SPECIAL REPORT

no. 163

Maritime Security, Peacekeeping, and Counterterrorism: Pillars of India's UNSC Presidency

Aarshi Tirkey

Editor

OCTOBER 2021

Introduction

In August 2021, India took over the one-month presidency of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). According to the UNSC rules of procedure, the Council presidency rotates between each of the 15 members of the UNSC, in alphabetical order.[1] This is India's tenth tenure as the Council President; its next council presidency is scheduled for the month of December 2022. For the month of August, New Delhi highlighted three pillars— maritime security, peacekeeping, and counterterrorism — and organised three high-level signature meetings on these areas.[2]

As the UN organ tasked with maintaining international peace and security, the UNSC exercises a range of powers, and can adopt binding and non-binding documents to resolve disputes, enforce sanctions, and respond to illegal use of force. However, the UNSC does not take cognisance of every international crisis and only members of the council can influence the legislative calendar. Even as the work of the UNSC is grounded in procedure, agenda-setting remains a largely political process—a segment where the five permanent UNSC members (or P5)[a] play a crucial role.

---

a   The five permanent members of the UNSC are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

With the presidency of this powerful organ comes the responsibility to shape the Council's agenda and programme of work for 30 days. In their capacity, the Council president plays two roles: to discharge the responsibilities of the presidency, and to remain as the representative of their government before the UNSC.[3] Before the presidency begins, the Council presidency plans the monthly programme of work in consultation with the other members of the UNSC.[4] For August, the programme reflected some of India's imperatives in the neighbourhood and beyond—i.e., the developments in Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, and the Middle East, as well as the review of ongoing UN peacekeeping missions.[5]

In this special report, each chapter details the outcomes and advances made during India's presidency under the three pillars of maritime security, peacekeeping, and counterterrorism. The authors analyse the importance of the three pillars to India, and to the UN Security Council in the context of the complex geopolitical realities of the 21st century. In the first chapter, Pratnashree Basu discusses the outcomes of the UNSC's first high-level debate on maritime security, thereby linking the importance of maritime security to overall collective security efforts being undertaken by the UNSC. While discussing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's five foundational principles for collaborating on maritime security, this chapter also looks at the importance of collective efforts to protect the global commons that are the oceans.

In the second chapter, Kartik Bommakanti examines India's longstanding commitment to peacekeeping missions under the UN, and underscores how India's participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs) has helped cement India's role as a responsible global power. Given how India has been one of the largest contributors to UNPKOs over the years, the focus on peacekeeping during August was not unexpected. This chapter also details two crucial outcome documents adopted during India's presidency: on technology for peacekeeping, and accountability for crimes against UN Peacekeepers. It displayed India's proactive role in shaping peacekeeping norms.

Kabir Taneja discusses the third pillar on counterterrorism in the final chapter of this report. India's presidency took place in the backdrop of a watershed event: the capture of Afghanistan by the Taliban on 15 August. Following this, the UNSC immediately seized the matter and adopted UN Resolution 2593 on the situation in Afghanistan, calling on the Taliban to prevent any terrorist group or individual from using the country to plan and execute terror attacks against any other state. With a brief overview of previous counterterrorism initiatives and their progress at the UN, this chapter looks at how India built its counterterrorism narrative during its presidency.

India's month-long presidency ended with substantive outcomes on key global issues, including a strongly worded resolution on the situation in Afghanistan.[6] India's focus areas—as compared to those it highlighted during its past presidencies—reflect the immediate developments in the world stage, such as the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Though the UNSC is frequently criticised both for its inability to confront controversial issues and its archaic membership structure, it continues to be the sole global body that wields power for the maintenance of global peace and security. While at the helm of the UNSC for a month, India displayed leadership, navigated the complexities of modern geopolitics, and through statements and resolutions, underlined its commitment to global governance.

- Aarshi Tirkey

Endnotes

1   United Nations Security Council, "Provisional Rules of Procedure", https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/repertoire/provisional-rules-procedure

2   Kadambini Sharma, "India Takes Over UN Security Council Presidency For August, Thanks France", August 1, 2021, https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/india-assumes-un-security-council-presidency-for-august-thanks-france-2499908

3   Istvan Pogany, "The Role of the President of the U. N. Security Council", The International and Comparative Law Quarterly 31 (1982): 232.

4   "The UN Security Council Handbook: A User's Guide to Practice and Procedure", Security Council Report, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/the-un-security-council-handbook-by-scr-1.pdf

5   "Provisional Program of Work of the Security Council: September 2021", United Nations Security Council, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil/files/programme_of_work.pdf

6   Press Trust of India, "India's Presidency of UNSC ends with 'substantive' outcomes on key global issues", September 1, 2021,   https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indias-presidency-of-unsc-ends-with-substantive-outcomes-on-key-global-issues/article36219690.ece

