielding neighbour. Border conflict, the Dalai Lama, and China's wish to remain Asia's only P5 member make Beijing unenthusiastic, even when language is polite.
- The United States has spoken of expansion in principle, including for India, but has not championed a time-bound text. Bilateral warmth does not equal a drafted amendment.

- Russia supports India politically in statements, yet a reformed Council that also seats others could complicate Moscow's own veto politics.
- The United Kingdom and France are more open, partly because they want a Council that still looks legitimate, but they will not spend their last veto capital if Washington and Beijing are not moving.

Competing formulas and regional rivals

- The G4 (India, Japan, Germany, Brazil) want new permanent seats, with or without an immediate veto. Linking four candidacies multiplies opponents.
- **Uniting for Consensus** (Italy, Pakistan, South Korea, Argentina, Mexico and others) wants more elected seats, not new permanents. Pakistan's opposition is a direct South Asian block on India's claim.
- The African Union's **Ezulwini Consensus** demands two permanent African seats with veto. If Africa is not satisfied, a large voting bloc will not back a G4-only deal.
- Arab States, small island States, and Latin American splits add more veto-players in the Assembly even without a Charter veto.

Design fights that stall the text

- **Veto:** new permanents with a veto look like a second 1945; new permanents without a veto look like second-class seats. India has been flexible in public; others are not.
- **Size of the Council:** too large, and it cannot act; too small, and regions feel cheated.
- **Categories:** intermediate or longer-term elected seats are offered as a "stepping stone". Critics say that is a parking lot, not reform.
- Text-based negotiations in the Intergovernmental Negotiations have repeatedly failed to produce a single negotiating document with square brackets, which keeps the process as speeches.

India's own limits, stated honestly

- GDP, population and peacekeeping are necessary arguments, not sufficient ones. The Council is a power club, not a fairness tribunal.
- India is not a party to the NPT as a recognised nuclear-weapon State, which some P5 lawyers still use as a talking point, even after the civil nuclear opening.
- Capacity to take positions on every crisis, and to risk relations with Russia, the United States and the Islamic world at once, is the hidden cost of a permanent seat. Some capitals doubt that Delhi wants that daily heat.

Flow diagram

India permanent seat bid -> Charter Art 108 P5 ratification

India permanent seat bid -> G4 formula

G4 formula -> Uniting for Consensus Pakistan

G4 formula -> AU Ezulwini two African permanents

Charter Art 108 P5 ratification -> China and P5 inertia

Uniting for Consensus Pakistan -> No single text

AU Ezulwini two African permanents -> No single text

Conclusion

India's pursuit of a permanent UNSC seat is blocked by the Charter's amendment rule, P5 inertia especially China, the G4 versus **Uniting for Consensus** and African formulas, the veto design fight, and the absence of a real negotiating text. Merit in peacekeeping and demography does not move those gates. Impediments will ease only when a bargain among P5, Africa and the Assembly is more attractive than the 1945 status quo - a political, not a drafting, event.

Facts & figures

UN Charter **Articles 108-109**

Amendments need two-thirds of the General Assembly and ratification by two-thirds of members, including all P5.

P5

China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States; each holds a veto on substantive Council decisions and on Charter change.

G4

India, Japan, Germany and Brazil campaign together for permanent seats.

Uniting for Consensus

A group including Italy, Pakistan and others that opposes new permanent seats and prefers more elected members.

Ezulwini Consensus

African Union position seeking two permanent African seats with veto and additional elected African seats.

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