

India's Growing International Clout

A changing global context, a more transactional world and China's assertiveness increase India's pool of potential friends.

By Gurjit Singh, June 18, 2021



The recently concluded G7 summit in Cornwall, was held in a very different world to that of 2019, when the last summit took place.

The impact of the Covid pandemic and the replacement of the Trump administration by the Biden dispensation have contributed to the altered context.

Other factors include the enhanced aggressiveness of China – both economically and strategically. In addition, we have seen the formal emergence of the

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (known informally as the Quad). This is a strategic dialogue between the United States, Japan, Australia and India.

India: From onlooker to partner

In recent months, India's participation in more Western-oriented engagements is being noticed. In the G7, this time round, India was more of a partner in the agenda than an onlooker.

Whether on the issue of climate change, the pandemic, the reworking of the international economy or the bolstering of democratic values, India has emerged as an important player.

Vaccines

India has always been a large producer of vaccines not just for its domestic market, but also for the rest of the world. That is an important fact whose strategic value has been highlighted by the Covid pandemic.

In the context of international vaccine cooperation, the focus on India as the future of cost-effective vaccine manufacturing has increased.

Climate change

On climate change, in the past, India was usually criticized internationally for not doing enough. However, since 2015, India has moved robustly towards improving its solar energy efforts, in particular through the International Solar Alliance.

India's national commitments towards mitigating climate change are among the most ambitious in the world. This is gradually being recognized. New Delhi has

Takeaways

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cooperation, India has emerged as a key player. In the context of the future of cost-effective vaccine manufacturing,

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India and the democracy vs. autocracy divide

With the world increasingly divided between democratic and autocratic regimes, India's open support for good governance and democracy at international fora,

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In a world divided between democratic and autocratic regimes, India's support for good governance and democracy gives it an important place.

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Because of the differential nature of their economies, several contradictions of interest remain between India and the G7 nations.

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Collaborations between developed countries and India help reduce costs as well as improve implementation and delivery of projects.

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India is increasingly seen as a useful and responsible player to uphold the international order. This gives India the new strategic options.

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also gives it a special place.

The enhanced strategic value attached to such a stance is giving India the chance to cultivate more friends around the globe.

Non-Western partners remain important

India remains a member of many dialogues that include China, such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), the RIC (Russia, India China), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the East Asia Summit.

Through these it engages with China and other non-Western partners like Russia, Brazil, South Africa and Central Asia. All these nations remain strategically important to India.

Countering Chinese aggression

However, the global and regional context in which these dialogues take place has altered due to China's aggressive actions, both prior to and after the Covid pandemic.

It is now more necessary than ever to counter these globe-spanning efforts.

India itself faced the brunt of China's aggressive intent in its northern region of Ladakh in June 2020. Tranquility on the long border that India shares with China was maintained for over two decades. China's transgressions shattered this peace.

Fresh options needed

The Chinese intent to rein in India is also evident in its attempts to block New Delhi's access to several international fora.

For example, China is openly opposed to India's attempts to gain a place on the United Nation's permanent security council. This has contributed to India seeking fresh strategic options.

The world is becoming more transactional and crisis-driven. Hence the importance of the recent G7 summit, which manifested the new set of geo-political engagements that India is developing.

New engagements

The G7 summit was preceded by the India-EU leaders meeting in May, which opened up new areas of cooperation and demonstrated a new willingness for both sides to engage.

In March 2021, the first ever Quad Summit was held. The Quad has become a firm commitment of the Biden administration. And Japan and Australia are equally committed to balancing the relationship with China by vigorously developing alternative partnerships.

The Quad

As a result, the Quad has become more robust.

It is no longer just a security dialogue, but has several new aspects that include vaccine production, the development of new value chains and technologies, as well as combating climate change.

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No doubt that India is still a developing country. It has a host of domestic problems that it must confront.

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However, it offers a huge market. And it is willing to engage positively with the EU and the United States to mutually expand economic opportunities.

India withdrew from the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) trade negotiations, due to the Chinese domination of the group. However, it is engaging afresh with Japan and Australia on the economic front.

Supply chain resilience

This includes the launching of the Supply Chain Resilient Initiative (SCRI), which aims to make supply chains more robust and independent of an overweening dependence on China.

India is also stepping up its engagement with ASEAN nations both as a block and in several trilateral arrangements. The latter include the India-Australia-Indonesia and the India-Australia-France dialogues.

Contradictions remain

Notwithstanding many positive developments, several contradictions of interest remain between India and the G7 nations. The primary cause for these differences is the differential nature of their economies.

The World Trade Organization will therefore remain a site of rivalry between them. Multilateral or plurilateral joint communiques often do not translate into bilateral agreements.

Countries continue to take positions, in their national interest, regardless of the international commitments they may have undertaken.

G7's China challenge

G7 countries remain major contributors of overseas development aid, foreign direct investment, trade and technology. However, they are being challenged by China through Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative.

India is an important player in countering this challenge. It is, for example, looking to join hands with Japan as an investor in Africa through the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). It is also developing an India-EU connectivity partnership.

Bringing value to the table

Finally, it is cooperating with the G7 approach to "Build Back Better" world, which will hopefully allow more value based collaborations to build global infrastructure.

Collaborations between the developed countries and India provide complementarities which reduce costs as well as improve implementation and delivery of projects. This is something that brings value to the table.

Conclusion

The post-pandemic period is hence one where India is building on its potential.

Strategically well placed in the Indian Ocean and willing to play a role in providing maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, India is increasingly seen as a useful and responsible player to uphold the international order.

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