



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



GLOBAL HORIZONS

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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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Cover Images:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a National Democratic Alliance (NDA) parliamentary party meeting at the Samvidhan Sadan, in New Delhi, on June 7, 2024. Source: [X/@narendramodi](#)

French President Emmanuel Macron, EU Commission Chief Ursula von der Leyen and Chinese President Xi Jinping met to discuss trade relations between Europe and China, on May 6, 2024. Source: [X/@EmmanuelMacron](#)

President Yoon Suk Yeol of South Korea, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan, and Chinese Premier Li Qiang at a joint news conference in Seoul after the Ninth Trilateral Summit Meeting, on May 27, 2024. Source: [President of the Republic of Korea](#)

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by

Nalin Surie

There was little relief during the month from the continuing carnage in Gaza, the grind of death and destruction in the Ukraine war, the tragic civil war in Sudan, the horrendous but virtually forgotten civil war in Myanmar, and tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

US pressure on Israel was unable to fully restrain Israel from its military operations in Gaza, where avoiding collateral damage appears to have become an irrelevance. The decision of the ICJ ordering Israel to halt its offensive in Rafah and withdraw from there, and of the ICC to seek arrest warrants for the leaders of Israel and Hamas, were met by harsh rejection in Israel. US efforts to bring about a lasting ceasefire and exchange of hostages did not bear fruit, but remained ongoing.

Israel appears to be convinced that irrespective of its continuing to not fully act on US advice and pressure in its war against Hamas, the US will continue to stand by it. Neither the ICJ nor the ICC can act without an explicit or implicit US go-ahead.

Western unity following unrestrained Israeli actions in Gaza continued to fray. This was reflected in the decision of three EU states, Spain, Norway and Ireland, to recognise Palestine. There was no EU consensus on this issue.

Some analysts suggest that there are concerns in Israel about Hezbollah entering the fray, and also Iran through its proxies. This could pose a much greater threat to Israel than the one from Hamas. Hopefully, this would weigh on Israel to find an early way out of the humanitarian disaster and the growing international isolation its actions in Gaza have created. Fortunately, there has so far not been any direct impact on the conflict of the death of Iranian President Raisi in a helicopter crash on May 19.

The situation in Ukraine remained grim, notwithstanding the resumption of US weapon deliveries to Ukraine. Other NATO countries also upped the supply of equipment, ammunition and aircraft. Russian bombardment of Ukrainian cities, infrastructure and other facilities continued to debilitate Ukrainian morale. Ukrainian forces, though, continued their dogged resistance.

At the Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore on June 02, President Zelenskyy openly called out China for supporting Russia's war effort against his country and President Xi Jinping for continuing to not take his calls. His angst may well have been accentuated on account of the outcome on Ukraine during President Putin's visit to Beijing on May 15. During that visit, Russia and China agreed to continuously improve the level of their ability to jointly respond to risks and challenges. On the Ukraine 'crisis', they called for a political solution using diplomatic means and dialogue, and noted that "to steadily resolve the Ukraine crisis, it is necessary to eliminate the root causes of the crisis, abide by the principle of indivisible security and take into account the legitimate security interests and concerns of all countries". To make matters worse, China has not agreed to participate in the peace conference on Ukraine planned for June in Switzerland, since Russia is not invited.

For their part, NATO Foreign Ministers at their meeting in Prague on May 31 reportedly reassured Ukraine of their fulsome support for the long haul, and conveyed to Russia that it cannot wait out Ukraine/NATO; that NATO will play a greater role in the support for Ukraine; and that the path will be prepared for its NATO membership. Ukraine's future in NATO, it was suggested, will be its ultimate security guarantee. In the meantime, Ukraine will have to doggedly fight the continuing Russian offensive with at least one hand tied, behind its back since several US/NATO placed limitations on attacks on the Russian heartland remain in place.

The G-7 Finance Ministers at their meeting on May 23-25 reiterated their commitment to helping Ukraine meet its urgent short term financing needs, as well as coordinating its long term recovery and reconstruction priorities, currently estimated at almost USD 488 billion over ten years.

President Xi Jinping paid an important probing visit to France, Serbia and Hungary from May 5-9, 2024. Europe has been and is still seen by China as being a critical partner from the economic, financial, technological and strategic stability aspects. The EU and China are theoretically strategic partners, but this relationship has soured in recent years because of China's mercantilist policies and efforts to divide the EU. Push back has been sharp.

Xi's choice of countries was not random but strategic and intended to make up lost ground. France is perhaps China's fundamental anchor in Europe, and has an old relationship with it. Its independent approach on foreign and security policies holds attraction. Serbia and Hungary have their own usefulness, particularly on connectivity issues.

Le Monde's editorial assessment of the visit Xi was very critical. It suggested that while China likes to claim it wants a "strong Europe", "nothing could be further from the truth. Its aim is to weaken Western democracies, thereby undermining the trans-Atlantic relationship as much as possible, and even the European Union itself".

An Op-ed in the same paper on May 11 assessed the outcome of the three-country visit from the Chinese perspective as "Mission accomplished". It was argued that given China's ambitions, the visit "principally enabled him (Xi) to display the commercial and geopolitical objectives of Chinese power without offering any concessions to the leaders of the EU". Not on Ukraine either. It was further argued that "experts who thought that the Chinese President was ready to flatter Europe's autonomy in order to drive a wedge with the US and reinforce the idea of a 'multipolar world' have been proven wrong. Xi's multipolar world is first and foremost, a world with Chinese features".

Europe is perhaps beginning to better understand the reality of China's ambitions and the implications of Xi's BRI and Global Development, Security and Civilisation Initiatives for reordering the existing international order. But the lure of the Chinese market still beckons for many in Europe.

