



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## GLOBAL HORIZONS SEPTEMBER 2023

*Author*

Nalin Surie

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**Delhi Policy Group**

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

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## ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group (DPG) is among India's oldest think tanks with its primary focus on strategic and international issues of critical national interest. DPG is a non-partisan institution and is independently funded by a non-profit Trust. Over past decades, DPG has established itself in both domestic and international circles and is widely recognised today among the top security think tanks of India and of Asia's major powers.

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.

## Author

Ambassador Nalin Surie, I.F.S. (Retd.), Distinguished Fellow for Diplomacy, Delhi Policy Group

*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:

*The Prime Minister addressing the G20 Summit on the theme 'One Earth' at the Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi on September 9, 2023. Source: [G20 Official Website](#)*

*Prime Minister Narendra Modi attending the 20<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-India Summit held in Jakarta on September 7, 2023. Source: [Indian Mission to ASEAN, Jakarta](#)*

*President Joe Biden being welcomed by General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng at the Presidential Palace in Hanoi, Vietnam on September 10, 2023. Source: [White House/Official Twitter](#)*

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## Global Horizons

by

Nalin Surie

September was an extraordinarily complex month, not only for Indian foreign policy but also for many other great and major powers. There was a constant ebb and flow of moves and counter moves to keep balancing in play.

The highlight was undoubtedly the very meaningful and successful outcome of the G20 summit hosted by India on September 9-10, 2023. The absence of Presidents Xi and Putin did not detract from the success, but may indeed have facilitated the compromise worked out on Ukraine on which undoubtedly US President Biden was most helpful. That nuanced compromise will not work to Ukraine's detriment. It was a reflection of the importance of ensuring that the G20 retains international credibility, especially with the UN System flailing and the world's problems multiplying and worsening. It was also an acceptance, albeit a reluctant one, of the growing need to acknowledge the growth of multipolarity and that the principles of the UN Charter and international law should be universally applicable, and not subject to the projection of a 'might is right' approach. The G20 summit also demonstrated that the voice, concerns and development problems of the Global South cannot indefinitely be set aside. In this context, agreement on the Indian proposal for the AU to be made a full member of the G20 was of particular significance.

In addition to the above, the extensive year long effort of the Indian Presidency to build a broad based consensus on a wide range of issues - economic, social, connectivity, resilient and secure supply chains, cyber security, digital infrastructure, technological and other challenges facing the developing world - has helped map the way forward for broad basing development to extend to all segments of the international community and address the critical challenges of poverty eradication, food, health and energy security, climate change, progressive use of technology, connectivity, finance for development etc. Implementation of these proposals in the years ahead will be of the essence.

The focus has been brought back to the G20 being the premier forum for international economic cooperation, while recognising the relationship between economic development, international politics and security.

The Memorandum of Understanding signed on the sidelines of the G20 summit among India, USA, UAE, Saudi Arabia, France, Germany and the EU to establish the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) was another

significant development, and it is intended to enhance connectivity and economic integration among Asia, the Gulf region and Europe. Two corridors are envisaged, and an action plan with timetables is to be developed. The potential for this to be a game changer is quite striking, and if ongoing moves to strengthen US-Saudi relations and normalise Saudi-Israel and Saudi-Iran relations fructify, the likelihood of the proposed IMEC Corridor fulfilling expectations would stand enhanced.

Another significant development from the Indian perspective was the state visit of the Saudi PM and Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Sultan, immediately after he attended the G20 Summit on September 11. This was part of the ongoing process of India's Act West policy and the ongoing comprehensive strengthening of relations with the Gulf nations. The first meeting of the Strategic Partnership Council was co-chaired by the two Prime Ministers. A comprehensive joint statement was issued, covering a wide range of issues including cooperation in energy matters, trade, investment, climate change, defence, security, the fight against terrorism etc. Saudi Arabia is now India's fourth largest trade partner, and India is Saudi Arabia's second largest trade partner.

