



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



GLOBAL HORIZONS JULY 2023

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Cover Image:

Official picture of the NATO Leaders at the NATO Summit in Vilnius on July 11, 2023. Source: [NATO Official Website](#)

Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi attends the Ceremonial Reception with President of France Emmanuel Macron at Elysee Palace in Paris, France on July 14, 2023. Source: [Prime Minister of India](#)

India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore Vivian Balakrishnan co-chaired the ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers Meeting on July 13, 2023. Source: Twitter ([@DrSJaishankar](#))

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Global Horizons

by

Nalin Surie

Uncertainty and lack of clear direction continued to haunt the outcome of the war in Ukraine. There was no clear, objective, view of the military situation on the ground. The prevailing consensus appears to be that both sides are in for the long haul and this is more an old-fashioned war than one being fought in an otherwise hi-tech world. Voices are growing to begin the process of finding a compromise acceptable not only to both sides, but also to Ukraine's Western backers who hold most of the cards.

The NATO Summit held in Vilnius on July 11-12, 2023 was neither a success nor a failure. The bottom line on what would not happen, i.e., Ukraine's membership of NATO, was unambiguously spelt out by US President Joe Biden in a CNN interview just before the Summit. The President also made it clear that Ukraine had several other criteria to fulfil before it could be made a member. It was, therefore, left for the summit to find palliatives to offer to Ukraine, and this was done by agreeing to cut short certain procedures leading up to full membership, and also by setting up structures to fast track Ukrainian requests for military equipment etc. But the decision to supply hi-tech and game changing equipment and systems vests firmly in NATO, and with the US. In effect, the US would be able to limit escalations by Ukraine in the war so as to prevent spread of the war in unacceptable directions. This does not, of course, gel with President Biden's decision, also announced before the summit, to supply cluster bombs to Ukraine, which was a dangerous sop.

Ukrainian President Zelenskyy was obviously unhappy with the outcomes of the summit, but his display of displeasure was sharply put down, and he was appropriately contrite in response. The latter was necessary because NATO and G7 support for Ukraine against Russia remained steadfast and heavily committed in terms of defence equipment and supplies, as also financial assistance. The latest addition to support for Ukraine came from the ROK. President Yoon, who visited Kiev on July 15, promised more military supplies and humanitarian assistance for Ukraine (PM Kishida of Japan had visited in March this year).

On the larger geopolitical and geostrategic picture, the NATO summit underlined that “the Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security and to peace and stability in the European security area.”

Equally important, though, were the very detailed references to the People’s Republic of China. It is the NATO position that “the PRC’s stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values.” However, NATO remains open to constructive engagement with the PRC. The summit communique has defined the scope of the China challenge, referred to the Russia-China alliance, and China’s growing nuclear arsenal. It calls upon China to engage in strategic risk reduction (on which China seriously demurs) and promotion of stability.

This calling out of China has interestingly been accompanied by the US making renewed efforts to reopen high level lines of communication with China, on which the Chinese have shown some flexibility. After receiving Secretary of State Blinken in June, they received Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Climate Change chief John Kerry in July. There is speculation that a Biden-Xi meeting may happen before the end of the year. At the same time, the US-Japan-ROK partnership is gaining momentum. There is to be a standalone summit of the three leaders in August in the US.

The need to keep relations with China from nosediving, but to guard against now established Chinese threats and challenges, was also reflected in Germany’s new China policy announced on July 14. It is specified in the latter that the need to change the economic approach to China has been necessitated by China’s economic strategy, whose aim is to make it less dependent on other countries while making international production chains more dependent on China. Further, China seeks to establish an international order in line with its single party system and relativise the rules based international order, including on human rights. Going forward, on economic relations with China, Germany will seek a system that is more fair, sustainable and reciprocal. A Deutsch World commentary has referred to the latter change in approach as “critical but not decoupling”.

To return briefly to the NATO summit, the NATO secretariat’s proposal to open an office in Japan was not approved because there is still no consensus, it would appear, on signalling an effort to extend the alliance’s area of operation to the Indo-Pacific. This is, no doubt, so as not to further annoy China and further strengthen the Russia-China alliance.

There was also a lack of consensus on appointing a new Secretary General. The present incumbent, the former PM of Norway, who has been in the position already for nine years, will stay on for another year.

Finland is now a member of NATO, and President Erdogan has, following his reelection and after assessing the situation in Ukraine and in his neighbourhood, in principle, withdrawn his objection to Sweden joining. But, he still wants a substantial outcome for himself and Turkey in return, and has said the Turkish Parliament will decide the issue in autumn this year. This buys him time. It is being suggested that he wants fast tracking of Turkey's membership of the EU and/or assurances of weapon supplies from the US.

