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India's Exclusion from Permanent Membership:

The Strongest Case for UN Security Council Reform?

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Global Governance, Issue 4, No. 5.

Over the past week, Lithuania, Nigeria, Chile, Chad and Saudi Arabia were elected unopposed to five non-permanent member seats in the UN Security Council. For Lithuania, Chad and Saudi Arabia, this was their first opportunity to serve as members in what still is the most elite club in the world. Only a few hours later, Saudi Arabia, though hardly a state celebrated for its human rights record, rejected its seat, citing the Council's double standards and ineffectiveness in resolving crises as its reasons.

While this unusual development expectedly made headlines, caused shock and sparked debate the world over, the old and dusty question of UN Security Council Reform found itself recalled to the frontseat. As the ears of the West remained attuned to the mystical rhythms of the Arab Kingdom, the Russian President sang to the Indian Prime Minister the song India had been yearning to hear, again: the Security Council ought to be reformed to "reflect contemporary realities", and Russia strongly supported India's candidature for a permanent seat.[i]

That India remains excluded from permanent membership is curious when one considers that it was a key Allied Power when, during the Second World War, the UN was first conceived. At least in the West, however, although the War remains a familiar subject, the history of the UN and the early bonds that tied the UNSC to the major Allied Powers appear to be largely forgotten. Given the extent to which popular accounts of the War obsess over Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt, and the powers they represented, the contributions of non-Western Allies as well tend to be largely marginalised in the popular imagination.

It is, hence, not surprising that few in the West recognise the name of Chiang Kai-shek or remember China's bloody and protracted engagement on the side of the Allies.[ii] It is even less surprising that fewer still realise the connection between China's emergence as a victorious great power at the end and its permanent membership in the UNSC. More tragic

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though is the case of India, painfully excluded from a permanent seat at the high table of global power to this day, despite its military and economic prowess, post-War contributions to the UN and even key role in the Allied war effort. When one considers the origins of the UNSC, one would soon discover that India's exclusion may well be its greatest oddity.

India today is not just the second largest country by population and the seventh largest by area, but also the world's largest democracy, the third largest economy by purchasing power parity and a significant nuclear power with the third largest standing army and eighth highest military expenditure in the world. Moreover, since joining the UN in 1945, India has been the third largest contributor to UN peacekeeping missions. In 2011, Colum Lynch noted that more than 100,000 Indian troops had served in UN missions over the past 50 years, and that year itself, India had "over 8,500 peacekeepers in the field, more than twice as many as the UN's five big powers combined."^[iii]

The irony of its tragic exclusion from permanent membership in the UNSC is rendered all the more obvious when one refers back to the history of the Second World War and realises that India had been the greatest colonial supplier of manpower and materials to the British war effort. Indian troops had been deployed across Western Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and South and Southeast Asia, as also on the high seas. Due to the sheer size and strength of India's armed forces, as Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck who served as Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army and Middle East Command during the War observed, "without their aid, the war could not have been won."^[iv]

By 1945, the Indian Army, which comprised of a little less than 200,000 combatants in 1939, numbered over 2.5 million, emerging as the largest volunteer force in history. Around 700,000 of the nearly million combatants in the British Fourteenth Army in Burma (aka the "Forgotten Army"), then the largest single army in the Commonwealth and also the world, were Indian. ^[v] Official Indian army and navy histories reveal that over the same period, the Royal Indian Navy expanded from having 114 officers and 1732 ratings to 3014 officers and 27,433 ratings, while the Royal Indian Air Force rose from having 16 officers and 662 men to 28,500 personnel, including 1,600 officers.

By the end of the War, there were more than 24,300 Indians who lost their lives in military action, over 64,300 wounded, at least 11,750 still missing and around 3 million who perished in war-related famines. A further 65,000 or so were taken as prisoners of war in the Far East,

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and another 17,000, in the Mediterranean theatres.[vi] Besides, even in 1945, India was not just the second most populous state in the world and home to around a seventh of the world's population, but had also emerged as the fourth largest industrial power and the second largest creditor to Britain after the United States. Britain owed India £1.3 billion, over a third of what it owed to creditors overseas and around a fifth of its gross national product. [vii]

India's exclusion from permanent membership of the UNSC is even more curious when one considers the link between the Allies and the UN. On 1st January 1942, midway through the First Washington Conference, the major Allied Powers of UK, US, USSR and China, followed by 22 other Allies (including India) the next day, affirmed their commitment to the purposes and principles of the Atlantic Charter of 1941 and signed the Declaration by the United Nations pledging to employ their full resources against the Axis Powers, in cooperation with one another and without making a separate armistice or peace with enemies. In its earliest significant use, thus, the term 'United Nations' had been intertwined in its meaning with the Allies.