On the sidelines of the G20 summit, PM Modi held substantive bilateral discussions with Presidents Biden and Macron on September 08 and 10 respectively, after which joint statements were issued to follow up on their summit discussions earlier in the year. PM Modi also met bilaterally with President Lula of Brazil on September 10 to reaffirm the bilateral strategic partnership and identify cooperative activities. A joint statement was issued. Brazil is not only a member of IBSA and BRICS, but is also to be the next chair of G20. Both countries are also candidates for permanent membership on an expanded UNSC and strongly support each other's candidatures.

India's commitment to its Act East policy was manifest in PM Modi's participation in Jakarta on September 6-7 in the 20th ASEAN-India and 18th East Asia summits, at both of which meaningful proposals were made to strengthen collaboration across a variety of sectors including climate change, cyber/food/health and energy security. The focus on the trilateral highway and multimodal connectivity, when read with IMEC, points to a clear intent to connect ASEAN, India and the Gulf to Europe. This would create serious opportunities for economic development and integration. The emphasis on maritime cooperation, including on maritime security and safety, was noteworthy.

PM Modi emphasised the importance of the EAS Forum for dialogue and cooperation on Indo-Pacific matters and development of CBMs in Asia. India considers ASEAN a central pillar of its Act East policy. For both, elevating the voice of the Global South is of common interest.

India's successful foreign policy outreach during the month seems to have been galling for some. Whether that is true or not, the absurd and baseless allegations made by Canadian PM Trudeau in the Canadian parliament on September 18 that India was responsible for the assassination in June of a wanted Canadian Sikh terrorist on Canadian soil has understandably led to a sharp deterioration in bilateral relations. No evidence was provided but obviously this malicious and motivated allegation may have been intended to cause India embarrassment at a time when the leaders of the international community were gathered in New York for the 78th UNGA. What is problematic is that some of the information, on the basis of which this unprecedented allegation was made, was provided by the US, perhaps as part of the Five Eyes intelligence sharing arrangement among the US, Canada, UK, Australia and New Zealand. The fact that Canada has for long protected terrorists, criminals and extremists working against India and has not acted on dossiers provided by India on such individuals and organisations, and has also interfered in India's internal affairs, as in the anti-farm laws agitation, is perhaps not relevant for some countries that espouse rules based order. Nor indeed that threats to the lives of Indian diplomats in Canada have been openly made by Canadian citizens. PM Trudeau is obviously focussed on saving his minority government, for which he desperately needs the support of a party that supports terrorism in India by Canadian Khalistanis. Till the time of writing, no evidence has reportedly been provided to India.

Reactions since PM Trudeau's wild, unprecedented and unsubstantiated charge against a fellow Commonwealth country would suggest that he is more than likely to fall on his own sword. What is troubling though is why the US at the level of both its NSA and Secretary of State have chosen to be supportive of Canada's absurd allegations. The U.S. obviously owes Canada and probably assesses that this blip will not adversely impact the ongoing US-India entente in an unmanageable manner.

The ongoing US effort to strengthen partnerships in the Asia Pacific, to challenge the growing Chinese intransigence and power projection in the region, proceeded apace with the visit of President Biden to Vietnam on September 10-11. He proceeded directly from Delhi. Importantly, during the visit, the US and Vietnam elevated their ten year old Comprehensive Partnership to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. The relationship has

come full circle with Vietnam condoning, no doubt on account of the China factor, the bitter past history of US aggression against it. This marks a new phase in Vietnam's balancing approach towards China. The US is to work with Vietnam, inter alia, in investing in the innovation economy, cooperation in S&T, deepening trade, investment and economic cooperation, bolstering security etc. Interestingly, on the ongoing war in Ukraine, the joint statement calls for "establishing a comprehensive, just and durable peace in accordance with the UN Charter and international law."

