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BRICS : India 2026

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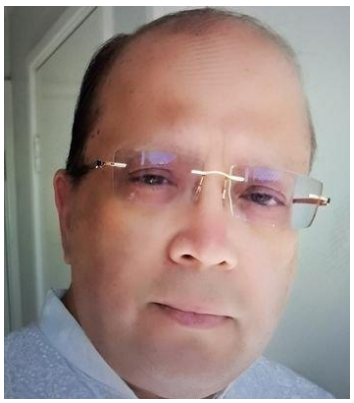


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PREFACE :

Foreign Policy Research Centre New Delhi

Presents

This special issue of FPRC Journal (68)

Focus : BRICS : India 2026

The manifold issues involved in the process have been identified by distinguished contributors of this special volume. They have also visualised the way forward in view of contemporary world politics scenario.

We take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks to contributors who have shared our sentiments and accepted our invitation to enrich the contents of the Journal. They have always been a source of strength to us.

Dr. Mahendra Gaur Director
Dr Indira Gaur Mg. Director



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5. How do you assess India's BRICS Diplomacy?

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Email Interviews

FPRC Journal-68

1) Hon'ble Dov S. Zakheim

1. Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob-HT) Do you agree?

Yes. Iis difficult to see India and China agreeing on very much. or India and South Africa on Israel (recall that 2I, 2U has not been disbanded). India also has not actively supported Russia's war with Ukraine; it has not condemned Russia but PM Modi has told Putin both to avoid using nuclear weapons and that, in general, "today's era is not an era of war." The UAE is now a BRICS member; it is being attacked by fellow BRICS member Iran. Egypt and Ethiopia, both BRICS members, expelled each other's diplomats in early October. In sum, at this stage BRICS is hardly a pressure group or even a talking shop--since several of its members are not even talking to each other.

2. How do you assess BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

The Declaration seems a bit divorced from reality. It speaks of "the importance of preventive diplomacy and mediation"--which reflects, for example, Egypt's efforts to mediate between Iran and the US or between Israel and Hamas, but clearly does not reflect Saudi-Iranian relations. Indeed, while the Declaration calls for "regional peace," Iran is not paying much attention. US actions certainly affected the BRICS agenda. The BRICS Declearation simply papered over serious differences among its members.

3. Trump says BRICS has no consensus.How much did US pressure shaped the agenda of 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi ?

If anything, Trump promoted a degree of consensus. The BRICS Declaration condemned tariffs, which are a signature Trump policy. It also "deplored attempts, by deliberately withhollding assessed contributions, to unilaterally undermine the work of global multilateral institutions--a not so subtle reference to Trump's holding back payments on American dues to the UN. The Declaration "condemn[ed] the imposition of unilateral coercive measures that are contrary to internal law," a reference to American activities in the Caribbean and elsewhere and expressed "deep concern" over the blockade of Cuba, BRICS states also pressed ahead with financial arrangements to avoid reliance on the US dollar. On the other hand, despite the various condemnations , the Declaration avoided any explicit reference to the UNited States, because on that issue there clearly is no consensus, with some countries, like India, determined to avoid taking sides in disputes involving the US, and others, like the UAE and egypt, who are among America's close partners. This is a

very complex set of relationships. India remains close to Russia, without offering outright support for its agfgression agianst Ukraine. New Delhi views CHina as its primary threat, but maintains cordial relations with Beijung. CHina is supporting Russia in its war with Ukraine.

4. How do you explain BRICS Power Triangle -India -Russia-China.

This is a very complex set of relationships. India remains close to Russia, without offering outright support for its aggression against Ukraine. New Delhi views CHina as its primary threat, but maintains cordial relations with Beijung. CHina is supporting Russia in its war with Ukraine.

5. How do you assess India's BRICS Diplomacy.

India managed, in the first place, to get all members to sign the Declaration. That in itself was no small feat. Second, India managed to keep the Declaration from including an explicit attack on the US, something that Iran and Russia in particular favored and that South Africa and China would not have opposed.

*****

2) DAVID J KARL

Questionnaire for FPRC Journal-68

BRICS India 2026

Responses from David J. Karl

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Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob-HT) Do you agree?

The annual hyperbole occasioned by BRICS summits recalls the line popularized by the Roman poet Horace: *Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus* ("The mountains will labor, and a ridiculous mouse will be born"). The din is sure to reach a crescendo next year when China hosts the gathering, complete with exuberant rhetoric about how the East is inexorably ascendant and showcasing the various global initiatives Xi Jinping has launched to reshape the international order in Beijing's favor.

The BRICS grouping is quite the peculiarity. Conjured into existence by investment bankers at Goldman Sachs, it was founded as a forum for leading emerging economies seeking a larger role in global governance but otherwise having scant geopolitical interests in common. The group's recent expansion has only exacerbated the lack of cohesion. Indeed, this expansion, along with the sudden onboarding of 10 partner countries, has occurred despite a glaring lack of clarity about the forum's purpose or future evolution. Rhetorically, the group presents itself as the tribune of the Global South, even though its most prominent member (China) denies that it is now on the verge of high-income status. Members continue to portray themselves as the vanguard of a new multipolar world even as Beijing is busy shifting the international order toward bipolarity. Institutionally, there is even confusion about its exact composition since Saudi Arabia has not yet accepted a formal membership offer (for fear of alienating the United States) but is nonetheless accorded full privileges.

The grouping's cheerleaders constantly emphasize the aggregate sum of all of its dissimilar parts, while conveniently omitting that China constitutes a highly disproportionate share of that sum. A few years ago, a former chief economic advisor to the Indian government called for New Delhi to withdraw from BRICS due to how China-centric the group has become. As the New Delhi summit convened, a Shanghai-based expert on India expressed the magnitude of this imbalance: "What exactly is India competing with China on? Those of us who have studied China-India relations long-term find it hard to see where any real competition exists. This isn't arrogance or self-conceit; it's simply hard to imagine." Paraphrasing a well-known American writer, there is not quite so much there once one subtracts Beijing from the BRICS equation.

True, the grouping does have one solid example of concerted action: the New Development Bank headquartered in Shanghai. But its creation occurred in 2014, when the collective was smaller and not as disparate as it is today. Importantly, it was conceived at a time when China-India relations were less roiled compared to the present and when government ministers in New Delhi believed "Chindia" was an actual thing. More than a decade on, the NDB's founding remains the high-water mark of the group's cooperation, despite all the high-minded rhetoric emanating from subsequent summit declarations. And even this development has distinct limits, as the bank's size remains considerably smaller than established global institutions and it continues to conduct the majority of its lending in US dollars. At the New Delhi summit, Prime Minister Modi acknowledged the sparse record of overall BRICS achievement, declaring that "the world now expects concrete results from the group, and not just ideas and commitments."

Happymon Jacob is correct to criticize punditry that interprets the BRICS enterprise as a development of great geopolitical consequence. As he rightly puts it, referring to the May 2026 of the BRICS foreign ministers' session, "a grouping whose foreign ministers could not manage a joint statement is unlikely to emerge" as an alternative pole in the international order. At best, Jacob argues, BRICS is a sort of uncoordinated notice board by which member-states broadcast their individual grievances to Washington with little expectation that the collective will remonstrate on their behalf. According to him, "A lobby argues for its members. BRICS members do not argue for one another; they argue for themselves."

He is correct here and the messaging problem is compounded by how expansive the group's membership has become and by the densely packed declarations its summits produce. The New Delhi document ran to 45 pages with 140 paragraphs, one of the longest such declarations – almost everything under the diplomatic sun was seemingly mentioned without conveying any mutual sense of urgency or priority or presenting a credible plan for joint action. A good example is the perpetual call in all BRICS declarations for a greater Indian and Brazilian role in UN Security Council affairs. No one seriously expects Beijing to do anything beyond lip service to advance this objective even though the Indian media repeatedly hails such rhetoric. And despite India succeeding in inserting condemnations of cross-border terrorism in summit declarations through the years, it is plain that no collective will exists to take punitive measures directed at Pakistan.

Similarly, the New Delhi declaration contained a protest against the US exclusion of South Africa from the upcoming G-20 summit in Florida, although none of Pretoria's confederates has any intention of expending real diplomatic capital pressing its case. Cuba, which became a partner country two years ago, managed to include a complaint about the Trump administration's economic warfare campaign directed at Havana, even though no one else is prepared to do anything substantive in response. BRICS is quite proficient at generating platitudinous rhetoric but incapable of distilling the profusion of words into meaningful undertakings.

How do you assess BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

The Indian media and foreign policy cognoscenti lauded New Delhi's skillfulness in wrangling a unanimous joint statement out of the divergent delegations, especially given the stark divisions on display just months earlier at the foreign ministers' session and the fact that three BRICS members are now on opposite sides of a shooting war. A particular focus was the declaration's call for "maximum restraint" in a Middle East that is now aflame. But it is does not take much diplomatic acumen to hammer out an anodyne statement based on the lowest common denominator, nor one that reads like a ritualistic benediction lacking any serious plan for follow up. Moreover, a good deal of the New Delhi declaration was recycled from the statement issued at last year's summit gathering in Brazil.

Much of the media coverage, in India and the West, played up the declaration's sections that implicitly rebuked President Trump's fondness for the use of military force, economic sanctions and protectionist trade policies. But these passages read as empty rhetoric given that prominent BRICS members honor existing global norms more in the breach than in the observance. The condemnation of the use of military power rings hollow in view of Russia's war in Ukraine and China's aggressive tactics in the Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea and along India's Himalayan frontier.* The call to uphold the protection of civilian infrastructure during conflicts exudes hypocrisy given the blind eye the summit turned to Russia's systematic battering of Ukrainian cities and Iran's intentional destruction of non-military targets around the Persian Gulf. The omission was all the more flagrant in view of the deleterious consequences these actions have had for food and energy security throughout the Global South.

Likewise, the complaints about unilateral economic coercion came off as perfunctory when nary a word was said about Beijing's economic strong-arming of an array of countries, including its effort to thwart New Delhi's ascent as a major power.

Ironically, Vladimir Putin used the summit to lash out against the West for "trying to contain growing competitors in every way possible," all the while oblivious to Chinese actions against India. And the declaration's call about respecting international law and committing to the peaceful resolution of disputes was farcical when China has made such a show of rejecting an intergovernmental tribunal's ruling invalidating its expansive maritime claims in Southeast Asia, particularly against the Philippines, whose president attended the summit as an invited guest, partially because Manila is ASEAN's current chair.

By ignoring the obvious and egregious sins of its own members, the BRICS summit surrendered any claim to the moral authority it sought to convey on behalf of the Global South. Indeed, the gathering will be known more for providing a convenient opportunity for Xi and Modi to interact bilaterally than for anything said or done at the summit itself – just as the October 2024 summit in Russia is most remembered for being the occasion when the two leaders initiated the present thaw in the Sino-Indian relationship.

**With President Xi's attendance at the summit occurring amid new ructions in Arunachal Pradesh, Beijing has continued a pattern of instigating border provocations whenever he shows up in India.*

Trump says BRICS has no consensus. How much did US pressure shaped the agenda of 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi?

In New Delhi, President Trump played the role of Banquo, whose ghost haunts King Macbeth at the royal banquet in one of Shakespeare's most celebrated works. Trump loomed over the summit deliberations even though he was physically far away, and despite going unnamed he inspired some of the joint declaration's most pointed paragraphs. One could easily conclude that the show of unity was another example of the "Trump effect" in international politics, by which the US president's bullying drives otherwise divergent nations into common cause. And yet Trump is also correct that the gathering's solidarity was superficial at best.

How do you explain BRICS Power Triangle -India -Russia-China?

In its early iteration, RIC trilateralism never did live up to Yevgeny Primakov's vision of forging a multipolar world order that could constrain American predominance as even then there were far too many strategic contradictions between New Delhi and Beijing. The mechanism did help lay the basis for the creation of BRICS, but with that exception it proved of little use as a vehicle for Indian diplomatic goals. As an Indian analyst has recently concluded, "Beyond consultations and the exchange of ideas, [the triangle] has failed to produce any solutions or large-scale initiative."

With the easing of Sino-Indian relations, there is now some talk about the potential benefits that would flow from a resurrected RIC platform. But this analysis is unconvincing. The military support China provided to Pakistan during and after the recent Pahalgam crisis, as well as its ongoing border provocations and restrictions on economic engagement with India make the prospect of significant trilateralism quite unlikely. New Delhi wants greater engagement with Beijing for its own domestic reasons, but that does not mean it's willing to enter into a meaningful association. Moreover, there is a major discrepancy between China and Russia, on the one hand, and India on the other. The former are revisionist states when it comes to the US-led

global system, while the latter holds only reformist goals vis-à-vis the world order. This tension also shows up constantly at BRICS meetings and will be a prominent feature of next year's summit in Beijing.

There is little reason to believe that a revival of the erstwhile RIC trilateral is in the cards. To the extent that a RIC dialogue does develop, New Delhi will use it almost entirely as a precautionary protective measure, attempting to moderate Moscow's close embrace of Beijing.

How do you assess India's BRICS Diplomacy?

New Delhi confronts a stark dilemma in its BRICS diplomacy: How does India bolster the grouping and its own role in it without further enabling China, the group's predominant member? How does it utilize the group to burnish its credentials for the leadership of the broader Global South without also enhancing Beijing's international profile? These questions also animate Indian diplomacy vis-à-vis the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. As an Indian commentator notes, "If [BRICS] becomes an effective group at all, it is likely to become one that China will use to promote its interests and isolate India, and to undermine India's main partners in the Indo-Pacific."

At the summit's opening, Prime Minister Modi called for developing nations to transition from being "rule-takers to rule-shapers." Yet given China's enormous economic clout in the developing world, the only way this goal could come to fruition is through BRICS policy convergence with Beijing. It is difficult to see an Indian leader agreeing to advance norms and standards that would inordinately favor the Chinese. Similarly, Indian concerns about privileging the renminbi put strong limits on the potential for BRICS financial cooperation.

A third example concerns Xi Jinping's attendance in New Delhi, which had the effect of diluting Modi's own role as conference host. Three years ago, the prime minister's star shone bright at the G-20 conclave in New Delhi due precisely to Xi's absence on the stage. His presence at this year's BRICS summit allowed him to project an image of statesmanship, trumpeting his "Greater BRICS" initiative designed to strengthen cooperation in trade, investment, manufacturing and technology. As a former Indian ambassador to China observed, "Beijing used India's summit to launch its own platforms, the 'Greater BRICS Initiative,' the AI Open Source Zone and the Special Economic Zone partnership, to be advanced during its chairship. India hosted; China seeded the future architecture."

New Delhi's dilemma will be all the sharper in the coming year, as Beijing assumes the rotating leadership of BRICS. As a result, India's diplomacy within the group will be even more defensive than usual.

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3) Dr. Richard ROUSSEAU

1. Don't mistake the buzz surrounding the BRICS for actual impact. At best, BRICS is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob, HT). Do you agree?

I agree, with a few caveats. Once referred to as "emerging economies," the BRICS+ now carry more weight than the G7 in the global economy. Long relegated to the sidelines, these Global South countries have established themselves as a counterweight to the West. While the 18th summit in New Delhi ended on a tense note, it’s worth noting that the bloc is undergoing a major transformation.

The BRICS initially brought together five major emerging powers: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Since then, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, and Indonesia have joined this core group, which is now known as the BRICS+. As of 2023, over 20 countries had officially expressed interest in joining the group.

The BRICS aim to represent the interests of emerging economies that have long been marginalized in major international institutions dominated by the West. Originally a platform for cooperation, the BRICS has established itself as a leading geopolitical actor.

The BRICS countries denounce their underrepresentation in global forums and demand a stronger voice in international economic governance. To address this growing interest, the group created a "partner" status, which allows countries to attend summits but does not grant them decision-making power.

Their investment bank is attracting developing countries. However, joining BRICS+ also means distancing oneself from the Western axis. Argentine President Javier Milei, an ultra-liberal, refused the invitation to join the group, deeming the alliance incompatible with his political convictions. BRICS+ is therefore an economic coalition in which political influences are growing. Saudi Arabia's refusal to join is one example.

By 2024, the BRICS+ countries will account for 50% of the world’s population, compared to 10% for the G7 countries. The BRICS+ currently hold a 36% share of the global GDP in purchasing power parity (PPP), compared to the G7's 29%. Their bond is primarily economic, though political convergence is also growing. Despite their differences, members are increasingly able to adopt common positions, particularly regarding U.S. trade policy and the military offensive in Iran.

China is the pillar of the bloc, accounting for 62% of the BRICS+ GDP, 36% of the population, and 64% of exports. Beijing sees the bloc as a strategic opportunity to diversify its trade markets and assert its influence against the United States. The BRICS provide Beijing with leverage to reduce its dependence on Western markets and establish strong relationships with countries in the Global South.

The West has failed to do the same. Beijing would particularly benefit from developing these relationships.

All members have one thing in common: stronger ties with China than with their other trading partners. Xi Jinping prioritizes the prospect of an increasingly powerful group forming a genuine bloc led by China.

Faced with this rising power, the United States is reacting. Donald Trump has threatened to impose a 10% tariff on countries "aligned" with the BRICS, though he has not specified what that entails. This is an attempt to curb the growing appeal of this economic counterweight, which could spark a movement toward de-dollarization.

The BRICS+ countries share a similar economic profile, including an emerging middle class, significant infrastructure needs, and a desire to accelerate development. Together, they account for 70% of global coal and rare earth production, over 60% of rice cultivation, and over half of global soybean, wheat, and corn production. With this in mind, Iran and Saudi Arabia, two major oil producers, were invited to join in 2024. But the group remains diverse.

Internal rivalries hinder integration. Iran and Saudi Arabia are still competing with each other in the Middle East. Egypt and Ethiopia have long disputed the management of the Nile. Above all, however, it is the Sino-Indian relationship that is the source of tension. The two giants view each other with suspicion. India has long opposed the group’s expansion, denouncing it as a political maneuver orchestrated by Beijing. India is generally wary of China’s attempts to increase its influence within the group. For instance, India advocated for equal participation in the group’s development bank.

These disagreements are impeding economic cooperation. BRICS+ countries export nearly twice as much to the G7 as they do to each other, and internal trade barriers remain high.

The BRICS+ could shape a new, more multipolar world order. China and Russia, however, view it as a geopolitical tool. Others see it primarily as an economic opportunity. Nevertheless, all members must continue to navigate their relationships with the West.

In 2025, an international organization's strength may lie in its ability to evolve despite disparities. In a polarized world, informal alliances may chart a new course.

2. How do you assess the BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

Let's be clear: It is a declaration devoid of substance. Contradictions quickly arise when political cooperation is prioritized over economic collaboration.

Xi, who has called for international rules to be "drafted by all countries," leads a one-party state where he increasingly dictates the rules alone. Putin calls for better representation of Africa, Asia, and Latin America on the UN Security Council, yet he frequently uses his veto power to prevent the council from acting, particularly regarding his war against Ukraine.

The omissions in the New Delhi Declaration are most revealing. Regarding Palestine, the text is explicit: it calls on Israel to end its war against Gaza, opposes forced displacement, supports the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees, and endorses the creation of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In contrast, regarding the war in

Ukraine, the declaration merely calls for "maximum restraint" and condemns attacks on "civilian infrastructure" and "peaceful nuclear facilities," though it does not name the United States, Iran, or Israel. Given that Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran were present, the text could not have gone any further.

Furthermore, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is completely absent from the text. This is a step backward from the 2025 Rio de Janeiro Declaration, which referred to "relevant proposals for mediation and good offices" and expressed hope that "current efforts will lead to a lasting peace settlement," and from the 2024 Kazan Declaration, which directly mentioned the conflict. During their bilateral talks, Modi urged Putin to end the war. However, the omission of the conflict from the statement suggests that Putin does not foresee an immediate end to the fighting. The statement only includes vague platitudes about peacefully resolving conflicts, which will be especially unconvincing in Ukraine.

It also condemns "the indiscriminate increase in tariffs" and "unilateral sanctions" without naming the United States. This reflects the reluctance of certain members, such as India, which is reportedly finalizing a trade agreement with the United States, to expose themselves to Donald Trump's wrath. The statement preserves a fragile consensus through carefully worded language that often says very little. The BRICS countries still struggle to reach a political consensus and often settle for

3. Trump says BRICS has no consensus. How much did US pressure shaped the agenda of 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi?

The New Delhi summit confirmed what Trump's tariff-based diplomacy had made inevitable: in two years, the forum had achieved a geopolitical importance that neither Moscow nor Beijing had managed in its first fifteen years.

Trump has treated this disparate and quarrelsome grouping as if it were a rival military alliance by threatening to impose 100% tariffs on members who "manipulate the dollar," followed by an additional 10% on any country aligning with what he calls the BRICS' anti-American policies. Washington now refers to it as a strategic threat. New Delhi, which chaired this 18th summit, finds itself in a unique position.

The BRICS have not become more cohesive or effective. The New Delhi Declaration was adopted by consensus, but that consensus was barely secured. On Iran and the Middle East, direct bilateral dialogue between Tehran and Abu Dhabi was necessary to prevent a breakdown given the divergent positions of Iran and the United Arab Emirates on this issue. Regarding Ukraine, the final text uses generic language about dialogue and diplomacy without naming the parties involved. In short, the "rival" bloc that Trump imagines does not exist.

