



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## GLOBAL HORIZONS

APRIL 2023

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**Delhi Policy Group**

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[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)



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Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to security policy and military modernisation.

At a time of disruptive change in the global order, DPG aims to deliver research based, relevant, reliable and realist policy perspectives to an actively engaged public, both at home and abroad. DPG is deeply committed to the growth of India's national power and purpose, the security and prosperity of the people of India and India's contributions to the global public good. We remain firmly anchored within these foundational principles which have defined DPG since its inception.

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*The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Delhi Policy Group as an Institution.*

### Cover Image:

*Following the outbreak of conflict in Khartoum and other parts of Sudan, the Government of India launched 'Operation Kaveri' and swiftly deployed Naval and Air assets for the evacuation of Indian citizens. Source: Twitter (@EoI\_Khartoum)*

*Group Photograph at the Council of Defence Ministers of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Meeting on April 28, 2023. Source: Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation.*

*President Biden hosted President Yoon of the Republic of Korea for a state dinner at the White House on April 27, 2023. Source: The White House.*

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## Global Horizons

by

Nalin Surie

April 2023 was characterised by serious moves and counter moves in international relations. The principal players included the United States of America, China, Japan, ROK, Brazil, South Africa and the processes of the G7, G20 and the SCO. The situation in Ukraine remained very serious and the much awaited spring offensive was still in the making.

The fact remains, however, that the fallout of the Ukraine war and efforts to end it remained at the forefront of international diplomacy, led by the USA and the West. The month also witnessed clear divisions or at the very least, differences in approach on how the Ukraine conflict should be resolved and what should be the posture of the United States and the West towards China following the designation of the latter by the West, variously as the principal challenge/threat/military contender. But yet, an important partner needed on economic and select global issues.

Even within the US, voices emerged that maximalist approaches to ending the conflict in Ukraine might need to be abandoned and there ought also to be some give on the hardline on economic collaboration with China in some sectors. The latter fits in with old Europe's approach (and that of Australia) but on Ukraine, Poland and others see no give as being feasible. The G7 Foreign Ministers at their meeting in Japan on April 18 though, reiterated their united uncompromising approach towards Russia over Ukraine.

A beneficiary, for the present, of the desire to seek a compromise on the Ukraine war seems to have been China, which has responded positively to French and other entreaties which enabled Xi Jinping to pursue his proposal seeking to arrive at a solution to the Ukraine war. He spoke to President Zelenskyy on April 26 and China will send an envoy to follow up. No doubt, Russia is on board and so too is the US, at least implicitly. Ukraine perhaps believes that by bringing China into the act it can weaken the Russia-China alliance to its advantage. How the Chinese will help reconcile irreconcilable positions remains to be seen, but much could depend on the outcome on the ground after the much anticipated spring offensive for which the US led West has invested heavily in providing equipment and training to the Ukrainian military. China's commitment to Ukrainian territorial integrity also came into question when its Ambassador in Paris publicly cast serious doubt over the so

called effective status of the post Soviet republics under international law. This understandably caused outrage. Beijing's clarification on this was more routine than categoric.

It is pertinent to recall here that high level visits to China during April included those by the French President, the EU Commission President, the Spanish PM (end March), the Brazilian President and the foreign ministers of Germany and Japan. Also, the Chinese Defence Minister paid a successful visit to Russia in mid April.

Uncertainty thus continues to dog the world and the costs continue to rise. Such uncertainty was compounded by the huge leak of classified US documents which covered in detail US assessments of the state of preparedness of the Ukraine armed forces and their capabilities. These do not necessarily paint a particularly positive picture of the ability to achieve Ukrainian objectives on the ground.

The Ukraine war, Western sanctions and the International Criminal Court (ICC) warrant against Putin had an unexpected impact in far away South Africa, which is to host the next BRICS summit later this year. At one stage, the South Africans did some loud thinking about withdrawing from the ICC so that they would not have to detain President Putin if he attended the summit. It appears that this route is not to be taken by South Africa which will no doubt have found some via-media to help them address this anticipated predicament.

The outbreak of fighting in Sudan in mid April forced the world to look away from Ukraine. The initial focus was on establishing short duration cease fires to evacuate foreign nationals, as also to put in place humanitarian corridors to provide relief to those displaced by the fighting. The civil war, however, is reportedly getting fiercer. Serious and focused international efforts will now be required to restore peace and establish a stable government in Sudan, acceptable to its people. The armed forces and rapid response forces will have to be reined in. How this will be done, given the current state of disarray in international relations and institutions, is not at all clear. The AU, neighbours and the great powers will have to pull together to ensure an early return to peace and constitutional rule in Sudan. The ongoing war in Ukraine will undoubtedly complicate such efforts.

