

## INDIA'S BID FOR A PERMANENT SEAT AT THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL - AVOIDING A WILSONIAN SETBACK

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### ABSTRACT

*As India gains increasing recognition as one of the world's major political, economic and military powers, attention is naturally drawn to the United Nations. In 2015 Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made it clear that India's intention was to gain a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council. The case for Indian permanent membership is in many ways self-evident. India is the world's largest functioning democracy and its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) already exceeds that of one of the Permanent members and soon will overtake a second. India's challenge is not its case but the inherent power of the permanent members. In P5 nations such as the United States and the United Kingdom, Indian success may reside with the Indian Diaspora's ability to move public opinion.*

**KEYWORDS:** UNO, Security Council, P5

When he spoke before a joint session of the United States Congress on June 8, 2016 Prime Minister Narendra Modi made only one reference to India's current role in the United Nations, noting that India was one of the largest contributors to UN Peace keeping missions. (*Indian Express*, Jun 10,2016) However, he chose not to use the occasion to punctuate India's interest in gaining a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council. In January 2015 United States President Barack Obama joined Prime Minister Narendra Modi in celebrating India's Republic Day. He used the occasion to articulate his position on India's bid for permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council, assuring Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Indian people by stating:

"So to ensure international security and peace, multilateral institutions created in the 20th century have to be updated for the 21st. And that's why I support a reformed United Nations Security Council that includes India as a permanent member."<sup>1</sup>

In a joint press conference held at the United Nations on September 28, 2015 Prime Minister Modi again thanked President Obama for his support for UN reforms that would lead to India joining the Security Council.<sup>2</sup>

The rationale for India entering this elite category that makes up the United Nations Permanent Five Members, known as the P5, does not try the mind. India is the world's largest democracy. It provides a model for other once colonized nations that remain saddled by authoritarian rule. India will overtake China as the world's most populated nation by 2022. It has the seventh largest nominal GDP, significantly outranking P5 member Russia. India's GDP will also overtake France, another P5 member, by 2020. India oversees the world's third largest army and is a nuclear power. Sufficient reasons exist for India's inclusion yet one must ponder the obstacles that might exist and that need to be addressed.

A key concept and approach within Peace and Conflict studies is the achievement of "ripeness," (Zartman, 2000) that is, recognizing the point at which two parties to a particular conflict arrive at the conclusion, perhaps one before the other, that their interests may be better solved at the negotiation table rather than through ongoing military action.

Such ripening of a conflict can be achieved in a variety of ways. Somehow, in the case of the United States and the Soviet Union, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev concluded a few weeks after talks seemed to break down in the October 1986 Reykjavik meeting with President Reagan (Kurtz,2014) that it was the time to end the standoff and begin to relate to the United States as not

only a rival but a potential partner. Perhaps it was because of the rapport between the two leaders. Perhaps it was because President Gorbachev perceived that the United States, because of its economy, would be the superior power in any face-off between the two. Perhaps it was because of frustration with the Soviet system. Whatever the reason, the two felt that it was the time to collaborate rather than only posture. In other words, a moment of ripeness had arrived. Both sides took advantage of it.

However, the concept of “ripeness” can also be applied to more than just conflict. Is the moment ripe to attempt to “close the deal” on India becoming a permanent member of the Security Council? Obviously there are still obstacles, including Pakistan’s outspoken reservations especially based on Kashmir-related issues. Furthermore there are issues with some Permanent Members but here let us look especially at the United States, which, in recent history, has repeatedly expressed support for the inclusion of India.

A brief history lesson. In March 1920 United States President Woodrow Wilson was dealt a devastating blow when his own Senate failed to support United States membership in the newly formed League of Nations. The League, a lynchpin of Wilson’s Fourteen Points drafted at the conclusion of World War I, served as a precursor to the United Nations and had a similar organizational structure. The League was, indeed the brainchild of Wilson, a distinguished political scientist and the former President of Princeton University. Wilson argued that the League was essential to prevent further global conflicts. Despite his success in convincing heads of state in Europe and Japan, Wilson could not prevail in the United States.

Because of the Treaty Clause (Article II, Section 2, and Clause 2) of the United States Constitution<sup>3</sup>, the US Senate had to approve Wilson’s proposal. Sensing strong Senate resistance, Wilson launched an ambitious national speaking tour in 1919, hoping to solicit popular support for his plan.<sup>4</sup> During the President’s tour on the West Coast, he suffered a devastating stroke and in 1920 the United States Senate would vote 49-35 against joining Wilson’s League. (Sidney and Nelson,2016)

Wilson faced opposition, on the one hand, due to fears that the League might lead the United States into unwanted wars. Irish-American civil society opposed the League because Wilson’s Fourteen Points did not embrace

Ireland’s bid for independence from the United Kingdom. ( French,2012) A quarter of a century later, the ravages of the Second World War fostered a climate which enabled the League’s successor, the United Nations, to win overwhelming US Senate support by a vote of 89-2. (Peter,2015)

Expanding the United Nations Security Council to include India (and possibly other nations) will most likely require approval of two-thirds of the United States Senate because of the aforementioned US Constitution Treaty Clause. A failure to gain United States Senate approval would oblige the United States to veto any resolution supporting India’s entry into the Security Council as a Permanent Member, even if the President of the United States supported the motion. Changing the composition of the Security Council would almost certainly be viewed as representing a substantive change to the United Nations Charter, which was ratified by the Senate on July 28, 1945. It would thus require United States Senate ratification once again.

