

AN ELITE CLUB: ON G-7 SUMMIT

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The G-7 summit, at Carbis Bay, sent out two very strong messages. The first was driven by the United States's new President Joseph Biden and his vow that "America is back" to take the lead on global challenges. The G-7 commitment to [donate one billion coronavirus vaccines to poorer countries](#) and to invest \$12 trillion in their combined pandemic recovery plan depends on U.S. commitments for a large part. The [special communiqué on "Open Societies"](#) for the G-7 outreach, and the invitation to "fellow democracies" India, Australia, South Korea and South Africa are also an extension of his stated commitment to convening a Democracy Summit this year. Even the slogan for the G-7, "Build Back Better", was a White House term to declare America's economy and jobs recovery plan. The second message was the consensus amongst the seven-member countries on countering China. The [final G-7 communiqué](#) holds no less than four direct references to China, each negative, including criticising Beijing for its rights record in Xinjiang and democratic freedoms in Hong Kong, its "non-market policies and practices...", concerns over its actions in the China Seas, and a demand for a transparent investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 virus. Though the bonhomie among the G-7 leaders was palpable, the differences and contradictions in the grouping remain a challenge. Even two decades ago, questions were raised about whether the grouping (earlier, the G-8), could claim its mantle as the world's "richest" countries, when emerging economies, China and India, are not included. On economic issues, the EU is a more representative unit than the individual European G-7 member countries. Finally, the premise of a group like the G-7, that of an exclusive club of the "haves" or "the best vs the rest", seems anachronistic in a world that is much more interlinked now than in 1975, when the grouping first came about.

India, a special guest to the G-7/G-8 since 2003, has also maintained its independent course, especially on political issues. It is significant that the G-7 outreach communiqués that included the guest countries, did not make the same references to China as the main document, and MEA officials clarified that Chinese aggression was not raised at the outreaches, which focused on the pandemic, climate change and democratic freedoms. India voiced concerns about some clauses in the joint communiqué on Open Societies which condemned "rising authoritarianism", net shutdowns, manipulation of information, and rights violations — areas where the Modi government has often been criticised itself. Addressing the session on Open Societies, [Mr. Modi said that India is a "natural ally" to the G-7](#). In the present, the Government will be expected to walk the talk on its commitments at the G-7 outreach, especially in the areas of information clampdowns, given that India had the largest number of Internet shutdowns in 2020.

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