

QUAD's Fragmented Position on Russia, the Wang-Lavrov Meeting and the EU-China Summit: What Do They Mean for the Future of a Multipolar World?

According to the neorealist theorist Kenneth Waltz, one of the main Western proponents of polarity theory in the International Relations, a Great Power is a state which excels in **“size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence”**. According to Waltz, these **power capabilities would allow such a Great Power to exert its economic, military and political influence on a global scale**. However, in the light of the UN Charter and in accordance with all other sources of Public International Law, states benefit of equal sovereignty and, irrespective of their power capabilities, no country has the right to interfere in the internal affairs of any other state. In this regard, one may consider Waltz's theory as not in concordance with the precepts governing the global community of nations.

The number, distribution and competition in terms of power capabilities in the international arena determine the polarity of the international system. Shall the number of Great Powers be higher than two, the system would be considered Multipolar; shall there be only two Great Powers, it will be Bipolar; a time period dominated by one single power is the expression of a Unipolar system.

The dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty, and particularly the Soviet Union, has generated the biggest change in the balance of power since World War II, turning the bipolar system of the Cold War into a unipolar international system, with the United States being the dominant actor. Following 1989, one of the central concerns in the field of International Relations has been represented by analysing such system and determining how it may function in the absence of an opposite power pole.

In the light of the last decade dynamics in the global arena, one may comment that the world currently displays a new architecture, a multipolar one, with new centres of power, which some may consider reflecting both the natural aspiration of countries seeking leadership as well as the cultural and civilisational diversity in our world. **Emerging medium and small powers render the Great Powers landscape even more complex by forming conferences, security dialogues and other embryonic types of international/ regional frameworks.**

One could affirm that, though fragile, conflictual and unstable in appearance, a switch to multipolarity **might produce a balance where the risk of mass military confrontation is comparatively reduced, yet undoubtedly present.** Moreover, **such a distribution of power could allow not only great powers but also middle and small powers to play a more significant role in the global arena.** To the same degree of extent, **in a multipolar world, emerging, flexible and less codified forms of international frameworks, incipient as they are, could represent both a source of balance as well as potential points of friction.**

In this regard, **the recent dynamics in the global arena could be regarded as highly influential when it**

comes to stressing the growing perception of a multipolar world: QUAD's apparently diverging ideas on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Wang-Lavrov meeting in China and the EU-China Summit.

QUAD Seeking Common Grounds on Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

With regard to the **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)**, an informal strategic forum that first met in 2004 in response to natural disasters affecting the Pacific Ocean, currently focused on the issue of openness and freedom in the Indo-Pacific region, three of its members, namely the **USA, Australia and Japan, have adopted a resolute and condemning stance towards Russia's unprovoked military aggression on Ukraine.**

Based on the available media sources, **India seems to have refused to condemn Moscow, however supporting calls for a ceasefire as a diplomatic solution for the invasion**, in a note which could be considered similar with Beijing's narrative on the matter. With regard to the **India-Russia ties**, they have been labeled by both New Delhi and Moscow as *"special and privileged strategic relationship"*. According to Arindam Bagchi, spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs of India, *"Our focus is to maintain and stabilise our established economic relations with Russia"*. **The April 12, 2022, "2 plus 2" format meeting between Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, and US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken has not brought a fundamental change in India's public position.** Following a joint statement issued after the meeting, the participating Ministers *"reviewed mutual efforts to respond to the worsening humanitarian crisis in Ukraine", "urged an immediate cessation of hostilities", "unequivocally condemned civilian deaths" and "underscored that the contemporary global order has been built on the UN Charter, respect for international law, and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states"*.

While New Delhi is providing humanitarian aid to Ukraine, **international media reports India has continued its purchases of discounted Russian crude oil.** According to analysts, surprisingly, less than 3% of India's oil imports come from Russia, while the rest is mainly imported from the Middle East. **In this regard, one may consider India's refusal to condemn Moscow may not be exclusively linked only to Delhi's oil preferences.**

With regard to the position of the other QUAD parties on India's apparently diverging stance, one may recall that, on March 19, 2022, **Japan's Prime Minister, Fumio Kishida, urged his Indian counterpart, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to take a tougher stance on the war in Ukraine during a visit to India.** On March 21, 2022, in a virtual summit with Modi, **Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison stressed "the importance of making Russia accountable for its actions"**, while adding that *"the cooperation of like-minded liberal democracies is the key to an open, inclusive, resilient and prosperous Indo-Pacific."*

