

MP-IDSA *Issue Brief*

Takeaways from the Prime Minister's Visit to Japan, Papua New Guinea and Australia

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S*ummary*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Japan, Papua New Guinea and Australia between 19-24 May, to attend the G-7 Hiroshima Leaders' Summit, the third Forum for India and Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) and the Quad summit (which was subsequently rescheduled to Hiroshima), respectively. As India moves forward in its quest to foreground the issues and concerns of the Global South amidst several interrelated crises, the prime minister's statements and activities in the three countries offer several ways forward for India's diplomacy to focus on, and provides glimpses of how India can best exemplify the voice of the Global South.

Introduction

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Japan on May 19 to attend the G-7 Hiroshima summit, followed by his trip to Papua New Guinea (PNG) to attend the long-delayed third summit of the Forum for India and Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC), and finally his visit to Australia, originally to attend the Quad summit, but later changed to a bilateral visit after US President Joe Biden cancelled his visits to PNG and Australia to attend to domestic matters. Instead, the Quad summit was convened in Hiroshima itself on the sidelines of the G-7 summit. As the significance and scope of the prime minister’s visit is vast, this Brief restricts itself to a discussion of the following questions: what did the prime minister’s visits achieve? What were the key outcomes of the three fora, and did they reflect India’s diplomatic priorities? What are the major steps required to take these goals further?

The G-7

The G-7 meeting was held between May 19-21 at Hiroshima, where the world’s first atomic weapon was dropped. The significance of this site is especially relevant as the war in Ukraine grinds on, with far-reaching effects on our connected world. As such, it was telling that Prime Minister Modi attended all three days of the summit, conducting both bilateral and multilateral meetings with several leaders.

A discussion of the complete G-7 communique would be partially irrelevant, as India is not a member of the G-7 and had no say in its final drafting. Therefore, restricted to just the fora where the prime minister spoke, the following points can be said to be the key outcomes of the sessions of the G-7 for India:

Session 6: Working Together to Address Multiple Crises¹

1. Inclusion of global fertiliser supply chains, as well as organic farming and a diversification of staple food crops away from wheat and rice to include millets as well, on the G-7 agenda;
2. The concept of One Earth, One Health Policy, which includes the digitalisation of health as well as universal health coverage for all;
3. Emphasising the need to orient economic development away from consumerism and towards what may be called ‘social capitalism’, which benefits all sections of society;
4. Combining technology, development and democracy;

¹ [“English translation of Prime Minister’s opening statement at the Working session 6 of the G7 Summit”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, 20 May 2023.

5. The inclusion of marginalised sections such as women and transgender persons into decision-making;

Session 7: Common Endeavour for a Sustainable Planet²

1. The session called for the resilience of green and clean technology supply chains;
2. Moving beyond discussions of climate change and global warming that are focused solely on energy, to focus on holistic understandings of the environment.

Session 9: Toward a Peaceful, Stable and Prosperous World³

1. The session emphasised the impact of the Ukraine war on food, fuel and fertiliser chains throughout the world,
3. Called for a cessation of conflict in Ukraine, and a return to dialogue and negotiation, in accordance with and with respect for the UN Charter, the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty, and the rule of law;
4. Called for an end to the gridlock of the UN system, and the urgent need for its reform.

Takeaways

The fact that several of these points made it into the final communique⁴ is proof positive that India’s voice and concerns as the voice of the Global South is being heard, especially by the host of the G-7. Since his visit to India in March 2023, Prime Minister Kishida has been leading the government of Japan in aggressively campaigning for the Global South. Indeed, the new plan⁵ presented by him on the Free and Open Indo-Pacific in India contains several elements that have traditionally been India’s concerns, indicating the degree to which he has been open to hearing India’s, and the Global South’s, voice. The recurrence of the term Global South in several of Kishida’s addresses, though not in the final G-7 communique, and his invitation of Prime Minister Modi specifically, is further evidence of Japan wanting to be perceived as playing a bridging role between the industrialised countries of the G-7 and the Global South⁶. Thus, the key takeaway of

² [“English translation of Prime Minister’s opening statement at the Working session 7 of the G7 Summit”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, 20 May 2023.

³ [“English translation of Prime Minister’s opening statement at the Working session 9 of the G7 Summit”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, 21 May 2023.

⁴ [“G-7 Hiroshima Leaders’ Communique”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 20 May 2023.

⁵ [“41st Sapru House Lecture on “The Future of the Indo-Pacific – Japan’s New Plan for a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” – “Together with India, as an Indispensable Partner”” by H.E. Mr. Fumio Kishida, Prime Minister of Japan”](#), Indian Council of World Affairs, 20 March 2023.

