



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



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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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Cover Image:

President Emmanuel Macron brought together 27 heads of state and government or their ministerial representatives for a conference in support of Ukraine at the Élysée Palace on February 27, 2024. Source: [X/EmmanuelMacron](#)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi meeting the President of the UAE, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan on February 13, 2024. Source: [Narendra Modi](#)

Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic (Greece), H.E. Mr. Kyriakos Mitsotakis, was welcomed by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for bilateral talks at Hyderabad House, on February 21, 2024. Source: [X/@narendramodi](#)

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by

Nalin Surie

The somber mood across the world intensified as the war in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war showed no end in sight. Lassitude appears to have overtaken the protagonists and their supporters, and no amount of killing of innocents, including women and children, of the growing humanitarian crises, and the wider negative impact on the international community, especially the Global South, seems to matter. Narrow national interests and domestic political compulsions reign supreme. The notion of right and wrong had stopped to matter a long time ago.

Domestic political developments in the US have meant that Ukraine is not receiving the war materiel it needs to stave off or push back against Russian forces. Suggestions that there is need to seriously look for an acceptable end game in Ukraine after two years of the war are no doubt also a cause for serious concern in Kiev. Europe is a willing supporter but does not have, or is unwilling to supply, the defensive and offensive weapons Ukraine needs. This was reflected in the response by major European countries to President Macron's suggestion that individual NATO countries could conceivably send troops to fight in Ukraine.

The domestic political problems in the US have begun to seriously impact US credibility as a guarantor of European security, or that of Ukraine. There is increasing talk of Europe needing to be able to defend and secure itself. US allies in Asia are also watching warily, but with an eagle's eye. Not the least, Taiwan.

The US inability to persuade Israel to accept a humanitarian cease fire and supply aid to the Palestinians while also protecting civilians has added to the Biden administration's woes. The death of over one hundred Palestinians in northern Gaza on February 29 during the delivery of humanitarian assistance compounded the problem. The US decision to airdrop some food packets to Gaza on March 02 was a sign of desperation. But the Netanyahu government seems unwilling to countenance any pause in its fight to eliminate Hamas until all Israeli hostages held by Hamas are accounted for and released. US credibility is now seriously challenged, although talks involving Egypt and Qatar for a limited humanitarian pause reportedly continue.

The growing likelihood that President Biden will be seriously challenged by, and possibly lose to, former President Trump in the elections due in November is giving rise to serious discomfiture in world capitals, not least in NATO countries and other US allies. The French Foreign Minister is reported to have said that Europe needs new life insurance. So too in China, which is facing its own very serious domestic, economic and external challenges.

Russia is not in an enviable situation either. The inexplicable death, or murder, of the opposition leader Alexei Navalny in a Russian prison on February 16, just days before Presidential elections in that country on March 15-17, can be interpreted as a sign of weakness since the outcome of the election is in little doubt. The military campaign in Ukraine is essentially bogged down. An economy focused on military output creates its own vulnerabilities. European hostility is palpable. Sweden is now set to join NATO, following Hungary's concurrence. Dependence on China is growing, but it is clear that the latter eagerly seeks normalcy in relations both with Europe and the US.

The 60th edition of the Munich Security Conference (an essentially Atlantic oriented gathering) was held on February 16-18. The deliberations were understandably overshadowed not simply by the Ukraine war, but more dramatically by the death of Alexei Navalny. An even more important subtext, though, was the seeming inability of the US to act decisively both in the Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas war. According to *Le Monde*, "a strong sense of urgency regarding the need to defend Europe gripped participants at the 60th MSC".

The official debrief of the conference acknowledged that dark clouds hung over this year's conference and that the key themes that emerged included "the need to insulate transatlantic unity from isolation; the call of 'now' for European action; the search for ways out of the Middle East's vicious cycle; the reimagining of global order; and across the board, the finding, or missing, of silver linings".

The debrief recognises that the ongoing conflicts in the world "have deepened the gulf between the transatlantic partners and countries of the Global South, and reinforced criticism of double standards. A global order that works for every one requires reformed international institutions and greater solidarity on the challenges facing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America". It remains to be seen whether this recognition will translate into concrete actions in the midst of weakened or crumbling multilateral institutions.

On the sidelines of the MSC, US Secretary of State Blinken met Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on February 16. The Chinese claim the meeting was sought

by the US side. The US described the talks as candid and constructive. (The Chinese added they were also substantive). Blinken spoke of the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and in the South China Sea. He questioned China's support for Russia's war in Ukraine. Wang Yi, among other issues, asked the US to take an objective and rational view of China's development and reminded that derisking/decoupling would backfire on the US. He stressed that Taiwan is part of China. He asked that the unwarranted harassment and interrogations of Chinese citizens by the US be stopped.

According to the Chinese side, it has been agreed to promote US-China dialogue on foreign policy, Asia Pacific affairs, maritime affairs, AI and mil-mil communications. The US clarified that bilateral talks on the Middle East and Korea will continue.

In another part of Eurasia, the 9th Raisina Dialogue was held in New Delhi from February 21-23. This is an annual flagship conference organised under the auspices of India's Ministry of External Affairs. The event was inaugurated by Indian PM Modi and the chief guest was PM Mitsotakis of Greece. There were participants from over 100 countries addressing a four pronged agenda encompassing "conflict, contest, cooperate and create". Participants included government ministers and representatives as well as thought leaders from the private sector, media and academia. Issues addressed included regulations and realities of Tech frontiers, investment and innovation, reforming multilateralism, the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, the post 2030 agenda and the future of democracy.