1

Full Sail: India on Maritime Security at the UNSC

Pratnashree Basu

As part of India's presidency of the UNSC for the month of August (2021), Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired the first ever High-Level Open Debate on 'Enhancing Maritime Security – A Case for International Cooperation.' Held on 9 August, the debate marked the first single-agenda discussion at the UNSC and was an attempt at a holistic approach to the issue of cooperation on maritime security. It witnessed the participation of several heads of state and government, representatives of important regional organisations, and level briefers from the UN System.[1]

One of the six key organs of the United Nations, the Security Council is tasked to preserve international security. Within this ambit, the subject of maritime security, although relatively new, is a significant component. The debate, therefore, is timely given the heightening importance of boosting maritime trade and securing sea lanes of communication. It has also become an imperative to build resilience against maritime natural disasters and non-traditional security threats such as terrorism and piracy, through the implementation of substantive and practicable solutions.
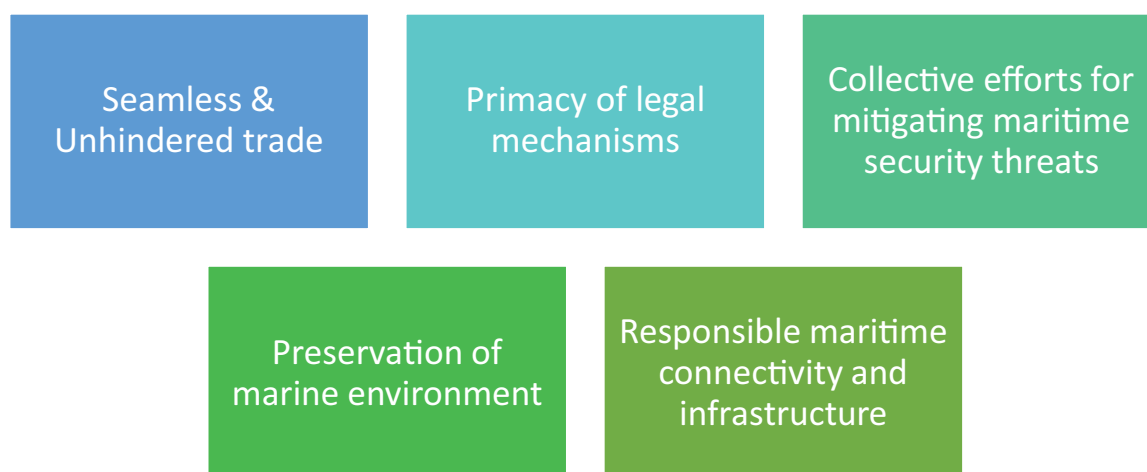
Why the debate is important

During the High-Level Debate, Prime Minister Modi called upon the UNSC members to make maritime security a collective effort. He laid out five broad principles around which to structure the debate and form the framework for future collaboration:[2]

a. The removal of barriers to legitimate maritime commerce and encouragement of the active flow of trade through the establishment of a stable, secure, and free maritime domain;

b. The salience of international maritime law;

c. Collective efforts in dealing with natural disasters and maritime threats posed by non-state actors—these include regular patrols to prevent piracy, information sharing, strengthening maritime domain awareness, and capacity-building for responding to both natural calamities such as cyclones and tsunamis, and maritime pollution;

d. Preserving the maritime environment and maritime resources. Given that oceans have a direct impact on climate, this principle seeks to promote the sustainable exploitation of marine resources and measures to prevent maritime pollution.

e. The establishment of responsible maritime connectivity and requisite infrastructure to enhance maritime trade in keeping with global norms and standards.

As an outcome of the deliberations, a Presidential Statement was unanimously adopted underscoring the primacy of international maritime law, in particular the UNCLOS, as the foundational legal framework for maritime engagements. The statement also encourages regional and international cooperation to offset threats to maritime safety; urges concerted efforts towards curbing transnational organised crime at sea; highlights the need for capacity-building and information-sharing to fill gaps in maritime governance; and calls for cooperation for the protection of critical and cross-border infrastructure.[3] Additionally, the Statement calls on member countries to implement the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code; ratify, accede to, and implement the 2000 United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; and work with the International Maritime Organisation to promote safe shipping.[4]

Figure 1:
Foundational Principles for Collaboration on Maritime Security

Seamless & Unhindered trade	Primacy of legal mechanisms	Collective efforts for mitigating maritime security threats

Preservation of marine environment	Responsible maritime connectivity and infrastructure

Source: Author's own – constructed from India's framework as conveyed at the UN Open Debate

For India, the theme of the debate, the debate itself, and the country's presidency of the UNSC are of significance for various reasons: First, it was the first time that the UNSC had made maritime security its single-point agenda–this indicates the degree of importance being accorded to the issue. Second, that India was called upon to preside over and lead the deliberations is testament to the UNSC's confidence in the country's maritime diplomacy and outreach. Third, it was a recognition of India's enhanced capabilities and an acknowledgement of its willingness to engage with the wider Indo-Pacific neighbourhood which has taken centre-stage in global geopolitical activity.

Fourth, the debate was the first comprehensive attempt at addressing maritime security with the adoption of an outcome statement – earlier attempts[5] (by Vietnam in April 2021 and by Equatorial Guinea in February 2019) had limited success. Finally, the debate, which is one of three signature events that took place during New Delhi's presidency, was a unique opportunity for the country to help shape UN agenda.