This is particularly because India has never allowed it to exist. Since the 2024 Kazan summit, where Moscow pushed for an alternative payment architecture outside the dollar and SWIFT, Delhi has blocked any such initiative, knowing that, beyond its practical impracticality, it would ultimately serve Beijing's interests. The New Delhi summit confirms this.

No common currency was agreed upon. The declaration supported continued work on the interoperability of payment systems and settlement in local currencies, allowing for bilateral arrangements but clearly rejecting anything resembling structured de-dollarization. The Indian presidency's agenda—which includes reforming the United Nations Security Council and international financial institutions, defending the multilateral trading system, cooperating against terrorism, and centering the development agenda on food and energy security—follows this same pragmatic line. It is not the agenda of a bloc but rather a pressure group firmly anchored in the existing order.

New Delhi keeps the BRICS on this moderate course for two reasons. The first is self-interest. India has too much to lose in its relationship with Washington to join an anti-American bloc. It prefers to reform the existing international order rather than undermine it. The second reason stems from a more structural conviction inherited from the Cold War: a world divided into rival blocs forces countries to make choices before they have the strength to set the terms themselves, compelling weaker powers to comply. India paid dearly in terms of influence for its refusal to choose sides during the Cold War. It does not want to be forced into making such a choice again, this time with China—rather than the Soviet Union—as the alternative.

Paradoxically, however, this same summit has made the BRICS more useful to India than they were two years ago. What once seemed like a tiresome diplomatic obligation has become a strategic cover—a space where India can sit with Russia and China without committing to anything at a time when Washington remains unpredictable. The summit also provided a framework and an opportunity to significantly improve Sino-Indian relations. Xi Jinping visited Delhi for the first time in seven years—a visit that likely would not have occurred without the summit. From this platform, India speaks on behalf of the Global South while maintaining a presence at the expanded G7 table.

Yet India has not used this summit to challenge Washington, despite Trump’s erratic and often punitive attitude toward India. When New Delhi looks at the United States, it doesn't just see Donald Trump; it also sees the Washington establishment, Congress, the Pentagon, tech companies, universities, and the bipartisan consensus on China that has survived three very different presidencies. India sees the country with which it will have to deal in 2035. In New Delhi and elsewhere, many view Trump as an anomaly. India is betting on the underlying structure. The recently concluded summit confirms, for now, that this bet is paying off.

4. How would you explain the BRICS power triangle—India, Russia, and China?

One question that 2026 and the following years may answer is whether the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) are becoming the new center of power in global politics. Now that the group has expanded to include new members, such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates, and represents 45% of the world’s population, some believe that it is uniting the so-called “Global South” and posing a serious challenge to American and Western power. However, I remain skeptical of such claims.

When Jim O'Neill (then chief economist at Goldman Sachs) coined the term "BRIC" in 2001, he simply wanted to identify the four economies most likely to dominate global economic growth by 2050. However, the label quickly took on political significance. The group began as an informal diplomatic association at the 2006 United Nations General Assembly and became a formal organization with the first BRIC summit in 2009. Hosted by Russia, the goal then, as it is now, was to promote a multipolar world order. The following year, the group gained an "S" when South Africa joined.

Thus, a Wall Street asset class became an international organization, partly because it aligned with Russia's and China's aspirations to lead the developing world. The 16th BRICS summit, held in Russia in October 2024, was the first to include its new members. Saudi Arabia has not yet decided whether to accept the group's invitation to join, and the new Argentine government has declined. Some 36 national leaders and representatives from numerous international organizations attended, including United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres. Turkey took the opportunity to submit its own application for membership.

The 2024 summit emphasized strengthening ties among Global South countries and building a multipolar world. Despite Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin used the occasion to demonstrate his global diplomatic relevance.

As more and more countries express interest in joining, BRICS appears poised to emerge as a leader in resisting the U.S.-dominated international order. Some even view BRICS as the successor to the Non-Aligned Movement of the Cold War era, whose members refused to choose between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, while the Non-Aligned Movement shared a common interest in resisting the United States, Russia and China were not among its founding members.

In any case, it is unlikely that BRICS will succeed in formally organizing the "Global South." Not only are its most important members—China, India, and Russia—all located north of the equator, but they are also competing for leadership.

Russia and China share a common interest in countering what they perceive as a threat from the United States. They have declared an "alliance without limits." However, these slogans mask significant differences in their strategic outlooks. Russia seized vast swaths of territory from China in the 19th century when the Qing dynasty was weak; now, China's economy is ten times larger than Russia's. The two countries are competing for influence in Central Asia, and China is uneasy about Russia recruiting its neighbor, North Korea, to fight in Ukraine.

The rivalry between China and India, the world's most populous country, poses an even greater constraint on the BRICS organization. Although China is much wealthier than India, it is experiencing a demographic decline (like Russia), while India's population and labor force continue to grow.

Furthermore, China and India share a disputed border in the Himalayas, where their forces have clashed several times, and the situation is further complicated by China's traditional friendship with Pakistan. In fact, India's persistent concern about

China is one of the reasons it participates in BRICS. Although India avoids formal alliances, it has strengthened its participation in the “Quad” (which includes the United States, Japan, and Australia) for the same reason.

Rather than strengthening the BRICS, admitting new members only exacerbates rivalries. Egypt and Ethiopia are in conflict over a dam that Ethiopia is building on the Nile, and Iran has longstanding disputes with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, both of which are potential members. These new intra-organizational rivalries will hinder BRICS's efforts rather than make it more effective. The Group of 77 developing countries has even more members, and it is chronically hampered by internal divisions.

At their 2024 summit, the BRICS+ addressed topics such as economic and security cooperation, cultural exchange promotion, and joint infrastructure and sustainability development projects. However, these discussions rarely lead to meaningful results. For example, in 2014, the group established the New Development Bank, which is headquartered in Shanghai; however, the institution has only achieved modest results thus far.

Similarly, the group’s intention to bypass the dollar and settle a larger share of its members’ bilateral trade in their own currencies has made limited progress. Any serious attempt to replace the dollar as the global reserve currency would require China to establish deep and flexible capital markets and the rule of law—conditions that are far from being met.

So what is the purpose of the BRICS? As a means of escaping diplomatic isolation, they are certainly useful to Russia. They have also been useful to China as a diplomatic tool for projecting the leadership of the developing world. As a channel for counterbalancing China, the group serves India's purpose. And as a modest stage for showcasing national development, the BRICS have been useful to Brazil and South Africa at times. But do these functions make the BRICS a new linchpin of world politics? I do not believe so.

5. How do you assess India's BRICS Diplomacy?

As India hosted the 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi in September 2026, its multi-alignment policy was under critical scrutiny. Will New Delhi be able to strike a balance between strategic autonomy and a genuine commitment to the Global South, or is BRICS merely another tool of transactional and opportunistic diplomacy?

India is presenting its BRICS presidency as a time of renewal. The official theme, "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, and Sustainability," emphasizes a "people first" approach. New Delhi aims to promote more inclusive global governance and increased institutional cooperation among developing countries. The BRICS now comprises 11 member states, representing approximately half of the world’s population and 40 percent of the global GDP.

The central political question is this: What future does India envision for the BRICS?

New Delhi has successfully cultivated the art of balancing its alliances. It is a member of the BRICS alongside China, Russia, and Iran, participates in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and is a strategic partner of the United States, Japan, and Australia through the Quad, an alliance designed to contain China. Although India depends on Russia for energy, it is strengthening its technological and defense ties with the West. This strategy, generally referred to as “strategic autonomy,” does not constitute a genuine geopolitical project, however.

There is a risk that India will treat multi-alignment as an end in itself without fully grasping the shifting dynamics of the great powers’ interactions surrounding India and will ultimately be left behind by new geopolitical realities.

India’s position within the BRICS differs fundamentally from those of China and Russia. Beijing views the BRICS as a means of reducing the international system’s dependence on Western financial and political structures. Moscow, for its part, has an even more pressing interest in establishing mechanisms to protect itself against Western sanctions and the dollar-dominated financial system. Iran follows the same logic.

The approach in New Delhi is more cautious. At the summit, India advocated for implementing cross-border digital payments and achieving interoperability among its central banks’ digital currencies. India aims to connect its digital currencies and national payment systems within the BRICS, emphasizing that this initiative does not seek to create a shared currency or challenge the dollar directly.

There is a reason for this caution. India is very interested in maintaining access to Western markets, capital, technologies, and institutions. However, this stance reveals a fundamental contradiction in India's policy toward the BRICS.

India wants to strengthen the BRICS without jeopardizing its relations with the West—a position quite different from one aimed at using the BRICS to promote the Global South's autonomy.

This contradiction is evident in Indian foreign policy more broadly. India wants to strengthen its ties with the U.S. while remaining active in the BRICS and SCO, both of which are viewed unfavorably by Washington. India wishes to maintain strategic competition with China while also stabilizing their relations. India aspires to be a leader of the developing world. However, it has not made clear commitments on geopolitical issues that unite a significant portion of the Global South.

India characterizes this as flexibility, but its critics see it as ambiguity. Indian policy lacks a coherent strategic framework and is overly guided by opportunism. This raises a pertinent question: Can a major power claim to lead a multilateral organization while constantly avoiding strategic choices?

Several observers, both Indian and foreign, have noted the tension between the BRICS’ desire to reduce their dependence on the West and India’s caution regarding multi-alignment. The question is not whether India should adopt an anti-Western stance but whether New Delhi can be "non-Western" while remaining strategically neutral.

While it is true that India is in territorial conflict with nearly all of its neighbors, it would be an exaggeration to say that it is in conflict with all of them. Some borders have been settled, others are being managed, and several relationships remain stable. Nevertheless, its two main strategic disputes with China and Pakistan continue to carry considerable political weight with no prospect of comprehensive resolution.

The convergence of geopolitics and domestic nationalism is decisive. The Sino-Indian border issue remains sensitive. In August, Wang Yi, China's special representative, and Ajit Doval, his Indian counterpart, held the 25th round of talks in Beijing. The talks concluded with measures aimed at de-escalating tensions along the border and paving the way for an overall improvement in relations. A few days later, military negotiations resumed in the eastern sector.

Xi Jinping is in India for the BRICS summit, where he met with Narendra Modi. According to Reuters, they planned to discuss economic and strategic issues, as well as the problematic border situation.

Paradoxically, the border remains a key lever for political mobilization despite dialogue, military disengagement, and the resumption of economic ties between India and China.

It is unfair to accuse Indian leaders of provoking every incident. Territorial disputes touch on sovereignty, history, and national identity, making any solution complex. However, the failure to reach a resolution can serve as a political tool, particularly through narratives of unity, security, and patriotism—a theme close to the heart of the nationalist wing of Narendra Modi's BJP.

A serious military clash between India and Pakistan followed the April 2025 attack in Indian-administered Kashmir. Although a ceasefire negotiated by the United States has been in effect since May 2025, the fundamental issue of Kashmir remains unresolved.

Political incentives are therefore crucial. A final agreement would require compromise, acceptance of ambiguity, and recognition of the other side's legitimacy. However, nationalist politics values firmness and territorial maximalism, viewing compromise as a sign of weakness.

The border issue goes beyond mere cartography; it concerns the political legitimacy of states. India faces a paradox: nationalism secures domestic support but hinders regional diplomacy. An agreement with Pakistan would be strategically sensible, particularly for direct access to Iranian gas and oil, but it would be politically costly. Similarly, making concessions to China would bring economic and infrastructure benefits, but it would be difficult to justify to a public marked by nationalism and territorial rivalry.

How can a power aspiring to play a central role in a multipolar world allow unresolved bilateral disputes to hinder regional integration?

India’s main challenge is not the existence of conflicting partnerships. Great powers regularly manage competing relationships. The deeper problem lies in the absence of a geopolitical vision that can reconcile these relationships with India’s ambitions to champion multipolarity, sovereignty, and leadership from the Global South.

India’s multi-alignment policy has given New Delhi greater diplomatic flexibility. This has allowed India to form partnerships with the United States, Russia, Israel, Iran, and the Gulf monarchies while also participating in groups such as BRICS, the Quad, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the G20. However, this flexibility does not equate to true strategic autonomy, neutrality, or genuine leadership from the Global South.

India's real challenge is not managing conflicting partnerships—the major powers do this constantly—but rather, its lack of a clear vision that links these relationships to its stated goals of multipolarity, sovereignty, a more just world order, and its aspiration to lead the Global South. This lack of coherence is particularly evident in India’s neighborhood policy, its rapprochement with Israel, and its positions within the BRICS. However, certain recent stances taken at the New Delhi summit surprised me. This text was written before the summit, so some inconsistencies may become apparent in light of the latest developments in Indian foreign policy.

Strategic autonomy cannot be limited to avoiding formal alignments. It requires active initiatives, coherent principles, and acceptance of the political consequences of institutional change.

India’s size, economy, and military power give it influence in South Asia. However, influence is not synonymous with leadership. True leadership also requires legitimacy, trust, institutional capacity, and a willingness to consider neighbors' interests.

The region is becoming more complex. Pakistan is strengthening its defense ties with Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and China, while Bangladesh is drawing closer to Beijing and Pakistan. This is not an anti-India coalition but rather a diversification of options among India’s neighbors, who no longer take Indian dominance for granted.

India often reacts with anxiety to these developments, interpreting Chinese initiatives in the region as an attempt to encircle it. However, when India aligns itself with the United States, Israel, Europe, or the Quad, it presents these choices as an expression of legitimate strategic autonomy.

A more equitable approach would recognize that smaller states have the same right to diversify their partnerships and sovereignty as India expects for itself.

Regional credibility is not limited to military power. Border disputes, water disputes, migration, and political interference have strained India’s relations with its neighbors. If New Delhi wants to embody leadership in the Global South, it cannot treat its neighbors as mere strategic buffer zones.

India’s multi-alignment strategy is rational; it seeks access to Western technology, Russian oil and arms, stable relations with China, and influence in the Global South. Giving up any one of these is unrealistic.

However, strategic flexibility becomes problematic when elevated to a general principle rather than treated as a tool. India cannot advocate for multipolarity and the sovereignty of the Global South while strengthening its ties with Israel and the United States, and remain silent when these partners harm other Global South countries.

This does not make Indian policy illegitimate, but it does make it selective, transactional, and limited. Serious analysis should focus on these constraints rather than merely celebrating diplomatic balancing acts, which Indian analysts often do.

The debate surrounding the BRICS illustrates this tension. India is praised for preventing the BRICS from becoming an explicitly anti-Western bloc. However, one could also interpret this as a desire to strengthen India's influence while preserving its relations with the West and Israel.

Both interpretations are important. One highlights India’s moderation, and the other points to a lack of commitment to genuine change. The real question is not whether India should be anti-Western but rather, whether it can promote a more autonomous world order without its ties to the West limiting its ability to do so.

The debate on Indian foreign policy suffers less from factual bias than from analytical asymmetry. India’s multi-alignment is presented as an expression of strategic autonomy, while similar behaviors by other states are analyzed in terms of influence, dependence, or opportunism.

India’s ambitions are seen as a reasonable reaction to its size, history, and security concerns. However, those of other powers are viewed as threats to the regional order. This results in a double standard, as the concept has historically been applied asymmetrically—a practice denounced by Indian political scientist Raja Mohan. A truly impartial analysis would ask whether India's actions would be judged differently if carried out by China, Russia, Iran, or the United States.

This is particularly relevant when Indian analysts present New Delhi’s diplomatic choices as evidence of neutrality. Multi-alignment is a strategy, not a demonstration of impartiality. India can support certain political outcomes while maintaining multiple relationships; it can oppose certain forms of Western domination while accepting other hierarchies, provided they serve its interests.

Therefore, analysis must not only celebrate flexibility, but also identify its costs, contradictions, and limitations. Strategic autonomy must be evaluated not just as a goal, but also in terms of the dependencies and asymmetries that limit it.

The strengthened diplomatic relationship between India and Israel highlights the limits of strategic autonomy. Their relationship is more than just a technical defense partnership. The two countries now cooperate in areas such as intelligence, surveillance, drones, cybersecurity, counterterrorism, and military technology. There

is also an ideological affinity between certain segments of the Indian and Israeli right. This alliance is becoming a pillar of India's security and technology strategy.

Some Indian analysts view this as a prime example of multi-alignment. India cooperates with Israel while maintaining ties with Iran, the Arab world, Russia, and the Palestinian cause. However, this is only partly true and provides an incomplete picture.

The real debate centers on the political and moral implications. What happens when Israeli actions contradict India's stated support for international law and the UN? Can India defend the Global South while marginalizing the Palestinians' right to self-determination—or even aligning with a brutal colonial regime or genocide? Is India truly balancing its partnerships, or is it drifting toward the U.S.-Israeli strategic orbit while maintaining a rhetoric of autonomy?

There is a significant distinction between recognizing India's interest in collaborating with Israel and asserting that this partnership is inherently compatible with strategic autonomy. The former is an observation, while the latter is an ideological stance.

Critical Indian intellectuals such as Achin Vanaik challenge the notion that relations between India and Israel are essentially a strategic or transactional partnership. Vanaik emphasizes that this rapprochement reveals an ideological kinship between Hinduism and Zionism with regard to nationalism, territory, identity, and state power—in other words, a convergence between Zionism and Hindu nationalism.

The question is not whether India should sever ties with Israel, which would ignore its security and technological interests. Rather, the question is whether India can pursue these interests without losing credibility on the Palestinian issue, international law, and the sovereignty of other societies in the Global South.

India's caution regarding Israeli or U.S. actions against Iran, as well as its failure to condemn these actions, also reveals the limits of the "balanced" discourse. Iran is not just any partner, but rather a neighboring regional power and a member of the BRICS group. It also has long-standing economic, cultural, and connectivity ties to India. India's silence in the face of threats against Iran undermines its claims to balance.

BRICS is the clearest institutional test of India's geopolitical ambitions. The organization is not intended to become an anti-Western bloc. Its potential lies in creating mechanisms that enable emerging and developing countries to gain greater autonomy in finance, trade, technology, development, and international representation, giving the Global South a stronger voice.

Key issues include not only a common currency, which India is reportedly resisting under U.S. influence, but also more efficient payment systems, increased use of local currencies, development finance, technological cooperation, standards, institutional reform, and alternatives to excessive dependence on Western financial infrastructure.

India has the diplomatic capacity to advance this agenda by promoting South-South trade, supporting reforms at the IMF and World Bank, strengthening development cooperation, and contributing to more inclusive technological and financial systems. However, this would require more than merely managing contradictions.

The transformative potential of the BRICS will remain limited if they only serve to increase India's influence without challenging existing hierarchies. In order to become a pillar of a more pluralistic and autonomous international order, India must accept that its partners, including China, Russia, Iran, Brazil, and South Africa, have priorities that do not always align with New Delhi's.

India's real dilemma is not choosing between the West and the Global South, but rather, defining the international order to which it wishes to contribute. Strategic autonomy cannot be limited to avoiding formal alliances; it requires proactive initiatives, consistent principles, and acceptance of the political ramifications of institutional change.
India's rise to power is real, and it is an influential power. However, it is not the undisputed leader of the Global South. Notable aspects of its influence include its ability to bring people together, its development partnerships, its defense cooperation, its digital infrastructure, and its symbolic weight. However, China has far superior economic, industrial, financial, and commercial assets in the developing world. The competition between Beijing and New Delhi therefore extends beyond mere diplomatic rhetoric.

India's greatest contribution would be developing a foreign policy that balances national interests with a coherent vision of international justice and institutional reform. This would require greater consistency when addressing issues of sovereignty, intervention, sanctions, occupation, and the rights of small states.

Multi-alignment remains an impressive diplomatic technique. However, a tool is no substitute for a vision. While it can protect national interests and avoid dependence on a great power, it cannot replace a geopolitical vision. Without such a vision, India risks becoming highly transactional, skilled at balancing acts, yet uncertain about the international order it wishes to shape.

The central issue is not whether India can pursue strategic autonomy, but rather, whether this autonomy is merely a tool for national advantage or a genuine political project of leadership and vision for the Global South. Until New Delhi decides, India's claims to being a leader of the Global South will be credible only in rhetoric. India's growing alignment with Israel has already compromised its leadership ambitions in the eyes of the Global South.

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4) Dr. Richard L BENKIN

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1. **Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob-HT) Do you agree?**

Let us first look at the reality. BRIC was formed in 2006 to further economic cooperation among the member states, which at the time were Brazil, Russia, India, and China. It held its first meeting in Russia in 2009 and became BRICS in 2011 with the addition of South Africa. Six more nations joined in 2024 and 2025, and the mission was expanded to include politics and security, and people-to-people contact. The *Hindustan Times* article referred to in this question makes excellent points. One point among them being that BRICS is not an action-oriented group but rather more of one that wants to send messages to the United States, hoping that US leaders will take them seriously. In fact, it is not designed to be any more than that, and certainly not a group that will supplant the US dollar with something else as its reserve currency, which is what some said would happen after BRICS' formation, and something that some individual members have made no secret of having as their goal. But it will not happen.

BRICS itself defines its effort as one that "serves as a useful platform for consultation and cooperation on contemporary issues having global as well as regional significance, and issues of global political and economic governance." Happymon Jacob believes that US President Donald Trump sees BRICS as a threat, and he could have a point. I would, however, tweak his assessment and agree that Trump might see BRICS as a *potential* threat, but a threat, again to cite Jacob, that "exists more in his fantasies than anywhere else."