⁶ Tosh Minohara, [“Why Japan Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is targeting the Global South”](#), *The Straits Times*, 15 May 2023; [“2023年4月9日 徹底分析『グローバル・サウス』から見た世](#)

the G-7 summit for India is also its largest task – convincing the world of the tangibility of the Global South.

Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra in a press briefing recently stated⁷ that the Global South is ‘a sentiment, it is a real concern. It's [the] reality of the challenges and the problems’. The Global South is an emerging concept, and definitional issues are natural. This is primarily because the term is a resuscitation of an academic term current during the Cold War, used to refer to countries that were perceived as economically backward, and thus considered fair game for both powers to exert their influence in. India has made a solid start in changing the term of this concept by hosting the Voice of the Global South summit, held last year, which has done much to actualise the concept. However, there is a need to do more to shape it into a tangible entity that can not only stand up to critical attention, but also be perceived as a viable interlocutor for the industrialised countries. Therefore, in the near-term, India’s diplomacy should focus on convening the Voice of the Global South summit regularly, so that there may be robust participation by all countries on the modalities of constructing a coherent platform that can articulate the concerns and aspirations of the lion’s share of the world’s people.

Amidst the sea of coverage on the G-7, the greatest ripple was undoubtedly caused by the physical appearance of the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky. One of the first leaders Zelensky met was Prime Minister Modi⁸, that too at the former’s request. During the meeting, the Prime Minister conveyed his sorrow for the victims of the war, and assured Zelensky that humanitarian aid would continue. However, what is most significant is his statement that India would ‘do everything within our means’ to resolve a situation he earlier said was ‘not only a political or economic issue but an issue of humanity, of human values’. This marks a very specific commitment, and an extension of India’s stance on the issue. To be sure, India enjoys a deep relationship with both Russia and Ukraine, one which is not likely to change any time soon, but Prime Minister Modi’s clear articulation of a need to resolve the dragged-out conflict using ‘any means at our disposal’ is a signal to the world that India is willing to place a higher premium on peace and stability. Needless to say, this opens up a role for India in the resolution of the conflict as well, a role which China is seemingly eager⁹ to play in recent times, should it wish to do so.

[界（前半）](#)”, *NHK*, 14 April 2023; [“2023年4月9日 徹底分析『グローバル・サウス』から見た世界（後半）](#)”, *NHK*, 14 April 2023.

⁷ [“Transcript of Special Briefing by Foreign Secretary on Prime Minister’s visit to Hiroshima, Japan \(May 20, 2023\)”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, 21 May 2023.

⁸ [“Prime Minister’s meeting with President of Ukraine”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, 20 May 2023.

⁹ Associated Press, [“What is China's peace proposal for Ukraine War?”](#), *ABC News*, 24 February 2023.

The Quad

Given that the Quad summit was held in an impromptu and truncated fashion on 20 May at the sidelines of the G-7 summit, it is difficult to argue that there was marked progress in talks between the US, Japan, Australia and India. A surprising set of deliverables, though, emerged from the meeting, the implementation of which would be interesting to observe.

These were the key outcomes of the Quad summit.¹⁰

1. A declaration of support for, and deepened cooperation with, all regional forums in the Indo-Pacific sector, especially ASEAN, PIF and IORA;
2. A recognition of the urgent need to mitigate the impacts of climate change, through the sharing of weather data across the region; focusing on clean economy transitions across the region via the IPEF and the Clean Energy Supply Chain, a new initiative that the leaders’ statement notes intends to ‘promote diverse, secure, transparent and resilient clean energy supply chains, and support a sustainable and inclusive energy transition;
3. The reorientation of the Quad Vaccine Partnership to a broader Quad Health Security Partnership, which aims to conduct Quad Pandemic Preparedness Exercises to train personnel, design better health infrastructures and build the capacity necessary to detect and contain future pandemics;
4. The announcement of the Quad Infrastructure Fellowships Program, which will aim to train 1,800 infrastructure professionals to ‘design, build and manage’ high-quality infrastructure;
5. To provide better connectivity and integrate the region, the commitment to a Quad Partnership for Cable Connectivity and Resilience’, not only to lay new high-quality undersea cables but also to ‘strengthen’ the undersea cable network from natural disasters or sabotage;
6. The expansion of new fifth-generation telecommunication networks by the introduction in Palau of the Open Radio Access Network (Open RAN), an open network not locked in to a particular standard;
7. The launch of the Quad International Standards Cooperation Network and the Quad Principles on Critical and Emerging Technology Standards for the development of new industry standards, the Quad Investors’ Network to facilitate investment in cutting-edge and critical technologies, the Quad Joint Principles for Secure Software and the Quad Joint Principles for Cyber Security of Critical

¹⁰ [“Quad Leaders’ Joint Statement”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, 20 May 2023.