Indeed, in recent years, New Delhi has been increasingly boosting its resources and capabilities in maritime diplomacy, connectivity and trade (both on the domestic front and on international forums). It has even expanded its strategic maritime reach beyond the immediate Indian Ocean Region. Initiatives that deserve mention[6] include SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) which aims to establish cooperative measures for the sustainable use of oceans and ocean resources. There is also the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, which comprises seven pillars of maritime security—i.e., Maritime Ecology; Maritime Resources; Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation; and Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport. Open waters and unhindered trade flows are the key drivers of partnerships that are taking shape across the world, including in the Indo-Pacific.

In his remarks during the debate, US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken pointed out that while threats from non-state actors (e.g armed robbers and illicit maritime traffickers) have for decades plagued the waters around the Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Guinea, the Caribbean Sea and the Eastern Pacific, encroachments on maritime sovereignty and unlawful advancement of maritime interests have been on the rise more recently. These incidents are occurring in South China Sea, for instance, as well as the Black Sea, and Sea of Azov. They necessitate the strict enforcement of international maritime law.[7] Citing the success of initiatives like Africa-led Yaounde Architecture for Maritime Safety and Security, the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia, and India's Maritime Fusion Centre,[8] Blinken emphasised the efficacy of coordinated and comprehensive responses to maritime governance.

Maritime Security and the UN

In recent years, partnerships at bilateral and multilateral levels outside of the UN have been formed to tackle these various aspects of maritime security. Under the aegis of the UN, efforts towards addressing threats to matters maritime have been undertaken as well, especially over the past decade. During this period, the UNSC has issued a significant volume of regulations and statements (see Table 1) on maritime security in regional as well as national contexts; expanded the scope of the UNCLOS; and addressed several other issues ranging from human trafficking to biodiversity loss. Massive threats are posed by human pressures, including destructive fishing practices and marine pollution. In terms of geopolitics, maritime spaces have increasingly become contested due to the rising importance of sea lane security for facilitating maritime commerce.

While the frequency of deliberations on maritime matters has increased in recent years, the progress in terms of diagnosis and implementation of mitigation mechanisms remains limited. One reason for this relates to the "tragedy of the commons": barring the immediate consequences of natural disasters, maritime threats are not always imminent. For instance, the build-up of microplastic in the marine environment is not as easily visible in the short term, and therefore does not gain adequate attention with lack of followup from stakeholders. Second, there are difficulties such as lack of sufficient information and analytical and scientific tools that influence the employment of response measures. Third, and most importantly, maritime areas beyond the sovereign jurisdiction of countries require effective institutional mechanisms. With the exception of UNCLOS, all other current regulations are of a sectoral nature, making it difficult to execute concerted and collective efforts.[9]

There is a general advocacy for the adoption of an ecosystems approach in the management of human activities in ocean and coastal spaces, as well as in the development of international maritime policy. However, gaps remain with respect to the understanding of such an approach and the nature of its application to requisite policy formulation, along with the challenge of integrating sector specific management approaches into a comprehensive framework (such as Marine Spatial Planning).[10]

Table 1:
Selected Naval Engagements by the UN Since 1947[11]

February 27, 1947	SC Res. 19, created a sub-committee of three members to examine all the facts involved in the dispute between the United Kingdom and Albania over the Corfu Channel incident
April 09, 1966	SC Res. 221, called upon all states to ensure the diversion of vessels reasonably believed to be carrying oil destined for Southern Rhodesia.
June 01, 1984	SC Res. 552, called for respect free navigation in international waters in accordance with international law, calling for respect for the territorial integrity for States that were not part of the conflict between Iran and Iraq.
October 16, 1993	SC Res. 875, widened international sanctions and imposed a naval blockade against Haiti
October 14, 2006	SC Res. 1718, Banned a range of imports and exports to North Korea and imposed an asset freeze and travel ban on persons involved in the country's nuclear program.
June 08, 2008	SC Res. 1816, condemned all acts of piracy and armed robbery against vessels off the coast of Somalia.
October 31, 2011	SC Res. 2018, condemns all acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea committed off the coast of the states of the Gulf of Guinea.
November 19, 2013	The blockading and diversion of the Cyprus-flagged M/V Vento Di Ponente, suspected of carrying proscribed arms and related material into Libya.
October, 2015	Seizure by the French frigate F/S Provence in the northern Indian Ocean of a dhow illegally transporting to Somalia "several hundred machine guns, anti-tank weapons and AK-47 assault rifles
November 06, 2018	SC Res. 2442, counterpiracy operations on the high seas, in the Somali territorial sea, and on land

Source: Author's own, based on Wilson (2018)

> "While the frequency of deliberations on maritime matters has increased, the progress in diagnosis and implementation of mitigation measures remains limited."