At first glance, BRICS appears to be incredibly powerful. Along with its ten "partner nations," BRICS accounts for more than half of the world's population (56 percent) and just under half of its total economy (45 percent). But those numbers suffer from two specific problems that will keep BRICS a messaging group, rather than a powerhouse. The first is that while all people are equally deserving and valuable as lives, as people they are not equal in terms of their pull on nations and economies. As a retailer, would you chase after the customer who has a suit handmade or someone who buys a clearance item off the rack? One is not a better person than the other, but we do not value the two equally as customers. As a restauranteur, you value all your customers. But if

there was only one open table, and the two people who wanted it were a customer who is there once every other month or so and one who is there daily, which one would get the last table from you? The second problem with looking at the combined numbers as a bloc is that it assumes the various BRICS nations share the same interests, which is the polar opposite of reality. Not even their economies are aligned.

There are two growing economies that already have a significant impact on global economics and have the potential to be economic superpowers: India and Indonesia. There are two other growing and robust economies, Brazil and Ethiopia, though not as large as the other two and without their serious potential. Two others are strong and should continue to be so, even as the product solely responsible for their economic strength becomes less important as we move to the second half of the century: oil-soaked Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). China is a separate case. It is an economic power at the moment, but its power has been waning, and I have given specifics about that through several issues of the FPRC. One clue to the direction of China's economy is that since the pandemic, starting with the 2022 GDP, China's has grown an anemic 6.3 percent, compared to the US's 17.5 percent and India's 21.5 percent. Moreover, China has depended on Venezuela and Iran for 20-30 percent of its imported oil (it has negligible domestic production and so is heavily dependent on imports for its survival). Venezuela already has been taken away from its former status as a Chinese gas station in South America, and Iran is likely to collapse shortly; both as a result of US military moves.

None of this bodes well for China's economic role moving forward. How will it replace that energy? At the same time as the US was boxing it out of that market, it began replacing Chinese imports with those from other countries. US companies have been leaving China in droves, frequently settling in India, and the export-dependent Chinese economy has seen its place among US importers fall from number one to number three; and it is struggling to maintain that position ahead of smaller East Asian rivals Vietnam and Taiwan. The other four BRICS nations (Russia, Iran, Egypt, and South Africa) are all economic basket cases, and it would not be surprising for one or all of them to see their governments and economic systems be overthrown between now and the end of the decade. If BRICS is incapable of fixing their economies, it is extremely difficult to see what kind of power it can wield globally. Thus, simply the economic struggles of some in BRICS, along with the economic goals of other BRICS nations, make a consolidated policy nigh impossible, let alone the legions of contrary interests that will be explored in subsequent questions.

2. How do you assess BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

Like almost all statements from this sort of international consortium, this one was primarily fluff and virtue signaling; that is, empty words. Virtue signaling is the practice of very conspicuously and outwardly showing that you "care" about political issues, in lieu of taking any action on them. Virtue signals most often are issued to placate a particular political constituency without having to take a real stand on them via action. They give an illusion of support without actual support; for instance, the ninth paragraph of the New Delhi Declaration, "In light of the ongoing selection process of the next Secretary-General of the UN and bearing in mind the relevant provisions of the UN Charter, we note that no woman has ever been elected for the role of Secretary General, and only one national from Latin America and Caribbean, and only two nationals from Africa and Asia each have ever occupied this position."

United Nations (UN) Secretary General Antonio Guterres has to be the most irrelevant world leader bar none. One of the very few things he can do is to travel and make empty comments that favor his narrative of things and ignore disparities. The day after BRICS issued the New Delhi declaration, he said that it was "reassuring" that "important powers" believe global crises can be addressed through multilateralism and the UN. He conveniently ignored the fact that when these nations needed something done, they did so through unilateral actions or bi-lateral agreements. All were negatively affected by US tariffs on their goods. Did any of them join together as a bloc to negotiate a favorable outcome? No, each did as every other nation did and negotiated for its people's interests without going to other countries that might form a united bloc with it in getting a better break from the United States. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in addressing the summit just prior to its formal opening, noted that since he became Prime Minister, India has "entered into Free Trade Agreements with nearly 40 countries around the world." Were these agreements between India and other individual countries, or between BRICS nations (or any other combinations of nations as a bloc and others)? These critical agreements were done bi-laterally between two sovereign nations each; none were multi-lateral. Have any BRICS nations actually used that multilateralism that a delusional Guterres says is so encouraging? Has any nation?

Moreover, BRICS is incapable of being that multilateral agent that Guterres thinks is so important. On the most important issues of our day, its members are on different sides. Brazil has voted in the UN to condemn Russia for its invasion of the Ukraine; Russia, of course, supports it; and India is trying to tread a middle course that does not throw away its traditional friendship with Russia while neither supporting Russia's blatant aggression and targeting of civilians. China and Iran have taken actions to support Russia, but none of the other BRICS nations have. On the Middle East, India acts daily sending weapons to its ally Israel, while Iran is fighting Israel. Brazil's position will be

determined by whether or not the next election brings a leftist or rightwing government. And as noted above, each has opted for a bi-lateral solution to its trade issue with the United States.

Perhaps the item that most shows how ridiculous BRICS and the declaration are is #40, which begins, “We express strong condemnation of any acts of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, whenever, wherever and by whomsoever committed.” It goes on to condemn “terrorism in all its forms” and agrees “that all those involved in terrorist activities and their support must be held accountable and brought to justice in accordance with relevant national and international law.” ***And one of the BRICS nations that signed this declaration id Iran!*** Iran is the leading sponsor or terrorism globally, which is not even a controversial statement anymore. Nor does Iran recognize any cross-border limit to its proxies’ activities. Item #41 emphasizes the “importance of countering extremism and radicalization.” Again, Iran????? If what the Islamic Republic of Iran supports is not extremism and radicalization, it would be impossible to identify anything that is. Item #42 expresses “our concerns about illicit financial flows including, financing of terrorism.” Iran was part of that while providing arms and financial resources to Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis. Moreover, these BRICS nations cannot agree on what constitutes terror and what actions fall within that definition.

There are 140 items in the New Delhi Declaration, and they almost all begin with phrases like we “express concern,” “welcome,” “acknowledge,” and so forth. Not a single action item among them. Yes, sections #21 and #22 seem to be targeting US tariffs and related actions, but as noted above, the members’ own actions have been taken without any multilateralism or moral outrage against them. That makes sense since every one of them then would have to explain their own tariffs and protectionist measures that predated US tariffs by decades. The entire declaration could have been rephrased to “Aren’t we good people? Look at all the things we support” and then merely list all the virtue signaling points they made sure to list in the declaration. The problem with BRICS and the New Delhi declaration is that it provides nothing of substance to give pause to any friend, adversary, or associate. Nor does anything there even suggest that this group of nations will be any more formidable than it is now. Virtue signaling without substance. The New Delhi Declaration’s destiny is to be filed away in a drawer somewhere and nothing more

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3. Trump says BRICS has no consensus. How much did US pressure shape the agenda of 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi?

I want to go back to Happymon Jacob’s article because it is quite germane here. Donald Trump could have pretty much ignored BRICS and its deliberations, but

he saw BRICS as a potential threat, regardless of whether it really is or not. Even without US lobbying or "pressure," it is almost certain that the BRICS summit would not have had a different ending. Trump knows that none of the nations, individually or in cooperation with others, could do anything to the United States on the tariff issue that they could or could not do individually. So that whole issue of trade and supply lines did not figure in the summit that significantly. Trump's efforts with regard to what was the upcoming BRICS summit appear to have been focused mostly on the current war in Iran and the Middle East more generally. Perhaps that has something to do with BRICS' toothless statements about terrorism, and that the only terrorist attack mentioned was the 2025 Pahalgam terror attack in Kashmir. The group did not address the war in the Middle East, and its declaration did not even mention the combatants by name with regard to the war or conflict. Among the partner organizations, three are active combatants in that war, and they are not all on the same side. Iran is a major belligerent, while both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been attacked by Iran; in the case of the UAE more than Iran attacked Israel. Saudi Arabia, moreover, is becoming increasingly sucked into a hot war with the Iran-backed Houthis. How would BRICS make sure not to alienate any of them?

UN Security Resolution 2803 (2025), which was the basis for an end to the hot war in Gaza, is a great example of why it is impossible for BRICS to form a consensus on the Iran War, which emerged from the Israel-Hamas War. The only two BRICS nations in the Security Council to vote on the resolution were Russia and China, the two most powerful advocates for Iran and its proxies. They both abstained and did not use their veto power to stop it. Of the other three nations in the BRICS acronym, Brazil and South Africa sounded off on their opposition, while India welcomed and praised it. Of the six partner nations, Egypt, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE strongly supported it, while Iran condemned it, and Ethiopia has been able to remain silent. The BRICS nations have widely differing relationships with Donald Trump's Gaza Board of Peace. Four (Egypt, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and UAE) are members of the board and very vocal in their support. India has participated as an observer, while also making supportive public statements about it. Ethiopia, while not invited to the initial meeting, has been positive about the effort and expressed support for its sending troops to Gaza as part of the International Stabilization Force, though no action has yet been taken on that request. That's the six yeas. On the other side, Brazil, China, Iran, and Russia all were invited but declined, and all have expressed their unequivocal opposition; and South Africa, never missing a chance to demonize Israel and the Jewish people, was ignored but took it upon itself to issue strong statements against the board. Imagine trying to come up with something that satisfies that cacophony of opinions.

Is it any wonder why Donald Trump said that BRICS has no consensus?

4) How do you explain BRICS Power Triangle India-Russia-China?

First of all, they each have their own set of interests, priorities, and stages of development. To consider them any kind of bloc is naïve. Moreover, the only one with an encouraging arc moving forward in the 21st century is India. The other two are projected to be mere shells of themselves by 2100. Start with people, which is important for driving economies that are dependent on a large (and therefore cheap) supply of labor. Without it, those economies cannot provide the needed products on which they depend. Right now, the three are the largest country by population (India), the second largest (China), and the ninth largest (Russia). By 2100, India will remain the largest country in the world, though with an increase between then and now of under two percent. It also will have a median age of 48.8 years, older than the United States, Canada, and a number of European countries. India, however, will not have a problem with labor supply or its military. China and Russia are a different story. China is projected to *lose* more than 55 percent of its population by 2100 and be left with a median age of 61.7. The high median age indicates the increasingly greater amount it will need for old age pensions, health care, and other items; all that will need to be supported by a shrinking number of working Chinese. Russia will lose about 12 percent of its population between now and the end of the century and fall out of the top ten countries all the way to number 17. Moreover, even now, none of those countries have a total fertility at or above the 2.1 replacement rate (birth rates needed to maintain current population). India has only fairly recently fallen a bit below the replacement rate, but this problem for Russia and China became endemic long ago. Russia's total fertility rate is 1.4699, and the longer Russia continues killing young people (who otherwise would have children) in its disastrous war in Ukraine, the more its numbers will continue dropping. China's is 1.0308, despite massive incentives now offered young people for procreating. And that does not even count its provinces of Hong Kong and Macao that both have total fertility rates under one—the two lowest among all countries and territories. Moreover, all three countries lose large numbers of people through voluntary emigration each year. Russia has had negative migration the past two years (that is, more people leaving than coming there). China has had negative migration every year but one since its 1948 communist revolution. India's story is a bit different but with the same results. It almost seems deliberate that Indians have been re-locating to the United States and other western nations with their considerable talents. The reality is that India has had only 21 years when it did not have a negative migration rate in the 76 years since 1950.

It all makes sense: the Indian diaspora is becoming a serious force globally; and who would want to move to Communist China or Vladimir Putin's Russia, which offer immigrants neither freedom nor opportunity.

Thus, migration rates reflect how people see countries and whether or not moving there or staying there offers them a chance at a good life. And it does not look good for two of the three parts of this "power triangle." The real question, however, is exactly what kind of power does this power triangle wield and with whom. I surveyed a number of people globally and situated differently within those countries. *I have not encountered a single person who were willing to talk about India, China, and Russia as any sort of bloc.* The three have different interests that are not in sync with one another, and it is difficult to find any nations, except for a few tiny ones nearby, that fear or respect the economic or strategic influence of the three countries together. Vietnam is one telling example. After the US put tariffs and sanctions on Chinese goods in the first Trump Administration, Vietnam became one of the most important countries for importing and exporting Chinese goods labeled as its own. After the tariffs and sanctions in Trump's current term, Vietnam stopped that activity in favor of becoming one of America's largest trading partners—Number 4 so far in 2026, which is a greater benefit to the people of Vietnam than China could provide. And Vietnam borders China! How much less potent is this power triangle elsewhere in the world not so close to home. And if any sort of alliance among these countries ever exists, expect Russia to be a token member that weighs the other two down like an anchor.

I will begin to wonder about that ersatz power triangle, when it actually does anything as a triangle.

5. How do you assess India's BRICS Diplomacy?

Now we get to the important part, because the UN's Guterres to the contrary, this is where things really get done at these meetings, on the side by two of the countries, not by the larger group. And India is in a tough spot. It is an emerging superpower that both East and West see as critical in how geopolitics will take shape moving forward in this century. But that tough spot also opens up opportunities from the emerging South Asian superpower. To accurately assess the success or failure of India's BRICS diplomacy, however, we first must understand Indian goals aside from specific issues or virtue signaling.

Ultimately, India has two important goals. One is to be the leader of the highly populated and young "Global South," which often is portrayed as the agglomeration of non-white former colonies, for the most part, vs. the white nations that colonized them. The other is for India to be the leader of a third

option that maintains good relations with both the democratic coalition, led by the United States, and the coalition of authoritarianism led by China. That is the context within which Indian diplomacy must be understood. And India has been laying the groundwork for decades. Among the leading democratic nations (United States, United Kingdom, European Union, Israel) and authoritarian nations (China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, Cuba), India has good relations with them all.

The fact that BRICS has no leading representatives of that democratic axis, except India itself, while the three authoritarian leaders (China, Russia, Iran) comprise three of the five letters in the BRICS acronym, means that anything coming out of BRICS will have that skewed weight on it; which makes Indian diplomatic success even more difficult. How did India do? The results are a mixture of both substantive messaging and virtue signaling mixed with perfunctory statements. The insiders and experts who I queried about this were unanimous in praising Indian efforts that maintained a summit that focused participants on the economic interests that they all share and relentlessly avoided forays into global geopolitics. This is extremely significant because it created space on the margins of the summit for nations to make individual agreements without worrying about domestic or global reaction to the politics of doing so. This also highlighted India's status as a global superpower that brings considerable assets to any negotiation. As pointed out earlier, the eleven BRICS nations do not share the same geopolitical interests or positions on significant global issues and conflicts. Crafting a statement that satisfies them all would require resources of time that India spent more productively focusing on concrete accomplishments. Additionally, navigating the dangerous and polarizing waters of global conflict would necessarily alienate either or both coalitions of democracy and authoritarianism and undermine India's role as a third force rising above the conflict and vitriol in which the others are enmeshed. For instance, how could it address the war in Ukraine without angering either Russia or the European Union? Or the war in the Middle East without alienating either the United States or Iran? Between the 2025 BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and the 2026 Summit in New Delhi, India, there were at least 50 serious terrorist incidents (including the Bondi Beach terrorist shooting in Australia) on every continent save Antarctica; the New Delhi declaration did not mention any of them by name. Yet, it devoted an item to strongly condemning the Pahalgam terrorist attack in Jammu Kashmir, India; and that is no coincidence. India was the victim nation, and no BRICS nations had any involvement in it. The only aggressor nation involved was Pakistan, India's long term rival; and I doubt whether India is concerned that it might anger Pakistan. According to the people I surveyed, this achievement by India was perhaps its greatest triumph at the BRICS summit, especially tied with its leadership role as host; and I concur with that assessment.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi also seems to have learned from the mistakes of his predecessor, the late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his "non-aligned movement." That movement was founded in 1961, at the height of the Cold War to provide developing nations with an option other than the democracies of the West, led by the United States, and the Communist bloc, led by the Soviet Union. That movement failed to gain the traction its founders hoped would result from it. Most people are not even aware that it is still around because it never became that third option envisioned by its leaders. Several interpretations have been offered for that failure of the non-aligned movement. Three, however, are particularly germane to India's diplomacy today and show just how far beyond the India of 1961 is today's India. First, the non-aligned movement was non-aligned in name only. Its original founders were all avowed communists or socialists: Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah, Indonesia's president Sukarno, and Nehru. As the group expanded, it gathered an increasing number of countries hostile to the West, which saw the movement as especially hostile. Ultimately, communist Cuban leader Fidel Castro was the group's primary spokesperson, and at the group's 1979 summit in Havana, Cuba, articulated the movement's goals as the "struggle against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, and all forms of foreign aggression, occupation, domination, interference or hegemony as well as against great power and bloc politics." That is, as they define these terms, making it more of a gauntlet laid at the feet of western nations and a statement of opposition to their overall positions. Compare that to the way India deliberately kept the New Delhi declaration away from any such divisive statements.

The non-aligned movement also failed because its collective strength did not amount to much, and its members were, in the end, dependent on the largesse of both the democratic and communist blocs. Taken together, they did not possess the economic heft that the other coalitions could not dismiss. While today's BRICS nations are not a unit at this point, they do bring far more economic and geopolitical strength than non-aligned movement members ever did, and which could be the basis for attracting others of the Global South. Finally, India was not the rising superpower and global leader then that it is today. In 1961, it was one of the founding nations, and not even *primus inter pares.* Today, no one can dismiss India, and it will be fascinating to watch India's global role grow consistently throughout this century.

*****

5) JOSEPH E FALLON

Answers to Email Interview – FPRC Journal -68- Focus - BRICS INDIA 2026

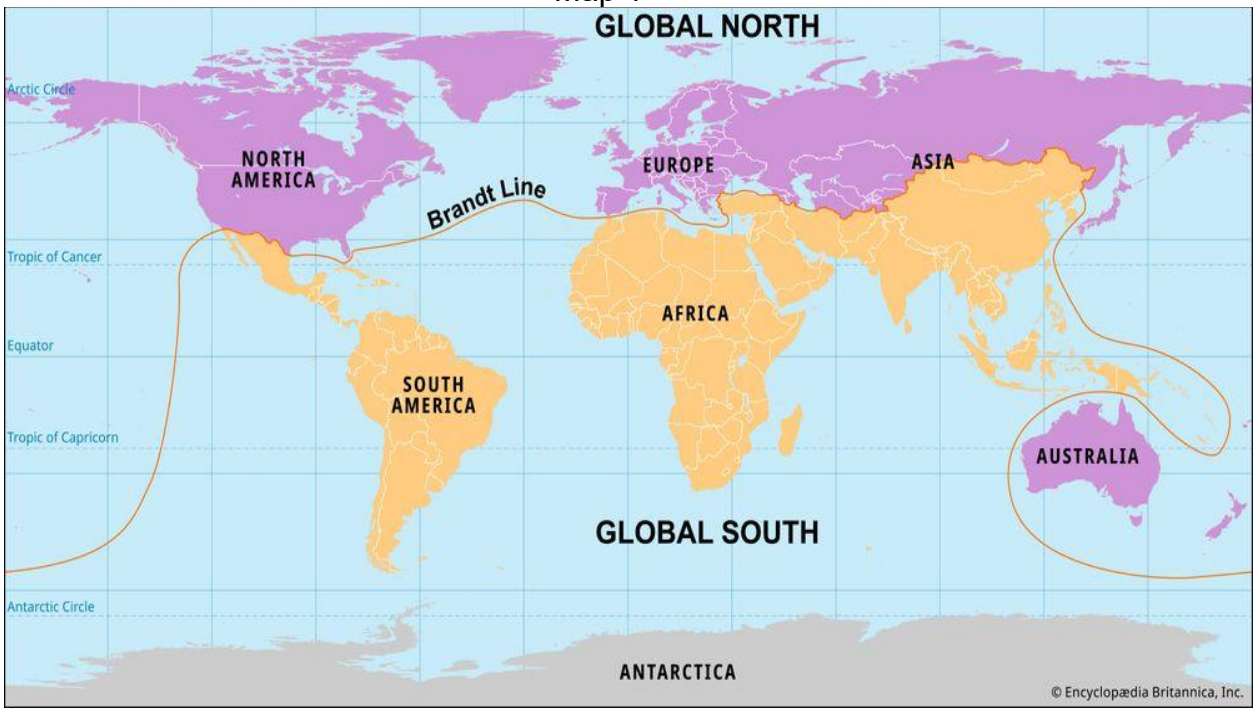
Joseph E. Fallon

1) **Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob-HT) Do you agree?**

Yes. I agree. For the present, BRICS functions as a pressure group. As Shara A. Rondon
observed in her article "The Internal Dilemmas of BRICS: Delivery Gaps and Limits to South–South Solidarity, Modern Diplomacy, September 16, 2025, "*BRICS promotes itself as the voice of emerging economies through annual summit declarations invoking multipolarity, South–South solidarity, and reform of the international order…Yet its greatest obstacle is not Western resistance but rather its own inability to deliver real results consistently because of internal dilemmas…As many scholars currently suggest, it will be judged not by summit communiqués and lofty declarations but by whether its promises reach the ground. So far, the global jury remains out." "*[i]

Rondon subsequently wrote "In Rise of the Global South," October 1, 2025, Gulf News, that *"From Shanghai to BRICS, emerging alliances are redrawing the world order."*[ii] But is BRICS redrawing the world order? And is there such a thing as the "Global South?" (Map 1)