Around eighteen months later, in October-November 1943, the Moscow Conference would see the foreign ministers of the UK, US, USSR and China propose the founding of a new international organisation for the maintenance of international peace and security. During the conferences in Cairo and Tehran that ensued in November-December 1943, the US President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill would coordinate Allied military strategy with Chiang Kai-shek, leader of Chinese National Party, and Joseph Stalin, Premier of the USSR, respectively, and it would be at the conference convened at Dumbarton Oaks between August and October 1944 that the principles and plans for the new world organisation would be outlined.

The proposals involved setting up a General Assembly, a Security Council, an International Court of Justice and a Secretariat, as also an Economic and Social Council, with the Security Council serving as the apex body primarily responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security.[viii] The Security Council was to comprise of eleven seats, five permanent, and six non-permanent to which the General Assembly would elect member states for a two-year period. At the Crimean resort of Yalta in February 1945, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin would deliberate on the finer details, particularly the voting procedure in the Council, and declare their intention to convene a Conference of the United Nations in

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San Francisco in April, where the Charter of the United Nations would be signed.

As David Bosco expounded in *Five to Rule Them All*, the negotiations at Dumbarton Oaks were far from smooth, with the “Big Three” (UK, US and USSR) divided in their visions. Roosevelt had come to favour a centralised structure with clearly-dominant great powers able to effectively police the rest of the world and included at times economic development and human rights within its remit.[ix] Churchill appeared to have been driven most by concerns about the preservation of empire and envisioned a tiered model of regional councils overseen by a council of great powers that only intervened in extreme circumstances.[x] For Stalin, chiefly concerned with Soviet borders, security ought to have been the greatest concern, with the council small enough for the USSR to prevent decisions not in its interest. [xi]

The Big Three justified their permanent seats in the Security Council “by virtue of their exceptional responsibility for world security”. [xii] In addition, Roosevelt insisted that the permanent membership be expanded to include China, which the US saw as a key ally, despite British and Soviet skepticism about its status as a Great Power.[xiii] The British, likewise, advocated the extension of the privilege to France, despite its occupation during the War and American and Soviet apprehension, to fortify its own position in Europe.[xiv] In the successful endeavours to bring China and France on board, as well as in the unsuccessful attempt by the US to secure a permanent seat for Brazil, the patrons emphasised not just the candidates’ regional significance, but especially their contributions to the Allied war effort.

Although India, while still not a fully self-governing state or dominion, was deemed eligible to participate in the San Francisco Conference of 1945 and be recognised subsequently as a founder-member of the United Nations, its anomalous status and lack of a zealous sponsor (as had China and France) meant it would not be seriously considered for a permanent seat. That the Commonwealth had been represented in the Security Council through the inclusion of Britain, that many in India were more concerned with the question of Indian independence and that India punched much below its weight in the negotiations are other reasons why the matter of India’s place in the UNSC took the backseat. The imminent Partition would, of course, present further complications in the years to come.

Nevertheless, it were mainly the same imperial bonds which meant that India had been reluctantly drawn into one of the goriest wars in history when Britain declared war on

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Germany in 1939 that also meant its contribution would not be duly acknowledged in its own right, as China's were, once the War ended in 1945. In India, while the Congress Working Committee welcomed the measures taken to maintain international peace in a resolution passed on the San Francisco Conference, it lamented that the declaration with respect to non-self-governing people was "vague" and "unsatisfactory". Furthermore, it questioned the legitimacy of the Indian delegation at the conference, denouncing it as representing the alien Government and not the Indian people.[xv]

The Great Powers, the resolution observed, had only "strengthened and consolidated their own position in the world", showing no inclination to give up "the special powers and privileges they enjoy at the expense of the dependent peoples". It added, "The fact of India's dependence on foreign authority has resulted in giving her an anomalous position in an organisation of Sovereign States and deprived her of a permanent seat in the Security Council of the new organisation, which should be her due." When India announced its intention to apply for UNSC membership in October 1946, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, leader of the Indian delegation to the General Assembly, stressed, "We shall base our application on the part India played in the War and on India's geographical position." [xvi]

At the San Francisco Conference, while the Indian delegation would be instrumental in pushing for the recognition of the promotion of fundamental human rights and racial equality as one of the key purposes of the organisation, its chief interests otherwise lay in penalties for member states defaulting on financial obligations, criteria for selection of non-permanent members, inclusion of observers in the Security Council and provisions for economic and social cooperation.[xvii] In short, the Indian delegation, as suggested earlier, punched much below its weight, directing their effort mainly towards consolidating India's position in the General Assembly and as a worthy candidate for non-permanent member status in the UNSC rather than pushing for a permanent seat and recognition as a great power.

