

India Role as Balancing Power Increasing Even Amid Deepening Contradictions

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On December 1, India will assume the presidency of the G20, which accounts for 80 per cent of the planet's GDP. At its 2009 summit, the G20 declared itself the world's primary venue for international financial and economic cooperation. The grouping has however often been largely seen as a vector for Western power and aspirations.

Even before assuming the group's presidency, during the G20 summit in Bali (Indonesia), earlier this month, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi played an important role there. Although New Delhi's agenda for the Bali summit has been described as quite modest, Western and other leaders are, according to Jawaharlal Nehru University's professor Happymon Jacob, increasingly "listening to India" as a power that remains close to "both the West and Russia".

New Delhi has successfully been balancing its ties between the US-led West and Moscow since the start of the current Ukrainian conflict. Although India and the United States ties have been growing stronger, especially after their November 2020 [Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement \(BECA\)](#), on the other hand, the Asian power and Russia strongly cooperate on defense and energy. In October, the Russian Federation surpassed both Iraq and Saudi Arabia to become the largest oil provider to India.

Can India push for multipolarity as the next president of a divided G-20 amid an unprecedented tense global situation while there are serious tensions between the Washington-led West and Moscow and also between the former and Beijing? Even within the West itself, there are disagreements: France and Germany, two leading European countries, have signaled they are no longer willing to follow NATO's line so eagerly. Meanwhile, the US' own relationship with its traditional main ally in the Middle East is possibly coming to an end after the Saudi Arabia's backed [OPEC+ decision to cut oil production](#).

Political analyst Niranjan Marjani, who specializes in the Indo-Pacific, argues that holding the

G20 presidency amid such circumstances is an opportunity for New Delhi to put into practice some of its propositions – India, after all, he reasons, has always proposed a multipolar order and strong mechanisms to balance and protect the interests of all stakeholders.

Marjani adds that, in 2023, New Delhi in fact will find itself in a unique position, as it will also be assuming the presidency of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a grouping which has often been perceived as an “anti-Western” organization – especially since [Iran’s admission](#) in September 2021.

India has of course diplomatically engaged with both sides in the Ukrainian-Russian conflict (which is also a [proxy Western war against Moscow](#)). Moreover, it can boast the fact that it is trusted by the two sides. Likewise, while presiding over two supposedly “rival” organizations (SCO and the G20), New Delhi can keep, it is argued, promoting dialogue and diplomacy.

This is not an easy task though, notwithstanding India’s soft power as a kind of a diplomatic giant, which, some believe, can become a global power. Although the two powers have been making advances in dialogue since September (when both Beijing and New Delhi [moved back troops](#) from the disputed area), within the Eurasian “bloc”, the South Asian power has its own border problems with neighboring China – not to mention its other border problems with Pakistan.

As for the West, Washington in turn has already threatened its partner with sanctions over its [purchase of Russia’s S-400 missile systems](#) (which Moscow will deliver by 2023). These were dropped in July, but the tensions could come back next year, while the growing Indian-Russian-Iranian cooperation around the [North-South Transit Corridor](#) should also be a major concern for American political elites.

The so-called [Indo-Pacific Region](#) (IPR) remains an arena of Western-Chinese rivalry, and the Quad, of which New Delhi is a member (often described as a “[new NATO](#)”) adds fuel to the fire. This region involves part of maritime Eurasia itself and thus is relevant for Russia also (and for India itself) – [Central Asian states](#) are after all increasingly relevant to the Quad. [France too has its ambitions for the IPR](#), and Paris is already New Delhi’s second main arms supplier (Moscow being number 1). French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu’s trip to India this week is part of a larger French attempt to lure India from Russia.

The problem is that Quad today is all about “countering” Eurasian powers, from an Atlanticist perspective – and it must also be seen in the context of calls for a “[global NATO](#)”.

In August, during a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Tashkent, National Security Council of Russia’s secretary Nikolai Patrushev stated that the US and its allies are working based on “anti-Russian or anti-Chinese principles”, as is “vividly demonstrated by the arrangements under the AUKUS and Quad.” The remark came soon after Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had stated in Bangkok that Quad can benefit the entire region, and that reservations about it stemmed from “unilateralist opposition”.

One can recall the fact that Japanese and Australian attempts to explicitly mention Russia in the Quad’s March readout were hampered by India in yet another act of “balancing”. But one can only “concile” so much. India needs to elaborate an integrated approach to Eurasia, intensifying its dialogue on security with Russia, but faces many contradictions in its foreign policy. How much all of them can be “balanced” remains to be seen in the near future.

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