

# At G20, Biden Looks to Fill a Hole Left by Putin and Xi

*With the Russian and Chinese leaders absent, the president hopes to get others to align with him on a variety of matters, including Ukraine and curbing Beijing's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific.*

By [Katie Rogers](#) and [Peter Baker](#)  
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President Biden is set to arrive in New Delhi on Friday for a global summit meeting where he will present the United States as an economic and strategic counterweight to China and Russia, taking advantage of the absence of leaders from those two countries, who are skipping the gathering.

Mr. Biden is bringing with him the promise of up to \$200 billion in new development funds for climate change, food security, public health and other infrastructure needs in less developed countries through revamped international financing institutions like the World Bank, leveraged by a relatively small investment by the United States.

The initiative represents an American-led response to China's Belt and Road project providing loans to poorer countries to build ports, rail lines and telecommunications networks, a venture that has expanded Beijing's influence in parts of the world where it rarely played much of a role before. Mr. Biden's plan would match only a fraction of the Chinese investments in recent years but offers an alternative to Beijing's presence as an omnipresent and often unforgiving creditor.

The president will have an important opportunity at the Group of 20 meeting thanks to the decisions by President Xi Jinping of China and President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia to not attend. Mr. Biden will have room to present a case to a large group of important world leaders that they should align with the United States on matters that include condemning Russia's war in Ukraine and curbing China's increasing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific.

Mr. Biden will land in New Delhi on a different political footing than he had less than a year ago at the G20 summit in Bali, when he was bolstered by better-than-expected midterm election results by Democratic candidates and held a high-stakes meeting with Mr. Xi centered around rebuilding a relationship that was threatening to boil over.

This year, Mr. Biden faces heightened concerns around his age — he will turn 81 in November — as he campaigns for a second term. A poll released by CNN on Thursday showed that his approval ratings remain low. A special counsel has indicated that he planned to indict the president's son Hunter on a gun charge by the end of the month.

On top of it all, there is concern that a resurgence of Covid-19 may affect Mr. Biden at some point during his trip to India and Vietnam after Jill Biden, the first lady, was diagnosed with the coronavirus this week. The president tested negative before boarding Air Force One on Thursday and will continue to be tested while overseas.

The president plans to use the trip to shore up his relationship with the G20 host, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, who is using the economic-focused meeting to showcase the promise and potential of a juggernaut Indian economy. Mr. Modi is so intent on a successful event that his government declared a three-day national holiday surrounding the meeting, closing many businesses and restaurants and increasing security throughout the capital.

Mr. Biden, who hosted Mr. Modi for a state dinner in Washington in June, is set to meet with the prime minister shortly after his scheduled arrival in New Delhi on Friday evening. He plans to attend meetings with other leaders on Saturday and visit the Raj Ghat memorial to Gandhi on Sunday before leaving for Vietnam, where he will seal a strategic agreement.

“What Modi has demonstrated, and what the U.S. is leaning into, is a leader who is willing to make bets on the future of the country,” Nirav Patel, the chief executive of the Asia Group and deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific under President Barack Obama, said in an interview. “The diplomatic as well as political stability that Modi enjoys allows this relationship to be more fruitful, and Biden has leaned into that.”

Mr. Modi, who is seeking a third term next year, has been criticized for his government’s record on human rights and faces concerns that he is presiding over a backsliding democracy. During Mr. Modi’s state visit to Washington, Mr. Biden coaxed him into answering questions from reporters during a news conference, one of the rare times the nationalist prime minister has done so in his nearly decade-long tenure.

Challenged on his record on human rights and religious freedom, Mr. Modi insisted that democracy is “in India’s DNA” and denied that his government has fostered prejudice.

It remains to be seen how much of a partner Mr. Modi will ultimately be in Mr. Biden’s broad efforts to counter China’s rising aggression in the Indo-Pacific. India, which remained staunchly nonaligned during the Cold War, has likewise refused to join the American-led coalition aiding Ukraine in its war against invading Russian forces.

Officials in the Indian government have suggested that any joint communication on Ukraine at the G20 incorporate Russia’s and China’s views, a conciliatory approach that is at odds with the more aggressive stance taken by Western leaders. China will be represented in New Delhi by Premier Li Qiang and Russia by Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov.

“The reality is that Russia’s illegal war has had devastating social and economic consequences, and the poorest countries on the planet are bearing the brunt of that,” Jake Sullivan, the president’s national security adviser, told reporters this week. Mr. Biden, he added, “will continue to emphasize that the United States will support Ukraine for as long as it takes to redeem these principles.”

Mr. Biden is also expected to hold separate meetings with several other leaders while he is in New Delhi, discussing a range of shared threats, including the rise of artificial technology and climate change.

The White House has not identified which leaders he will meet with, but many are watching to see if Mr. Biden sits down with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia. Mr. Biden’s envoys are trying to broker a diplomatic opening between Saudi Arabia and Israel that could transform the Middle East.

Mr. Sullivan said the president would spend much of his time in New Delhi urging other leaders to bolster global development banks, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to make it easier for poor countries to gain access to credit.

The White House asked Congress last month for \$3.3 billion to expand development financing both through the World Bank and separately, which it said would leverage more than \$27 billion for developing countries. It also asked Congress to authorize the government to lend to two International Monetary Fund trust funds, which it said would unlock up to \$21 billion in new lending without additional American money. Altogether, the White House said it believes it could leverage those funds into \$200 billion in credit with the help of partner countries over the next decade.

“Those are crucial additional resources for reducing poverty, advancing global health security and combating climate change,” Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen told reporters in New Delhi.

Mr. Biden is scheduled to travel on Sunday to Hanoi, Vietnam, where he will focus on positioning the United States as a stable and reliable ally in the Indo-Pacific. Vietnam has agreed to elevate its diplomatic relationship with the United States to its highest status, equivalent to its ties with China and Russia.

If the trip goes well, Mr. Patel said, “it will send a global signal” that Vietnam has “made a determination over how it seeks to determine its own strategic future.”