President Putin's visit to China on May 15, his first overseas visit after re-election, witnessed a significant new stage in the growing Sino-Russian concord. Mutuality of benefit was stressed, and Putin recalled that the FSU was the first to recognise the PRC on October 2, 1949, the day after its declaration. He also reminded his hosts that the FSU had provided substantial assistance to the PRC at the initial stage of the development of its political system, state institutions and the economy. The suggestion that Russia today is a junior partner of the PRC clearly rankles.

A very long joint statement was issued. The length represents a set of signposts on the route to the further comprehensive development of Russia-China relations. Importantly it also contains critical principles and concerns on the basis of which the relationship will develop and reflect a careful balance of give and take. Xi spelt out that the relationship is based on "demonstrating mutual respect and firm commitment to supporting each other on matters dealing with core interests of both sides", and "addressing each other's current concerns". Putin noted that the Joint Statement is significant because it sets new objectives and a long term direction for advancing the entire spectrum of Russia-China relations.

China and Russia have agreed to ensure global strategic security and equal and indivisible security, and to explore establishing a sustainable security system in

the Eurasian space on the basis of the same principles. US efforts to undermine strategic stability are seen as posing a direct military threat to China and Russia, who will strengthen cooperation and coordination against the US's non constructive and hostile 'dual containment' policy towards China and Russia. They also agreed that "China and the CSTO have potential for cooperation in maintaining peace and security in the Eurasian region and jointly responding to external challenges". In effect, China and Russia wish to become dominant players in Eurasia.

China responded with a comprehensive show of military force surrounding the island following the inauguration of the new President of Taiwan Lai Ching-te on May 20. The messaging was clear: do not push the envelope of Taiwan independence. This is a hard red line which cannot be crossed. At the same time, there are indications that China will use the results of the parliamentary elections in Taiwan (that did not favour Lai) to make governance, and pursuing Lai's agenda, fraught with obstacles.

At the same time, China continues with its efforts to mend fences with its two important neighbours and trade and technology partners, Japan and ROK. In spite of these two countries being even more firmly aligned with the US on account of Chinese activities in the region than in the past, they too see benefit in restoring the relationship with China. The ninth trilateral China-Japan-ROK summit which was held on May 27 in Seoul, has to be seen in this context and was held after a gap of four and a half years on account of the Covid pandemic and China's muscular and mercantile policies vis a vis Japan and ROK. The eighth summit had been held in December 2019 in Chengdu.

Chinese premier Li Qiang made clear the Chinese objectives at the summit viz., need to fully resume trilateral cooperation and respect each other's core interests; deepen economic and trade connectivity, including keeping supply chains stable and unimpeded; and restarting and completing negotiations for a trilateral FTA; championing cooperation in technology innovation; advancing sustainable development; and p2p exchanges. These clearly reflect Chinese concerns and vulnerabilities going forward.

A Joint Declaration was issued that essentially follows the contours of the one issued after the eighth summit. The focus is on regularity of summits and ministerial meetings; cooperation on climate change issues, economic cooperation and trade, health, digital technology and disaster relief; promotion of Trilateral plus projects e.g. reduction of dust storms in East Asia in collaboration with Mongolia, fight plastic pollution; and deter and eliminate

IUU fishing (ironic since China is a principal offender). The section on regional peace and security is full of palliatives.

Bilateral meetings were held on the sidelines. PM Kishida described his meeting with President Yoon as having been “highly meaningful” and with Premier Li as “highly significant”. Clarity is awaited on what exactly this means.

The future of the trilateral summit and ministerial process will no doubt depend on Chinese behaviour in East and South East Asia, the Taiwan situation, the evolving US posture vis a vis China, the future evolution of secure and sustainable supply chains, the evolving dynamics between security and tech development and innovation, China’s growing engagement and integration with Russia, China’s effort to establish its own currency mechanism for international trade, and its mercantilist policies, among others. On the other hand, Japan and ROK cannot wish away their security concerns vis a vis China nor the existing and potential complementarities with the Chinese economy.

In the above context, it is pertinent to recall that at their meeting on May 23-25, the G-7 Finance Ministers expressed concern “about China’s comprehensive use of non-market policies and practices that undermine our workers, industries and economic resilience”. Japan is party to this determination.

The EU’s fledgling security and defense policy continues to develop while recognising that the “EU’s strategic partnership with NATO underpinned by the strong transatlantic bond is essential for Euro-Atlantic security and stability, as demonstrated again in the context of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine”. In this context, the decisions of the EU Council of May 27 are pertinent. Five main priorities and follow up tasks are identified: unwavering support to Ukraine, spending more and better as the EU, increasing the EU’s ability to act, strengthening the EU’s resilience and secure access to strategic domains, and building partnerships.

The EU Council has also called for developing and adopting a new comprehensive forward-looking implementation document encompassing the full spectrum of EU-NATO cooperation before the end of 2024. This should reflect the seriousness with which Europe will take responsibility for its security following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and will bear careful scrutiny.

The expected happened in South Africa following the elections on May 29. The ruling African National Congress, the party that delivered liberation from apartheid, lost its majority in parliament on account of the usual ailments of corruption, unemployment, growing inequality, low growth, mismanagement etc. Talks have begun to form a coalition government. An era has ended. The

onus is now squarely on South Africa's political parties to demonstrate that plural democracy has taken firm root in their country.

The peaceful and successful conduct and results of the general elections in India, which concluded on June 01, once again demonstrated that in India it is the people who are the ultimate masters and arbiters. Indian democracy stands tall as ever. So do India's elections institutions. The outgoing BJP has emerged by far as the largest single party but somewhat short of a majority, although it has a majority together with its pre-election partners in the NDA. A new coalition government headed by the outgoing prime minister is expected to be sworn in early June.



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