

India's Incredible Internationalism in the Emerging International Order

India Rising

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India is an embodiment of internationalism; manifested as nearly 20% of the world's population, 5th largest economy, 1st greatest diaspora, immense cultural diversity, robust democracy, and historical as well as contemporary destination for and source of ideas and influence. Regardless of how much India's secular economic, diplomatic, and military power grows, India has been, is, and will remain a strong contributor to and an essential component of internationalism.

India's importance and relative share in internationalism likely will increase.

Assessments of India's future trajectory differ—ranging from modest to great expectations - always staying above collapse yet well below dominance. The empirical record demonstrates that over time India is emerging stronger in every metric of conventional international power: economic, diplomatic (including multilateralism), military. Simultaneously there remains a high, unmet ceiling to becoming a true great power. For example, India is the world's 5th largest economy, yet it has the lowest per capita gross domestic product of any G20 country. India's bilateral relations have expanded and, in many instances, have been enhanced across the globe, but where they are determinative is undemonstrated. India's multilateral memberships have proliferated even as key memberships in global governance such as the United Nations Security Council elude it, and it chooses not to join key commercial ones such as the Indo-Pacific's Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). India's military and technical capabilities increase as does its access and opportunities to work with the most advanced countries, but its own defense expenditures and capacities remain very measured.

India's internationalism is incredible (to steal from the country's tourism slogan—Incredible India!). It reflects a singular combination of challenges, strengths, and most markedly—diffusion; characteristics that are inter-related and a function of key economic and politico-strategic interests. For example, if one “maps” India's key economic

interests such as trade, foreign direct investment, petroleum, oil, and lubricants (POL) imports/exports, multilateral/commercial debt, and remittances among other factors the net result is that no single country or region is critical to India or vice versa. India must engage and act everywhere to maximize achievement of incremental, marginal, and niche interests. Similarly, India's politico-strategic interests (e.g., autonomy, de jure/de facto recognition of India's nuclear weapons status and conventional arms commerce, support for a UNSC seat, and membership in global, North, South and regional organizations, and

commitment to “non-alignment” and “strategic autonomy.” Indeed, even concepts such as nonalignment and strategic autonomy should be seen as less about deltas in alignment with different international players and more about how and how much India should be engaged in world affairs. The manner and degree of India's international engagement must be perceived in the context of domestic needs, the prevailing distribution of international power and possibilities of partnership.

Congress governments have gone with first Prime Minister Nehru's “non-alignment” (during a bi-polar US-Soviet



international order) by definition even diasporic relations) require an incredibly wide-ranging engagement. A central feature of India's “incredible internationalism” is that India's interests require robust global engagement, yet India's material influence internationally is still increasing. India and the world are weighting on and waiting for each other.

India's will combine its heightened engagement in coalitional arrangements

India now has the potential to take advantage of emerging trends such as the diffusion of power, multipolarity among countries, fragmentation and networking in global and regional institutions, and emerging coalitions of functional and values-based alignments in the international order. It remains to be seen if it will take advantage of them, given domestic priorities, competing demands, and the emerging order's push and pull on India to make choices.

India's internationalism is contested more within India than outside of it. Observers of India's international role have overly debated the country's

international order), the first BJP government under Vajpayee used “strategic autonomy” (just as the bipolar international order collapsed and the US hyperpower loomed), and Prime Minister Modi's administration uses “Vishwabandhu” and “Aatmanirbhar Bharat” (self-reliant India) amidst global fragmentation, networking, and emerging multipolarity.

India's foreign and security policies have traditionally been a preserve of a tiny elite. A considered recent effort has been undertaken to internationalize India at home via, for example, holding G20 events across India's cities to highlight the country's international role. Though the overall federal structure of India will likely bear little on the country's broad foreign policy interests and engagement, specific states will exercise outsized weight in relations with neighborhood countries (e.g., West Bengal with Bangladesh, North-Eastern Indian states with Myanmar, Tamil Nadu with Sri Lanka, etc.) And India's coalitional politics at the national level will shape ceilings and floors of what India does abroad, even if it is unlikely to guide continuity on key economic and politico-strategic interests.

What kind of actor will India be in the newly emerging international order that is characterized by multipolarity, coalitional multilateralism and systemic polarization? India's positioning on the evolving international arena will be defined by the domestic political developments and by the navigations required due to a shifting, uncertain international environment. Continuity rather than departures will be dominant in India's approach to the emerging international order.

First, **India will redouble efforts to develop domestic economic, social, technological and defense capacity, and to strengthen itself by seeking cooperation and assistance with beneficial partners** (countries, companies and mechanisms) that can contribute to domestic development in pursuit of Viksit Bharat (“Developed India”). Domestic development, primarily using its own resources, will be India's preferred way to achieving its great power aspirations, and will trump any foreign policy pursuits.

Second, **increasing alignment with the United States (and many of its allies and partners, especially in the Indo-Pacific)** is likely to persist despite a highly globally distributed, regional and Indo-Pacific focused set of

engagements. These allies and partners are seen as the most promising (but by no means the only) partners for facilitating India's aspirations at home and abroad.