Although the non-permanent seats in the UNSC would be increased from 6 to 10 in 1963, permanent membership would not be expanded. While India was elected to a non-permanent seat 7 times since 1945, a permanent seat still eludes it. If its exclusion in 1945 was curious, its continued exclusion only establishes how outdated, unrepresentative and undemocratic the UNSC has become. That China remains the only non-Western power in the UNSC, while Germany, Japan and Brazil, which have since become the second, third and tenth largest donors to the UN budget, remain excluded, only prove the point. If one

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were to contend that it was their capacity to maintain international peace more than their status as major Allies that qualified the Permanent Five, the failures of the UNSC in resolving conflicts, whether in Rwanda, Darfur or Syria, undermine this contention more than any counter-argument could.

The objective here, however, is not simply to present a critique of the UNSC, but more so to highlight the hierarchical framework that underlies how the various Allies feature in our understanding of the War. It is impossible to entirely separate India's estrangement from the great-power status long afforded to China from the inadequate acknowledgement of its role as a wartime ally. This is not a call on the P5 to right history's wrongs by awarding India a sixth permanent seat; it is instead a call on Britain to take further steps in advancing the understanding of non-Western Allies' contributions to the British war effort and an exhortation to the international community, however it may be defined, to recognise why India's lack of a permanent seat is among the strongest arguments for UNSC reform.

In the light of India's experience, it also hopes to illustrate that perhaps one of the truest tragedies of Empire, thus, may have been the existential conundrum it presented to both the former coloniser and the formerly colonised. If, as the former US Secretary of State Dean Acheson observed, post-war Britain's greatest problem is that it "has lost an Empire and has not yet found a role", the same holds true for post-War India: India has gained independence from an Empire but still struggles to find its rightful role in the world order that has since emerged.

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[i] "Russia supports India's bid for permanent seat in UNSC", *The Economic Times*, 21 October 2013.

[ii] For more on Chiang Kai-shek and China's involvement, see Mitter, R., *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937-1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2013).

[iii] Lynch, C., "India threatens to pull plug on peacekeeping", *Foreign Policy*, 14 June 2011.

[iv] Auchinleck, C., "Preface", in Elliott, J.G., *A Roll of Honour: The Story of the Indian Army, 1939-1945* (London: Cassell, 1965).

[v] Barua, P., *Gentlemen of the Raj: The Indian Army Officer Corps, 1817-1949* (Westport,

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CT: Praeger, 2003), p.108.

[vi] Douds, G., "The Men who never were: Indian POWs in the Second World War", South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, Vol.27, No.2 (2004), p.189.

[vii] Tomlinson, B.R., The Political Economy of the Raj , 1914-1947: The Economics of Decolonisation in India (London: Macmillan, 1979), p.140.

[viii] Pamphlet No.4, Pillars of Peace (Carlisle Barracks, PA.: Book Department, Army Information School, May 1946).

[ix] Bosco, D., Five to Rule Them All: The UN Security Council and the Making of the Modern World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.14-5.

[x] Ibid., pp.16-7.

[xi] Ibid., p.18.

[xii] Russell, R., A History of the United Nations Charter: The Role of the United States, 1940-1945 (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1958), p.440.

[xiii] Bosco, Five to Rule, p.24.

[xiv] Ibid., p.26.

[xv] "Domination of Great Powers: Congress Executive on World Charter", Times of India, 17 July 1945, p.4.

[xvi] "India wants Security Council Membership: Application to be made to UNO Assembly", Times of India, 25 October 1946, p.1.

[xvii] Ramaswami Mudaliar, "Verbatim Minutes of the Third Plenary Session" (28 April 1945), UNIO, Documents, 1:245; "Suggestions presented by the Government of India for the Amendment of the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals", Document 2, G/14 (h), 4 May 1945, UNIO, Documents, 3:527.

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Please cite this article as:

Menezes, D. (2013). 'India's Exclusion from permanent Membership: The strongest Case for UN Security Council Reform?' Human Security Centre Global Governance, Issue 4, No. 5.