

Charting A Course for Multilateral Reform: The New Delhi Leader's Declaration

Introduction

We find ourselves in a global order marked by a myriad of multifaceted challenges, many of which have eluded effective resolution within the framework of United Nations (UN) led multilateralism. Then, it is incumbent upon international and diverse groupings like the G20 to address the imperative for a reinvigorated multilateralism suited to the intricacies of a multipolar world. India's G20 presidency, holding the summit in New Delhi from 9th-10th September 2023, embodied the same. Prime Minister Narendra Modi outlined the aim of this year-long stewardship as one that would seek "To amplify the voice of the Global South"^[i] in accordance with the theme: 'One Earth, One Family, One Future'.^[ii] The Summit has cemented India's stance as a leader in the Global South and placed considerable emphasis on creating impactful multilaterals for the coming years.

Multilateralism remains a pivotal factor in the global pursuit of stability, peace, and economic advancement.^[iii] Presently, multilateral cooperation confronts a multitude of crises. Firstly, a lack of consensus has eroded trust in multilateralism. Secondly, powerful member-states perceive it as increasingly irrelevant. Furthermore, escalating great-power tensions, the rise of populist nationalism, and urgent climate concerns compound these challenges. Consequently, states have sought alternative arenas, including bilateral, plurilateral, and mini-lateral arrangements, exacerbating global polarization.^[iv] Therefore, cooperation and reform within the multilateral framework are imperative. Amidst these conditions, the New Delhi Leader's Declaration aims to conceptualize and bring to life a 'reformed multilateralism' capable of addressing these shortcomings.

Recommendations for A New Age of Multilateralism

The first section of policies emphasises the importance of reinvigorating multilateralism in the face of significant global changes since World War II. The Declaration on the Commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the UN was recalled, and it reaffirms the need for reinvigorated multilateralism, reforms, and international cooperation to address interconnected global challenges effectively. This entails making global governance more representative, transparent, and accountable, aligned with the 2030 agenda.

The second section underscores the need to reform international financial institutions for the 21st century. It emphasizes the importance of a financial system that can address the scale of needs and shocks faced by developing countries, particularly the most vulnerable. The Declaration commits to enhancing multilateral development banks (MDBs)^[v] by improving operating models, increasing financing capacity, and enhancing representation for developing countries. The G20 also supports the implementation of the G20 Roadmap for Implementing the Recommendations of the G20 Independent Review of MDBs Capital Adequacy Frameworks (CAFs)^[vi]. To meet development requirements and global challenges through increased investment, the Declaration urges the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, alongside relevant international institutions, to support the enhancement of domestic resource mobilisation in emerging markets and developing economies.

The third section focuses on mobilising headroom and concessional finance for development. To achieve this, options are explored to boost the World Bank's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development headroom, reduce investment costs, and increase the capacity of the International Development Association's (IDA) crisis response window.^[vii] Voluntary contributions and pledges are welcomed, and efforts to strengthen the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PGRT) encouraged. The Declaration reiterated the nations' commitment to a "Strong, quota-based, and adequately resourced IMF at the centre of the global financial safety net".^[viii] They reaffirmed that they remain committed to revisiting the adequacy of quotas and will continue the process of IMF governance reform.

The final section addresses managing global debt vulnerabilities, particularly in low and middle-income countries. It reiterates the commitment to the Common Framework for Debt Treatments, emphasising the need for predictable, timely, orderly, and coordinated implementation.^[ix] The Declaration showcases the leaders' expectation and interest in solving several national economic crises, world over. Agreements between governments and official creditor committees, such as in Zambia and Ghana, are welcomed, and resolutions for Ethiopia and Sri Lanka are encouraged. The Declaration calls for a swift conclusion to debt treatment and welcomes joint efforts from all stakeholders.

Evaluating The Comprehensive Scope of Recommendations

While today's problems require global solutions and global cooperation, we must acknowledge that competing interests and the dominance of powerful states are here to stay on multilateral platforms. Therefore, while supporting multilateral cooperation, G-20 should continue encouraging mini-lateral groupings as a new form of multilateralism and try to transform them into multi-stakeholder partnerships. Creating networks of issue-based mini-laterals, particularly in areas related to the governance of the global commons, will be helpful in preventing competitive coalitions. Moreover, including the African Union as a permanent member is a welcome move^[x] and inviting the UN Secretary-General and General Assembly President as permanent invitees would be helpful to enhance its legitimacy.

The Summit and its Declaration placed a strong emphasis on economic concerns and revitalising economic multilateral institutions. Notably, the exclusion of Ukraine from the invitation list highlighted the G20's renewed economic focus. However, a noticeable gap appeared in discussions regarding UN reform. The G20 appeared cautious when addressing UN reform, whether concerning the UN Security Council (UNSC), the UN General Assembly (UNGA), or its development-focused agencies. This caution might be seen as a reluctance to take bold measures in this area. Achieving consensus on UN reform, especially with powerful nations like the United States involved, remains a formidable challenge. Therefore, it remains uncertain whether UN reform was a substantive topic during the summit. Interestingly, while reforms at the IMF and World Trade Organization (WTO) levels received attention^[xi], however concerns arise about the sustainability of these efforts without parallel UN reform. The US has expressed support for India's bid for a permanent seat on the UNSC.^[xii] Still, the G20's final declaration makes minimal reference to UN reform. This raises questions about India's stance on the UN's state of affairs, as it appears to prioritise UNSC membership over broader UN

reforms. This approach prompts contemplation on whether it signifies strategic acumen or a reluctance to broach the topic.