There were several moves by and pertaining to Russia during the month of particular interest. In an effort to bring pressure to bear on Ukraine and its Western allies, Russia refused to extend the Ukraine-Russia grain export arrangement that had been worked out with the good offices of Turkey and the UN. The move, though, may boomerang on Russia if the reports emerging from the second Russia-Africa summit in St. Petersburg on July 27-28 are to be believed. Several African countries are dependent on grain supplies from Ukraine and fear uncalled for and unbearable price hikes resulting from Russia's decision. President Putin appears to have offered some palliatives, that are not being seen as quite enough. Besides, summit level participation from Africa was lesser compared to the previous time. The outreach to Africa is part of ongoing efforts by Russia to break out of the tentacles spread out by the West since Russia invaded Ukraine. Even before this, though, Russia has been very active in influence and regime building in several mineral rich African countries, including through the mercenary Wagner Group whose leader Prigozhin revolted against President Putin last month. Ironically, that same group will, it seems, continue to be used to build influence in Africa. Prigozhin, it appears, was at hand in St. Petersburg during the summit. This casts doubts over the level of control the Kremlin still wields within Russia's ruling cabal.

President Putin has announced that he will not attend the BRICS summit in South Africa next month, since his presence in Russia is more important. No doubt, the ICC indictment of Putin, the state of the war with Ukraine, and internal power struggles, have weighed heavily in the making of this decision. It remains to be seen how this decision will impact effective Russian participation in the BRICS summit.

The decision by Russia and China to attend ceremonies in Pyongyang to mark the seventieth anniversary on July 27 of the Armistice on the Korean Peninsula

was noteworthy. Russia was represented by its embattled Defense Minister and China by Li Hongzhong, a Politburo member and Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of the NPC. The trilateral bonding becomes more pertinent in the context of the fallout from the ongoing Ukraine war. Interestingly, some Western analysts have suggested that the Armistice on the Korean Peninsula could offer a model to end hostilities between Ukraine and Russia.

Japan's activism under PM Kishida in foreign and security matters was on display. The new White Paper on Defense of Japan 2023 clearly signalled the hierarchy of principal military threats currently perceived by Japan. It is propositioned that the DPRK's "military activities pose an even more grave and imminent threat to Japan's national security than ever before". Secondly, Chinese military and other activities are "a matter of serious concern for Japan and the international community and present an unprecedented and greatest strategic challenge". And thirdly, "Russian military activities in the Indo-Pacific region including Japan, together with its strategic coordination with China are of strong security concern".

The concern over the DPRK is more than understandable. The other major worry is that China may actually take steps to change the status quo over Taiwan and this will seriously undermine Japanese security.

During the month, PM Kishida also reached out to Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar between July 16-18, 2023. Japan wishes to strengthen its strategic, energy, green transition, trade and investment, climate change, innovation, tourism and space partnerships with all or some of these important Gulf nations. FTA negotiations with the GCC are to be resumed. An important message (keeping in mind Taiwan etc.) conveyed by Kishida during his visit was that no unilateral change of status quo would be acceptable.

Indian diplomacy and foreign policy outreach during the month was purposeful and part of a broader pattern.

The first ever SCO summit was held on July 4 in an online format. Criticism that an offline format would have been more fruitful misses the point and the objective reality on the ground. India was able to effectively return to the core principles of the organisation and deliver outcomes of importance and utility to all. The reflection in the Declaration that Central Asia should be the core of the SCO is important, so too the focus on fighting terrorism, the stress on multipolarity (just and multipolar world order), start-ups, innovation, youth empowerment and the two declarations on 'Countering radicalism leading to terrorism, separatism and extremism' and 'Cooperation on digital

transformation'. Nonetheless, some linguistic concessions were made to core current Chinese positions, without explicitly acknowledging or endorsing them. These included a reference to the "formation of a common vision of the idea of creating a community of the common destiny of humanity". India did not sign on to the para on the BRI in the Declaration that was adopted. There was also no specific reference to Present Xi Jinping's flagship GDI, GSI and GCI proposals to restructure international relations.

The references to Afghanistan are silent on the position of women.

Iran is now a full member of the SCO and, its Presidency moves to Kazakhstan.

PM Narendra Modi's state visit to Paris to coincide with Bastille Day in France was undoubtedly the high point during the month, and the outcomes, honours extended, and bondings reaffirmed that France continues to be the principal strategic anchor for India in Europe, and an important growing partner in the Indo-Pacific. The timing coincided with 25 years of the bilateral strategic partnership.