At the same time, US efforts to find ways to manage the overall relationship with China and address the negative fall out of differences on account of China's aggressive military postures and economic de-risking/diversification continued. US NSA Sullivan met Chinese FM Wang Yi in Malta on September 16-17. US Secretary of State Blinken met Chinese Vice President Han Zheng on the sidelines of the UNGA on September 18, and Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong met his U.S. counterpart in Washington on September 28. These discussions were described as candid and constructive/substantive in the effort to maintain open lines of communication and manage the serious differences in bilateral relations. Additionally, the two countries launched on September 22 two working groups on economic and financial issues that will report to US Treasury Secretary Yellen and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng. This had been agreed on last July when Yellen visited China.

It is reported that China helped in the repatriation of the U.S. soldier, Travis King, who had strayed across the 38th parallel into the DPRK.

As part of its ongoing rebalancing efforts, President Biden held a first ever summit meeting with the leaders of the five Central Asian states on the sidelines of the UNGA in New York on September 19. Biden proposed, inter alia, launching a C5+1 Critical Minerals Dialogue "to develop Central Asia's vast mineral wealth and advance critical minerals security". A joint statement was issued that spelt out principles of further interaction that include expanded security cooperation, a C5+1 Economic and Energy Corridor, enhancing energy security and combating the effects of climate change.

Moves, and counter moves, continued in East Asia. At a meeting in Seoul on September 26 of the three Foreign office representatives, it was announced by the ROK Foreign Ministry that the leaders of China, ROK and Japan would hold a trilateral meeting at the earliest convenient time. Prior to that, the Foreign Ministers would meet. Such summits were held since 2008, and the last took place in 2019 before COVID-19 hit. Now that both Japan and ROK seem closer to each other, they can perhaps tackle China together more effectively.



Another significant development in the Far East was the visit by the DPRK Leader Kim Jong Un to Russia (September 12-17) and his discussions with President Putin in Russia's Far East. At their meeting on September 13, Kim told Putin that "currently, our relations with the Russian Federation are the top priority for our country." He described the war in Ukraine as Russia being "engaged in a sacred battle to defend its state sovereignty and security in the face of the hegemonic forces that oppose Russia." He expressed the hope that the two countries "will always stand together in fighting imperialism and building a sovereign state." The talks were held at the Vostochny Space Launch Center as requested by Kim. The space sector is obviously of great interest to the DPRK on account of its current defence posture, while Russia needs a whole lot of conventional war materials which the DPRK has, for its ongoing war in Ukraine. Details of outcomes are awaited but this new development will no doubt be of concern not only to Japan, ROK and the US, but also to China. And to Ukraine.

China for its part has continued to be proactive. It has strongly criticised Japan's decision to release water from Fukushima which it alleges is contaminated and has banned import of marine products from Japan. The latter has contested this at the WTO as being unacceptable. The IAEA had ruled that the discharged waters were within safe limits.

The PM of Nepal visited China from September 23-30 at the invitation of his counterpart. A joint statement was issued with details of bilateral projects etc. High quality Belt and Road coordination is to be pursued. Nepal has expressed support for China's Global Development Initiative and will consider joining the friends of GDI. The strategic partnership of everlasting friendship for development and prosperity was reiterated. Both sides also reiterated that they will respect and accommodate each other's concerns and core interests. From the Chinese perspective, this includes Tibet and Taiwan. For Nepal, China has promised firm support for Nepali independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The joint statement is silent, understandably from Nepal's point of view, on Xi Jinping's two other proposed flagships, the Global Security and Global Cultural Initiatives.

In effect, Nepal continues to play the balancing game.

In a major initiative timed to coincide with the ongoing 78th UNGA, China issued on September 26 a detailed proposal on "The Reform and Development of Global Governance." This was again a determined effort to set the agenda for reform of multilateral institutions and governance, consistent with China's

interests and the determination to ensure that the Chinese Dream is realised. The focus is on Xi Jinping's vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind which requires the world to "act on true multilateralism" which implicitly is founded on principles set out by Xi in his GDI, GSI (global security initiative) and GCI (global cultural initiative.)