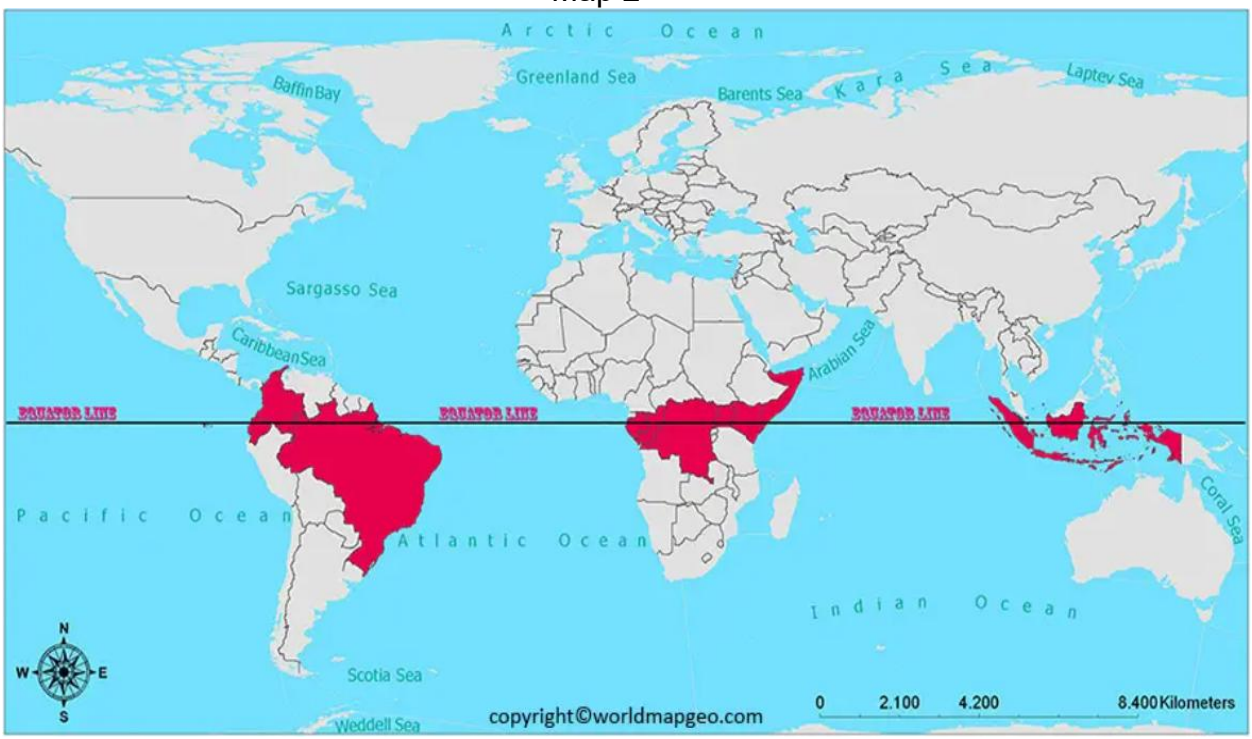
Map 1[iii]



The answer to both is "No". The "Global South" is a political construct. And therein lies its weakness. First, it is not a geographic classification. "Global South" implies

"south of the equator." But most countries of the "Global South" are "north" of the equator. Except for Australia which is "south of the equator," but is identified as "Global North." (Map 2)

Map 2[iv]



Secondly, and most importantly, "Global South" is not an economic classification. It is not a synonym for "third world" or "underdeveloped." Founding members Russia and China are neither geographically, nor economically part of the "Global South". China has the world's second largest economy. India, too, is not geographically or economically in the "Global South". It lies north of the equator and has the world's sixth largest economy.[v] Argentina and Chile are geographically in the "Global South" but both are listed by the United Nations Human Development Index as economically part of the "first world". According to World Population Review: *"First World countries enjoy the most advanced technologies, the highest standards of living, and the greatest degree of political and cultural influence across the globe."*[vi] The oil-rich countries of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and United Arab Emirates, are in the defined limits of the "Global South," but economically they have nothing in common with most of the countries in Asia and Africa. Turkey is also included in the "Global South" despite geographically and economically being part of the Global North and being a member of NATO.

This leaves the question of how BRICS is "*redrawing the world order*." At present, it isn't.

Various theories have been presented on how BRICS will further the geoeconomics, and, thereby, the geopolitical ambitions of the "Global South". All based to some degree on China's false premise "*the Western development model has had its day.*"[vii]

According to BRICSIPEDIA, Swiss Institute for Global Affairs, these theories include "Power transition theory" (Neo-realism), "Soft Power Concept" (Neo-liberalism), "Peaceful Coexistence Concept" (Neo-liberalism, Globalism, and Neo-realism), "Status theories" (Post-positivism), "Neo-regionalism / Global regionalism" (Post-positivism), "Neo-functionalism", "Neo-institutionalism", "Neo-liberal Institutionalism", "Offensive Neo-realism", "Defensive Neo-realism", "Moral realism" (China's 'Tsinghua approach'), and "Chinese Relationality."[viii]

While BRICS bilateral Agreements (Table 1) have been termed as "Neo-classist Realism" or "Multi-alignment." [ix]

Table 1[x]

BRIC'S Bilateral Agreements

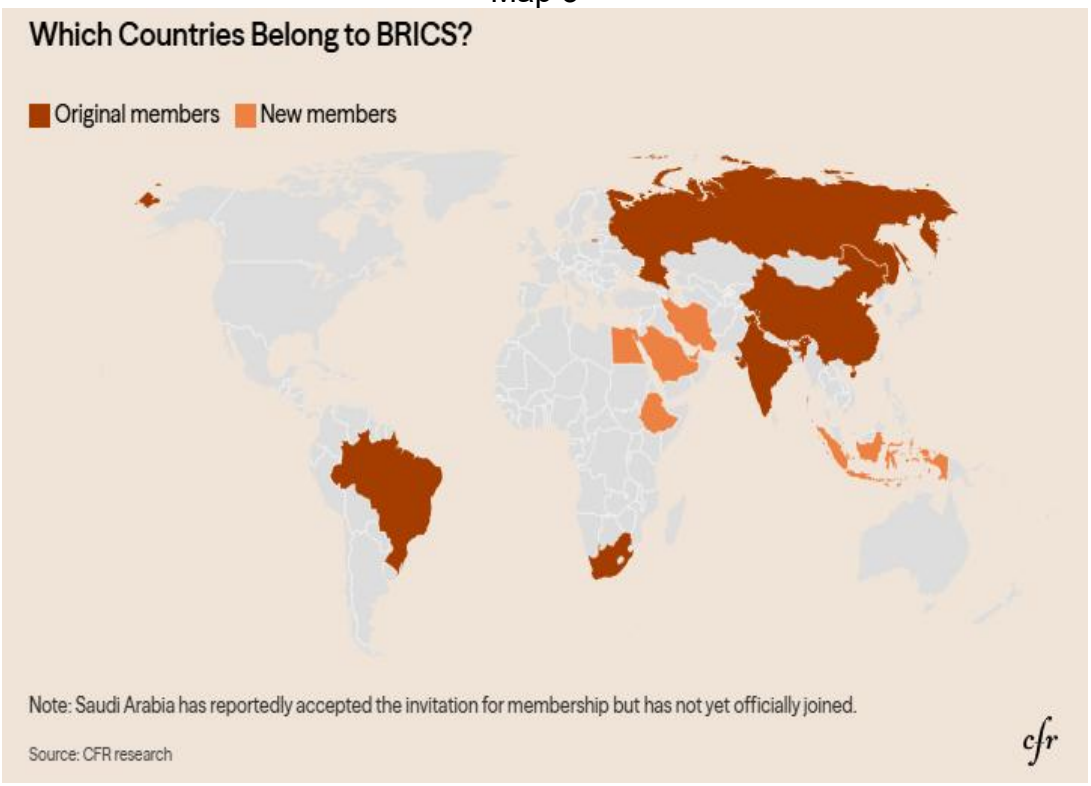
Countries	Before BRICS	Since BRICS	Areas
Brazil-India	3	15, VT esp. since 2006	Esp. trade agreements
Brazil-China	3	59	Space, energy, economy, technology, defense, sports
Russia-India	11	23-51 MOUs & agreements	Esp. military cooperation; a total of 250+ bilateral documents
Brazil-Russia	6	4	
Brazil-South Africa		1	2010: Strategic Partnership
Russia-South Africa		2	Investments, taxes, energy, agriculture, natural resources, intellectual property; a total of around 70 documents
China-South Africa	2	1	Statement on Strategic Partnership before and after BRICS
India-China	5	1	2014: 5 year trading plan
India-South Africa	5		
China-Russia			

No data available | Significant increase in bilateral agreements since BRICS | Declaration of strategic after BRICSpartnership | Significant decrease in bilateral agreements since BRICS

But, if the function of an organization can be explained by a number of divergent theories, perhaps, that organization is more shadow than substance.

The analysis by the Boston Consulting Group in April 2024, still stands. *"Yet grounds for skepticism over BRICS+'s capacity to become an effective institution remain. This grouping includes countries that are very diverse in terms of political systems, institutional frameworks, economic models, and cultural backgrounds. It even includes geopolitical rivals; for example, relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as between China and India, remain strained. A so-called "China shock" of low-cost exports of everything from steel and chemicals to machinery could also raise trade tensions within the group. The expansion, moreover, is heavily tilted toward the Middle East, so further regional balance may be required as the group grows."*[xi] (Map 3)

Map 3[xii]



But China is the economic behemoth of BRICS (Table 2).

Table 2[xiii]

How BRICS Countries Compare in Population and Economy

Population, gross domestic product (GDP), and exports as a share of the world for BRICS countries as compared to the United States and Europe, 2023

	Population	GDP	Exports
India	17.7%	3.3%	2.5%
China	17.5%	16.8%	11.3%
Indonesia	3.5%	1.3%	1%
Brazil	2.7%	2.1%	1.3%
Russia	1.8%	1.9%	1.5%
Ethiopia	1.6%	0.2%	0%
Egypt	1.4%	0.4%	0.2%
Iran	1.1%	0.4%	0.4%
South Africa	0.8%	0.4%	0.4%
Saudi Arabia	0.5%	1%	1.2%
United Arab Emirates	0.1%	0.5%	1.1%
Europe	5.6%	17.5%	31%
United States	4.2%	26.1%	9.8%

Source: World Bank

cfr

The concern of India, therefore, is to insure BRICS does not become a tool for Beijing to promote Sinocentric policies. So far, New Delhi has been successful in preventing that.

However, BRICS is further constrained by various, overlapping regional sub-groupings to which its members belong. Groupings possessing separate agendas with a higher priority. In particular, the Mecca Defence Alliance and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). (Diagrams 1, 2, and 3)

Diagram 1[xiv]
BRICS+

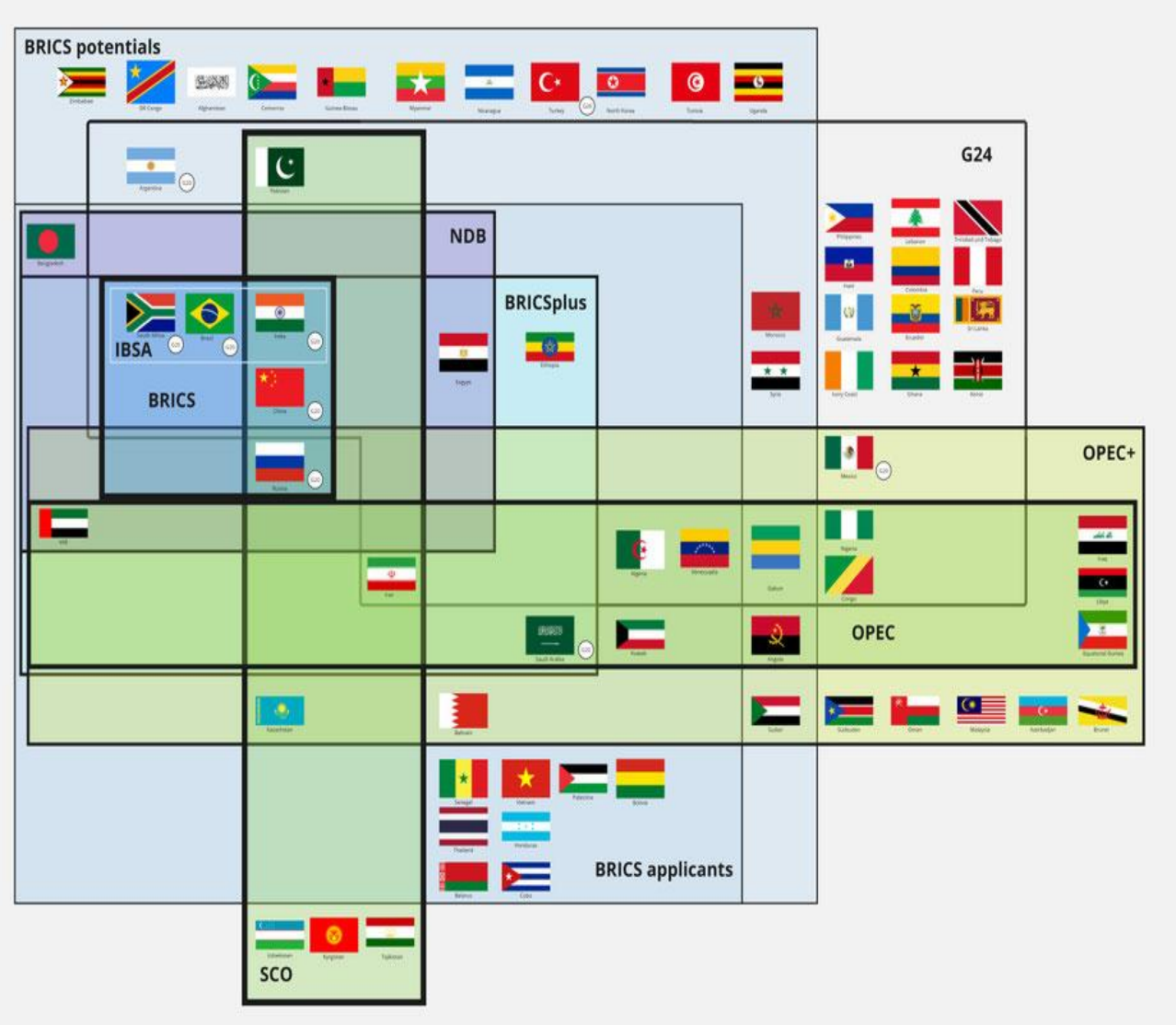


Diagram 2[xv]
Asia's Overlapping Circles: Reinventing Regional Power Beyond the West -1

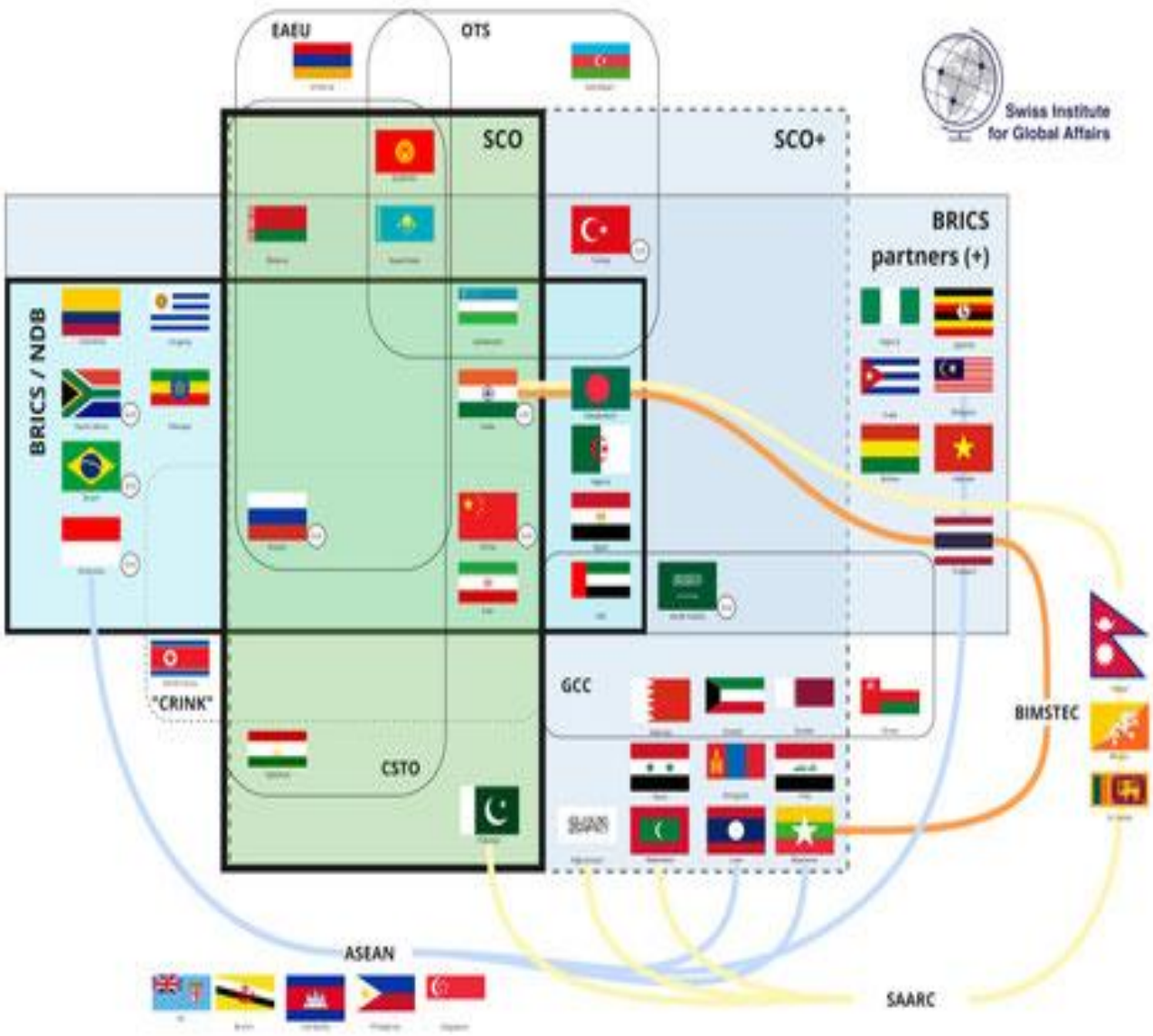
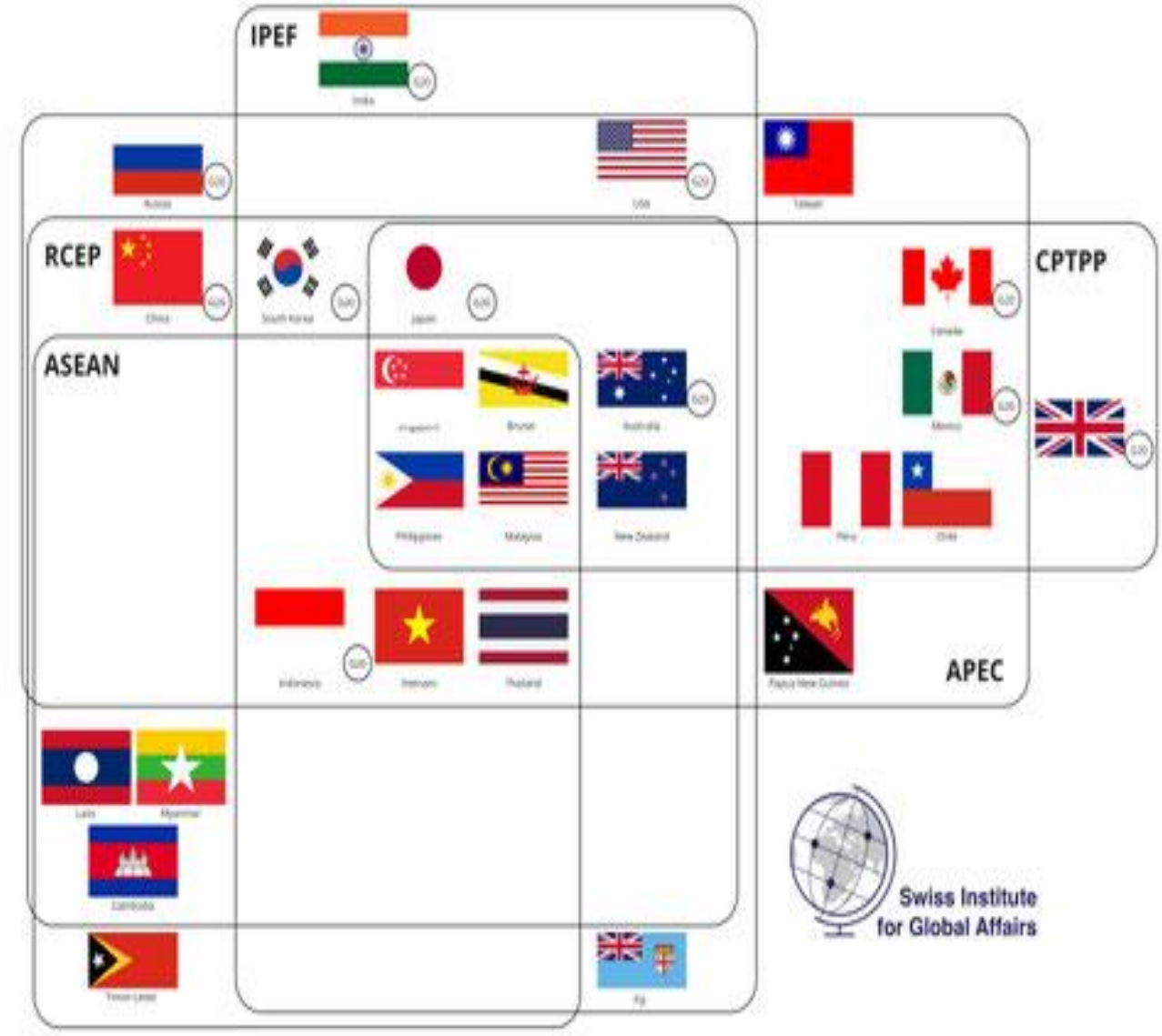

EAEU
OTS
SCO
SCO+
Swiss Institute for Global Affairs
BRICS partners (+)
BRICS / NDB
"CRINK"
GCC
BIMSTEC
CSTO
ASEAN
SAARC

Diagram 3[xvi]
Asia's Overlapping Circles: Reinventing Regional Power Beyond the West - 2



So yes, for the present, BRICS is essentially one more pressure group. The competing national interests among its leading, and founding members, India, Russia, and China, limits its evolution into an institution comparable to the European Union.