The Wang-Lavrov Meeting in Anhui, China

On March 30, **Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with his Russian counterpart, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in the Eastern Chinese province of Anhui, where China hosted two days of meetings on the situation in Afghanistan, with the participation of the ruling Taliban as well as Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.**

While the Chinese and Russian media agencies have been scarce on details, according to a thorough analysis

of today's complex international situation, it seems that the topic matter of the meeting was not entirely on Afghanistan, but similarly on clarifying the status of engagement of these two countries in Afghanistan. The two leaders might have also discussed about Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Subsequently, the Russian state news agency RIA Novosti announced that Lavrov, during the two-day meeting with Wang on the sidelines of the conference on Afghanistan, reiterated **Moscow's interest in developing bilateral relations with Beijing in a "sustainable and coherent" way.**

According to the Russian Foreign Minister, *"We are going through a very serious phase in the history of international relations. I am convinced that, following this phase, the international situation will become much clearer and, together with you, together with other like-minded people, we will move towards a multipolar, just and democratic world order."*

One may assume that the discretion associated with the meeting underlines its capital importance, which is leading to many other aspects related to the current and future Sino-Russian relations. The Anhui meeting is likely to have created the foundations of the future Russian-Chinese relations.

Certainly, the position of both countries with regard to the Russian invasion of Ukraine have not changed significantly following the meeting. However, one could notice that, **despite the international pressure on Beijing, China has not only maintained, but increased its economic exchanges with Russia – according to Chinese media sources, which some have interpreted as a showcase of economic support despite Kremlin's violation of the UN Charter.**

The EU-China Summit

On April 1, 2022, the **President of the European Council**, Charles Michael, the **President of the European Commission**, Ursula von der Leyen, virtually met with the **Chinese President** Xi Jinping. The **EU Commission President**, Ursula von der Leyen chaired, along with the **Chinese Prime Minister**, Li Keqiang, the **23rd European Union–China Summit.**

According to Charles Michel, *"As major global powers, the EU and China must work together on stopping Russia's war in Ukraine as soon as possible. We have a common responsibility to maintain peace and stability, and a safe and sustainable world. Key international norms and principles must be respected. We count on China's support to achieve a lasting ceasefire, to stop the unjustifiable war and address the dramatic humanitarian crisis it has generated."*

Ursula von der Leyen underlined that *"the Russian invasion of Ukraine is not only a defining moment for our continent, but also for our relationship with the rest of the world. There must be respect for international law, as well as for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. China, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, has a special responsibility. No European citizen would understand any support to Russia's ability to wage war."*

One could interpret the above statements as **reassurances sought after by Brussels that China will not supply weapons or help Russia evade the sanctions imposed by the West. Equally, it could be asserted that the European Union desires a more active involvement on China's behalf in stopping the Russian invasion of Ukraine.**

While the EU Commission press release did not mention the position of the Chinese President, Xi Jinping manifested his hope that *"EU could form its view on China independently"* as Beijing is willing to nurture *"a bridge of friendship and cooperation"*. **Certainly, one could interpret the views expressed by the Chinese President as a conditional clause, which the EU is neither willing to accept nor to reproduce on its official press release.**

Given the last year's EU-China Summit did not take place, the April 1st summit was the first to be held between the two parties in the past two years.

Clearly, as one may expect, significant aspects of the interaction among the QUAD parties, as well as the Wang-Lavrov meeting and EU-China Summit have been discussed behind closed doors. In this regard, **the pragmatic results of the events presented above could only be observed in the future months.**

On the other hand, **the three events described above represent a clear expression of today's multipolar system in which growing power ambitions and rivalry may assure a balance of power able to deter a revival of the Cold War spirit.**

Certainly, one may agree that, **in an ideal world, it is not multipolarity – which expresses ambition, but multilateralism – expressing the desire to openly cooperate, that could most successfully secure a peaceful and secure international environment. Accepting multipolarity means facing the reality of a diversified world, but also a fragmented, conflictual and possibly balanced, one. Defending multilateralism means rejecting fatalistic views and mobilizing for a more fluid and cooperative global community, always bearing in mind the equal sovereignty and independence of each state in the global community of nations.**

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