Third, **India will continue to navigate great power politics** amongst the US, China, Russia and other major countries to give itself the space to shape outcomes in its interests. Indeed, by “straddling the seams” of international relations and “standing straight” by the accrual of more power, **India's internationalism will be inclusive rather than exclusive.**

India both a revisionist and a responsible global stakeholder, with a tilt towards the latter

Fourth, **India will combine its heightened engagement in coalitional arrangements** (e.g., the Quad, G7+, even potentially the IP4 and other configurations over time) **with continuing efforts to reshape global governance in its interests.** The emergence of coalitional or “wired” multilateralism (rather than the hubs-and-spokes “wheels” of alliances and partnerships and the

“webs” of networked mechanisms) provides India with a greater space to utilize international mechanisms to pursue specific interests. The net effect is that such combination makes India both a revisionist and a responsible global stakeholder, with a tilt towards the latter (given more improved relations with countries seeking to maintain the post-1945 international order than those seeking to amend it). In this sense, too, **India will continue to speak for the global South even as it continues to work more than in the past with**

the global North. India will likely speak even more loudly for itself, rather than for the causes seen as amenable and aligned with it. Like any country, India balances international positioning with interests, but India is becoming markedly less ideational and more earthy in the pursuit of its interests.

[With continuing efforts to reshape global governance in its interests](#)

Finally, India's contemporary domestic politics and material progress have created a sort of **“peak India” internationally.** Key Indian personnel such as Prime Minister Modi and Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar have been the most positively influential Indians globally in recent decades. India's economic growth rates and diplomacy have been robust. Whether such conditions will prevail cannot be foretold. But such things matter, of course, not in lieu of other structural factors in India and in internationalism, but in combination

with them. **India interestingly appears to be immune from intense polarization regarding international engagement**—though that seems to be a function of a consensus-based calibration of India's internationalism rather than the absence of such a debate.

As the 21st century begins its second quarter, India's standing and role will be vital in shaping internationalism's future. ■

The Summit on Peace in Ukraine

Paving a Hard-Fought Path to Freedom

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Path to peace: steps preceding the Summit

In June 2024, representatives from 92 nations and 8 international organisations attended the Summit on Peace in Ukraine. They came together to find common ground and a starting position for **building a just and lasting peace in Ukraine**, the country that has been fighting against all odds for its free and democratic future, and for the world's liberal values since February 2022.

The Summit used President Zelenskyy's 10-point peace plan as a springboard for its discussions. **Based on the principles of the UN Charter**, the key elements of this plan were focused on the cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of Russian troops, the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, justice and reparations, radiation and nuclear safety, food and energy security, and prevention of escalation.

The discussions at the Summit were deliberately narrower in scope, focusing mainly on civilian issues directly impacting the population (i.e., nuclear safety, global food security, prisoners of war) – topics and underlying principles which are on their own accord highly relevant for the international community.

Russia, the aggressor in the conflict, had expressed no interest in taking part in the Summit, and no formal invitation was issued. However, on the eve of the Summit, President Putin released his own terms for a peace agreement, which were based on the “new territorial realities” (MinFA Russian Federation) indicative of what he would like to have reached as the outcome of negotiations. According to Putin, any peace agreement had to be based on the international recognition of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson as part of the Russian Federation, a demilitarisation of Ukraine and a lifting of all sanctions against Russia. Ukraine and its allies denounced Russia's terms as an “ultimatum” and “renaissance of Nazism” (AP



News), pointing out that it was not a sincere attempt to reach peace.

Previous attempts to mediate between the two parties, or offers to help, were made by China and Brazil in early 2023, by a pan-African peace delegation (led by Zambia, Comoros, Senegal, South Africa, Egypt, Republic of Congo and Uganda), and by the Indonesian Minister of Defence, both in June 2023.

Whilst Brazil attended the summit as an observer, China declined the invitation to attend, preferring instead to “continue to promote talks for peace in our own way” (MinFA of the PRC). End May 2024, China and Brazil put forward an alternative proposal for a peace conference in the future that was to be “recognised by both Russia and Ukraine” (government of Brazil).

Conclusions reached at the Summit

A Joint Communiqué was issued as an outcome of the summit, which first reconfirmed the participants' commitment to develop a framework for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, based on international law, including the UN Charter. This framework for peace should be based on the absence of threat or use of force against the territo-

rial integrity or political independence of any state, the principles of sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of all states, including Ukraine, within their internationally recognised borders, and the resolution of disputes through peaceful means.

The Communiqué lists the following three focus areas that may form a foundation of trust, on the basis of which further peace negotiations could be held:

1. “Firstly, **any use of nuclear energy and nuclear installations must be safe, secured, safe-guarded and environmentally sound.** Ukrainian nuclear power plants and installations, including Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, must operate safely and securely under full sovereign control of Ukraine and in line with IAEA principles and under its supervision.

[Any threat or use of nuclear weapons in the context of the ongoing war against Ukraine is inadmissible.](#)

2. Secondly, **global food security** depends on uninterrupted manufacturing and supply of food products. In this regard, free, full and safe commercial navigation, as well as access to sea ports in the Black and Azov Seas, are critical. Attacks on merchant ships in ports and along the entire route, as well as against civilian ports and civilian port infrastructure, are unacceptable.

[Food security must not be weaponized in any way. Ukrainian agricultural products should be securely and freely provided to interested third countries.](#)

3. Thirdly, **all prisoners of war** must be released by complete exchange. All deported and unlawfully displaced **Ukrainian children**, and all other **Ukrainian civilians who were unlawfully detained, must be returned to Ukraine.**”

The Communiqué was signed by 84 participants to the summit. As the Joint Communiqué is considered a “living document”, several states either opted in or out following the end of the summit. As of 25 August 2024, the Communiqué is signed by 93 countries and organisations.

What next?

Each of the three focus areas mentioned in the Communiqué will be developed further by working groups in specific action plans.

Aside the development of the action plans following the Joint Communiqué, the China and Brazil's peace proposal may also see a further follow-up in the future.

Regardless of who undertakes the initiative, however, the essential point is that any negotiations must be based on the principles enshrined in the UN Charter. ■