India should not have to face a Wilsonian-like setback in its bid for Security Council permanent membership. The power of Diaspora-led civil society organizations in the United States is illustrated by the way in which Korean-Americans have helped to effect United States policy on the Comfort Women issue, a World War II issue related to the sexual abuse of Korean women and girls by the Japanese military, which Koreans consider unsettled. On December 28, 2015 Japan and Korea signed what Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe described as a “final and irreversible solution” (*Washington Post*,2015)to the comfort women controversy that has sharply divided the two nations since it came to the political forefront in the 1990s. “Comfort women” is a more benign way of referring to the tens of thousands of women, mostly Koreans, who were pressured into providing sex to Japan’s military during World War II. Less than fifty of these women are still alive today. As a part of the recent pact, Prime Minister Abe agreed to apologize to them and to provide a 1 Billion Yen (\$US 8.3 million) fund for them that will be administered by the Korean government.

The road to ripeness and to the agreement involved more than state-to-state diplomacy and the approach chosen by the Koreans may provide valuable lessons for India. A key battleground that the Koreans chose was not

just Tokyo or Seoul but the United States, where some twelve cities with significant Korean-American populations have erected monuments to the victims since 2010. The monuments indict Japan and they have gained groundswell American support, putting pressure on Japan to apologize, take responsibility for the mistreatment of the comfort women and provide compensation. In 2007 the momentum built by Korean-American civil society led to the passage of a non-binding resolution by the United States House of Representatives, calling on Japan to admit its culpability and provide compensation for the surviving victims and their families.<sup>5</sup> This culminated in a provision in the United States Congress' Spending Bill of 2014, which was signed into law by President Obama, calling for a special inquiry into Japan's handling of this matter. (*The Hankyorech*, Jan 17,2014)

Members of the United States Congress, Democrats and Republicans alike, roundly criticized Japan for failing to be forthright in addressing this issue. Buckling to pressure, Japan made it clear that in exchange for its apology and its financial contribution for the victims, it hoped to see an end to these indictments of its past history and even specifically called for a memorial that had been built near its Embassy in Seoul to be removed. (*Japan Times*, Nov 16,2015) Japanese government leaders have also demanded that "Comfort Women" statues in the United States should be removed. (*Time*, Feb 25,2014)

As it builds its campaign for a Security Council seat, India can learn from the approach used by the Korean government and the Korean Diaspora. India will want to present its case and, like Korea, seek to enlist the support of the Indian Diaspora in the United States and possibly in other countries with a significant population of citizens of Indian origin.<sup>6</sup>

There are approximately 1.8 million Korean-Americans in the United States today but there are some 3 million Americans of Indian origin. In his speech to Congress in June, Prime Minister Modi recognized pointed out that the United States and India also share "a unique" and dynamic bridge of three million Indian Americans."(*The Indian Express* 2016.) As Modi further noted, "Today, they are among your best CEOs; academics; astronauts; scientists; economists; doctors; even spelling bee champions." (*The Indian Express*,2016)At the proper moment, the Indian Diaspora can play a key role in

mobilizing U.S. support by presenting India's case to American political leaders, including the Senators who make the final call. The Indian Diaspora, the largest Diaspora in the world,(*Times of India*, Jan 14,2016) can play a similar role in the United Kingdom where the Indian Diaspora constitutes nearly 2% of the UK population.<sup>7</sup>

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## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup>See *The White House*, “Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister After bilateral Meeting,” <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/28/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-modi-india-after-bilateral>, retrieved on February 27, 2016.

<sup>3</sup>See *Charters of Freedom*, “Constitution of the United States,” [http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html); retrieved on March 2, 2016.

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<sup>5</sup>See House Resolution 121-110<sup>th</sup> Congress (2007-2008), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/house-resolution/121/text>; retrieved on March 2, 2016.

<sup>6</sup>See This includes Canada, the United Kingdom, Guyana, Surinam, Trinidad & Tobago, Belize, Seychelles, Fiji, Mauritius Singapore, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka.

<sup>7</sup>See *NDTV*, “Indian Diaspora makes significant contribution to UK’s GDP,” March 9, 2016, [ndtv.com/indians-abroad/indian-diaspora-makes-significant-contribution-to-uks-gdp-1285186](http://ndtv.com/indians-abroad/indian-diaspora-makes-significant-contribution-to-uks-gdp-1285186); retrieved on June 24, 2016.