

JAISHANKAR IN BRATISLAVA

Eurocentrism Is Dead, India Makes Its Own Foreign Policy

by Cynthia R. Rush

June 11—Speaking June 3 at the GLOBESEC 2022 Bratislava Forum, as part of his four-day tour of NATO members Slovakia and the Czech Republic, Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar spoke very bluntly about the independence of Indian foreign policy decisions. He refuted the accusation that his government is a “fence sitter” that must choose to ally with one or another “power axis”—Europe-U.S. on the one hand, or Russia-China on the other. He told one questioner during the Q&A period,

Do not think it’s necessary for India to join any axis. India is entitled to its own choices which will be a balance of its values and interests. I’m not sitting on the fence just because I don’t agree with you. It means I am sitting on my ground.

During his speech, titled “Taking Friendship to the Next Level: Allies in the Indo-Pacific,” he put it this way, as [reported](#) in *The Economic Times*:

I [India] am one-fifth of the world’s population. I am, what, today the 5th or 6th largest economy in the world.... I feel I am entitled to have my own side. I am entitled to weigh my own interests and make my own choices. My choices will not be cynical and transactional. They will be a balance of my values and my interests. There is no country in the world which disregards its interests.

Jaishankar was unsparing with Europe:

A lot is happening outside Europe. There are so many human and natural disasters in our part of the world, and many countries look to India for help. The world is changing and new players are coming in. The world can’t be Eurocentric anymore. Europe has to grow out of the mindset that its problems are the world’s problems, but the world’s problems aren’t Europe’s problems.

Why, he asked, are linkages being made between China

and India, and what is happening in Ukraine?

China and India happened way before Ukraine.... So, the Chinese don’t need a precedent somewhere else in the world on how to engage with us or not engage us, or be difficult with us or not be difficult with us. I don’t see this frankly as a very clever argument, but a very self-serving one.

Yes, he said, the relationship with China is difficult, but “we are perfectly capable of managing it. If I get a global understanding and support, it will be of help.” But leave geopolitics out of it. “This idea that I do a transaction, I come in one conflict because it will help in another conflict, that is not how the world works.” So, he said,

[A] lot of our problems with China have nothing to do with Ukraine, have nothing to do with Russia, they are predated. And, if we are getting into who is silent on what issue at what point of time, I could point to a whole lot of issues on which, as I said, Europe has held its peace.... If I were to take Europe collectively, which has been singularly silent on many things which were happening, for example in Asia, you could ask why would anybody in Asia trust Europe on anything at all?

In response to another question on whether India’s purchase of Russian oil is financing Putin’s war in Ukraine, he pointed to the West’s hypocrisy:

If countries from the West, Europe, U.S. are so concerned, why don’t they allow Iranian oil to come to the market; why don’t they allow Venezuelan oil to come to the market?

He also rejected claims that India has imposed an export ban on wheat, saying that India has been exporting wheat, but “then we saw a run on our wheat, in large part by international traders based in Singapore and the U.A.E.” Low-income countries were being squeezed out.

Our good will was used for speculation. We will not give speculators open access to the Indian market like what we saw happening with vaccines. We don’t want to see that for wheat.

India, he said, has exported wheat to 23 countries this year.