



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

China torpedoed India's G20 presidency, but can it pay the price?



China has made an effort to cast a shadow over India's G20 presidency just ahead of the central annual event, next weekend's summit in New Delhi.

Since the beginning of the year, Beijing has taken several actions to torpedo India's G20 presidency, effectively discrediting one of the few still-functioning global organisations.

It is possible that Xi Jinping, President of China, will not attend the summit in New Delhi. This would be his first absence from this forum since he took office in 2013.

The opportunity for Xi's meeting with US President Joe Biden, which has been the focus of numerous diplomatic and economic initiatives for almost a year, would also be lost as a result of his non-arrival.

Before the crisis involving a Chinese spy balloon above US territory last February, when contacts once again ceased, their meeting in Bali last year marked a good turning point in the frozen US-China relations that opened the way for several high-level political and economic discussions.

Downplaying the significance of the New Delhi summit

Xi's non-arrival in India will also mean a limited reach of the summit, which, in his absence, will most likely pass without significant political and economic breakthroughs.

India prepared its presidency of the G20 this year very enthusiastically, seeking a place to promote its significant economic and development ambitions, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, but Beijing has made an effort to

prevent this from happening.

Earlier this week, authorities in Beijing angered several neighbours, including India, by releasing an official map of China that claimed parts of their territory.

This seemed like a technical matter, but it was rightly interpreted as an aggressive political message from Beijing towards India, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Japan, but not in Moscow, where the Chinese appropriation of part of Russia's territory was the only one without comment or protest.

“It is not that simple. It took India a while to realise that its rise would be opposed tooth and nail by Beijing”, said Indrani Bagchi of the Ananta Aspen Centre, an Indian think-tank.

China was also at the centre of obstructions at this year's G20 ministerial meetings. Because of its solidarity with Russia, also a member of the G20, the joint statements of the ministers of finance on Ukraine last July and the heads of diplomacy in Bengaluru last February were absent.

Expensive support for Russia

The Russian invasion of Ukraine will be the "elephant in the room" at the summit in New Delhi, as it was last year in Indonesia, so the host will be forced to find wording that will satisfy the majority that condemns the Russian

, but also China and Moscow, to aggression preserve a semblance of organisational functionality.

However, this will not change the reality that the G20's functioning has been damaged, if not

Beijing has been avoiding this kind of diplomacy in complete contradiction to its statements that it wants to strengthen -multilateralism - either to strengthen one-on-one relations or organisations where it has an undeniably strong influence, like the BRICS.

Xi decided not to come to the G20 summit in New Delhi and to save the privilege of a meeting with US President Biden for another occasion (and with another host).

At a high level, communication between Beijing and Washington is currently fairly active. Following US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo's visit to China, the Pentagon reported that, after much waiting and China's reluctance, the first military-to-military meeting between China and the US took place in Fiji in mid-August.

This means that the US-China dialogue has been working, but the Chinese leader is still not ready for a summit meeting, at least not in New Delhi.

However, Beijing will not be able convincingly to promote its principles of resuming an equal global dialogue in many places and occasions while simultaneously dismantling such mechanisms.

China could become isolated in several significant international fora due to its support of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The fact that China and Russia will be the consensus-breakers at the G20 meeting in India, which follows the summit in Indonesia, should already raise red flags in Beijing.

This forum is significant for China and its economic interests because it gathers members with 90% of the global GDP and 80% of international trade.

jeopardised, despite being one of the most efficient global forums in charge of recovering from the effects of the 2008 global financial crisis and the late 1990s Asian economic crisis.

Global governance has failed in both its “mandates of preventing wars and fostering international cooperation”, Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, told G20 foreign ministers last February.

Beijing will try to deflect blame for undermining India's presidency, as President Xi and Prime Minister Modi recently met in the margins of the BRICS summit in Johannesburg.

However, unless it is related to the fact that India is hosting, it is impossible to understand why the Chinese leader, for the first time in 10 years, will not attend the summit of the organisation from which China gains a great deal of worldwide credibility.

China avoids global forums

Understandably, Russia does not want to withdraw from the G20 despite the fact that the vast majority of members, practically all except China, condemn its aggression against Ukraine.

This forum is perhaps the only remaining influential place where Russia can still appear in an equal capacity, because the G20 does not have a formal structure nor a procedure for expulsion from membership.

However, China has been trying to weaken its influence on the global stage, perhaps due to the assessment that the G20 could one day turn against it as it is now turning against Russia.

Beijing will not find another place where it could push and negotiate its economic interests as effectively as in the G20.