2) How do you assess BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

A success for India. As the 19th Century German Statesman, Otto von Bismarck stated, *"politics is the art of the possible, the attainable — the art of the next best."*[xvii] With the 2026 Delhi Declaration,[xviii] India navigated members rivalries and opposing economic systems to advance a future agenda for BRICS, which also advanced New Delhi's policy of "strategic autonomy" within in an emerging multipolar world order and a leadership role in the "Global South". (Diagram 1)

Diagram 1[xix]



The declaration diplomatically expressed present world concerns and future world goals in a way whereby India maintained BRICS unity while not alienating the West in general, or the United States in particular.

Such a diplomatic success furthers India's long-held objective of becoming a permanent member of an enlarged UN Security Council. Point 13 of the New Delhi Declaration states: "*We stress that the UN Security Council reform is to lead to the amplified voice of the Global South. Recalling the 2022 Beijing and 2023 Johannesburg-II Leaders' Declarations, China and Russia, as permanent members of the UN Security Council, reiterate their support to the aspirations of Brazil and India to play a greater role in the UN, including its Security Council.*"[xx]
An objective likely to be realized since the Trump Administration has *"extended its support to India's call for a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council."*[xxi]

On September 17, 2026, The Diplomat wrote, *"For New Delhi, BRICS is not a camp or a bloc, but a forum – one of several -- [World Trade Organization, World Bank, G20, United Nations, International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Commonwealth of Nations, Quad, and International Atomic Energy Agency]* [xxii] *-- that it uses to secure a seat at one of the tables defining the unfolding multipolar order. The evidence is in the declaration the leaders adopted and, above all, in what it leaves out [U.S.-Iran war, Russian-Ukrainian war, U.S. tariffs]…India, as chair, seems to have been working around members' quarrels and different perspectives [in particular, those of China, Iran, and Russia]…So it is fair to assume that India's BRICS chairmanship was less about*

turning the grouping into a political front and more about finding the narrow but complicated areas of consensus that could hold a deeply diverse membership together." [xxiii]

Which India achieved.

3) Trump says BRICS has no consensus. How much did US pressure shaped the agenda of 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi?

That BRICS has no consensus is partially true. The more BRICS expands (Map 1, Table 1), the more ideological and economically diverse its membership becomes, (Tables 2 and 3) thereby, making it more difficult to find consensus on major issues. To maintain unity, consensus becomes agreement on vague generalities.

Map 1[xxiv]

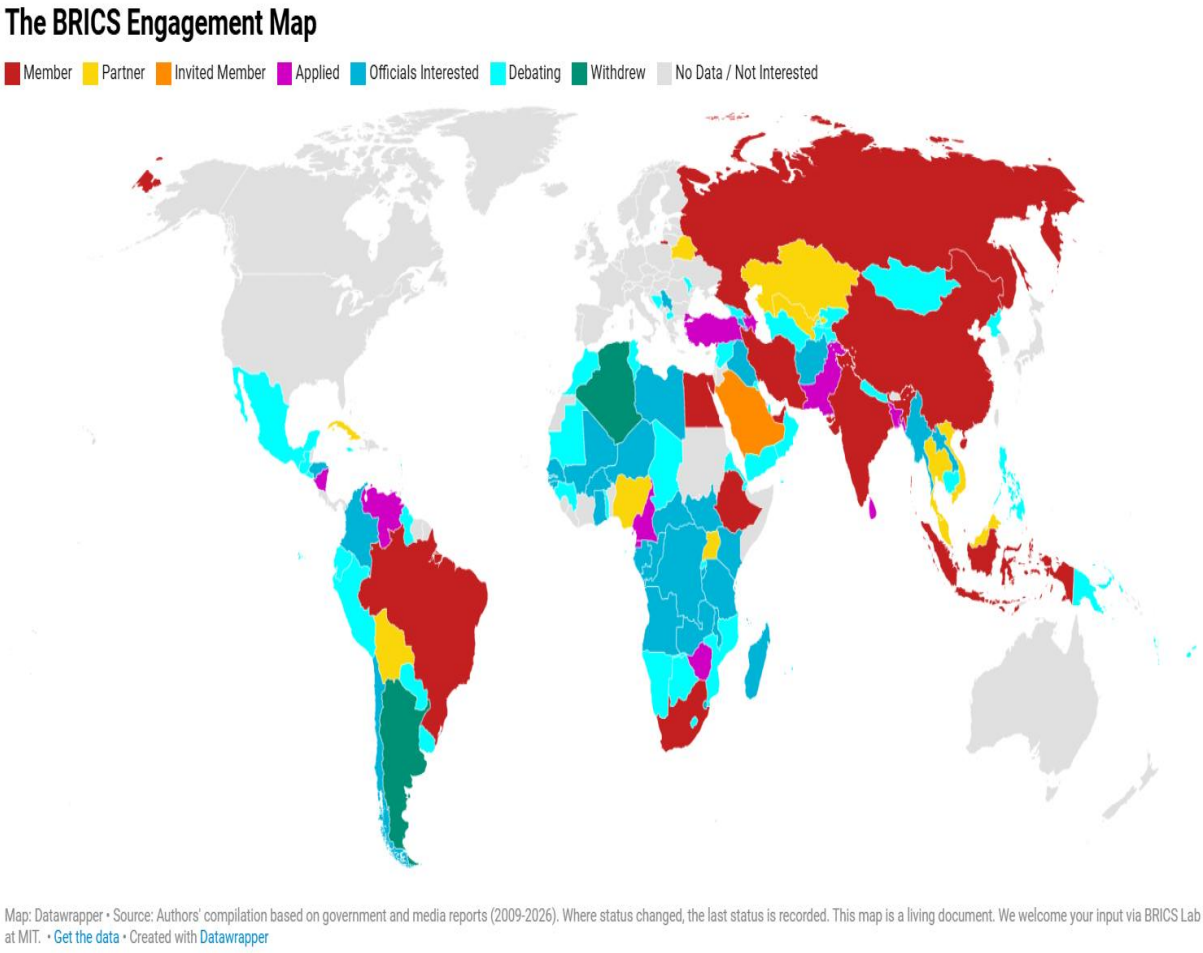


Table 1[xxv]
Countries Associated With BRICS by Category

Group	Countries	Description
BRICS Founders	• Brazil • Russia • India • China • South Africa	Countries that created the BRICS organization and make up the majority of economic output, population, and trade with the United States.
BRICS+	• Egypt • Ethiopia • Indonesia • Iran • United Arab Emirates	Countries that have been officially accepted as members in recent years. (Can refer to the BRICS founders, as well.)
BRICS Partners	• Boliva • Belarus • Cuba • Kazakhstan • Nigeria • Malaysia • Thailand • Vietnam • Uganda • Uzbekistan	Countries announced during the 2024 summit in Russia and are mentioned in the Rio summit's joint declaration. This group has yet to become official members but still partakes in joint objectives and economic cooperation with BRICS.
BRICS NDB Members	• Algeria • Bangladesh • Colombia • Uruguay	Countries that are part of the BRICS New Development Bank but are not official BRICS members or partners. (Many of the above BRICS countries are also NDB members.)
Prospective/Unofficial	• Turkey • Saudi Arabia	These two countries have been invited to join the organization, but their membership status remains unclear. Turkey has officially applied for membership while Saudi Arabia has yet to publicly confirm its acceptance into the bloc.
Interested Countries	• Afghanistan • Bahrain • Iraq • Kuwait • Laos • Nicaragua (blocked) • Pakistan • Senegal • Syria • Tunisia • Venezuela (blocked) • Yemen • Zimbabwe	Countries that have expressed interest in joining BRICS in the past or may become partner countries in the future.

Table 2[xxvi]
BRICS and BRICS+ Economic Indicators (Weighted by Population)

	Share of Global GDP 2024	Share of Global Population 2024	Median Age	Fertility Rate	GDP per Capita	Average Income 2022	Average Democracy Index
BRICS	25.0%	40.2%	34	1.5	$8,274	$7,813	6.7
BRICS+	26.4%	44.5%	33	1.7	$7,901	$7,476	3.0

Sources: Our World in Data, Worldometer, International Monetary Fund

Table 3[xxvii]
BRICS+ vs the G7 Economies in 2024

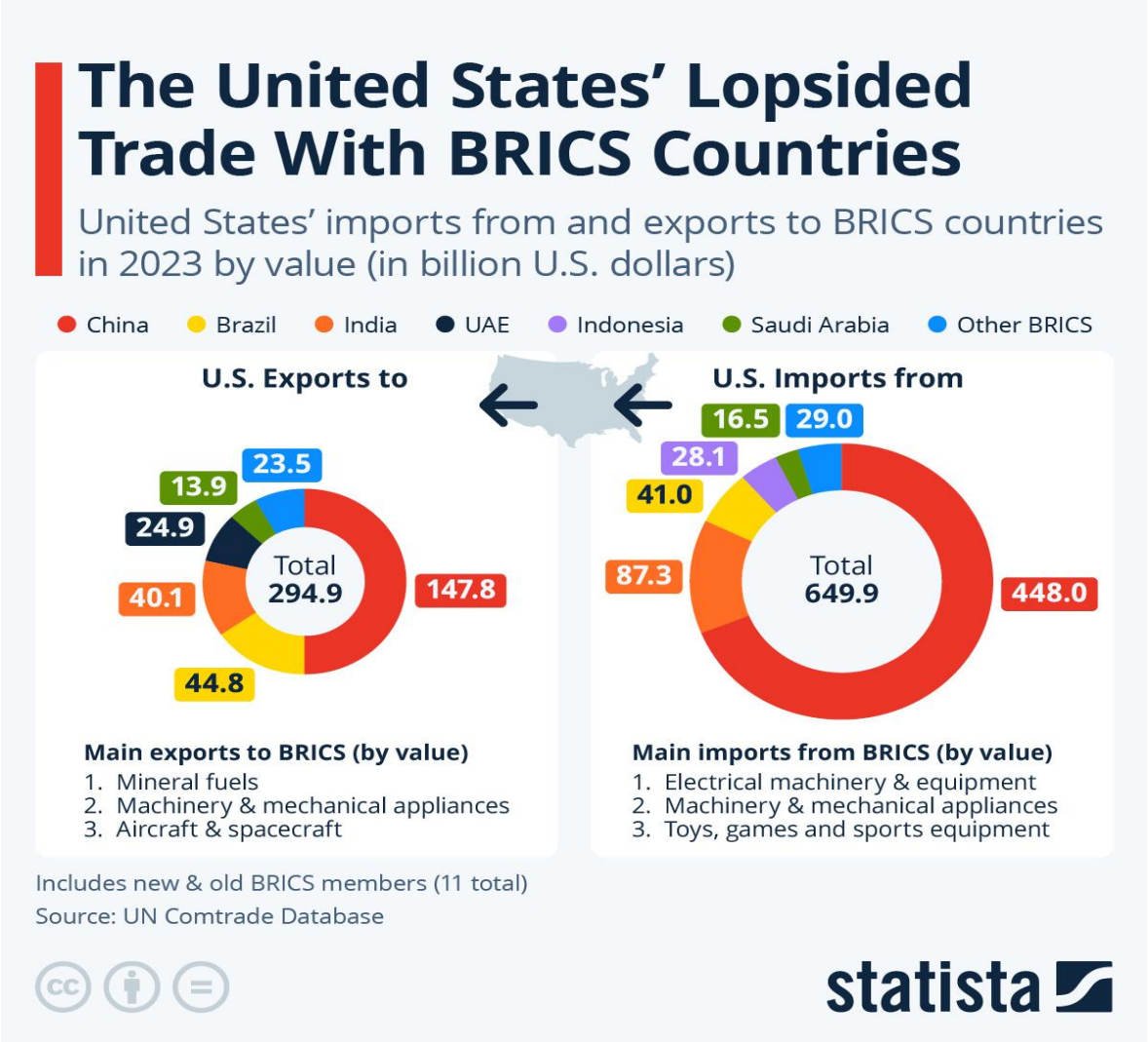
	Share of Global GDP	Share of Global GDP (PPP)	Share of Global Population	GDP per Capita	Average Income 2022	Average Democracy Index
BRICS+	26.4%	35.5%	44.5%	$7,901	$7,476	3.0
G7	44.7%	29.7%	9.6%	$61,735	$59,805	8.3
Difference	69%	-16%	-78%	681%	700%	177%

Sources: Our World in Data, Worldometer, International Monetary Fund

Over 28 world leaders including BRICS members, partner countries, invitees, and several international organizations attended the 2026 BRICS Summit in New Delhi held under the theme *Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability*. The United States is not a member. It is not a partner. President Trump did not attend. But as BBC reported *"…yet President Donald Trump's shadow will loom large over the group's summit in Delhi this weekend."*[xxviii]

An issue of concern at the 2026 Summit is Trump's use of tariffs on BRICS members. Trump's tariffs is a response to the U.S. trade imbalance with BRICS, which is lopsided to Washington's detriment. (Chart 1)

Chart 1[xxix]



This imbalance is not a result of "supply and demand" in a free market world economy. The world economy relies on tariffs for the benefit of local industries. Trump's tariffs are to do the same for local U.S. industries.

On March 17, 2025, radio commentor Brian Mudd, who has appeared on BBC, Fox News, NewsNation, and Newsmax, explained *"…during the second year of President Trump's first term…President Trump offered all non-sanctioned countries a 'zero-tariff deal', or in other words, if they'd drop their tariffs against the US, than Trump either wouldn't impose tariffs against those countries – or would drop those already imposed…what was true seven years ago – remains true today.*

…Prior to President Trump's second term as president how many countries/territories imposed tariffs against US goods? The survey says...197. Yes, 197 countries/territories including every European country, Canada, Mexico – Zimbabwe – you name it. In fact, literally if you name a country – you'll be right. How come. Here's the next trivia question for you... How many countries are there in the world? The answer: 195. Yes, effectively every country in the world plus additional territories impose tariffs against US goods.

Do you care to fancy a guess as to where the US ranks in terms of the use of tariffs – even now? 153. As in 153 countries/territories charge higher tariffs than the United States does. At an average of 1.5% - the US tariff rate remains one of the lowest in the world. The median tariff rate worldwide is currently 2.6%, or a rate that's 73% higher than what the United States has imposed…President Trump's tariffs aren't punitive, as they've so often been positioned in news reporting to be, they're…in response to long standing tariffs imposed by other countries against US goods. [xxx]

Another issue facing the 2026 Summit was Trump's statement of what his Administration will do if BRICS pursue "de-dollarization" seeking to reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar as the primary reserve currency. On September 9, 2026, prior to the start of the Summit, WION reported, "*US President Donald Trump has repeatedly targeted BRICS over de-dollarisation, threatening 100% tariffs on countries seeking to replace the US dollar and an additional 10% levy over alleged anti-American policies. Trump has also mocked the bloc as fading and claimed his pressure weakened it."*[xxxi]

India needed to maintain BRICS unity, but also insure its own "strategic autonomy," which includes increasing trade and investment with the United States.

The result was the New Delhi Declaration *"endorsed de-dollarization in practice — limited to internal currency transactions and settlement frameworks — but stopped short of launching a common currency or directly challenging the dollar's reserve status."*

The same for tariffs. Here "*India's role was pivotal. Russia, China, and Iran pressed for sharper language against Western institutions and the dollar. India resisted, insisting on a 'balanced' text that would not jeopardize its $500 billion trade relationship with the US or its growing partnership with the EU. The compromise was a declaration that condemned 'unilateral measures' and 'tariffs' without naming the United States. This ambiguity was deliberate -- a way to acknowledge grievances while avoiding direct provocation."*[xxxii]

Trump was correct. His pressure did shape the agenda of 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi.

4) How do you explain BRICS Power Triangle - India - Russia – China?

As with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Map 1), BRICS (Map 2) is a platform by which India, China, and Russia can advance their respective strategic interests. Interests that shape their relationships with the United States. (Diagram1)

Map 1[xxxiii]



