



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



GLOBAL HORIZONS AUGUST 2024

Author

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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.

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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 Images:

Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, met with the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in Kyiv, on August 23, 2024.

Source: [Prime Minister of India](#)

Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Pham Minh, received a ceremonial welcome during his state visit to India, at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on August 1, 2024. Source: [Prime Minister of India](#)

At the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Anwar bin Ibrahim paid a State Visit to India from August 19 to 21, 2024. Source: [Prime Minister of India](#)

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by

Nalin Surie

August was a complex month, with several developments that could significantly bear upon international relations and India's foreign policy going forward.

A most striking feature during the month was, arguably, the pace and manner in which the campaign of US Vice President Harris for the Presidency proceeded. Observers suggest that while the strength of the Trump campaign cannot be underestimated, the Harris campaign has taken the lead and the former could be on the back foot. The outcome of the debate on September 10 between Harris and Trump could, in that context, be significant. Till then, Harris seems to be treading the safe path and defending the track record of the Biden administration, but with important variations to counter perceptions particularly on the economy, that are not in conformity with the actual state of the economy.

On her foreign policy approach too, Harris was cautious but firm. In her acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, she highlighted that she will bring back the bipartisan border security bill; remain steadfast in advancing US security and values abroad; ensure that America will have the strongest, most lethal fighting force in the world; that the US will lead the world into the future on space and AI; that America, not China will win the competition for the 21st century, and that the US will strengthen, not abdicate its global leadership. She added that under her administration the US will stand strong with Ukraine and NATO allies; that she will always stand up for Israel's right to defend itself and ensure it has the ability to defend itself; and that with Biden she will continue to work to end the war in Gaza such that Israel is secure, the hostages are released, the suffering in Gaza ends, and the Palestinians can realise their right to dignity, security, freedom and self-determination. The message to Iran and DPRK was uncompromising.

US allies and friends would be reassured by the continuity reflected in Harris' message. The Global South, though, would expect more.

Israel's war against Hamas continued with almost relentless intensity and without concern over collateral death and destruction. The military action

extended to the West Bank during the month. It is almost as if a reality is being created on the ground that might make a two state solution unviable in the future. In spite of US pressure and serious domestic pressure, the Israeli government seems unwilling to agree on a deal to free the hostages, accept a sustainable cease fire, and allow humanitarian assistance to flow to the desperate Palestinians in Gaza till Hamas is 'destroyed'. The lack, so far, of an Iranian response to the killing of the Hamas leader in Teheran on July 31 seems to have emboldened the authorities in Israel to carry on their military operations against Hamas and Hezbollah without demur. Israel also appears to be convinced that the US will not pull the plug on its operations, except perhaps in notional terms.

Notwithstanding the Ukrainian counter offensive in the Kursk region of Russia, the war in Ukraine remains stalemated and risks becoming a forgotten conflict. The Kursk incursion so far does not seem to have achieved anything more than boosting morale, while Russian forces have reportedly made inroads in the Donbas instead of shifting forces from there to push back in Kursk. In addition, the Russian tactic of attrition and destruction of infrastructure in Ukraine continues. President Zelenskyy continues to seek from NATO partners an agreement to attack targets in Russia, but to limited avail at best.

The above notwithstanding, the reality is that the war in Ukraine has seriously upended several important structures of international governance and this European war has seriously impacted countries of the Global South, including India.

The visit to Ukraine by Prime Minister Modi on August 23 should be viewed in this context. India's stance on this war has been balanced from its inception, namely that diplomacy and dialogue are the key to resolving this issue since this is not an era of war and the battlefield will not provide the solution. Modi had made this clear to President Putin during his Moscow visit last month, and did so to Zelenskyy as well.

India's EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar, while briefing the media on the visit, conveyed that the Modi-Zelenskyy discussion on the war was "fairly long and detailed" and "it devolved around to some extent the military situation, about on the medium term concerns like food and energy, and most of all, on conceivable pathways to peace and conflict resolution". He described the conversation as "a very constructive discussion".

In response to a question, Dr. Jaishankar made it clear that going forward on the peace process in which India has been participating from the beginning,

any exercise to be productive will naturally have to involve the other party concerned, i.e., Russia.