The sustainable use of ocean resources, along with ensuring security of maritime trade, are the key components of multilateral cooperation for improved maritime governance. Ocean spaces form global commons and therefore necessitate collective action for addressing the attendant challenges. Going forward, the UNSC can help develop an annual record of transnational crime and ensuing responses; it can establish an institutional structure to coordinate efforts regarding best practices on the subject; and work on capacity building for the mitigation of maritime threats.[12] This UNSC debate under India's presidency serves as the first stepping stone for future collaborative action on maritime security.

Endnotes

1   Huma Siddiqui, "India initiates open debate on maritime security at UNSC; PM Modi to head the meeting," *Financial Express*, August 09, 2021, https://www.financialexpress.com/defence/india-initiates-open-debate-on-maritime-security-at-unsc-pm-modi-to-head-the-meeting/2307186/

2   Media Center, "English translation of Prime Minister's remarks at the UNSC High-Level Open Debate on "Enhancing Maritime Security: A Case For International Cooperation" (August 9, 2021)," *Ministry of External Affairs*, August 10, 2021, https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34151/English_translation_of_Prime_Ministers_remarks_at_the_UNSC_HighLevel_Open_Debate_on_Enhancing_Maritime_Security_A_Case_For_International_Cooperation_A

3   "Issuing Presidential Statement, Security Council Underlines Importance of Maritime Safety, Safeguarding Oceans for Legitimate Use," Press Release, Security Council, August 09, 2021, https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14598.doc.htm

4   "Issuing Presidential Statement, Security Council Underlines Importance of Maritime Safety, Safeguarding Oceans for Legitimate Use," Press Release, Security Council, August 09, 2021, https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14598.doc.htm

5   "UNSC adopts presidential statement under India's presidency, first-ever outcome document on maritime security adopted," *The Economic Times*, August 09, 2021, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/unsc-adopts-presidential-statement-under-indias-presidency-first-ever-outcome-document-on-maritime-security-adopted/articleshow/85186106.cms

6   PM to chair UNSC High-Level Open Debate on "Enhancing Maritime Security: A Case For International Cooperation," *Press Information Bureau*, August 08, 2021, https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1743814

7   Secretary Antony J. Blinken, "Remarks by Secretary Antony J. Blinken at a UN Security Council Open Debate on Maritime Security" (speech, Washington, D. C., August 09, 2021), United States Mission to United Nations, https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-by-secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-a-un-security-council-open-debate-on-maritime-security/

8   Secretary Antony J. Blinken, "Remarks by Secretary Antony J. Blinken at a UN Security Council Debate on Maritime Security."

9   Marjo Vierros, "Global Marine Governance and Oceans Management for the Achievement of SDG 14," *United Nations*, https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/global-marine-governance-and-oceans-management-achievement-sdg-14

10 Vierros, "Global Marine Governance and Oceans Management for the Achievement of SDG 14"

11 Brian Wilson, "The Turtle Bay Pivot: How the United Nations Security Council Is Reshaping Naval Pursuit of Nuclear Proliferators, Rogue States, and Pirates", *Emory International Law Review*, Volume 33, Issue 1 (2018); pp. 1-90, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3329212

12 Christian Bueger, "Does Maritime Security Require a New United Nations Structure?", The Global Observatory, August 26, 2021, https://theglobalobservatory.org/2021/08/does-maritime-security-require-a-new-united-nations-structure/

2

The Importance of Peacekeeping for India

Kartik Bommakanti

India has made significant contributions to United Nations Peacekeeping Missions (UNPMs) since their inception. Indeed, one scholar has called India "the sword arm of the UN."[1] Since the inception of UNPMs in 1948 and until 1987, New Delhi contributed to seven out of 13 UNPMs, making India one of the largest contributors.[2] In the immediate post-Cold War era, New Delhi remained an equally enthusiastic participant in UNPMs, with its troop contributions peaking in 1994 at 7.03 percent or 5,159 of the total 73,393 personnel.[3] Even within the country, however, India's role in peacekeeping has often been underappreciated.[4]

Historically, India's focus was on peace-building operations where it provided troops.[5] This laid the foundation for subsequent Indian contributions to modern peacekeeping. New Delhi has generally had to find a balance between two contradictory goals: to support the UN, while managing local resistance to Indian ground force deployments for peacekeeping operations.[6]

At present, UNPMs are important for India's geopolitical interests. Table 1 lists India's contributions to UNPMs.

Table 1:
Current UN Peacekeeping Missions

Name of UNPMs	Country/Region Name	Number of Deployed Military Personnel by India	Number of Deployed Police Personnel by India
United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)	Western Sahara	None	None
United Nations Mission Multidimensional integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)	Central African Republic	None	None
United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)	Mali	None	None
United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO)	Democratic Republic of Congo	1874	140
United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)	Golan	197	None
United Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP)	Cyprus	None	3
United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)	Lebanon	862	None
United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA)	Abyei	None	2
United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)	Kosovo	None	None
United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)	South Sudan	2390	27
United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP)	India and Pakistan	None	None
United Nations Troop Supervision Organisation (UNTSO)	Middle East	None	None
	Total	5323	172

Source: United Nations Peacekeeping, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/where-we-operate

