

United Nations Votes are not Black and White

Why in news?

Over the years, the voting options in United Nations have gone beyond 'Yes', 'No' and 'Abstention'.

What is the voting system prevalent in UNSC?

- The voting system in the UN Security Council is rigid.
- Article 27 of the UN Charter states that:
 - Each member of the Security Council shall have one vote.
 - Decisions of the Security Council on procedural matters shall be made by an affirmative vote of 9 members.
 - Decisions of the Security Council on all other matters shall be made by an affirmative vote of 9 members including the concurring votes of the permanent members; provided that a party to a dispute shall abstain from voting in cases relating to Chapter VI
- China, France, Russia, the U.S. and the UK were granted the special status of Permanent Member States at the Security Council, along with a special voting power known as the "right to veto".
- If any one of the five permanent members cast a negative vote in the 15-member Security Council, the resolution or decision would not be approved.
- If a permanent member does not fully agree with a proposed resolution but does not wish to cast a veto, it may choose to abstain, thus allowing the resolution to be adopted if it obtains the required number of 9 favourable votes.
- The explanation of the vote before the vote acts as canvassing for votes of others.
- The explanation of the vote after the vote can even amount to taking with the left hand what has been given with the right, as it happened in the case of India's abstention on the Russian invasion.

The requirement of compulsory abstention by the affected parties in cases relating to Chapter VI does not apply to other resolutions and thus permanent members can veto resolutions against them even under Chapter VII.

What is the case of India's voting in the UN?

- In the recent vote on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, China and India voted together to indicate neutrality.
- The Chinese abstention reflected the new understanding between Russia and China.
- The Indian abstention in cases relating to the Soviet Union at the UN was institutionalised by Indira Gandhi in 1979, after the Soviet Union had vetoed a Security Council resolution against its intervention in Afghanistan.
- India could have abstained only in the substantive vote in the UNGA but it also abstained in the UNSC on an earlier procedural vote to refer the matter to the General Assembly.
- The same applied in the case of the Human Rights Council.

- The U.S. criticism of India's vote was as expected in the context of the Quad.
- In the case of India, votes in the UNSC, UNGA and the Human Rights Council reflect its current national concerns in the light of the situation in Ladakh, Afghanistan, the increasing ties between Russia and China, and its membership of the Quad.
- Without naming or blaming anyone, India has expressed its fundamental position that war is not a solution and diplomacy should be the only option to prevent war.

References

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/united-nations-votes-are-not-black-and-white/article65232559.ece>
2. <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/voting-system>

