

**JAPAN'S QUEST FOR A PERMANENT
SEAT IN THE UNITED NATIONS
SECURITY COUNCIL**

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Executive Summary

1. In September 2015, Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo reiterated Japan's desire to reform the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) at the 70th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Top leaders of the G4 (Japan, India, Germany and Brazil) Summit reaffirmed their cooperation to secure a permanent seat each.
2. The prestige and power that go with a permanent UNSC seat will certainly boost Japan's status and identity as a great power again in international society after its catastrophic defeat in World War II.
3. Then Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio established the Headquarters on Strategy for the UNSC in the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in January 2016. Tokyo then sent state ministers and parliamentary vice-ministers for foreign affairs to various regions to campaign for a permanent seat.
4. In February 2016, Kishida made another pitch for Tokyo to secure a permanent seat. He cited the dispatch of his country's Self-Defence Force (SDF) to South Sudan for UNPKO (United Nations Peace Keeping Operations) and peace-building efforts in areas suffering from internal conflict such as Cambodia, Mindanao (southern Philippines), Sri Lanka and parts of Africa.
5. Besides the arguments that Japan is uniquely qualified as a peace-loving country and there is a need for equitable regional representation in a changed world, many Japanese politicians, bureaucrats and analysts highlighted that their country is the second-largest contributor to UN budget, UNPKO and the Peace Building Commission.
6. Tokyo's quest for a permanent UNSC seat will be an additional bone of contention with Beijing. Beijing will resolutely oppose Tokyo's bid for a permanent UNSC seat given their dispute over Senkaku/ Diaoyu islands, competing narratives of history (Imperial Japan's past invasion of China) and Japan's deepening alliance with the US superpower.

7. Japan's quest for a permanent UNSC seat will fail if it cannot secure China's consent. The question is whether Tokyo is embarking on a quixotic quest for UNSC reforms when Beijing is dead set against it and when even Japan's US ally is unenthusiastic about the G4's UNSC bid.
8. Tokyo's strategy is to act with the G4 to seek a two-thirds majority in the UNGA and avoid the veto of the P5 (Permanent Five: United States, China, Russia, UK and France). It is unclear whether Japan will ever attain sufficient support in the UNGA.
9. Less spoken publicly by Japanese diplomats is the pragmatic decision to accept a compromise such as a permanent UNSC seat without veto powers, back-to-back renewal of two terms, or a renewable semi-permanent membership of four years or more.
10. The process of UNSC reforms is likely to remain protracted and "horse trading" is likely over the next decade or two. Despite the consensus at home and momentum abroad for UNSC reforms, Tokyo's quest at the UN may still turn out to be an elusive dream.