



G20 Avoids Villainizing Russia, Adopts Ambiguous Stance on Ukrainian Conflict

Although the Russo-Ukrainian conflict remained a hot point of contention among participants at last weekend's G20 summit in New Delhi, India, the summit nonetheless culminated in a final joint declaration that avoided villainizing Russia with regard to the Ukraine crisis.



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Not surprisingly, all eyes were on the section in the summit [declaration](#) addressing the conflict.

"All states must refrain from the threat or use of force to seek territorial acquisition against the territorial integrity and sovereignty or political independence of any state," the declaration read, without using the term "aggression" to refer to Russian actions in Ukraine, unlike 2022's G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia. The declaration added:

We call on all states to uphold the principles of international law including territorial integrity and sovereignty, international humanitarian law, and the multilateral system that safeguards peace and stability.

The document admitted the lack of consensus among the G20 economies about the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, stating that "there were different views and assessments of the situation" among the members. Notably, host country India has adopted a relatively neutral position on the Ukrainian crisis, refusing to condemn Russian actions in Ukraine as New Delhi tries to balance its ties with Moscow as well as with its fellow QUAD member states (the United States, Japan, and Australia).

Yet the declaration articulated countries' support for "all relevant and constructive initiatives that support a comprehensive, just, and durable peace in Ukraine."

The final text of the declaration indicated that the G20 members "highlighted the human suffering and negative added impacts of the war in Ukraine with regard to global food and energy security, supply chains, macro-financial stability, inflation and growth." Developing countries, which have already been adversely impacted by Covid-19 lockdowns, have been the ones reeling from the ramifications of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, the document continued.

The declaration highlighted G20 leaders' resolve to "unite" in mitigating the effects of the Ukrainian crisis on the international economy, and signaled the group's intent to "welcome all relevant and constructive initiatives that support a comprehensive, just, and durable peace in Ukraine" that would abide by the principles of the UN Charter.

"Friends, I just received a piece of good news," the host of the gathering, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, declared in his address on September 9.

"Thanks to the hard work of our teams and your cooperation, the New Delhi G20 Leaders' Summit have agreed on a joint declaration," he said. He subsequently published the entire text of the 34-page document on his account on X (previously Twitter).



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on September 11, 2023

Reuters had earlier reported that the Ukrainian crisis had been a key hurdle in finalizing the document, as Western pressure for tough criticism of Russia over its military operation in Ukraine faced other G20 countries' resistance or reluctance to do so.

Based on reports by Reuters, the paragraph pertaining to the "geopolitical situation" remained blank in the draft of the summit's declaration on September 8, notwithstanding multilateral agreement regarding other issues such as cryptocurrencies and international debt.

With Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping both absent from the summit, observers initially anticipated the gathering to be dominated by the U.S. and its allies. Nevertheless, the West could not convince the nations from the so-called Global South to alter their positions on Ukraine.

Russia's representative, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, hailed the G20's declaration as "a step in the right direction" and "a milestone," for India as well as the world's developing countries.

Lavrov asserted that Western countries were unsuccessful in making the weekend's summit focus on the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, largely owing to the efforts of developing countries.

Speaking to reporters on September 10, Lavrov, who led the Russian delegation at the gathering, congratulated India for gathering the countries of the Global South "to protect their legitimate interests," thus preventing "the West from once again Ukrainizing the entire agenda" of the summit and distracting countries from the acute issues experienced by developing economies.

The Russian foreign minister emphasized that the joint declaration "mentions the Ukraine crisis, but only in the context of the need to resolve all conflicts" in line with the principles of the UN Charter.

Lavrov maintained that the G20 must concentrate on economic and financial issues, and lauded emerging countries, which prevented the meeting from turning into a "politicized club."

With Russia and Ukraine each attacking territory claimed by the other, the declaration's wording provided a technical compromise that Russia and the West could both accept.

Referring to the guaranteed flow of grain, food, and fertilizer from both Ukraine and Russia, which the declaration lobbied for, Lavrov announced that Russia would revert to the Black Sea deal that permits Ukraine to export grain if Moscow's demands are fulfilled.

The G20 declaration explicitly urged the "unimpeded deliveries of grain, foodstuffs, and fertilizers/inputs" from both Russia and Ukraine.

Moscow pulled out of the deal in July, as the U.S. and EU had reneged on their pledges to facilitate exports of Russian food products and fertilizers.

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry [lambasted](#) the declaration as being "nothing to be proud of," and even altered the text to offer the Ukrainian perspective of the crisis with Russia.

The foreign ministry also elaborated that a Ukrainian presence at the summit would have enabled participants to better comprehend the situation.

In response to the declaration, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters that it "does a very good job of standing up for the principle that states cannot use force to seek territorial acquisition or to violate the territorial integrity and sovereignty or political independence of other states."



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To boot, the summit unveiled a key rail and shipping project — the “India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor,” as a direct rival to China’s Belt and Road Initiative — which would connect Europe to the Middle East and India.

U.S. President Joe Biden revealed that the United States, the EU, and various other partners were already cooperating on the project and had signed a letter of intent. (He also divulged that he had conducted discussions with Chinese Premier Li Qiang at the summit. The talks were the highest-level meeting between China and the U.S. in almost 10 months, since Biden and Xi met at 2022’s G20 in Indonesia.)

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen labeled the plans as “historic,” as they would “unlock the great potential” in multilateral partnerships.

Significantly, the U.S. and the EU disclosed that they would jointly bankroll an African transport corridor that would link the Democratic Republic of Congo’s Katanga region with the “copperbelt,” the copper mining area in Zambia, as well as the port of Lobito in Angola.

Another noteworthy takeaway from the summit is that African countries will have a permanent seat at the G20’s table, as the grouping officially welcomed the African Union into its ranks.

Meanwhile, Modi has requested that G20’s leaders have a virtual meeting in November to evaluate progress on the policy suggestions and goals they declared. Brazil is to assume the role as G20 host for 2024.

Set up to address global economic issues, the G20 is a group of countries that contribute up to 90 percent of the world’s GDP and consist of 70 percent of the world’s population.



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