

Japan's G7 Presidency: Beyond the Symbolism

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Japan, currently holding the presidency of the G7, which includes Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, will host the G7 Leaders' Summit in Hiroshima later this month. Leaders of eight non-member countries have been invited by Japan to attend the summit – these include India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Brazil.

Significance of invitation to India, Indonesia and Brazil

The invitation to leaders of India, Indonesia and Brazil is especially significant. Indonesia was G20 Chair last year, India is currently chair of G20 and Brazil will be chair next year.

Indonesia and India have taken a balanced stance on the Russia-Ukraine war. Apart from the purchase of oil at discounted prices from Russia, India has also sought to give a push to bilateral economic relations with Russia, in spite of US sanctions, and both countries are engaged in talks over an Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Here it would be pertinent to point out that New Delhi has been refining oil purchased from Russia into fuel for Europe and the US.

Both Indonesia and India have repeatedly flagged the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on global supply chains, while not necessarily supporting US' approach vis-à-vis Russia they have called for an end to the war.

Brazil while pushing for an end to the conflict has blamed the West and Ukraine for the conflict. During his visit to China, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said: "The United States needs to stop encouraging war and start talking about peace; the European Union needs to start talking about peace so that we can convince Putin and Zelensky that peace is in the interest of everyone and that war is only interesting, for now, to the two of them."

US sanctions on Russia

One of the issues which is likely to be high on the agenda during the G7 summit is imposition of sanctions on Russia, something which has been opposed by India, Brazil and Indonesia. A statement issued after the G7 Foreign Ministers meeting said: "There can be no impunity for war crimes and other atrocities such as Russia's attacks against civilians and critical civilian infrastructure."

It also stated that G7 would seek to intensify sanctions and ensure that they are "fully enforced".

Issues pertaining to the Global South

Here it would be pertinent to point out that India, currently the chair of G20 and Indonesia, currently the ASEAN Chair have been flagging issues concerning the 'Global South'. India has in fact stated that one of its key thrust areas as chair of G20 would be giving greater attention and space to the views of the Global South.

The China factor and need for alternative supply chains

While there may be differences with the US over several issues, India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Australia and South Korea are important in the context of shifting global supply chains and reducing dependence upon China. The issue of alternative supply chains will also be high on the agenda during the G7 Leaders' Summit.

While India and Washington may have differences on certain issues, New Delhi is a member of the Quad along with Australia, US and Japan and its ties with China have witnessed a significant deterioration in recent years. Several US companies, including Apple are shifting operations to Vietnam and India. Apple CEO, Tim Cook was in India to open two Apple stores in the country, the company has also been expanding production in India.

Japan, shares close relations with the US, is a pro-active member of Quad, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization NATO is likely to set up an office in Japan to enhance cooperation pertaining to the Indo-Pacific with other partners.

In spite of all the convergences with the US, there are area of differences. It has been purchasing oil from Russia at above the price cap set by G7 countries. In Africa, Japan wants to provide an alternative to Russia and China. Japanese PM Fumio Kishida undertook a four nation — Egypt, Mozambique, Ghana and Kenya – tour of Africa. While China is way ahead of Japan in terms of trade and investment with Africa, Tokyo has been providing assistance under the umbrella of Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). At the TICAD Summit in 2022, Japan had pledged \$30 billion assistance for Africa’s development – with a thrust on high quality growth in and investing in human capital.

Kishida’s emphasis on giving greater voice to the Global South as well as the rising debts of African countries to China may provide an opening to Japan, but it has a lot of catching up to do with Beijing. Here it would be pertinent to point out that Japan and India are also working jointly under the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor.

While the ‘Russia-China’ vs. US nexus draws a lot of attention, the role of countries like Japan, India and Indonesia is extremely important in global geopolitics. While countries in the developing world, especially African nations, may be sceptical vis-à-vis Western institutions they can also not afford to be excessively dependent upon China. Japan has been providing assistance to developing nations, without harsh conditionalities, for long and has a stellar record in terms of delivering high quality infrastructural projects, in the developing world, and can emerge as an important alternative individually as well as under the umbrella of multilateral platforms and groupings like Quad.

It is also important for international institutions to give genuine space to developing countries, and Japan’s invitation to India, Indonesia and Vietnam is significant in this context.

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The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author.



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