**A Fragmented G-20**

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India is manifestly disappointed by the lack of agreement on a declaration at the end of a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of G20 countries in New Delhi (March 1-2, 2023). Many regard it as a diplomatic failure. The main reason for the deepening divisions within G20 is how the conflict in Ukraine is viewed. The US secretary of state said the meeting had been marred by Russia’s “unprovoked and unjustified war.” Russia’s foreign minister accused the West of “blackmail and threats.” The foreign ministers could not even agree to reiterate a formulation on Ukraine that they had managed at the G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia, last November. This underlines the worsening great power conflict and growing crisis of multilateralism and dampens India’s G20 Presidency.

India, despite having close strategic ties with the US, as a pivot to its Indo-Pacific policy, has been walking a tightrope to project itself as non-aligned as regards the conflict of Ukraine, avoiding joining the US allies to censure Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. Instead, it has cleverly created a smoke screen of projecting itself as a self-styled leader of the “Global South” advocating agenda items of priority for the South such as climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, global economic slowdown, debt burdens, uneven recovery from COVID-19, growing poverty and inequality, food and energy insecurity, and global supply chain disruptions exasperated by geo-political tensions and conflicts. This, however, evoked only lip service by the G7 countries.

The G20 is a premier multilateral platform connecting the world’s major developed and emerging economies, was formed in 1999 to discuss policies to achieve international financial stability. As such the G20 holds a strategic role in securing future global economic growth and prosperity. Russia feels that G20 is being unfairly used to promote the geopolitical interests of the US and the West in Ukraine. The Russian foreign minister Lavrov has questioned why the G20 didn’t discuss Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria.

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The New Delhi G20 moot brings out several takeaways:

The Ukraine conflict is one of the most divisive and destabilizing conflicts having far-reaching global implications. By pushing the Ukraine conflict on the agenda of an economic and financial forum, the US and its allies have deepened the polarisation of the Group. The G20 faces the real threat of its declining relevance to global economic governance. The upcoming September New Delhi summit may be no different. Consensus may be elusive.

Today, the G20 has extensive divisions. In the East-West divide, Russia and China are firmly resisting Western pressure. India is manoeuvring a strategic escape by championing the cause of the Global South, primarily in self-interest to carve out a bigger niche for itself in global governance.

India’s Global South mantra, however, is not strong enough to mask its policies of intimidation, impunity, and censorship of media by the “populist and increasingly authoritarian” leadership of Narendra Modi. The editorial board of the New York Times on February 12, 2023, made a scathing criticism of the Modi government’s intolerance of a BBC documentary entitled “The Modi Question.” The documentary uncovers the Modi government’s role when he was the Chief Minister of the state of Gujarat. In a horrifying episode of violence in 2002, more than 1,000 people – most of them Muslims – were slaughtered. The Modi government looked the other way, giving a free hand to Hindu extremists and militants. A Human Rights Watch report notes, “The BJP’s ideology of Hindu primacy has infiltrated the justice system and the media, empowering party supporters to threaten, harass, and attack religious minorities, particularly Muslims, with impunity.”

The original G7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, and the US) became G8 in 1997 with the inclusion of Boris Yeltsin’s Russia. Later, Moscow’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 became the trigger to evict Russia from G8. The first three G20 summits, held in 2008-09 in Washington DC, London, and Pittsburgh (US), met with notable success with a series of initiatives that stabilised the global economy. The key to the success of these summits was the intense coordination between the US and China. The former US Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson, in a recent article entitled “America’s China Policy Is Not Working” in the journal Foreign Affairs, has alluded to the dangers of a “broad decoupling with China.”The current global crisis underscores the vital importance of China as an integral part of the global economy. After the trade wars and persistent hostility with China, it is about time for the US to “re-couple” and constructively engage with China for global growth and stability.

The contours of the emerging global order reflect the gradual contraction of the US influence, the rise of China and the growth and influence of poly centres of power. Today, the world is in a state of strategic turbulence and economic volatility. Conflict in Ukraine, geopolitical tensions in the South China Sea and evolving equations in the Middle East have become testing grounds for great power rivalries. The key question is when this polarised G20 will return to the logic of major power cooperation. The new international order must be a collaborative undertaking for it to be stable, and beneficial to all big and small nations.

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