The Ukraine war notwithstanding, the U.S. effort to simultaneously keep its focus on the Indo-Pacific did not wane. The G7 foreign ministers, meeting in Japan, reiterated the importance of a free and open Indo-Pacific which is inclusive, prosperous, secure, based on the rule of law and that protects shared principles including sovereignty, territorial integrity and peaceful resolution of

disputes, fundamental freedoms and human rights. Importantly, they welcomed their partners and members to enhance engagement with the Indo-Pacific. The ministers also focused at some length on the China and DPRK challenges. The importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait was described as “an indispensable element in security and prosperity in the international community”.

President Biden will travel to Australia for the QUAD summit and to Japan for the G7 summit, both in May 2023. The focus on the Indo-Pacific will thus remain, notwithstanding the Ukraine war, but will no doubt be impacted by outcomes of the latter. (PM Narendra Modi will attend both.)

Additionally, President Yoon of the ROK paid a successful state visit to Washington in the last week of April, at the conclusion of which a significant Washington Declaration was issued on April 26. The latter reaffirms in “the strongest words possible their commitment to the combined defence posture under the US-ROK mutual defence treaty”. Also, their commitment to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific. The ROK has, it says, “full confidence in US extended deterrence commitments and recognises the importance, necessity and benefit of its enduring reliance on the U.S. nuclear deterrent.”

The messaging to the DPRK and China is very clear. So is the US desire to ensure that the ROK does not go nuclear. The effort also is to strengthen the U.S.-Japan-ROK alliance in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific.

Following his reelection as President in January 2023, Brazilian President Lula has begun an active outreach to re-establish Brazil’s credentials as an emerging power of international consequence. After visits to neighbours, Argentina and Uruguay in January, he visited Washington in February. In April he visited China to reaffirm the strategic partnership with that country. He has views on how the Russia-Ukraine war could conceivably be ended and on reducing dependence of international trade and finance on the US Dollar. After China he visited Abu Dhabi, Lisbon and Spain, all important partners.

On the G20 front, meetings in specific areas of common interest continued under India’s presidency including in digital economy, agriculture and education. Of particular interest was the second meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors in Washington on April 12-13 during which, on the debt agenda (critical for developing countries), the need to swiftly complete the ongoing debt treatments under the Common Framework and beyond was reiterated.

Additionally, a meeting of the Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable was held on April 12, co-chaired by India's Finance Minister. The Paris Club, non-Paris club members, debtor nations and private sector representatives attended. The intention was to accelerate debt restructuring processes and improve their efficiency under the G20 Common Framework. At that meeting, it was agreed to hold a workshop in the coming weeks to clarify key concepts to support predictability and fairness of debt restructuring processes and how to assess and enforce comparability of treatment. Therefore, it marked some progress, albeit grudging.

It is also the Indian objective to prepare, under its presidency, a G20 roadmap on a Common Adequacy Framework for Multilateral Development Banks.

The next meeting of the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors will be held in July 2023 in Gandhinagar, India.

On the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation front, an important meeting of Defense Ministers was held under India's chairmanship on April 28 in New Delhi. While all other ministers attended in person, the Defense Minister of Pakistan attended on line. In his intervention, India's Defense Minister stressed that to make the SCO stronger and more credible, the topmost priority should be to effectively deal with terrorism. India, he conveyed, envisions a robust framework of regional cooperation which mutually respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all member states by taking care of their legitimate interests. He reiterated India's commitment as a first responder and preferred partner for HADR operations in the region.

The SCO meeting enabled India's Defence Minister to have bilateral meetings with his counterparts, including notably with the Russian and Chinese ministers. The latter may have permitted a better understanding of the state of the Russia-China military alliance. The meetings with the Uzbek, Belarus and Kyrgyz ministers too may have helped obtain their insights into the Russian approach to the Ukraine war.

The meeting between the Defense Ministers of India and China on April 27 was held on the heels of the meeting of the Corps commanders of the two armies in Eastern Ladakh on April 24. The discussions were reportedly frank, and allowed both sides to reiterate their known positions since the unprovoked Chinese attack in Galwan in June 2020. The gap remains unbridged. The high-tension standoff continues along the entire Sino-Indian border but the lines of communication remain open.

As summer sets in, the international situation remains convulsive and fraught with danger and uncertainty. There is thus need to actively begin the search for a fresh architecture for European strategic stability that unites rather than divides. Simultaneously, an open, transparent, inclusive, law based and multipolar Indo-Pacific order needs to be established, based on respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and the principle of mutual and equal security for all.

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