

SAMARKAND: A MINIATURE OF AN EMERGING WORLD

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: SCO and India

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin attend a meeting on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. | Photo Credit: Reuters

That the world is in a state of flux — with all its complexities, hopes, aspirations and fears, but unable to embrace new realities — was in evidence in the historic city of Samarkand during the summit (September 15-16) of the [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation \(SCO\)](#) when key world leaders groped in the dark for an ideal world order.

The realities they faced were mind-boggling even without their traditional rivals breathing down their necks. Russia was clearly in the dock for its [invasion of Ukraine](#), but the former Soviet Republics were not in a position to call a spade a spade. [China was vulnerable](#) because of the [deal it had struck with Russia](#) on Taiwan in return for a pledge to support Russia in its war with Ukraine. China appears to have made up its mind that its future lies with Russia as it does not see itself becoming a partner of the U.S. The U.S. seems to have chosen to be with democratic countries in its eventual return to centre stage. The [emergence of a Red Quad](#) may well be a possibility to counter democratic forces in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S.'s decision to modernise the Pakistani air force may be to preempt Pakistan from becoming a closer ally of China.

India had both its biggest adversaries on the table but was not on talking terms with them on account of a conspiracy of circumstances. Ironically, India, with its special historic bonds with Russia, was the only country to [demand a cessation of hostilities](#) and want diplomacy and democracy. India bluntly told Russia that this was not the time for war and that the war must stop because of the immense challenges it had posed to the world. India spoke about the oil crisis and the looming food scarcity, the disruption of supply chains and transit trade access. The war had to stop to avert a disaster.

Russian President Vladimir Putin got away by saying that he understood India's concerns over the war in Ukraine, promising to try and end the conflict, but blaming the Ukrainian government for prolonging the crisis. He indicated that he was in no hurry to end the war. India has the best of relations with Russia, but the exchange pointed to the future when Russia would be an adversary of India together with China. India appeared to be the spokesperson of the conscience of mankind, which wanted the war to end.

India's real business should have been with China, which had violated every bilateral agreement and occupied territories across the Line of Actual Control. Chinese President Xi Jinping was there dictating to the world what kind of new world order must be shaped, and India was silent. The latest disengagement in Ladakh was supposed to have facilitated a thaw in the situation, making it possible for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to attend the SCO, but each side was perhaps waiting for the other to blink.

India had much to say about Pakistan too when a new Pakistani leader was there, and with no sign of regret over the perpetration of terrorism. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif claimed that he had discussed Kashmir with the Chinese President and received an assurance of support, though China made no such statement on Kashmir. The only point that Mr. Modi made was that Pakistan should give India transit trade access by land to Afghanistan and Central Asia. China

and Russia had good words to say about India when they welcomed India's Chairmanship of the SCO and extended their support, which was nothing but a formality. It is impossible to predict the state of the SCO if the war persists and the world reaches an economic crisis.

India's position at the summit turned out to be one of questioning Russia on the continuation of the war, which may have positioned India on the right side of history in a world order divided between democracies and autocracies. Clearly, India cannot be with China or Russia in the new dispensation. India made this clear at the SCO summit.

The Samarkand summit presented, in miniature, the world that may emerge in the future and demonstrated to us where we should stand right now. The Quad may well be the forum that will enable India to protect its interests in the Indo-Pacific, and the SCO may have been a dress rehearsal for what may eventually emerge. As Chairman of SCO, India cannot transform it from within, because a China-Russia-Iran-Pakistan axis will dominate it. India should concentrate on cultivating bilateral relations with democratic nations to build a pole for itself in the new world order.

The ripples of the events in Samarkand became evident in the United Nations General Assembly at its present session when both the U.S. and Russia declared for the first time that they would favour an expansion of the UNSC to make it more effective. U.S. President Joe Biden indicated his readiness to accept an expansion while Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov specifically supported India being a permanent member. An effort is on to move with the times and meet the aspirations of developing countries and thus help shape a new world order.

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