Map 2
BRICS

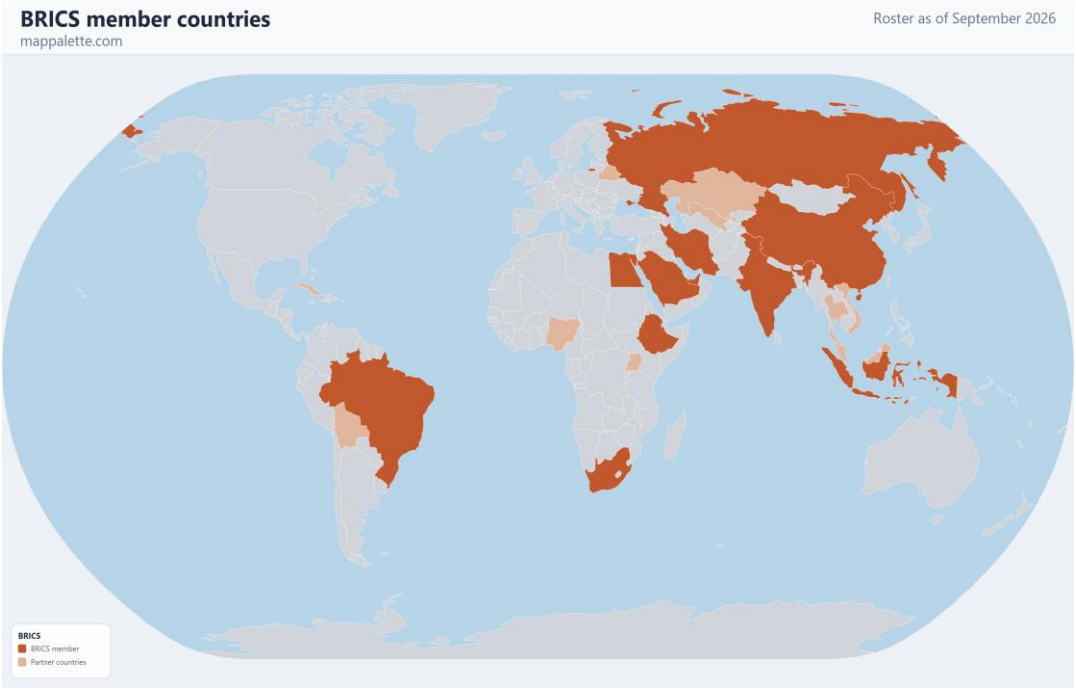
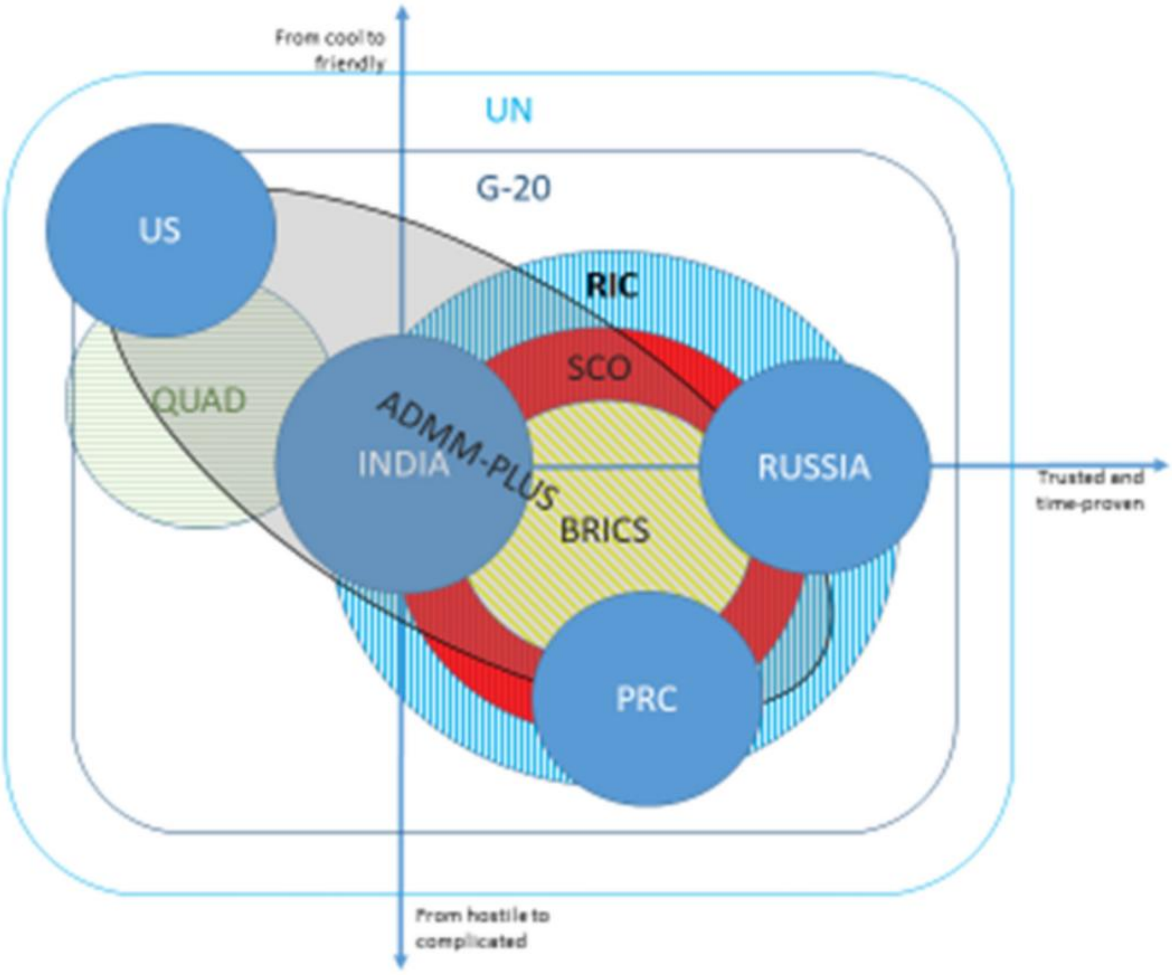
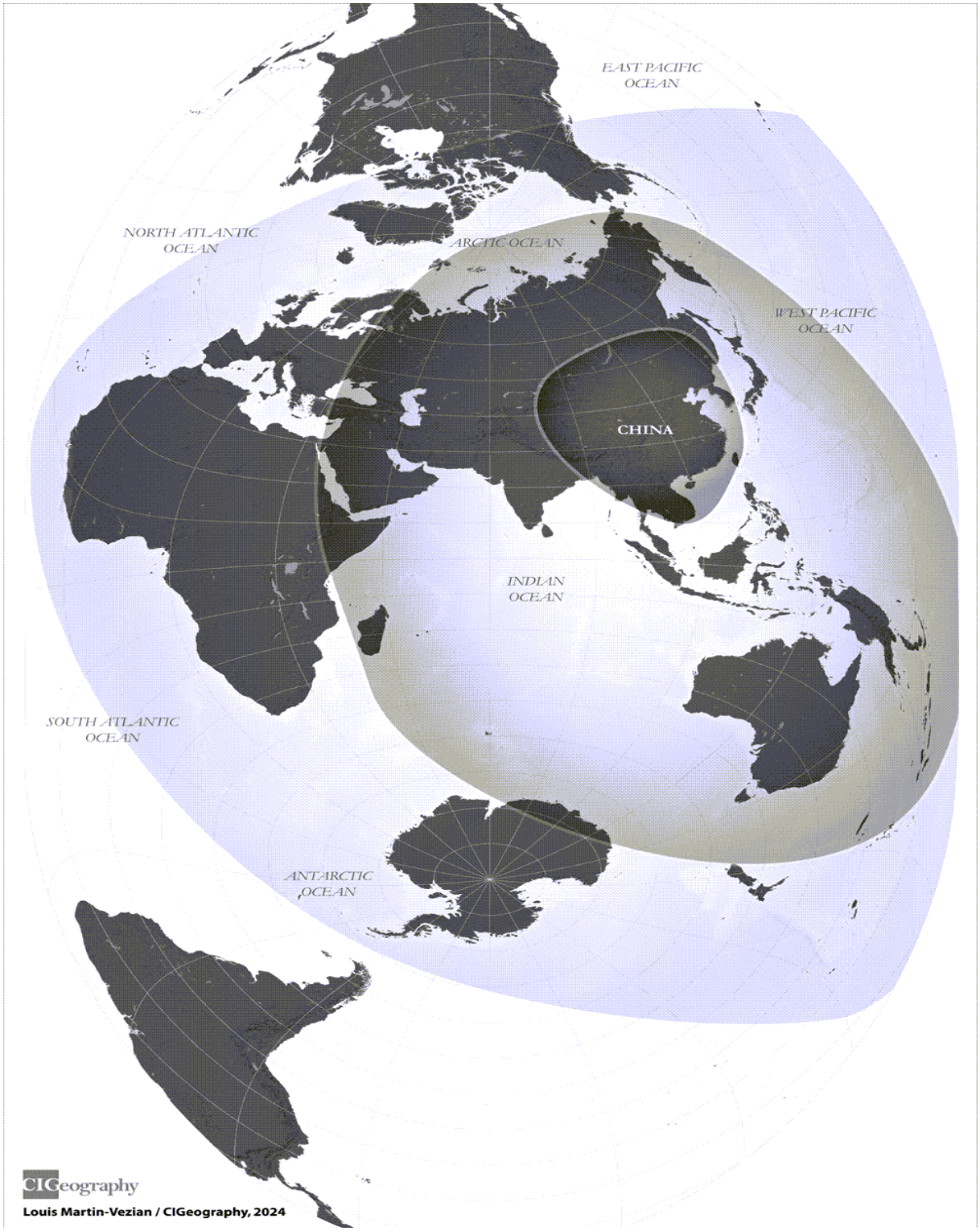


Diagram 1[xxxiv]
India's engagement with USA, Russia, China via international security, political frameworks and institutions.



For China and Russia, BRICS is a vehicle to counter the dominant position of the United States in the post-Cold War world order. Beijing and Moscow seek a multipolar order. For Beijing, multipolarity is a necessary first step in establishing a Sinocentric world order. (Map 3)

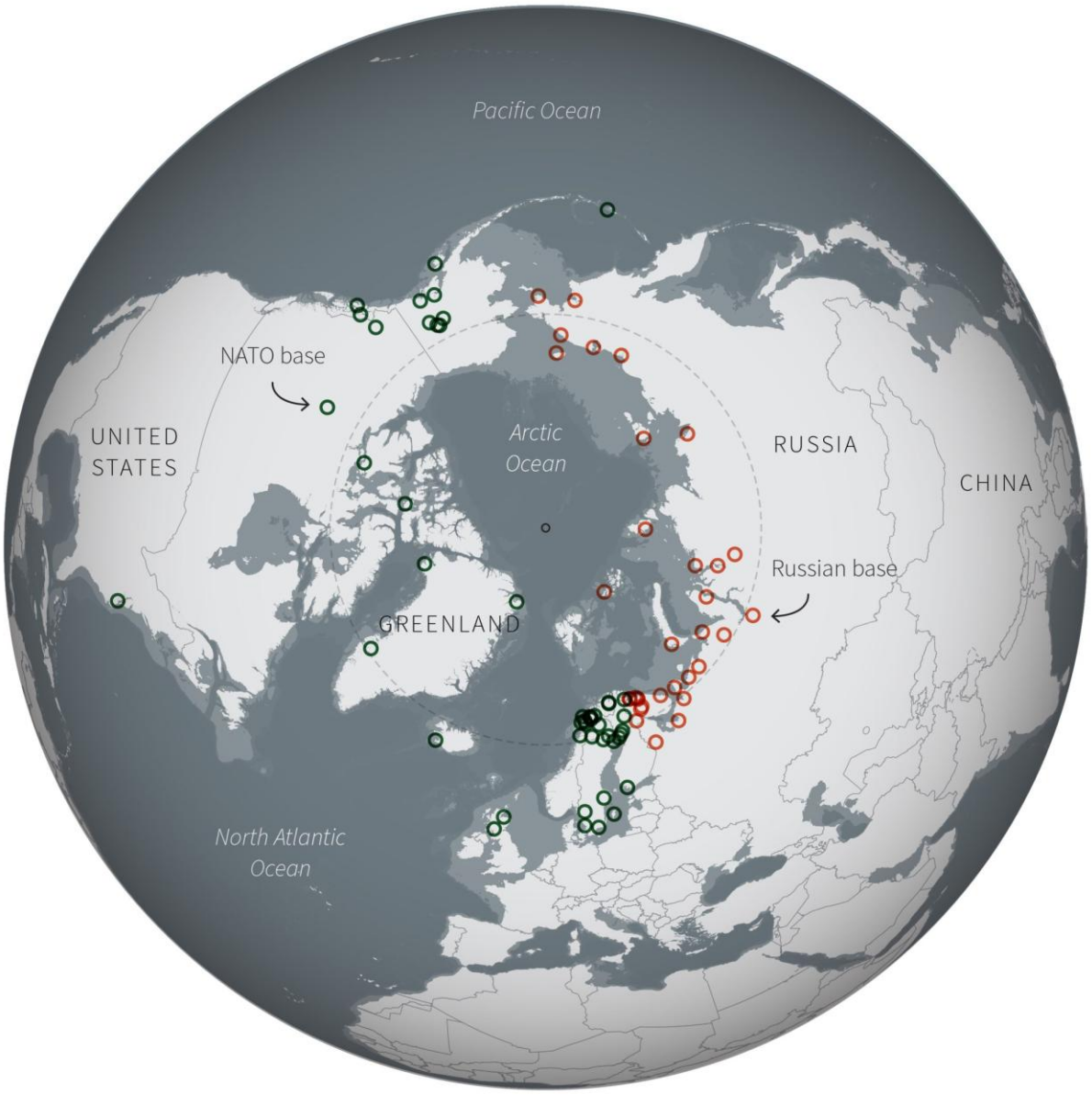
Map 3[xxxv]
Concentric circles of China's strategic space



For Moscow, multipolarity is an economic and strategic necessity to neutralize NATO's encirclement of Russia – North, (Map 4) West, Southwest, South, and East. (Map 5)

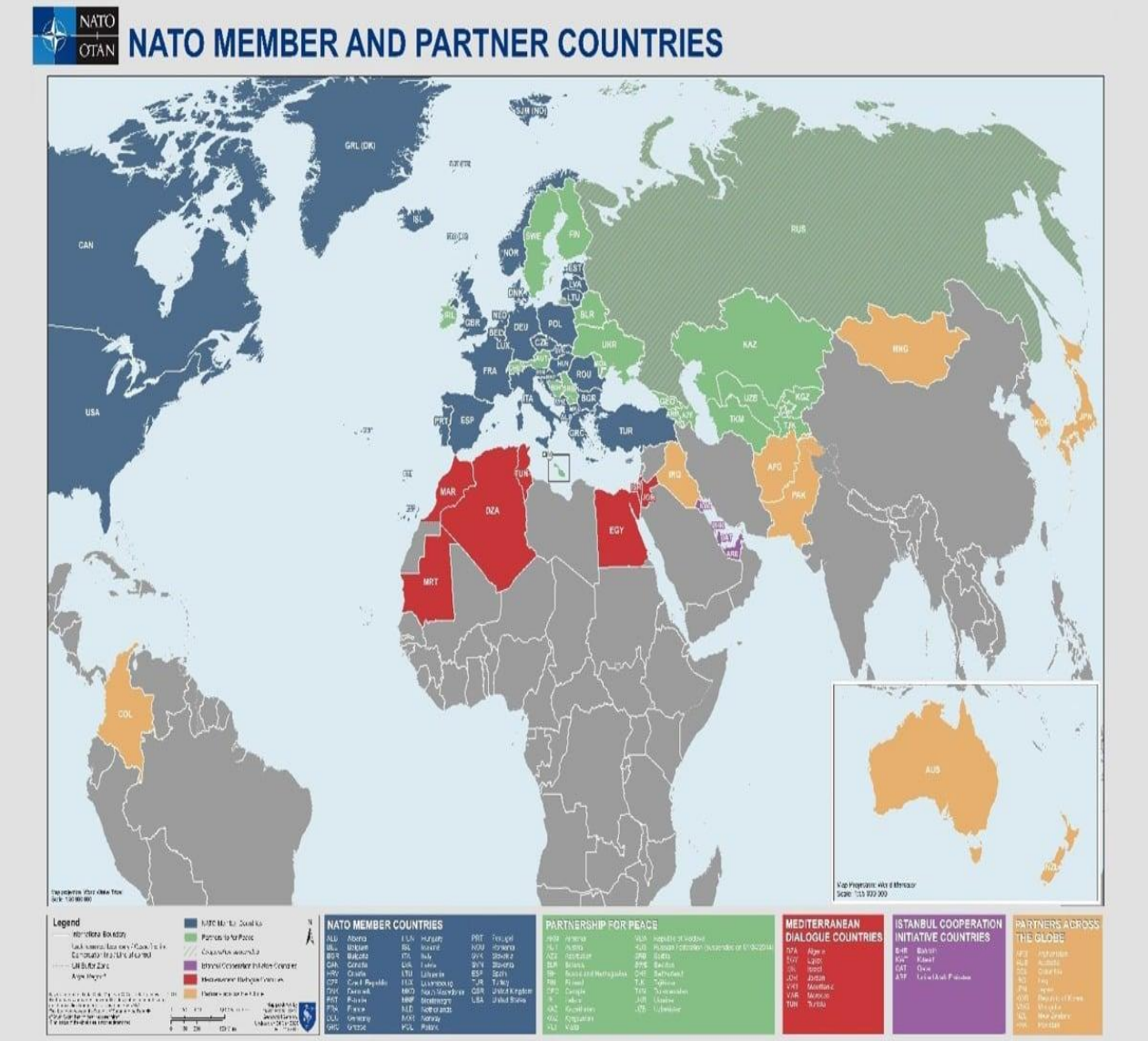
Map 4[xxxvi]

New NATO members help alliance to match Russian military presence in the Arctic region



Sources: Natural Earth; International Institute for Strategic Studies; Telegeography; Reuters Reporting; Center for European Policy Analysis
Vijdan Mohammad Kawoosa; Michael Newton | Reuters; Center for European Policy Analysis Oct. 26, 2024

Map 5[xxxvii]
Encirclement by color: blue, light green, and orange



China and Russia believe multipolarity can be advanced with “de-dollarization” by BRICS members.

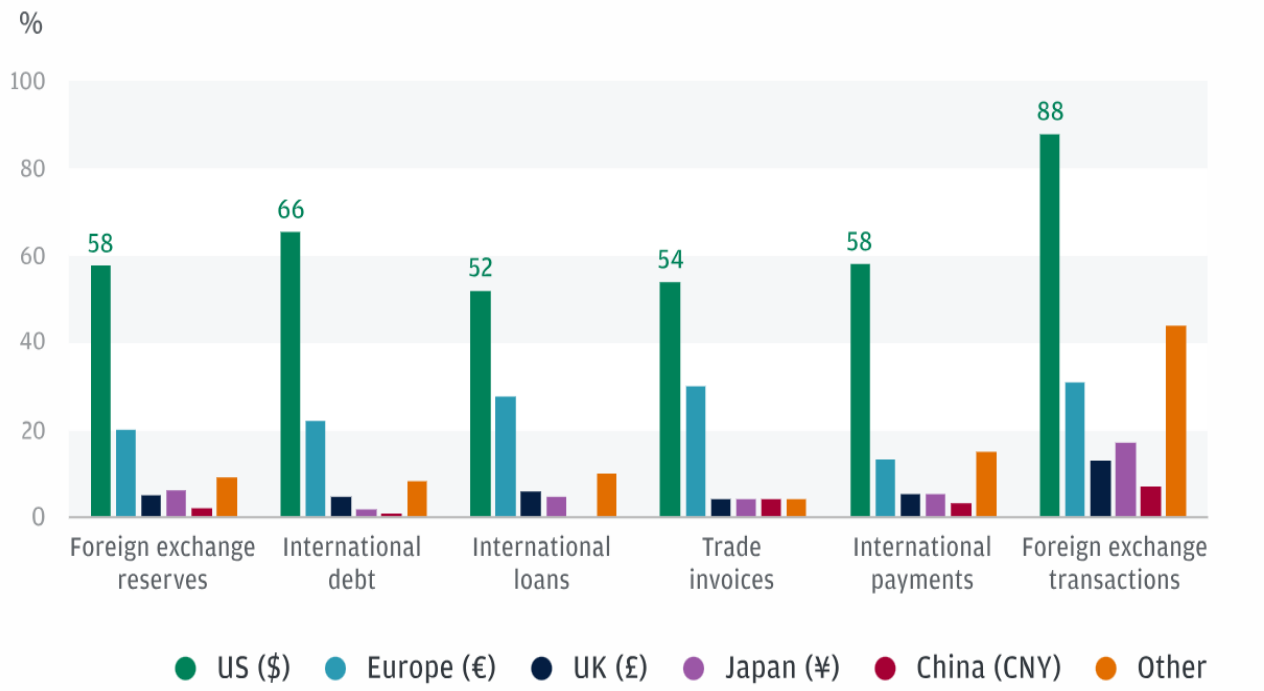
Luis Oganes, head of Global Macro Research at J.P. Morgan, explained *“De-dollarization refers to changes in the structural demand for the dollar that would relate to its status as a reserve currency. This encompasses areas such as transactional dominance in FX volumes or commodities trade, denomination of liabilities and share in central bank FX reserves…the dollar-centric system gives the U.S. significant geopolitical leverage beyond cheaper funding costs, including the ability to impose sanctions and control payment systems…De-dollarization could shift the balance of power among countries, in turn reshaping the global economy and markets. The impact would be most acutely felt in the U.S., where American financial assets would likely underperform versus the rest of the world.”*[xxxviii]

This would benefit China and Russia. *“China is settling more trades in yuan, while BRICS nations are exploring a common currency to reduce their dependence on the dollar.”*[xxxix]

Beijing views "de-dollarization" as necessary for a Sino-centric world order. For Moscow, "de-dollarization" is economic necessity. "*Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the G7 froze around $300 billion of the Russian central bank's foreign-exchange reserves and major Russian banks were cut off from the SWIFT international payments system.*"[xl]

However, a shift away from the dollar has been limited. (Chart 1)

Chart 1[xli]
How the dollar's dominance holds across key metrics



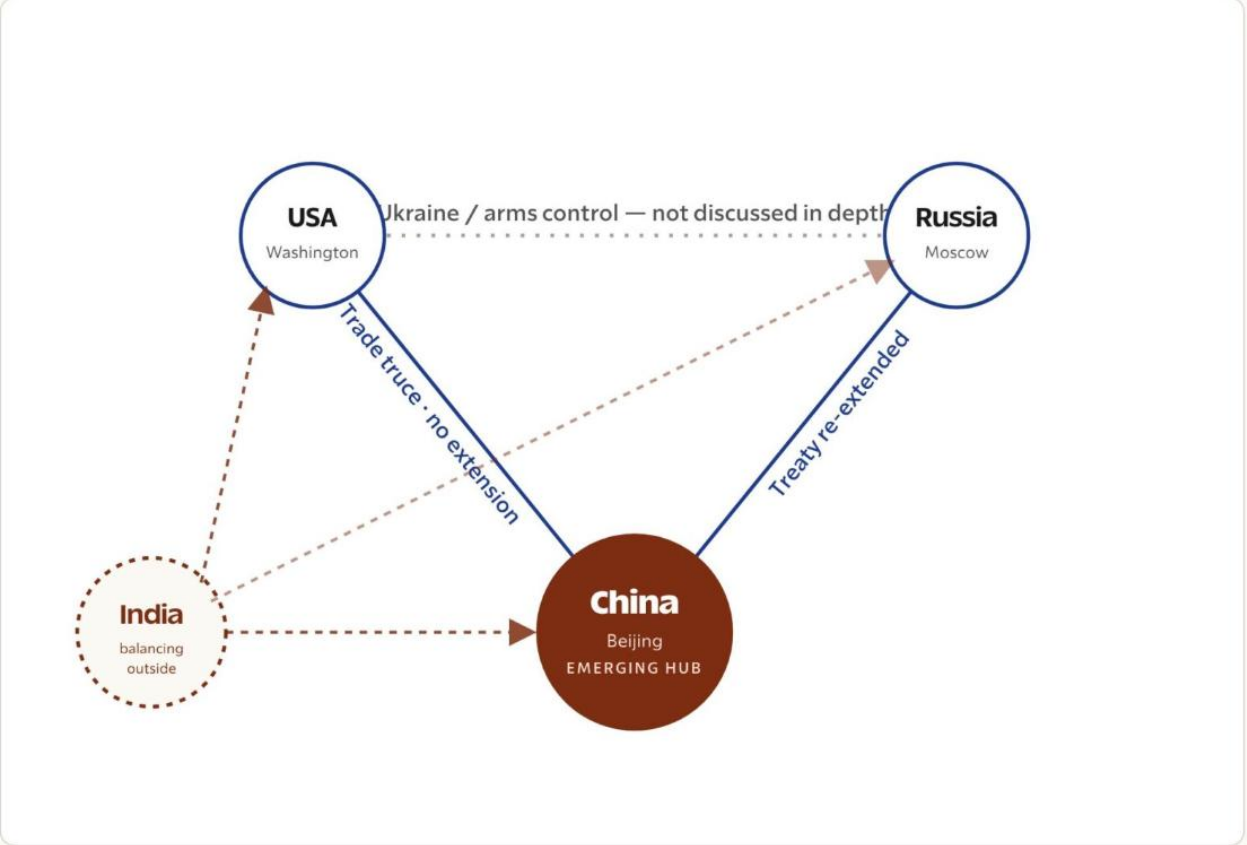
Source: Atlantic Council (Dollar Dominance Monitor); BIS (Triennial Central Bank Survey); Boz et al (2022); ECB (The International Role of the Euro Report, 2023); IMF (COFER); SWIFT (Global Currency Tracker).