The document adopted on Horizon 2047 (when India completes a hundred years of its independence) is of multiple significance, and is the first such document concluded by India with any partner. It specifies 63 outcomes and is composed of several pillars, including security, sovereignty and the Indo-Pacific.

Horizon 2047 is intended by India and France "to reaffirm their sovereignty and decision making authority and to respond together to major challenges confronting our planet". The areas of collaboration include joint defence manufacturing; placing collaboration on space issues at the heart of the strategic partnership; making the Indo-Pacific an area of stability and sustainable development, including through trilateral arrangements; committing to the fight against terrorism; promoting renewed and effective multilateralism; collaboration in science, technological innovation and academic cooperation; energy security; urban and economic transitions in India, including social inclusion; enhancing bilateral trade and investment; and growing people-to-people and cultural interaction.

In his press briefing on the visit, India's Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra called it a "historic visit" that also honoured India, apart from the personal honours extended to PM Modi. He spoke of the "exceptional warmth, warmth of the friendship and genuineness" visible during the visit. (To recall, the Foreign Secretary had described the outcome of PM Modi's state visit to Washington in June as "path breaking," with decisions taken being "truly transformative".)

On his way back from Paris, PM Modi made a brief visit to the UAE on July 15. This was his fifth visit in eight years, and an integral part of India's very active Act West policy towards a region of critical geostrategic and geo-economic importance for India. UAE has become a foundational partner of India in the Gulf region.

Issues discussed covered economic integration, COP 28 (UAE is the host), energy partnership, food security, the fight against terrorism, and the setting up of an Indian Institute of Technology in the UAE in collaboration with IIT Delhi.

The sixth meeting of the India-Arab Partnership Conference on New Horizons in investments, trade and services was held on July 13 in Delhi. The outcomes are expected to provide a momentum to India-League of Arab States economic interactions.

The business-like visit by the President of Sri Lanka to New Delhi on July 21 was important, and focused on further assisting Sri Lanka to overcome the very serious economic challenges it is facing. An important Economic Partnership Vision was adopted. The objective is to bring about sustainable, equitable and stable growth through the development of connectivity in a variety of spheres, such as maritime, air, energy, power, trade, economic and financial, and people-to-people relations.

When asked at his press briefing on the visit to comment on security issues, Foreign Secretary Kwatra responded that "Sri Lanka side did convey to us their sensitivity and respect for our security and strategic sensitive concerns relating to what happens in our maritime domain". He added that actually, these are "shared challenges".

Coming soon after the important and equally business-like visit of the Nepal PM to India in May/June, the visit of the Sri Lanka President reflects the clear desire and intention of India to be of fulsome assistance to its South Asian neighbours, and to consolidate the South Asian space.

There was extensive interaction with India's east as well during the month. External Affairs Minister Jaishankar participated actively, back-to-back, in mid-July with the ASEAN Foreign Ministers (ASEAN-India, EAS and ARF formats) in Indonesia, and in Thailand, he attended the 12th meeting of the Mekong Ganga Mechanism and took part in the BIMSTEC FMs' retreat. These three mechanisms are an integral part of India's Act East policy, and participation by the EAM in these meetings reflects the importance India places on the region and its integration with it.

There were some developments in Sino-Indian relations. India's EAM met Chinese FM Wang Yi on the sidelines of the ASEAN meetings and India's NSA also met Wang on the sidelines of the meeting of BRICS NSAs in Johannesburg. From publicly available information, there appears to be no change in the position of the two sides, with India insisting that China first vacate the outcomes of its aggression in Eastern Ladakh in June 2020, and China insisting on moving on, irrespective.

Chinese intransigence on the border issue was again manifest in the decision to issue stapled visas to three athletes from the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh who were to participate in the Wushu tournament at the World University Games in Chengdu (July 29-August 3). India lodged a strong protest, withdrew the entire Wushu team, and reserved the right to respond appropriately. China's irrational decision could have an impact on India's participation in the Asian Games to be held in Hangzhou, China in September-October 2023, for which there are expected to be several sportspersons from Arunachal Pradesh.

August is normally a vacation period in Europe, but with the ongoing war in Ukraine, it is difficult to predict the direction events might take. There are reports, for instance, that at Western request, Saudi Arabia may host, in early August, a meeting to discuss the Ukrainian proposal to end the war. It is interesting to recall that Saudi Arabia had invited Ukraine President Zelenskyy to address the Arab League summit in May. Such a move would bear careful watching, particularly to assess the real intention behind it.

Going forward, from India's perspective, the BRICS Summit in August will present some challenges. It will also be focusing majorly on ensuring successful outcomes of the G20 summit under its presidency, to be held in New Delhi in September.



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