There are significant contrasts between current Indian military deployment to UNPMs and those of the five permanent members of the UNSC (or the P-5). None of the P-5 contribute even one third of India's total force strength of military personnel as part of UNPMs. (See Table 2)

What progress did India achieve with regards to peacekeeping during its UNSC presidency in August? Two crucial outcome documents were adopted by the UNSC. The first was Resolution 2589, "Accountability of Crimes against UN Peacekeepers", which was drafted by India and the first of its kind and co-sponsored and unanimously adopted by all 15 members of the UNSC as well as 80 Member States of the UN.[7]

Table 2:
P-5 Contribution of Military Personnel to UN Peacekeeping Compared to India

P-5 Countries	Number of P-5 Military Personnel in UNPMs	Share of P-5 Personnel in UNPMs (%)
China	1591	29.89
France	564	10.6
United Kingdom (UK)	249	4.68
Russian Federation	8	0.15
United States of America (USA)	None	None

Source: United Nations Peacekeeping, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/where-we-operate

The Resolution called upon members states to condemn crimes against peacekeepers as war crimes. More significantly, it calls upon members "…hosting or having hosted United Nations operations to take all appropriate measures, in accordance with their national law, and international law, as applicable, to bring to justice perpetrators of the killing of, and all acts of violence against United Nations personnel, including, but not limited to, their detention and abduction…."[8]

The second outcome document was a President's statement on "Technology for Peacekeeping",[9] the first of its kind. India's official position is that implementing the UNSC mandate on peacekeeping means that the requisite technical requirements need to be made readily available to peacekeepers to effectively implement the Council's mandate. In the president's statement, India called upon the Council to address the technological needs of peacekeepers and leverage technology, especially digital technology, as they are operating in "complex political and security environments and face asymmetric threats" such as terrorism.[10]

India drew attention to the necessity of situational awareness technology platform, UNITE Aware, which seeks to "integrate technological and innovative capacities of Member States" as it is already happening in four UNPMs.[11] As Minister of External Affairs (MEA) S. Jaishankar observed: "India believes in walking the talk when it comes to the safety and security of UN peacekeepers."[12] India also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the UN under the "Partnership for Technology in Peacekeeping" initiative. It is geared to helping build capacity and train peacekeepers in the domain of technology and supports the UN C4ISR or UN Command Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Academy for Peace Operations (UNCAP).[13] The latter is also known as the Peacekeeping Institute.[14]

Injecting greater substance into the mandates for peacekeeping is not an easy exercise. Modern peacekeeping faces challenges when situated within 21st century geopolitical realities, which requires staying abreast of evolving norms and technology, and remaining adept at managing and responding to changing patterns of conflict. The strength and clarity undergirding a mandate passed by the UNSC determines how effective UNPMs will likely be. Moreover, peacekeeping as an undertaking is integral to the UN's goal of collective security goal. It assumes that all states have uniform interests and peacekeeping is at least one means of securing a peaceful and just world.

New Delhi demonstrated throughout its presidential stint in August 2021 that it is not merely a large troop contributor to UNPMs, but it is equally capable of introducing new initiatives or ideas and actively shaping the agenda on matters relating to peacekeeping and beyond. The foregoing analysis convincingly demonstrates that India is a "reliable peacekeeper" which has had to incur considerable risks in highly adverse peacekeeping operations.[15] Moreover, peacekeeping is integral to the pursuit of the principle of collective security which enshrines the UN.[16] Collective security assumes that all states have uniform interests, among them, for a peaceful and just world; peacekeeping is a means of securing these interests.[17]

"Modern peacekeeping faces challenges when situated within 21st-century geopolitical realities."

Endnotes

1   Nayudu, "India's under-appreciated role as sword arm of the UN".

2   Yeshi Choeden, "India and the Current Concerns of UN Peacekeeping: Issues and Prospects", *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 4, October-December, 2006, p. 61.

3   Choeden, "India and the Current Concerns of UN Peacekeeping: Issues and Prospects".

4   Swapna Kona Nayudu, "India's under-appreciated role as sword arm of the UN", *liveMint*, April 28, 2021, https://www.livemint.com/opinion/columns/indias-under-appreciated-role-as-sword-arm-of-the-un-11619546965882.html

5   Swapna Kona Nayudu, "Foreign Policy Tiffin Talk", Brookings India, December 2018, New Delhi, p. 2, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/From-Korea-to-the-Congo-Nehru's-India-and-UN-Peacekeeping.pdf

6   Nayudu, "Foreign Policy Tiffin Talk", p. 2.

7   "Under India's Presidency, UN Security Council unanimously adopts two outcome documents on peacekeeping", *The Times of India*, August 18, 2021, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/under-indias-presidency-un-security-council-unanimously-adopts-two-outcome-documents-on-peacekeeping/articleshow/85436204.cms

8   "Resolution 2589", United Nations Security Council (UNSC), S/RES/2589 (2021), August 18, 2021, pp. 1-4. https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/229/15/PDF/N2122915.pdf?OpenElement

9   "Under India's Presidency, UN Security Council unanimously adopts two outcome documents on peacekeeping", *The Times of India*.