Both Presidents Biden and Putin spoke to PM Modi after his visit to Kiev. India can clearly provide an effective channel of communications between Moscow and Kiev if the parties want. It has the credentials and commitment to dialogue and diplomacy required for this purpose, and for the need to restructure and reform multilateral institutions for the benefit of the Global South.

The decision by PM Modi to combine his visit to Ukraine with an official visit to Poland made much sense, given the historical connects and influence Poland has in Ukraine and equally, the recognition of the importance of Poland for India bilaterally and in the EU and NATO contexts. It bears recalling that Poland is the fifth largest economy in the EU, and is also the fifth largest in terms of population. Our bilateral relations have in the past been substantive, though below potential.

While the war in Ukraine ground on, developments in Europe continued to give cause for concern. France conducted the Olympic Games with great success and grandeur but the political stalemate in government formation, following gains made by the far right in the last elections continued. President Macron has still to appoint a new Prime Minister. Recent state elections in Germany, too, point to the extreme right making important gains, but reportedly they could be kept out of government due to tactical adjustments among the other parties. Chancellor Scholz's SPD continues to slip significantly in the polls, and the German economy's performance is worrying.

There were far right inspired riots in parts of the UK early in the month, but swift and firm action by the new Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, has put a lid on the situation for the present.

The rise of far right parties in Europe's three biggest countries is a matter of serious concern that unless politically and economically addressed, can further strengthen forces that can seriously divide Europe.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang was in Moscow on August 20 for the 29th regular meeting with the PM of Russia, a mechanism that started in 1996. The focus of discussions was on trade, economic and humanitarian cooperation issues. He met President Putin on August 21, at which time the latter observed that trade relations are flourishing. Li for his part noted that the strategic leadership of Xi and Putin has elevated China-Russia relations to an unprecedentedly high level. The partnership continues to firm further.

Notwithstanding their serious differences on critical issues, both China and the US appear keen to maintain the dialogue and relationship with each other on a relatively even keel and prevent confrontation before the forthcoming US Presidential elections. In this context, the US NSA Sullivan made his first visit to Beijing on August 27-29 for meetings with his counterpart, Politburo member and Foreign Minister, Wang Yi. (Their earlier meetings were held in other countries.) He also met with the Vice Chairman of China's Central Military Commission, Zhang Youxia (first time in eight years for a US official), and called on President Xi Jinping.

From what is available in the public domain, it would appear that while both sides stuck to their known positions on issues bedeviling their relations, the Chinese were quite willing to engage in dialogue to ensure that differences remain within controllable parameters. The proposed meeting with the CMC vice chair, and the decision that the US Indo-Pacom Commander and the PLA Southern Theatre Commander will speak, suggests that the Chinese are equally interested in ensuring that direct military confrontation is avoided. It is also important that later in the year, Presidents Biden and Xi will speak or meet, perhaps at the G20 or APEC summit.

Both sides described Sullivan's discussions in Beijing as "candid, constructive and substantive".

The Taiwan thick redline apart, China's demands include being treated as an equal; an end to its suppression in the economic, trade and scientific fields; to be treated as a partner, not rival; for its legitimate interests not to be undermined; and for the two countries to visualise each other's development as an opportunity and not a challenge.

For his part, Sullivan, inter alia, made it clear that the US will continue to take necessary action to prevent advanced US technologies from being used to undermine US national security without unduly limiting trade or investment; remains deeply concerned about China's support for Russia's defense industrial base and its impact on both European and transatlantic security and the war in Ukraine; and the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. He also reaffirmed US commitment to its Indo-Pacific allies.

The conference on Sudan organised by the US and Saudi Arabia from August 14 was hamstrung by the non-participation of the Sudan Army. The conference reportedly had three objectives : provide channels for humanitarian access, protection to civilians and cessation of hostilities. According to the US Special Envoy for Sudan, progress appears to have been made on the first two

objectives in separate negotiations with the main principals, but on the third issue of cessation of hostilities there is lack of political will for the parties to stop fighting. The fighting is, reportedly, accelerating. He noted that there is an increasing number of external actors, both countries and negative forces, pouring fuel on the fire in Sudan. It remains to be seen whether the RSF and SAF will actually allow even the understandings on the first two objectives to be met, in part or whole. The onus is on the external and internal backers of the two factions in Sudan to ensure that at the very least, the humanitarian situation there does not worsen. For this to happen, the US and the principal Arab countries will have to exert greater pressure on the protagonists.