Share of global FX reserves excludes gold. International loans data excludes China; China is included in "Other". Trade invoice and international payments data excludes eurozone trade. Sum of shares of FX transactions totals 200%.

While New Delhi favors a new multipolar world order and a shift away from the U.S. dollar, India's differing relationship with China, Russia, and the United States requires diplomatic finesse. (Diagram 2)

Diagram 2[xlii]

"India balances outside a triangle Beijing increasingly anchors"



In "India and the US–China–Russia Triangle: Strategic Autonomy in a Realigning Order," May 31, 2026, Rahul Puri Sir quantified and qualified the geopolitical balancing act New Delhi is pursuing in quest of maximum "strategic autonomy."

Table 1[xliii]



India's multialignment portfolio

One relationship anchors India's supplies, another its largest deficit, a third its sharpest volatility. The three pulls don't reinforce each other — each can be turned into pressure.

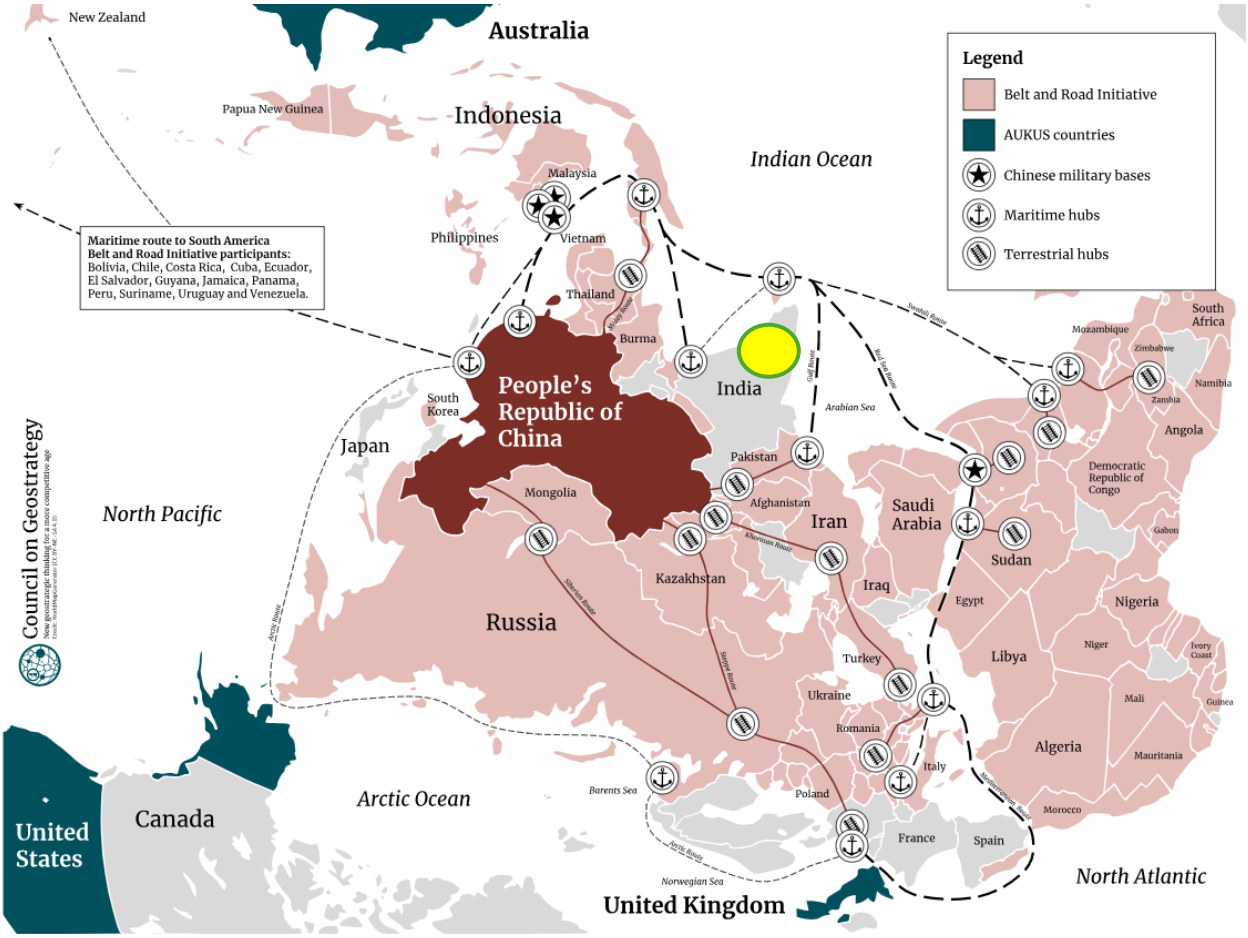
PARTNER	Russia DECLINING BALLAST	United States VOLATILE · TRANSACTIONAL	China CAUTIOUS NORMALISATION
DEFENCE	**~40%** of major-arms imports; S-400 three of five units delivered.	**Rising supplier** Quad and technology cooperation; not yet a top arms source.	**Adversary** Principal strategic competitor along the disputed border.
ENERGY / TRADE	**~35%** of crude (under 1% before 2022); record ~2.3M bpd in early May.	**50→18%** tariff on Indian goods, raised Aug 2025, cut 2 Feb 2026.	**~$100bn** goods-trade deficit, FY2025–26 (a range, ~$100–106bn).
FRICTION	**Junior to Beijing** Analysts note China could throttle components for S-400 / BrahMos.	**Russian-oil pressure** Tariff tied to oil; the halt pledge is a US claim India has not confirmed.	**LAC standoff** Depsang & Demchok disengaged on patrolling — not a resolved boundary.
TRAJECTORY	Falling share of arms, surging share of oil — still ballast, more dependent on China.	Long-term partner India most needs, renegotiated in every trade cycle.	Worth normalising; mistaking disengagement for resolution loses marks.

The asymmetry: India's deepest dependence runs to Russia, the weakest corner; its largest deficit to China, the strongest; its most volatile tie to the US, the one it most needs. The pulls work against each other.

Concurrently, China, a historic rival, is trying to economically and strategically isolate India in a new multipolar world, which Beijing seeks to be Sinocentric. (Map 6)

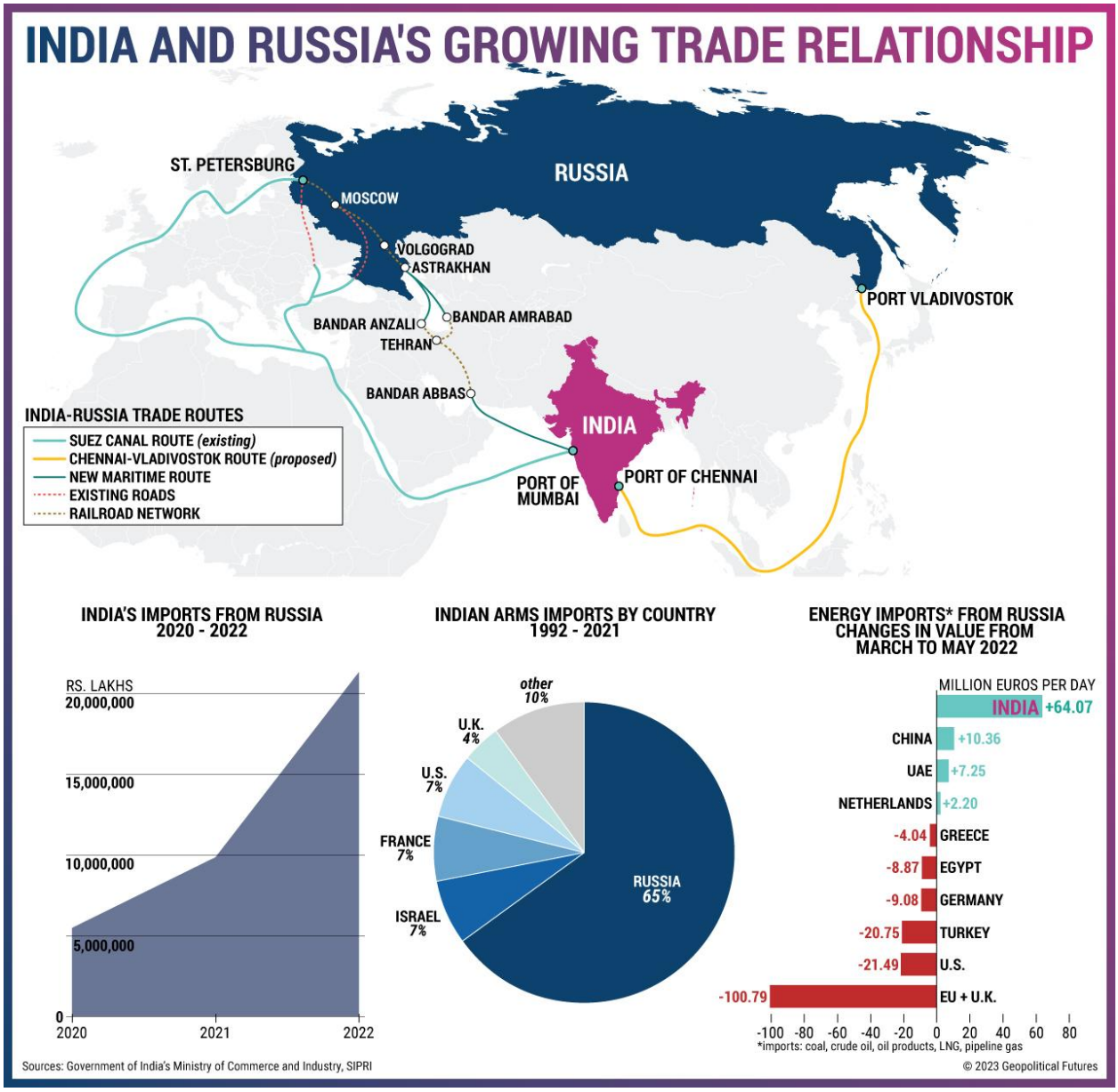
Map 6[xliv]

A Sinocentric world: The Belt and Road Initiative



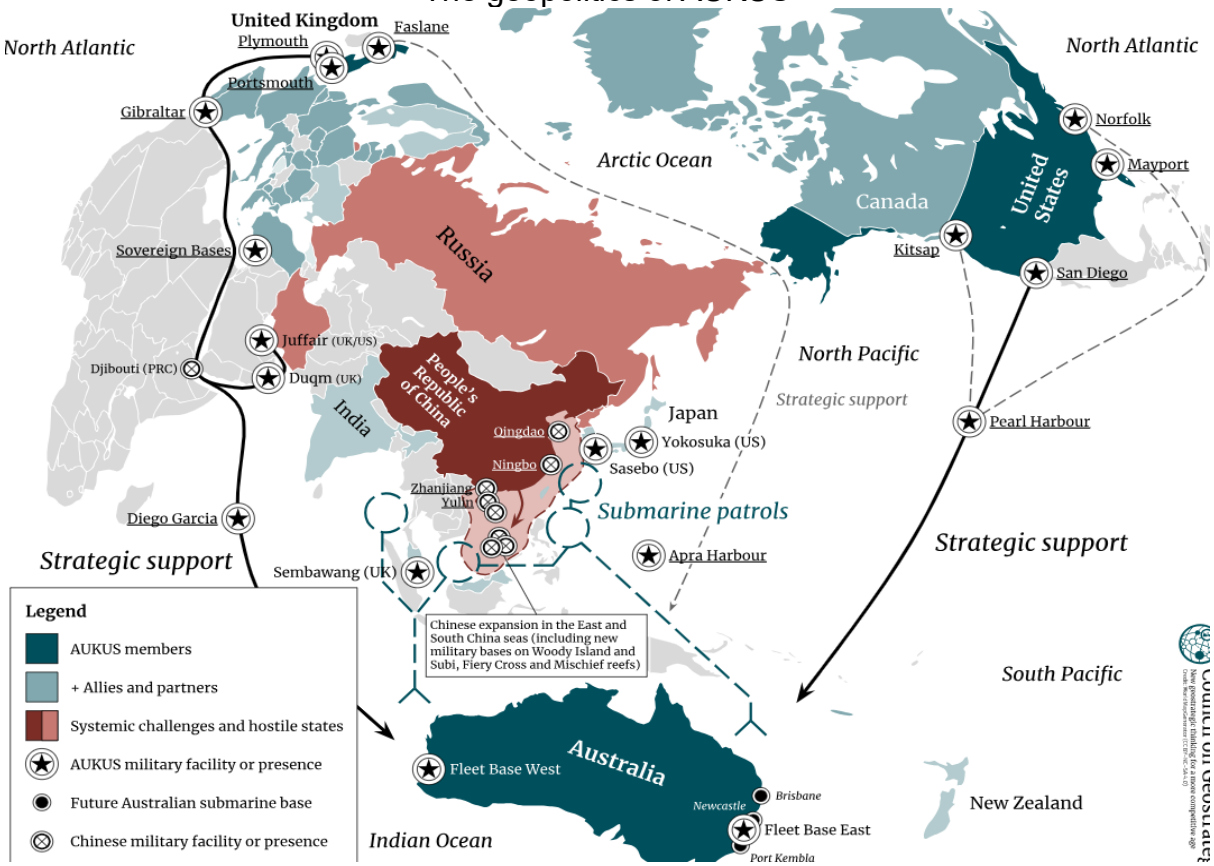
While Russia, a historic friend currently economically weak offers New Delhi, with the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war, avenues to increase India's global trade and offset, if not undercut, China's Belt Road Initiative. (Map 7)

Map 7[xlv]

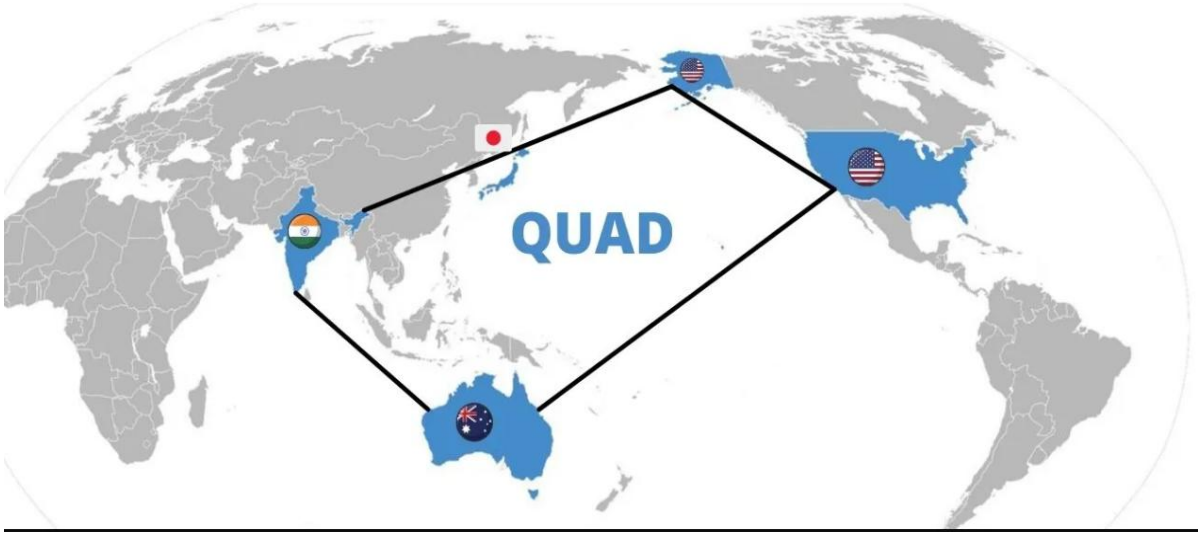


Despite the volatile nature of U.S.-India relations, as a result of tariffs, in addition to trade and investment, Washington offers New Delhi strategic security and a means to enhance India's strategic depth against China through AUKUS, the security pact among Australia, the U.K., and the U.S., (Map 8) and the diplomatic forum of the Quad among India, Japan, Australia, and the U.S. (Map 9).

Map 8[xlvi]
The geopolitics of AUKUS



Map 9[xlvii]



It is by balancing China, Russia, and the United States in this manner that New Delhi can achieve, maintain, and enhance India's "strategic autonomy."

5) How do you assess India's BRICS Diplomacy.

India's diplomacy maintained cohesion of BRICS and a consensus on the 140 points of the New Delhi Declaration.[xlviii] In addition, India's BRICS diplomacy was also a success for New Delhi's policy of "strategic autonomy."

As Shashi Tharoor wrote in "India's Strategic Autonomy in a Multipolar world," January 2026, "*Strategic autonomy refers to a nation's ability to make sovereign decisions in foreign policy and defence without being constrained by external pressures or alliance obligations. It is not synonymous with isolationism or neutrality. Rather, it implies flexibility, independence and the capacity to engage with multiple powers on one's own terms."* [xlix]
(Diagram 1)

Diagram 1[l]



This wording for "strategic autonomy" is similar in intent to words Interim Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru spoke in an address to the Constituent Assembly in 1946. "*We propose, as far as possible, to keep away from the power politics of groups, aligned against one another, which have led in the past to wars and which may again lead to disasters on an even vaster scale."*[li]

Upon that principle, India helped establish the Non-Aligned Movement over the following decade.

In a lecture half a century later, former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao said in 1995, *"As classically formulated, Non-Alignment probably assumes a different significance from the one it had in the third quarter of our century…But as a principle of equity and sanity, which enabled the developing nations to speak with a voice of dignity in the fora of the world, Non- Alignment is as relevant today as it was when it was enunciated."* [lii]

At a more recent seminar, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar asked his audience a rhetorical question. *"Imagine if [India were] not today adopting strategic autonomy. Please tell me, which country in the world would you like to join up with and put our future in their hands?...I can't think of anybody. [India's] interest is best secured by [India] maximising its options, maintaining its freedom of choices."*[liii]

Times change. The Cold War ended. The Warsaw Pact was dissolved. The Soviet Union collapsed. NATO expanded across Europe only to become redundant. China discarded Maoism and became the world's second largest power. India discarded socialism and became the world's sixth largest economic power.

Despite this "brave, new world," the principle of "strategic autonomy" remains as true and as vital for India today as when Nehru first articulated the concept 80 years ago.

India's 'strategic autonomy" can be seen in its active membership in numerous regional and international organizations. (Chart 1)

Chart 1[liv]



India's diplomatic success with the BRICS New Delhi Declaration: Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability as well as its previous chairmanship of BRICS in 2012, 2016, and 2021, has enabled India to pursue "strategic autonomy" and advance its voice as "leader of the Global South."

Please see END NOTES at -pp174-pp177

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6) Dr.CARLYLE A Thayer

INDIA AND BRICS

Q1. Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob-HT). Do you agree?

ANSWER: Happymon Jacob writes that "[The BRICS] is a messaging platform and a pressure group." He does not define "pressure group" and this may lead to the inference that it carries the same meaning when used to analyse domestic politics. In this context, "pressure group" carries a somewhat pejorative connotation as a group that seeks to influence government policy outside normal channels.

The BRICS is better described as an intergovernmental coalition of states that coordinates policy on specific issues to advance their common interests. In other words, the BRICS brings its non-western members together to draw up an agenda and coordinate their collective criticism of the current international order and its multilateral institutions. In addition, the BRICS has taken its first nascent steps to institutionalise this process by establishing the New Development Bank to finance development projects.

The BRICS is not yet a fully-fledged international institution with a formal structure that functions to promote policy on specific issues. The BRICS lacks institutional cohesion because its members have divergent national interests. The BRICS does not make authoritative decisions that are binding on its members. The BRICS has no power of enforcement.

In sum, the BRICS is a loose intergovernmental coalition of states that bargain together to fashion a common agenda to promote changes to the norms and structures of global governance through public diplomacy.

Q2. How do you assess BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

ANSWER: India hosted the 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi on 12–13 September 2026 under the theme "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability." The summit adopted the 140-paragraph New Delhi Declaration.

The 2026 New Delhi Declaration set out the following reform agenda: greater representation for developing countries in the United Nation and international financial institutions, opposition to unilateral sanctions, increased use of national currencies, and stronger cooperation in areas such as development, technology, artificial intelligence, digital public infrastructure, health, climate change, supply chains, counterterrorism and reform of global institutions.

The 2026 New Delhi Declaration was a diplomatic success for India and a useful political statement for the Global South. The 2026 New Delhi Declaration demonstrated that the expanded BRICS was able to reach consensus on a reform agenda for global governance despite major differences among its members.

In sum, the 2026 New Delhi Declaration demonstrates the BRICS' growing political relevance. The Declaration's criticism of unilateral sanctions and concern over conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East indicated that the BRICS coalition was willing to challenge Western dominance in international affairs.

The 2026 New Delhi Declaration was an important achievement for India itself as it supported a larger role for India and other developing countries in international decision-making. Specifically, India was able to represent the BRICS as intergovernmental coalition of states calling for reform of the current international order rather than an anti-Western alliance seeking to overturn international order. Prime Minister Modi's formulation of BRICS as a coalition seeking to become a "rule-shaper" for the Global South reflected India's preference for strategic autonomy and a multipolar world.

However, the New Delhi Declaration was lengthy and ambitious and many of its commitments were general, non-binding and dependent on future implementation. BRICS members remain divided over China's leadership ambitions, Russia's war in Ukraine, relations with the United States, the Middle East, trade policy and the pace of de-dollarization.