10 "Statement by the President of the Security Council", United Nations Security Council (UNSC), S/PRST/2021/17, August 18, 2021, p. 2, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_prst_2021_17.pdf

11 "Statement by the President of the Security Council". Also see T.S. Tirumurti, "India's Presidency of the UNSC fortified our role in world affairs", *Mint*, September 8, 2021, https://www.livemint.com/opinion/online-views/indias-presidency-of-the-unsc-fortified-our-role-in-world-affairs-11631122648728.html,

12 "Remarks by External Affairs Minister at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Technology and Peacekeeping", Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), New Delhi, August 18, 2021, https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/34192/Remarks_by_External_Affairs_Minister_at_the_UN_Security_Council_Open_Debate_on_Technology__Peacekeeping

13 "UNSC unanimously adopts significant Presidential Statement, Resolution on peacekeeping, as India presides over council", *The Hindu*, August 19, 2021, https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/unsc-unanimously-adopts-significant-presidential-statement-resolution-on-peacekeeping-as-india-presides-over-council/article35991852.ece

14 T.S. Tirumurti, "India's Presidency of the UNSC fortified our role in world affairs".

15 Kabilan Krishnasamy, "A Case for India's 'Leadership' in United Nations Peacekeeping", *International Studies*, 47, 2-4 2010, pp. 225-247.

16 Krishnasamy, "A Case for India's 'Leadership' in United Nations Peacekeeping".

17 Krishnasamy, "A Case for India's 'Leadership' in United Nations Peacekeeping".

3

The UNSC and India's Counterterror Narratives

Kabir Taneja

As India took over the presidency of the UNSC in August 2021, New Delhi made counterterrorism a primary agenda, along with maritime security and peacekeeping. External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar underlined that New Delhi will be a voice of moderation, an advocate of dialogue, and a proponent of international law.[1]

This particular UNSC presidency was perhaps the most effective of all of India's such stints with respect to highlighting the country's concerns over terrorism from across the border in Pakistan. The available examples of public support for the Taliban from both leaders and intellectuals in Pakistan, along with pro-Taliban rallies in the country's Quetta region, offered clear evidence for New Delhi to underscore its long-standing argument on where lies the nucleus of terrorism in the South Asian region.[2]

The beginning of India's UNSC stint coincided with Afghanistan's fall to the Taliban. A crisis that was already unfolding at a rapid pace, the collapse of the Afghan state under former President Ashraf Ghani came as an immediate challenge around which much of India's counterterror narratives needed to be formed. On 16 August, as images were being broadcast across the world of the Taliban entering the Presidential Palace in Kabul, consultations at the UNSC were expedited. India's permanent representative to the UN, Ambassador T.S. Tirumurti, in his comments made sure to keep the reality of what was unfolding in Afghanistan at the forefront. The Indian statement highlighted the rapid erosion of the Afghan people's civil rights, and the continuing threats to their safety and security.

It also carried a degree of pragmaticism: India called on the UN to demand from the Taliban that their dispensation will not only represent all sections of society but also work towards zero tolerance for terrorism, and guarantee that Afghanistan's territory will not be used by terror groups to threaten or attack other countries.[3]

Earlier, EAM Jaishankar had provided the UNSC an eight-point agenda on countering terrorism from an institutional point of view. The recommendations included: fundamental political clarity such as not to justify terrorism, or glorify terrorists; avoid knotting global discourse against terrorism on binaries such as definitions, lists and exclusivist thinking; and solidify mechanisms such as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to apply objective pressure on states, individuals and leaders that would lead to real-world change and outcomes.[4]

It is a task easier said than done, however, given the realities of international diplomacy and the multi-layered interests at play at the UN and the UNSC. To be sure, there remains a significant level of consensus at the UN on issues such as tackling international terror groups, the so-called Islamic State (also known as ISIS or *Daesh* in Arabic), Al Qaeda and its various affiliates, entities that are increasingly aligning themselves to these groups in extremist ecosystems fast developing in places such as Africa. At the same time, views on the return of the Taliban to power are more contested within the UNSC members themselves.

In a press statement issued on 16 August 2021, the UNSC said that "neither the Taliban nor any other Afghan group should support terrorists on the territory of any other country."[5] Only some days later, in another statement released on 27 August 2021 following the terror attack at Kabul airport, the UNSC omitted any reference to the name, Taliban. Instead it used the words, "Afghan group or individual".[6] This brings to the forefront issues of the UNSC taking part in enlisting, de-listing and working around the continuing issue of "double standards" in recognising groups and individuals engaged in terrorism. These anomalies have impeded the formulation of instruments such as the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT), which India has repeatedly highlighted at the UNGA and other international and regional multilateral organisations such as BRICS as an urgent mechanism to be adopted. The idea has been languishing since 1996, and remains unlikely to fructify anytime soon.[7]