Moreover, the Think20(T20) document on “Enhancing Legitimacy of Multilateralism: Two Innovative Proposals for the UN” made two specific recommendations for U.N. reform, however they have found no mention in the Declaration. The recommendations include creating a UN Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA), and the UN World Citizens’ Initiative (UNWCI).^[xiii] The UNPA is a proposed institution, created by the UN General Assembly, that should have participation^[xiv] in intergovernmental negotiations and "Establish inquiry committees to assess matters related to the actions of the United Nations".^[xv] The UNWCI is an instrument that provides individuals with a formal mechanism to influence the agenda and decision-making of the UNG and the UNSC through a process of gathering popular support^[xvi].

Further, the T20 Communique outlined several recommendations on global digital governance in its section on reforming multilateralism, which are absent from the final Declaration. These included increasing efforts to inform multilateral consensus-building amongst states regarding cyber norms. Further, they recommended The G20 Health Working Group should consider how the World Health Organization (WHO) may look at healthcare in a more holistic manner and provide more space for traditional medical systems.^[xvii] The Working Group also recommended that the UN create an Intergovernmental Panel on Pandemic Risk and Preparedness^[xviii] to advance scientific knowledge and ensure these issues remain on the global agenda. These are fundamental aspects of the discourse that would have made the Declaration more holistic in nature but they do not seem to be on New Delhi’s radar.

The recommendations from the summit stressed the importance of improving access to funds and offering developmental assistance to emerging economies, reinforcing the organisation's commitment to economic issues. However, the conspicuous absence of robust discourse on UN reform, despite the presence of key global actors, raises questions about the summit's broader diplomatic priorities. And whether India's UNSC ambitions come at the expense of more comprehensive UN reform discussions.

End notes

^[i] Nilanjan Gosh, “G20 Summit to amplify the voice of Global South in an era of polycrisis”, *Observer Research Foundation*, 16 August 2023, Accessed On: <https://www.orfonline.org/research/g20-summit-to-amplify-the-voice-of-the-global-south/>

^[ii] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Unveiling of the Logo, Theme and Website of India’s G20 Presidency”, 08 November 2023, Accessed On: <https://mea.gov.in/press->

[releases.htm?dtl/35865/Unveiling_of_The_Logo_Theme_and_Website_of_Indias_G20_Presidency](#)

[iii] Rajesh Kumar, “Multilateral Reforms as priority in the G-20”, *The Hindu*, 06 March 2023, Accessed On: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/explained-multilateral-reforms-as-a-priority-in-the-g-20/article66588852.ece>

[iv] *ibid.*

[v] New Delhi Leader’s Declaration, “Multilateral Institutions for the 21st Century”, 10 September 2023, 19, Accessed On: <https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/CPV/G20-New-Delhi-Leaders-Declaration.pdf>

[vi] *ibid.*, 20

[vii] *ibid.*, 21

[viii] *ibid.*

[ix] *ibid.*, 23

[x] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Press Briefing by G20 Presidency”, 09 September 2023, Accessed On: <https://mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/37093/Transcript+of+Press+briefing+by+G20+Presidency+September+09+2023>

[xi] New Delhi Leader’s Declaration, “A Strong, Sustainable, Balanced and Inclusive Growth”, 10 September 2023, 4, 21, Accessed On: <https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/CPV/G20-New-Delhi-Leaders-Declaration.pdf>

[xii] White House Briefing Room, “Joint Statement from India and the United States”, 08 September 2023, Access on <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/09/08/joint-statement-from-india-and-the-united-states/>

[xiii] Think20 India, “Enhancing The Legitimacy of Multilateralism: Two Innovative Proposals for the U.N.” May 2023, 11-16, Access On: <https://www.orfonline.org/research/enhancing-the-legitimacy-of-multilateralism-two-innovative-proposals-for-the-un/>

[xiv] Pan-African Parliament, “A United Nations Parliamentary Assembly” (Resolution adopted at the 8th Ordinary Session, Midrand, South Africa, October 24, 2007), Accessed On: <https://www.unpacampaign.org/2254/statement-pap/#:~:text=Pan%2DAfrican Parliament&text=The Pan%2DAfrican Parliament ...,co%2Doperation%3B%20...>

[xv] *ibid.*

[xvi] Think20 India, “Enhancing The Legitimacy of Multilateralism: Two Innovative Proposals for the U.N.” May 2023, 11-16, Access On: <https://www.orfonline.org/research/enhancing-the-legitimacy-of-multilateralism-two-innovative-proposals-for-the-un/>

[xvii] *ibid.*, 35

[xviii] *ibid.*

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