Infrastructure for ensuring the security of critical software and infrastructure against cyberattacks, as well as the Quad Space Working Group to provide open source Earth observation data from the host of satellites operated by all members;

8. The articulation of opposition to China’s unilateral activities in the Indo-Pacific, as well as concern over the situations in Ukraine, Myanmar and North Korea.

Takeaways

The list of outcomes is a long one, and some commentators¹¹ have argued that the Quad is in danger of overreaching. Whether the Quad is growing organically or not, is a debate that has been conducted since its founding. However, it is difficult to believe that the Quad, which after all is not (yet) a formal entity, has much to lose by expanding into sectors where the experience of its members are welcome, especially in areas where it can provide high-quality public goods not available from its competitors. The new initiatives on high-quality infrastructure, critical technologies, open-access telecommunication networks, undersea cable infrastructure and sharing of Earth observation data freely are particularly worth encouraging in this regard, as they provide extremely valuable information and services that countries of the Indo-Pacific region (most of whom are also members of the Global South) would benefit from. As such, India has a chance to capitalise on these initiatives and ensure that Quad standards become widely available as an alternative to China’s.

A deeper takeaway, though, and linked intimately to the first, is whether Quad is a low area of priority for its members. In other words, is the Quad valued by its members? The proximate cause of these questions arising again is of course the cancellation of the Quad summit that was scheduled to be held in Australia due to President Biden’s sudden shortening of his trip to deal with the financial crisis brewing domestically. Such questions have arisen before, when most members distanced themselves from the Quad to engage China. There is something to the criticism, as abandoning the Quad project midway is not a good sign to send either to Indo-Pacific countries or to China, which has explicitly placed itself in opposition to it. In this light, there is something to be said for ‘the value of showing up’¹², which many critics are accusing President Biden of having undervalued.

¹¹ MK Bhadrakumar, “[Indian diplomacy in overstretch mode](#)”, *Asia Times*, 22 May 2023.

¹² Thomas Corben and Alice Nason, “[Biden’s cancelled Australia-PNG trip was a missed opportunity – but a US debt crisis would hurt a lot more](#)”, *Yahoo! News Australia*, 24 May 2023.

However, there should be more sympathy with the contrast presented by Foreign Secretary Kwatra¹³ – ‘Quad is wherever the members are’. As a grouping without a fixed institutional identity, unlike NATO or ASEAN, the Quad has always been conceived of by its creators, especially by the late Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, as a voluntary association between four (or more) like-minded countries to engage each other for the benefit of the Indo-Pacific, which is experiencing unprecedented flux in recent years. As such, the Quad exists as long as the leaders are willing to talk to each other under its rubric. Given that all four members are territorially situated in the Indo-Pacific, two share maritime or territorial borders with China, and that all have identified it as their long-term strategic challenge, it is only natural that the Quad will continue to remain relevant. Even in the case of the current summit, it must be noted that it did take place, if only in Hiroshima instead of Australia as originally intended.

The FIPIC summit

The FIPIC’s sudden re-emergence, after it had seemingly been rendered moribund after 2015, is an interesting case study of how institutional groupings are reactivated by countries when their interests sufficiently realign. The grouping, which originated in Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Fiji in 2014, ties together a region where India has several connections, most pertinent of which is the fact that a great number of people in the Pacific island countries trace their ancestry back to the Indian subcontinent. However, the falling into abeyance of India’s engagement of these countries has benefited China most of all, as it engages aggressively with the region by offering its development finance and infrastructure development expertise at concessional rates. Thus, the reactivation of FIPIC at this juncture can be said to be extremely timely.

The present meeting, co-hosted by Prime Minister Modi and Papua New Guinea Prime Minister James Marape on 22-23 May, produced the following key outcomes¹⁴:

1. The construction or organisation of several health facilities, including a super-speciality cardiology hospital in Fiji, dialysis units, annual prosthetic limb (the Jaipur Foot) camps, and sea ambulances in all 14 Pacific island states;
2. The expansion of Jan Aushadhi centres to Pacific island countries;

¹³ [“Transcript of Special Briefing by Foreign Secretary on Prime Minister’s visit to Japan, Papua New Guinea and Australia”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, 18 May 2023.

¹⁴ [“English translation of Prime Minister's closing statement at the FIPIC III Summit”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, 22 May 2023.

3. The transformation of the Centre for Excellence in Information Technology in Papua New Guinea to a Regional Information Technology and Cybersecurity Hub;
4. The creation of a support project for the development of small and medium entrepreneurs in all Pacific island countries, including training and technology transfer;
5. Provision of solar and desalination technology;
6. The creation of the Sagar Amrut Scholarship to create 1000 opportunities for Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme training in the next five years.