Table 1:
Key UNSC Resolutions and Communications on Counterterrorism

UNSC Resolutions	Year	Relevance
UNSC Resolution 2368	2017	Continuation of counterterror resolutions targeting groups and individuals from Resolution 1267 adopted in 1999
UNSC Resolution 2354	2017	Recognition of importance of counter-narratives in an increasingly digitised online extremism space
UNSC Resolution 2462	2019	Continuation of putting financial backing of terrorism as a critical issue
UNSC 10th Technical Report on Daesh	2020	Highlights UN-sanctioned research on terror threats such as Daesh (ISIS). Critical data is provided here for states and NGOs alike.
UNSC Resolution 2593	2021	Continuation of UNSC debates and actions on Afghanistan crisis

Source: Author's own, using information culled from UN websites.[8]

The Afghanistan crisis has been aided by a superfluous deal between the Taliban and the US, and the latter's expedited exit from the country that left behind a highly destabilised environment for India to contend with. That the events unfolded close to the UN General Assembly in mid-September, also illustrated how a stronger push on counterterrorism, and recognising such threats without viewing them through multiple political lenses could make a difference on whether an issue will remain only as a discussion point or be translated to an actionable one. And India is not new to these debates.

It has repeatedly raised concerns on terrorism, specifically cross-border terrorism in South Asia, long before Kabul fell to the Taliban. That the Western press started to train the spotlight on groups such as the Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed along with Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), Al Qaeda amongst others, has only confirmed New Delhi's decades-long narrative before the UN.[9]

During India's presidency, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2593 that highlighted the developments in Afghanistan. It called on the Taliban—using its name—to uphold its publicly stated commitments to counter any terrorist group or individual from using the country to plan and execute terror attacks against any other state.[10] The resolution referenced UN Resolution 1267 from 1999 on the use of Taliban-run territories of Afghanistan by various regional and transnational jihadist groups alike. Yet, the language of the resolution was relatively tame, proving that although counterterrorism is high on the UN's agenda, it is difficult to arrive at all-encompassing agreements on terror groups and actors beyond the likes of Al Qaeda and ISIS. This point was further highlighted by the fact that both China and Russia abstained from the vote on Resolution 2593, despite both having significant interests in the potential rise of Islamist extremism in the region, accentuated by the situation in Afghanistan. These gaps between the UNSC permanent members and their ways of exercising veto powers have often impeded upholding the UN Charter's fundamental aim of maintaining international peace and security.

To highlight this challenge further, while Resolution 2593, in true UN form, used diplomatic language to allude to certain states, groups and actors without directly naming any one of them other than the Taliban, Indian diplomatic officials took it upon themselves to highlight those groups that pose a magnified threat to India following the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban. Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said, "UNSCR 2593 unequivocally demands that Afghan territory not be used for sheltering, training, planning, or financing terrorist acts, and specifically refers to terrorist individuals proscribed by the UN Security Council, including Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad."[11]

> "Although counterterrorism is high on the UN's agenda, it is difficult to arrive at all-encompassing agreements on terror groups and actors beyond the likes of Al Qaeda and ISIS."

Genuine progress in counterterrorism is seldom achieved via the UN. However, building robust arguments in tackling this issue within the international community continues to hold significant equity in long-term strategic thinking. The victory of the Taliban has showcased that tactical strategies without long-term political, economic, and societal blueprints have severe limitations within the mostly exclusively kinetic frameworks of counterterrorism itself. These potential shifts in counterterror thinking of the future may end up making multilateralism a much more important tool than many believe it to be today. At the UN, India can be a driving force to help set a realistic and inclusive agenda for the future despite the heightening erosion of trust for such global institutions to deliver on security issues.

Endnotes

1   Elizabeth Roche, "India takes over UNSC presidency for August", *Mint*, August 1, 2021, https://www.livemint.com/news/india/india-takes-over-presidency-of-un-security-council-for-august-11627803889807.html

2   Noor Ul Arifeen, "Video shows people expressing support for Afghan Taliban in Quetta", *Samaa TV*, July 14, 2021, https://www.samaa.tv/news/2021/07/video-shows-people-expressing-support-for-afghan-taliban-in-quetta/

3   "UNSC briefing on Afghanistan: India statement delivered by Ambassador T.S. Tirumurti, Permanent Mission of India to the UN", August 16, 2021, https://www.pminewyork.gov.in/IndiaatUNSC?id=NDMyNA,,

4   "20th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1373 and establishment of Counter Terrorism Committee: Statement by External Affairs Minister of India Dr S Jaishankar", Permanent Mission of India to the UN, January 2021, https://www.pminewyork.gov.in/IndiaatUNSC?id=NDEzNw

5   "Security Council press statement on Afghanistan", United Nations, August 16, 2021, https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14604.doc.htm

6   "Security Council press statement on terrorist attacks near Kabul airport", United Nations, August 27, 2021, https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14615.doc.htm

7   "Anti-terrorism fight should take strong steps against states providing havens to terrorists: India", *Press Trust of India*, September 26, 2019, https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/anti-terrorism-fight-should-take-strong-steps-against-states-providing-havens-to-terrorists-india/article29516617.ece

8   All listed resolutions and communications are available at the UN website, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/content/security-council-resolutions