Thus, for instance, enhancing global security requires the GSI to promote a global security community for all while committing to "taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously," including in Ukraine. The question is, who decides what is legitimate? No doubt, the one that has the greater muscle.

The U.S. is warned in the document not to stoke up camp based confrontation and to instead work to build a balanced, effective and sustainable European security architecture; asked to draw lessons from Afghanistan; and to lift unilateral sanctions and undertake reconstruction and development of Afghanistan. In Africa, China opposes the wanton use of sanctions and long arm jurisdiction, while supporting solving African issues in the (undefined) African way.

The section in the paper on advancing global human rights is particularly interesting, and is linked not only to Xi's GCI and GDI but also to GSI. People's happiness is defined as "the biggest human right," but the paper goes on to say that "all aspects of human rights are equally important and should be advanced in a coordinated and systematic way". Further, that the rights to subsistence and development are of paramount importance. In effect, there is lack of intellectual and analytical clarity in this section. Given China's human rights record, that is hardly surprising. The effort is to justify its internal actions to ensure regime security.

The section on technology essentially underlines that no country should overstretch the concept of national security or unscrupulously deprive another country of its legitimate right to development. The target is obviously the current technology denial actions of the US and the West against China.

On the issue of the maritime order going forward, China will want threats and challenges to be addressed under the framework of the GSI, as if observing the UNCLOS is not adequate for the purpose.

Not surprisingly, China also seeks the building of a community with a shared future for mankind in outer space. Towards this end, in their opinion, countries that are major players in outer space should take primary responsibility for



safeguarding peace and security in outer space. This is hardly a proposition for inclusivity and equality.

The final section of the proposal addresses reform of the global governance system and is replete with such ambiguity that it can be defined to China's advantage. "True multilateralism" is equated with promotion of greater democracy in international relations and requires keeping up with the evolved international political and economic landscape. China supports "necessary and equitable reform" of the UNSC. What this means is not defined, except that the historical injustices done to Africa should be redressed and more developing countries with "independent foreign policies and just positions" given the opportunity to sit on the UNSC and participate in its decision making. And finally, China seeks a "package solution that addresses the interests and concerns of all parties on the five clusters of key issues related to reform." In effect, this is a recipe for no reform of the UNSC.

The war continued in Ukraine fitfully and with no end in sight. President Zelenskyy was in New York at the UN and in Washington to drum up and sustain support for his country. He would be concerned, since support seems to be waning in some European countries, including Poland, Hungary and Slovakia. In the US, the Republicans are not particularly supportive and the recent budget impasse may temporarily mean reduced funding for Ukraine that could adversely affect military supplies.

With winter approaching, the fighting may get adversely impacted for both sides. Besides, Russia appears to be coping reasonably well in spite of sanctions. A fresh grain export arrangement is still not in place, although alternate routes are being explored.

Zelenskyy has had to change the leadership of his defence ministry on account of corruption allegations that were worrying donors.

No serious moves seem to be happening to find an early end to the war, or for arranging a cease fire or armistice. The hope seems to be that Russia will in time find the economic burden of the war and sanctions unbearable and seek a way out of the current impasse.

One additional casualty of the Ukraine war seems to have been the loss of the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan. With Russia now unable or unwilling to help the Armenians, the enclave has been taken over in a swift military move by the Azeris. Virtually the entire Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh has fled to Armenia, creating a new refugee crisis.

September was a hectic month in international relations. The earthquake in Morocco, the floods in Libya and the ongoing disputes including in Sudan, Niger and Gabon have added to the other humanitarian and governance challenges in different parts of the globe, including from climate change and inadequate progress on the SDGs. The 78th session of the UNGA has begun and hopefully solutions and assistance will be forthcoming to address at least the most immediate of the problems.

New Delhi.

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Core 5A, 1st Floor,  
India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road  
New Delhi - 110003  
India

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