Takeaways

The key takeaways, in a broad sense, are as follows. Firstly, India has historically had much to offer the Pacific island states. It has supported their decolonisation, has provided them a platform in the international arena, and is the country of origin of many of their citizens. However, in recent years, China has made significant inroads into these countries by way of development aid and the construction of infrastructure. One of the key realisations India has had in recent years, and a welcome one, is that it too needs a tangible economic footprint in this region. This is because while India may have all the good intentions in the world, China has the money, and the Pacific island states, many of which are impoverished and require help to overcome the effects of climate change, have naturally gravitated toward the latter. The declarations that have come out of the current meeting are thus welcome, and offer much ground to build on.

However, that is not the end of it. India needs to fix in the Pacific island countries’ minds that the Global South that India is promoting abroad is an inclusive platform, where their concerns are not given short shrift. India is not just there to get rich and get going, or to trap them and extract concessions, but to stay and help. This message needs to be consistent and continuous, across all levels of government and at all levels of diplomacy. For this purpose, India can also positively explore avenues of joint cooperation with countries such as Britain and the United States, who have traditionally had good connections with countries such as Micronesia; France, which was the former colonial master of places such as the Seychelles and Reunion; and Japan, which also has historical connections to the region through its control of many of the Pacific islands between the turn of the twentieth century and the Second World War. Only then can there be a substantive weight to the prime minister’s characterisation of the Pacific island countries as ‘large ocean countries’ instead of ‘small island countries’.¹⁵

¹⁵ [“For me you are large ocean countries, not small island states: PM Modi at Pacific Forum in Papua New Guinea”](#), ANI, 22 May 2023.

Bilateral visit to Australia

The Prime Minister’s visit to Australia from 23 to 24 May is the most challenging to categorise, as it was originally intended as the venue for a Quad summit which had to be hurriedly modified to a bilateral visit for reasons mentioned above.

The short meeting produced a few outcomes, most prominently among them are the following¹⁶:

1. The refocusing of discussions on an India-Australia Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA);
2. Strengthening cooperation on mining and critical minerals;
3. Declaration of a joint task force on Green Hydrogen;
4. Signing of a migration and mobility agreement.

Takeaways

The India-Australia relationship has been full of ups and downs, but has been marked by an overall stability that has not wavered, despite the continuous irritant of attacks on houses of worship frequented by Indians¹⁷, and earlier in the century, on Indians themselves. The key takeaway here is that Australia’s obvious commitment, under the administrations of both Prime Ministers Scott Morrison and Anthony Albanese, not only to the idea of the Indo-Pacific, but also to a recognition of the challenge that China poses not only to the global order but to the most fundamental principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty, remains solid. This commitment provides natural avenues for cooperation with India, a country which shares with it many of the same principles. As such, as a new resource crisis brews across the region, and as Asian countries strive to attain cleaner, greener economies that can provide steady growth, India and Australia have much scope to provide their shared expertise and advice on these issues. This is especially relevant in the Pacific island countries, as Australia enjoys good working relationships with PNG and Nauru in particular, and is closer geographically to these countries than India is.

¹⁶ [“English translation of Press Statement by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi at the Joint Press Meeting with the Prime Minister of Australia”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, 24 May 2023.

¹⁷ David Crowe, [“Indian PM raises alarm over attacks on Hindu temples in Melbourne”](#), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 March 2023.

Conclusions

India’s diplomacy has always been in service of privileging India’s core interests, and under Prime Minister Modi, this interest has been defined and sharpened considerably. Concepts such as the Global South indicate the extent to which India is preparing to take up a mantle as a regional power transitioning into a soon-to-be global power. In conclusion, therefore, certain guideposts that mark significant inflection points for India’s successful diplomatic moves at the international level in the coming months can be pointed out.

Prime Minister Modi’s impending visit to the United States in June on a state visit is sure to produce outcomes that would further clarify the next moves in the Indo-Pacific region. A key test for the prime minister will be whether he can convey effectively to President Biden the concerns and aspirations of the Global South, a concept the US has hitherto not acknowledged.

Similarly, the prime minister’s visit to France on the eve of Bastille Day in July will also prove to be a significant milestone, as he gets a chance to interact with President Macron directly. Here, the agenda will be to confirm France’s continued involvement with the Indo-Pacific region, especially the Indian subcontinent, and to ensure that Indo-French defence cooperation continues to prosper.

Finally, and most crucially, Prime Minister Modi’s biggest challenge will be to ensure that the G-20 Leaders’ Summit, scheduled in September 2023, is fruitful, as it will bring together in one place the new antagonists of the global order, with the US and several members of the Western world on one side, and China and Russia on the other. In one respect, all the interactions the prime minister has had with world leaders so far can be considered as an exercise in generating goodwill. This must translate into a commitment by the members of the G-20 to set their differences aside and work on tackling the real challenges of conflict resolution, climate change, food insecurity, energy crisis, nuclear proliferation and terrorism. For the Global South, it is vital that the G-20 must come through and deliver.

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