9   Melissa Skorka, "The Haqqani are the new global terror threat", *The Wall Street Journal*, September 26, 2021, https://www.wsj.com/articles/haqqani-network-taliban-success-terrorism-security-11632671942

10   "United Nations Security Council Resolution 2593", United Nations, August 30, 2021, https://undocs.org/S/RES/2593(2021)

11   Rezaul H Laskar, "UNSC resolution 2593 should shape world's response to Afghanistan", *The Hindustan Times*, September 15, 2021, https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/unsc-resolution-2593-should-shape-world-s-response-to-afghanistan-says-india-101631630677971.html

About the Authors
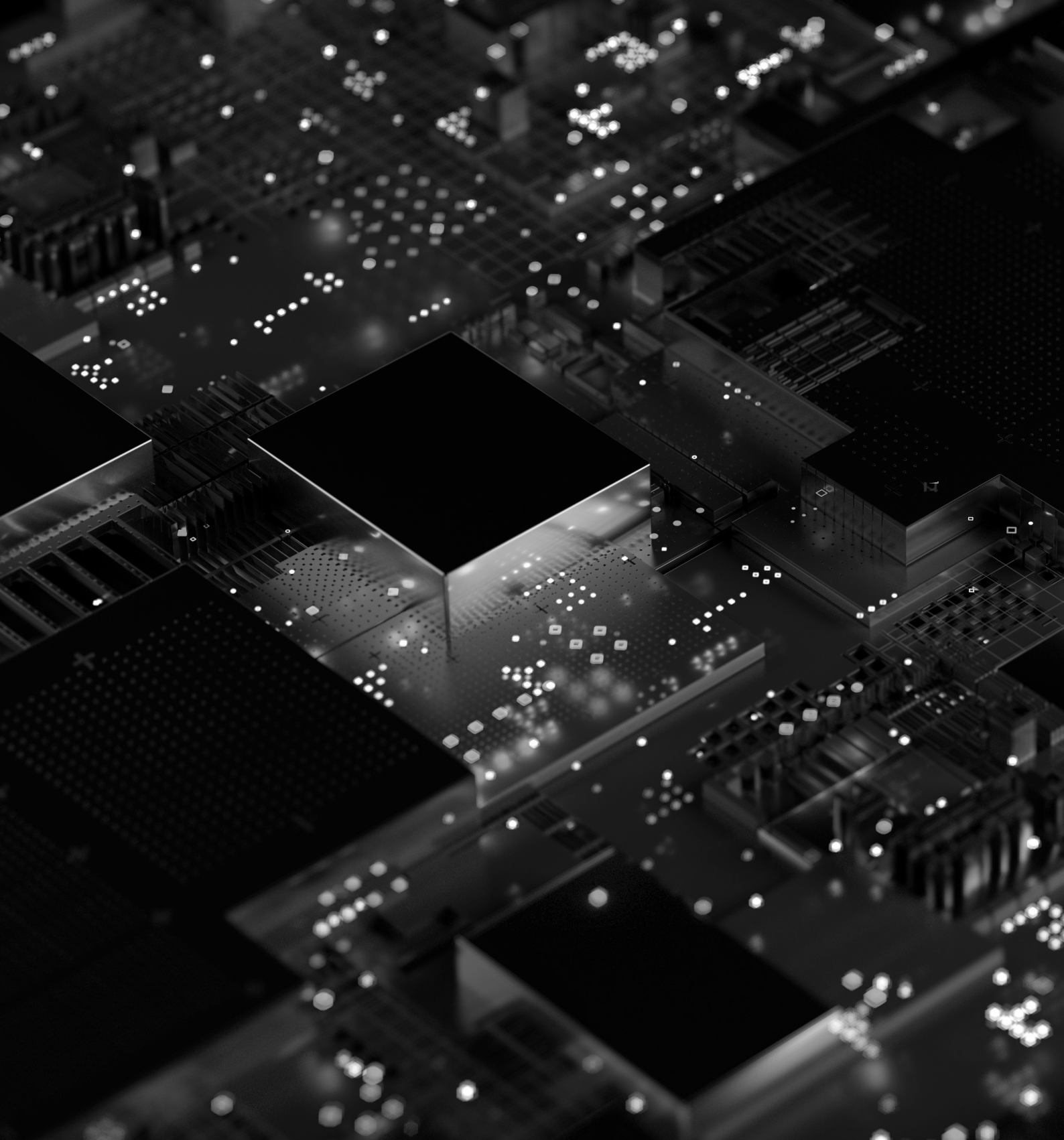
Pratnashree Basu is an Associate Fellow at ORF, Kolkata.

Kartik Bommakanti is a Fellow at ORF.

Kabir Taneja is a Fellow at ORF.

Aarshi Tirkey is an Associate Fellow at ORF.

ORF OBSERVER RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Ideas . Forums . Leadership . Impact

20, Rouse Avenue Institutional Area,
New Delhi - 110 002, INDIA
Ph. : +91-11-35332000. **Fax :** +91-11-35332005
E-mail: contactus@orfonline.org
Website: www.orfonline.org