The agenda was topical and deliberations at the conference will no doubt have given food for thought to those involved in analysis and decision making.

The 7th Indian Ocean Conference was held in Perth, Australia on February 09-10 under the rubric 'Towards a stable and sustainable IO'. The conference is organised by the India Foundation on behalf of India's Ministry of External Affairs, and is an important initiative. The President of Sri Lanka and Ministers/Ministers of State/officials from 16 countries addressed the meeting, including from Singapore, Australia, Mauritius, Timor Leste, Bangladesh, Madagascar, Seychelles, Nepal, Maldives, US, Japan, Oman, UK, Vietnam, UAE and Bhutan.

In his remarks at the conference, India's EAM stressed the need for lateral land based connectivity across the Indian Ocean region to supplement and complement maritime flows. Hence, the importance of IMEC on India's west and the Trilateral Highway on India's east. He also referred to the importance of the development of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative which will strengthen

bonds among those that share the desire to sustain the two oceans through practical, project based cooperation.

Brazil as Chair of the G20 hosted its first meeting of G20 Foreign Ministers on February 21-22, 2024 in Rio de Janeiro. (Incidentally, this seems to have impacted participation at the ministerial level at the Raisina Dialogue, because of an overlap of dates.)

President Lula had identified Brazilian priorities earlier, and had specified that they would pursue approaches already followed by Indonesia and India and expressed the confidence that so would the next G20 Chair, South Africa. These priorities include: to continue to shed light on the needs of the Global South, to set up special task forces to fight hunger and climate change, global governance reform, restoring trust in multilateralism, restoring primacy of international law (including humanitarian law), and ensuring an equal voice for all in a fair international order.

The Brazilian Foreign Minister issued a press statement on February 22 after the meeting of foreign ministers summarising the discussions, which covered current geopolitical tensions, including Ukraine and Palestine. According to him, on the latter issue there was virtually unanimous support for a two state solution as the only possible solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Reform of global governance was also addressed, and it was agreed that the UN, WTO, WB and IMF and others need to be reformed so that they can adapt to the challenges of today's world. Interestingly, on UNSC reform, he spoke of inclusion of new permanent and non permanent members, in particular from LAC and Africa, but not Asia.

There will be a second meeting of G20 Foreign Ministers in September on the sidelines of the UNGA. It will be open to all UN members, to help promote global governance reform.

India's proactive Act West policy was in evidence during the month. PM Modi visited the UAE and Qatar from February 13-15. The visit to the UAE (including Dubai) came hot on the heels of the UAE President's visit to India in January, and was symbolic of the growing strength and diversity of the partnership. It was PM Modi's seventh visit to the UAE. Ten MOUs/ Agreements were entered into, reflecting the growing enmeshing of the economies and cultural linkages. Early operationalisation of IMEC also figured, notwithstanding the war between Israel and Hamas. A joint statement was issued.

The inauguration by PM Modi of the BAPS (Hindu) temple in Abu Dhabi was among the highlights, for which special thanks were extended by him to the UAE President.

At the invitation of the Ruler of Dubai, PM Modi delivered the keynote address at the World Government Summit on February 14, in which he called for the promotion of the values of a cohesive, cooperative and collaborative world. His six point proposal included participation of the Global South in global decision making, highlighting the priorities of the Global South, establishing global protocols to deal with AI, cryptocurrency and cyber crime, and to prioritising national sovereignty while also upholding international law.

The visit to Qatar on February 15 was PM Modi's second official visit to that country, the first was in 2016. Just before the visit, the issue of eight Indians of the Al-Dahra Co., who had been on death row, was resolved with their repatriation.

With the Amir of Qatar, PM Modi agreed on the need for strategic investment and strategic partnership in energy, technology, space, innovation, green energy and fintech. The Father of the Amir affirmed that India and Qatar share an unwavering bond epitomised by mutual trust and cooperation.

The state visit by the PM of Greece on February 21-22 can be seen as a territorial extension of India's Act West policy. The visit took place within six months of PM Modi's visit to Greece. A joint statement was issued.

The objective of the visit was to enhance the strategic partnership in the political, security, economic and cultural spheres. Trade is to be doubled by 2030. Areas of collaboration include pharmaceuticals, infrastructure development, ports, shipping, chemical industry, digital world, communications, defense, agriculture, tourism, space, nanotechnology, biotechnology, quantum computing, clean energy, air connectivity and IMEC. Greece will join the IPOI.

An important Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement is to be finalised between India and Greece.

The obvious need to fast track the bilateral relationship has been recognised by both sides.

It remains to be seen what the Ides of March portend for international relations, peace, security and development in the world. The state of politics in the US, the situation in Europe, the war between Israel and Hamas, the projected

direction of Chinese policies, the conflicts in Africa, the growing fragmentation of international institutions, and the problems of the Global South and of the global commons are a grim reminder that a lot is not well in the world. There is thus the dire need to resurrect the original compact of ensuring that the world is actually rid of the scourge of war, social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom are promoted, tolerance is practiced and peoples live together in peace with one another as good neighbours.



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