In Venezuela, President Maduro continues to ride out the storm after his disputed reelection. It is reported that he continues to depend on support from the armed forces and foreign countries, including China and Russia. Complete voting tallies have still not been published; street protests continued. EU Foreign Ministers have agreed not to recognise the democratic legitimacy of Maduro's reelection. India has clarified that it is following developments in Venezuela since their recent Presidential elections, and hopes that there will be a peaceful resolution of the issue.

The situation in Bangladesh which forced PM Hasina to resign and flee the country on August 05 presented a not unexpected, but certainly unwanted challenge for India. She is currently in India. EAM Dr. Jaishankar informed both Houses of Parliament on August 06 of what had happened and why. He sought the "understanding and support of both Houses in regard to sensitive issues regarding an important neighbour on which there has always been strong national consensus". This was forthcoming.

Bangladesh now has an interim government headed by the former founder of the Grameen Bank, Mohammad Yunus, who has returned from an extended sojourn abroad. The armed forces are undoubtedly an important component of the government, as are some student leaders who led the agitation against PM Hasina's government. Religious fundamentalist forces are making a comeback. The next steps the interim government takes to restore normalcy and hold fresh elections will undoubtedly be assessed in India. So too its approach to continued economic cooperation, Indian projects in Bangladesh, connectivity issues, P2P relations, security concerns of interest to India, protection of minorities, and regional integration.

Dhaka will no doubt bear in mind how important the bilateral relationship is not only for India but for itself. India cannot but want the best of relations with one of its most important neighbours that was once joined at the hip; a

geographical reality that has not changed. It may be best for both countries to make haste slowly and allow normalcy to be restored in the changed circumstances.

India hosted the 3rd Voice of Global South Summit virtually on August 17. The effort was to continue to address challenges and development priorities ranging from development finance to climate change, health to technology, energy to trade, digital transformation to women-led development, and sustainability. PM Modi proposed a fourfold Global Development Compact covering trade for development, capacity building, technology sharing, and project specific concessional finance and grants. Several initiatives were announced to collaborate with the Global South, including in trade promotion, trade policy negotiation, provision of affordable generic medicines, and natural farming.

In the specialised ministerial sessions dealing with international relations, finance, health, education, youth, trade, information technology, environment and energy, topical issues were discussed in a search for solutions on the way forward for problems confronting the developing world.

The discussions and outcomes at the 3rd Summit will feed into the forthcoming UN Summit of the Future.

There were two important incoming visits by ASEAN heads of government to India during the month, by the Prime Ministers of Vietnam and Malaysia. The former helped consolidate an already special partnership while the latter helped restore positivity in a relationship that has for a variety of reasons remained below potential. Both partnerships are important components of India's Act East policy.

A joint statement was signed at the conclusion of Vietnam PM Pham Minh Chinh's visit on August 1. This covered trade/economic/ investment cooperation, defence and security cooperation, innovation and S&T cooperation, and regional and international cooperation. Several agreements were also signed and, importantly, a Plan of Action for implementation of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for 2024-28 was finalised.

Letters of credit for USD 300 million were extended to enable Vietnam to purchase two naval vessels. The enhancement of defence and security cooperation, an important pillar will, as the joint statement projected, also contribute to greater stability in the wider Indo-Pacific region.

The visit of Malaysian PM Anwar bin Ibrahim on August 20 resulted in important outcomes, and a joint statement was issued. The current Enhanced Strategic Partnership was upgraded to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Bilateral defence and security partnership was described as a core pillar of the partnership.

Important MOUs on Recruitment, Employment and Repatriation of workers, cooperation in Ayurveda and other traditional medicine, Digital technology and Tourism were entered into. A program of cooperation was finalised on Culture/Arts/Heritage.

The gathering of world leaders at the Summit of the Future at New York on September 22-23 will hopefully provide an opportunity to restore at least a semblance of peace and rationality in the world.



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