

Navigating Geopolitical Complexities: India's Role in G20 Diplomacy

The most complex part of the entire G20 was to bring consensus on the geopolitical paras (Russia-Ukraine). This was done over 200 hours of non-stop negotiations, 300 bilateral meetings, 15 drafts.

Thus wrote Amitabh Kant, the G20 Sherpa of India during its Presidency year, about the Leaders' Delhi Declaration on the popular social media post X (formerly Twitter).

The intensity of the 'tough' negotiations was spelt out two days after Kant's post by Germany's Ambassador to India, Philipp Ackermann. Speaking to a select group of journalists, the Ambassador said the G20 Sherpa from India, along with Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia, shared the final text of the declaration — "A hard copy on paper — to the Sherpas Friday (September 8) night and asked them to 'take it or leave it'".

The four Presidencies – Indonesia (2022), Brazil (2024), and South Africa (2025), along with India "...asked them (other Sherpas) that if they had any problem, they should speak to Prime Minister Narendra Modi", reported The Indian Express, quoting Ackermann.

The day the G20 New Delhi Declaration was made public, several journalists at the International Media Centre came to know about the Prime Minister's role in guiding the discussions to a consensus. It was his personal involvement that helped solve an otherwise contentious issue.

The United States has been moving closer to India in recent times. Washington's overt war in Afghanistan is over, thus there is no further need for launchpads across the Durand Line. Millions of dollars had flown into Pakistan to get rid of (then) Soviet occupation of Kabul. The details are well chronicled in the book 'The Bear Trap', co-authored by Brigadier Mohammed Yousuf and Mark Adkin.

The Brigadier headed Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) Afghan desk (1983 to 1987) during the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) counter-Soviet operations in Afghanistan. The book reveals the logistical and armed support Pakistan was showered with by the CIA in its war against the erstwhile USSR in Afghanistan.

Mark Adkin, a writer and editor, was earlier a major in the British army.

Under Taliban rule, China enjoys considerable clout in today's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. But Kabul's rulers today also look at India for assistance, which the latter is considering sympathetically weighing security concerns.

India's economic growth has remained robust even in the aftermath of the pandemic. The country has registered the fastest growth among the world's top five economies in the first quarter of 2023. At this rate, by the end of the year, it is expected to surpass China.

Meanwhile, India earned the respect and cooperation of the Global South by bringing to the fore the cause of developing nations. The inclusion of the African Union in G20 (55 countries) is an example.

It is the only nation in this part of the world that can contain the expansionist policies of The Dragon.

Thus, India has since moved closer to the United States, but retained its ties with Russia. It has imported crude oil from Russia even as President Vladimir Putin dealt with sanctions from the West following the Ukraine war.

Thus, it can well be understood why "The most complex part of the entire G20 was to bring consensus on the geopolitical paras (Russia-Ukraine)".

Uncertainty over the issue loomed large even at the final meeting of the G20 Sherpas before the Summit, held between September 3 to 7 at Manesar, Haryana. Subsequently, it was time for the "take it or leave it" and "speak to the Prime Minister" – and the goal was achieved.

And just ahead of the time that G20 leaders convened at the Bharat Mandapam on September 9, a new draft was prepared and circulated by India; and accepted by all. The world heaved a sigh of relief.

According to reports, in the words of Ackermann, Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany was "very satisfied" with the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration that "exceeded expectations". The careful framing of the paragraphs in respect of the 'war in Ukraine' is evident.

The G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration said "Concerning the war in Ukraine, while recalling the discussion in Bali, we reiterated our national positions and resolutions adopted at the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly (A/RES/ES-11/1 and A/RES/ES-11/6) and underscored that all states must act in a manner consistent with the Purposes and Principles of the UN Charter in its entirety. In line with the UN Charter, all states must refrain from the threat or use of force to seek territorial acquisition against the territorial integrity and sovereignty or political independence of any state. The use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible."

Interestingly, Russia was not mentioned by name unlike the G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration (in November 2022) which noted "This year, we have also witnessed the war in Ukraine further adversely impact the global economy. There was a discussion on the issue. We reiterated our national positions as expressed in other fora, including the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly, which, in Resolution No. ES-11/1 dated 2 March 2022, as adopted by majority vote (141 votes for, 5 against, 35 abstentions, 12 absent) deplores in the strongest

terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and demands its complete and unconditional withdrawal from the territory of Ukraine.”

It further said, “Most members strongly condemned the war in Ukraine and stressed it is causing immense human suffering and exacerbating existing fragilities in the global economy – constraining growth, increasing inflation, disrupting supply chains, heightening energy and food insecurity, and elevating financial stability risks. There were other views and different assessments of the situation and sanctions. Recognizing that the G20 is not the forum to resolve security issues, we acknowledge that security issues can have significant consequences for the global economy.”

Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, – who was representing President Putin – returned home happy, unlike Bali where he left a day ahead of the conclusion of the G20 Summit.

And according to Ackermann, Chancellor Olaf Scholz was ‘very satisfied’ with the G20 New Delhi Leaders’ Declaration that ‘exceeded expectations’.

Also, in a statement to the House of Commons on the G20 Summit in Delhi, United Kingdom Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said on September 11, “At the G20, leaders united in calling out the ‘human suffering’ caused by Putin’s war.”

On China, the PM stated, “...I was emphatic with Premier Li that actions which seek to undermine British democracy are completely unacceptable and will never be tolerated. I also emphasised the UK’s unyielding commitment to human rights.”

According to a BBC report, China has been accused of committing crimes against humanity and possibly genocide against the Uyghur population and other mostly Muslim ethnic groups in the north-western region of Xinjiang.

Human rights groups believe China has detained more than one million Uyghurs against their will over the past few years in a large network of what the state calls "Re-education camps", and sentenced hundreds of thousands to prison terms, it added.

Considering the overall reaction of world leaders, it can well be assumed that in the current world order, India is indeed poised to be a Vishwaguru.

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