

Modi's Absence from Commonwealth Meeting Highlights UK's Losing Prestige

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*Held in Samoa in the wake of the BRICS Summit in Russia, the 27th Meeting of Heads of State of the Commonwealth of Nations was not attended by Indian **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** and South African **President Cyril Ramaphosa**, a demonstration that the prestige of the United Kingdom is on the decline.*

India and South Africa sent junior representatives. **Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju** led the Indian delegation, while **Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Thandi Moraka** headed the South African delegation.

At first glance, there are undeniable practical reasons, such as returning from the 16th BRICS Summit, held between October 22 and 24 in Russia. However, there is another aspect. Modi and Ramaphosa could have attended the Commonwealth meeting instead of the BRICS one. Having preferred to go to Russia denotes a foreign policy decision.

Created in different stages - the Balfour Declaration in 1926, the Statute of Westminster in 1931, and the London Declaration in 1949 - the Commonwealth of Nations was a way for the British Crown to provide greater independence of government for its colonies while still retaining influence. This power relationship was and is essential for the United Kingdom.

Based on its history, the Commonwealth of Nations is diametrically opposed to BRICS, a group of countries that advocates the creation of a world order based on multipolarity and the development of so-called peripheral countries. Therefore, BRICS is naturally incompatible with the Commonwealth, which represents the idea of the British empire and colonialism.

In effect, the Commonwealth is a meeting around the British Crown to honour and revere its colonial past. Thus, Modi and Ramaphosa's choice to prioritise the BRICS Summit, to the detriment of the meeting led by **King Charles III**, reveals the geopolitical reorganisation underway worldwide.



25/10/2024. Apia, Samoa. Prime Minister Keir Starmer attends the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa. Picture by Simon Dawson / No 10 Downing Street (Licensed under CC BY 2.0)

The Indian and South African leaders' absence was not the only setback for the 27th Commonwealth Heads of State Meeting, the first to be presided over by King Charles III. Canadian **Prime Minister Justin Trudeau** did not attend the meeting, so Canada's High Commissioner to the UK, **Ralph Goodale**, was sent in his place.

However, unlike Modi and Ramaphosa, Trudeau's absence does not signal geopolitical opposition. Canada is aligned with the Euro-Atlantic order, a member of NATO and the G7, which were created to maintain the Old World order. Instead, Trudeau's absence is explained by domestic political problems. Parliamentarians are pushing for the prime minister's resignation as his popularity plummets.

Still, the message about Trudeau's priorities is clear: Maintaining his power instead of meeting with the King of England. As such, the only major Commonwealth countries present at the meeting were the United Kingdom and Australia, which sent **Prime Ministers Keir Starmer** and **Anthony Albanese**, respectively.

The UK's presence is more than mandatory, while Australia operates in the same Western sphere of influence as Canada. Australia positions itself as a country of the Global North, a developed country, and a Western country that benefitted from British colonialism rather than be looted and pillaged like what happened in India and South Africa.

However, more than expected, the West still encourages the presence of Australian leadership. The Oceanian country is used as a spearhead in the AUKUS military alliance, which is composed of Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States and created to

combat any influence in the Indo-Pacific region that does not align with the Anglo alliance.

In addition to the absence of three of the five largest economies, the Commonwealth meeting also saw some discontent with the UK. Even before it began, during a visit to Australia, King Charles III was confronted by Indigenous senator Lidia Thorpe, who accused him of complicity in the genocide of the indigenous population in her country.

Furthermore, in August, former Jamaican Prime Minister P. J. Patterson (1992–2006) stated that reparations for slavery would be discussed at the summit. This was vehemently denied by the UK, which further stressed that neither the government nor the Crown would issue an apology for the country's role in the transatlantic slave trade.

Although financial compensation is being requested, London could indeed provide the abandonment of the colonial relationship that the Commonwealth itself proposes. In years past, this meeting was the moment to reverse the British monarchy, yet a small country like Jamaica now dares to challenge the Crown.

The decline of British influence in the world is evident, with countries of the Global South, such as India and South Africa, continuing to question Western policies and practices. These countries advocate some degree of transformation in the international system, mainly in the sphere of economic relations and international institutions, and are becoming far more relevant and important than the UK.

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