The Delhi Declaration strengthened the perception of BRICS as an intergovernmental coalition negotiating forum thus contributing to its visibility and political influence.

Q3. Trump says BRICS has no consensus. How much did US pressure shape the agenda of 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi?

ANSWER: President Donald Trump's criticism of the BRICS had a substantial impact on its 2026 New Delhi agenda but not entirely in the way he would have liked.

Trump's tariffs, threats of sanctions, and criticism against a BRICS common currency resulted in spotlighting three sets of issues that BRICS member could rally around: (1) opposition to unilateral tariffs and non-tariff barriers; (2) opposition to unilateral and secondary sanctions; and (3) support for greater use of national currencies, interoperable payment systems, and a stronger New Development Bank. At the same time, Trump's efforts to pressure BRICS resulted in self-imposed restraint by its members who toned down their anti-American rhetoric.

The New Delhi Declaration did not mention the United States or President Trump by name. BRICS members, however, clearly expressed their opposition to U.S. economic coercion. The New Delhi Declaration criticised tariff measures as inconsistent with World Trade Organisation rules and condemned unilateral sanctions that were not authorised by the UN Security Council. BRICS members refrained from directly endorsing their own currency. Instead, the New Delhi Declaration called for an expansion of local-currency finance and a reduction in their vulnerability to Western financial institutions.

Trump's pressure, however, did impact on the BRICS' political-security agenda. The New Delhi Declaration condemned attacks on civilian infrastructure and nuclear facilities and called for restraint in the Middle East without directly mentioning Israel and the United States. But Trump's pressure alone does not explain this moderation. Both Iran and the United Arab Emirates are BRICS members with conflicting interests.

Trump's claim that BRICS lacked consensus is only partly correct. As the New Delhi Declaration demonstrated, BRICS members reached consensus on broad principles such as support for multilateralism, opposition to unilateral sanctions, reform of global institutions, and agreed to carry out the following concrete proposals:

- No common BRICS currency: India made clear that BRICS was not considering replacing the U.S. dollar with a common BRICS currency.

- Local-currency trade and payments: BRICS supported expanding trade settlement in national currencies and improving links among members' payment systems.
- New Development Bank (NDB): BRICS encouraged the NDB to increase local-currency lending and diversify its funding. The NDB approved approximately US$42.9 billion for 139 projects by 2026, giving BRICS one of its clearest institutional achievements.
- Digital public infrastructure: India promoted a BRICS repository and pilot projects based partly on its experience with Unified Payments Interface and other digital public goods.
- Artificial intelligence (AI): The grouping endorsed cooperation on AI governance, access to AI capabilities and the interests of developing countries.
- Industrial and health cooperation: India proposed an India Centre for BRICS Industrial Competencies, health-training networks and cooperation on mental health.

In sum, Trump's pressure resulted in a moderation of the BRICS summit's geopolitical and economic messaging, but it did not shape the overall agenda. The broader programme — development, technology, climate, space, urban cooperation and institutional reform — reflected longstanding BRICS priorities and India's chairmanship.

Q4. How do you explain or assess the BRICS Power Triangle India-Russia-China?

ANSWER: The BRICS "power triangle" of India, Russia and China is best assessed as a strategic triangle of converging interests, unequal capabilities and persistent mistrust; but the "power triangle" is not a cohesive security pact or alliance.

The China-Russia side of the power triangle is the strongest. China and Russia are closely aligned against the U.S.-dominated international order. They both oppose Trump's unilateral sanctions and Western intervention. They both support a multipolar international order, coordinate their diplomatic efforts at the United Nations and other international forums, and engage in extensive cooperation in energy, technology and defence.

The relationship is not equal. China is economically and technologically much stronger, while Russia has become more dependent on Chinese markets, finance and diplomatic support since its invasion of Ukraine. Russia is China's strategic partner, but it pulls back from becoming China's subordinate.

The India-Russia side of the triangle is durable. India and Russia have a substantial relationship based on a diplomatic legacy dating from the Soviet period. They closely work together across several areas including: defence cooperation and Russian-origin military equipment; energy imports of discounted Russian oil; and nuclear energy and space.

The India-Russia relationship is changing. India's dependence on Russian arms has declined as it diversifies toward the United States, France and Israel. Trade has expanded sharply because of Russian oil purchases, but it is heavily unbalanced in Russia's favour. India also recognises that Russia's deepening partnership with China limits Moscow's willingness to oppose China on India's behalf. The India-Russia side of the triangle is robust and resilient, but it is no longer the near-exclusive strategic partnership it was during the Cold War.

The India-China side of the triangle is a decisive fault line. India and China cooperate within BRICS on issues such as development finance, reform of global institutions, de-dollarization and opposition to unilateral sanctions. But their bilateral relationship is defined by strategic competition in five areas: the unresolved Himalayan boundary dispute; continuing military tensions and the legacy of the 2020 Galwan clash; competition for influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean; China's finance of infrastructure and diplomatic support for Pakistan; and a large and structurally unequal trade relationship.

China and India periodically resume dialogue and military-to-military communication. But tactical stabilization of bilateral relations should not be confused with strategic trust. China views India as a major regional competitor; India views China as its principal long-term security challenge.

The triangle's strategic geometry is summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1

BRICS Power Triangle India- Russia-China

Dyad	Main Features of Bilateral Relations	Main limitations
China-Russia	Anti-hegemonic alignment; energy, diplomatic and military cooperation	Russia's growing dependence on China
India-Russia	Historical ties; defence, energy, nuclear	Russia's closer China partnership and trade imbalance
India-China	Economic interdependence and shared BRICS interests	Border dispute and systemic rivalry

India is the swing power or pivot point in this triangle. It cooperates with Russia and China through BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Russia-India-China (RIC) format. At the same time, India participates in the Quad with the United States, Japan and Australia and seeks closer security and technology ties with Western countries. This reflects India's strategy of multi-alignment to preserve room for manoeuvre by preventing any one major power from becoming indispensable.

What does the India-China-Russia power triangle mean for BRICS? China supplies the greatest economic weight and increasingly shapes the organization's agenda. Russia supplies diplomatic activism and the sharpest opposition to Western sanctions. India supplies legitimacy as an independent non-Western power. India's membership prevents BRICS from being viewed simply as a Chinese (or China-Russia) led anti-Western bloc.

In sum, the power triangle gives BRICS political and diplomatic heft, but at the same time imposes constraints on decisive action. BRICS is most effective when it concentrates on institutional reform, development finance, trade, technology, local-currency payments and the representation of the Global South. It is much less effective when it attempts to reach a common position on security crises, conflict in the Middle East or the structure of the current international order.

Overall assessment

The power triangle is politically and diplomatically significant but strategically fragile. China and Russia are the closest dyad, but their relationship is unequal and increasingly China-centred. India and Russia remain partners, but Russia's dependence on China creates complications. India and China share an interest in limiting Western dominance, but they are also serious strategic competitors. India is therefore the balancing or moderating force within BRICS.

The power triangle's importance lies less in producing a unified bloc than in creating a negotiating space for a more plural international order. BRICS can constrain Western dominance to a certain extent and amplify the voice of emerging powers, but it is not a coherent alternative to the present global order while the India-China strategic rivalry remains unresolved. In summary, China provides the weight, Russia provides the geopolitical edge, and India provides the strategic balance—but their rivalries mitigate against the power triangle from becoming a political bloc or strategic alliance.

Q 5. How do you assess India's BRICS Diplomacy?

ANSWER: India's BRICS diplomacy is best understood as an example of the practical pursuit of strategic autonomy. BRICS provides the framework for India to expand its influence in the Global South by advocating the reform of global institutions while constraining BRICS from evolving into an anti-Western alliance.

There are five main features that characterise India's BRICS diplomacy.

First, India pursues a balancing strategy, not bloc politics. India has resisted efforts to define BRICS as an anti-American or anti-Western coalition. At the 2026 New Delhi summit, Prime Minister Modi presented BRICS as a platform for making the Global South a "rule-shaper," rather than replacing one hegemon with another. India is a member of the Quad and simultaneously maintains close ties with United States, Japan, Australia and Europe.

Second, India uses BRICS to manage the China-Russia relationship**.** BRICS provides India a diplomatic framework in which it can engage China and Russia without being co-opted into their wider geopolitical agendas. This is particularly pertinent when India-China relations remain competitive and Russia's relations with the West remain confrontational. For example, India used the BRICS New Delhi summit to host separate bilateral meeting with Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin and other leaders (Iran).

Third, the BRICS provides India the platform to demonstrate leadership on behalf of the Global South. For example, India promotes reform of the UN Security Council, international financial reform through greater voting power for developing countries in the IMF and World Bank, and stronger representation for Asia, Africa and Latin America. The New Delhi Declaration welcomed support for a larger role for India (and Brazil) in the UN system.

Fourth, BRICS also provides India with a platform to advance practical economic cooperation. For example, India supports trade facilitation, supply-chain resilience, digital and critical minerals cooperation, energy security and development finance. India's exports to the core BRICS countries rose sharply in 2026, although its overall trade relationship with China remains structurally unbalanced.

Fifth, BRICS provides India a diplomatic platform to forge broad consensus on selective international issues of concern to the Global South, such as development, energy, terrorism

and institutional reform, that in turn restrain BRICS from adopting agendas set by China or Russia. India's most significant innovation was Prime Minister Modi's proposal for a BRICS Continuity and Implementation Mechanism. This would create a Troika of the previous, current and incoming chairs, supported by a secure digital repository recording each decision, its responsible agency, timetable and implementation status

Membership expansion has increased BRICS representativeness but also made consensus more difficult. India, for example, is dependent on Western markets, technology, investment and security partnerships. India is therefore constrained from supporting the evolution of the BRICS into an economic counterweight to the United States and the West.

The limitations of BRICS as a diplomatic platform are substantial. BRICS is increasingly heterogeneous as its membership expands. Its members differ over China's ambitions, Russia's war in the Ukraine, conflict in the Middle East, multilateral economic cooperation, and the future of the international order.

Overall assessment

India's 2026 BRICS chairmanship demonstrated that BRICS is influential as an intergovernmental coalition of states but not an established multilateral institution. BRICS is an expanding diplomatic network whose practical influence is growing incrementally, but whose political impact remains constrained by internal divisions and the absence of binding commitments.

India prefers BRICS to be sufficiently effective to increase its bargaining power, but insufficiently cohesive to become a rival bloc dominated by China or aligned against the United States.

India conducted pragmatic diplomacy at the BRICS summit to advance multipolarity, Global South representation and economic diversification without abandoning strategic links with the West. Its success lies less in transforming BRICS into a coherent geopolitical bloc than in making it intergovernmental coalition of states.

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7) ANDREY VOLODIN

Andrey Volodin, *Centre for Studies of the Global South Societies, Institute for Scientific Information on Social Sciences (INION), Russian Academy of Sciences*

Interview on BRICS

1. BRICS has never been a 'pressure group', for two basic reasons. Number one: West-centred world order has actually ceased to exist. It is an established fact. International affairs are not in a position to function in case they are devoid of an institution/ organization shaping the global space for a foreseeable future. Otherwise universal chaos is inevitable paving the way for total destruction of the humankind. It goes ANDEY without saying that no nation is interested in such an ominous perspective. Some kind of a new and viable organization of world affairs is a 'must'. Number two: Brazil, Russia, India and China were acting as plenipotentiary representatives (at time of inception) of the World Majority, though their intention to find a new path of world

development was not politically articulated for reasons quite known. Let me remind the readership that during the 2007-2009 global financial crisis (with its traditional Western lenders mired in a slump), the International Monetary Fund appealed to China and oil-rich Gulf monarchies for $ 150 billion it needed to help poor developing nations overcome financial crisis. Reflecting the general sentiment of the non-Western world, Shi Jianxum, a prominent Chinese economist and expert, voiced for 'a diversified financial order that is not dependent on the United States'.

2. and 5. Russian scholars engaged in academic studies of international affairs are of the opinion (at least a large part of them) that India 'is playing the second fiddle to America' in the area of world politics. This argument further goes on to say that 'the world's largest democracy' is so fearful of its 'great neighbour in the North' that it is prepared to yield part of its sovereign power even to a non-regional actor, namely the United States. This mode of thinking is evidently an oversimplification. In reality the India-China 'picture' is more complex. Theoretically speaking, neither country is in a position to destroy the 'adversary'; hence, India and China are doomed to competition and cooperation under conditions of the emerging world order that is becoming more and more diversified. In my humble opinion, since the 1955 Bandung Conference, India and China have advocated different approaches to the handling of world affairs. Putting this statement another way, it has always been a protracted conflict between the 'soft power' and 'hard power' (according to the outstanding economist Prem Shankar Jha). Nowadays, India is 'refurbishing' its foreign policy paradigm. 'Strategic dialogue' with America gradually gives way to the more balanced attitude to world politics centred around the principles of *Realpolitik* advocated and pursued by Indira Gandhi. The principle of 'India First' was implicit in the text of the 2026 Delhi Declaration; that is the reason why China had no controversies with India and why the Declaration was endorsed by the other BRICS participants. Under the new, 'turbulent' world politics circumstances, the methods used by Indian diplomacy are subjects to change, renewal and rearrangement.
3. President Trump has a sovereign right to articulate whatever he likes. So far as my humble knowledge goes, the only international body functioning on the principle of consensus today is ASEAN. Nonetheless, Trump was instrumental of BRICS elaborating a new policy agenda. Here and there, President Trump stresses the paramount importance of America's *reindustrialization* as an instrument of recapturing a 'major power' (R.Nixon) status by the USA. India, among other nations, is the target of Trump's sanctions and tariffs policy. In a sense, this pressure by America is gradually but irreversibly changing India's foreign policy model- from that of the junior partner of the United States to that of the 'India first' course defending national industry and coming back to the unyielding intellectual and political nationalism successfully advocated by Indira Gandhi. This 'divorce of convenience' with America, in its own way, shaped the agenda of 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi. In a broader geopolitics perspective, India seems to have already opted for *Realpolitik* enjoying the support of the other BRICS member states.
4. The BRICS Power Triangle India-Russia-China has a number of manifestations. The BRICS dimension has a dialectics of its own. For example, India and Russia are less developed economically; hence, the economic cooperation between our two countries is a natural and desired means of balancing China's superiority in this field. At the same time, all the three powers are vitally interested in establishing a diversified world order; also India, China and Russia are obsessed with peace, progress and stability in neighbouring areas, namely in Central Asia. To be more concrete, the 'big troika' is keen on the preservation of secular political regimes and secular political elites'

dominance in Central Asia. Cooperation inside the Eurasian 'big three' is a vital foundation of peace and security on this gigantic landmass.

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8) Prof. M.B. ALAM

1. Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob-HT) Do you agree?

I do not agree with the term , 'pressure group' per se for being used for BRICS for the following reasons. One, BRICS is a multilateral body that works with an approach of consensus based on retaining each country's core national interests. Second, BRICS has à rather modest goal and objective in laying out its agenda before a global forum for wider dissemination. And, third, BRICS, tries and strives to bridge the divide among participating countries on issues ranging from climate change to having one single currency.

2. How do you assess BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

India did make a notable contribution in calling for an 'end of war', be it in Ukraine or Iran, as these conflicts are having debilitating impact on geopolitics and global economy and which may take years to recover. Additionally , India did provide value addition in sync with the BRICS Summit motto of 'Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability' and within the broad gamut of sovereign equality, openness, transparency and inclusiveness.

3. Trump says BRICS has no consensus.How much did US pressure shaped the agenda of 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi ?

I do not think President Trump had any personal agenda for this specific Delhi BRICS summit . As for as the US Administration is concerned, yes, US as a major industrial and military power, did want to insure that its hegemony in world affairs do not get diluted by any of the major contending parties, be it China or Russia. Furthermore, Trump also has had his own way of looking at multilateral institutions from purely transactional framework taking MAGA doctrine in an absolutist sense.

4. How do you explain BRICS Power Triangle -India -Russia-China.

As for troika: India, Russia and China, there are areas of convergence as well as divergence. In an uncertain and unpredictable world, no single country benefits and only by forging consensus in a collaborative way, each nation can navigate the uncharted global

churning and tumult in a much more measured and calibrated way.

5. How do you assess India's BRICS Diplomacy.

India did play a sterling role by addressing onerous challenges with a balanced, proactive, actionable, sustainable, goal-oriented and pro-people approach. India also took the lead in making a clarion call for bolstering WTO's basic objectives towards lessening of trade disruptions and in providing a doable roadmap for the emerging markets and developing economies (EMDEs) particularly for the Global South. India, as the Chair, also ensured the use of space resources for peaceful applications and for sustainability of outer space activities and prevention of arms race in outer space by forging consensus in formulating viable confidence-building measures.

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9) Dr.NADIA HELMY

Replying the questions regarding the BRICS, sent from Prof. Mahendra Gaur

Interview with: Dr. Nadia Helmy

Egyptian expert on Chinese Politics, the policies of the ruling Communist Party of China, Sino-Israeli relationships, and Asian affairs – Professor of Political Science, Beni Suef University- Visiting senior researcher at Centre For Middle Eastern Studies "CMES" at Lund University, Sweden. Director of the South and East Asia Studies Unit

1. **Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob-HT) Do you agree?**

The issue sparks considerable debate among political and economic analysts and cannot be settled with either absolute approval or outright rejection; the view that BRICS is merely a "lobby group" rests on strong grounds, yet there is also evidence reinforcing its status as a rising geopolitical and economic bloc.

To evaluate this proposition objectively, one can consider the arguments for and against the idea, **as follows:**

- **First: Arguments in favor "BRICS as a lobby group"**

1. Lack of political cohesion and shared agendas: The bloc lacks a unified political ideology or a shared system of governance. For instance, it brings together the world's largest democracy (India) with vastly different governance systems **(such as those of China and Russia)**, alongside deep-seated border and geopolitical disputes between India and China.

2. Absence of a robust institutional structure: Unlike the European Union or NATO, BRICS possesses no permanent secretariat, defense treaties, or binding common market; this renders it more of a platform for coordination and issuing joint statements than an executive bloc.

3. Focus on reforming the existing system rather than replacing it: To date, the group's efforts have centered on pressuring international financial institutions **(such as the IMF and the World Bank)** to grant developing nations a greater voice - behavior characteristic of lobby groups

Secondly: Counter-arguments: "BRICS as an influential economic and geopolitical bloc"

1. Alternative financial institutions: The group has successfully established the New Development Bank **(NDB)** and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement **(CRA)**. These are practical steps that go beyond mere **"media hype"** or rhetoric, providing actual funding for infrastructure projects.

2. **Continuous expansion and magnetic appeal:** The group's expansion and the accession of new members reflect a collective desire among "Global South" nations to create an alternative to - **or a counterweight against** - Western influence **(represented by the G7)**. This grants the bloc immense demographic and economic weight **(surpassing the G7's share of global GDP in terms of purchasing power)**.

3. **Seeking alternatives to the dollar**: Despite the challenges, the group is seriously pursuing the promotion of trade in local currencies and the development of payment systems to serve as alternatives to SWIFT. This constitutes a direct geopolitical challenge to the prevailing financial order, rather than merely a call for reform.

In conclusion, if we view BRICS through the lens of traditional blocs **(such as NATO or the EU)**, it might indeed appear to be nothing more than a lobby group or a discussion forum. However, if we view it as a flexible movement reflecting a shift in the global balance of power and the **"Global South's desire for multipolarity"**, its actual impact transcends the label of **"lobby group"**, positioning it instead as the nucleus of a new, multipolar global order.

2. How do you assess BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

The New Delhi Declaration - **issued at the 18th BRICS Summit hosted by India in New Delhi on September 12–13, 2026** - stands as a balanced consensus document. It reflects the bloc's aim to cement the growing role of Global South nations without transforming into a confrontational bloc vis-à-vis the West.

- **Key themes and assessments of the 2026 Declaration:**

    1. **Global Governance Reform:** The Declaration called for a comprehensive structural overhaul of the UN Security Council and international financial institutions **(such as the IMF and World Bank)** to ensure equitable representation for developing nations.

2. **Economic and Financial Measures**: It focused on boosting trade settlements in local currencies among member states to reduce reliance on the US dollar, alongside initiatives for digital cooperation and technological infrastructure.
3. **Political and Security Stance:** The Declaration condemned **"unilateral acts of war"** and emphasized the importance of peaceful resolutions to regional conflicts, particularly in the Middle East and the security of maritime navigation.
4. **Indian Flexibility and Pragmatism:** India's presidency successfully steered the discourse toward sustainable development, innovation, and artificial intelligence. By avoiding harsh language that could have turned the group into an anti-Western alliance, India reinforced its strategy of **"multi-alignment"**.

3. Trump says BRICS has no consensus. How much did US pressure shaped the agenda of 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi?

US pressures and threats directly contributed to reshaping the priorities and agenda of the 18th BRICS summit **(held in New Delhi, India, in 2026)**. These pressures acted as a catalyst, reinforcing the group's drive to reduce reliance on the Western financial system while simultaneously necessitating a balancing act to avoid direct confrontation with Washington.

- **US influence and the response to it shaped the 2026 summit agenda, <u>through the following key areas</u>:**

1. **A Unified Response to Tariff Threats**

The summit took place at a time when the administration of US President Donald Trump had escalated threats to impose punitive tariffs **(reaching up to 100%)** on nations attempting to undermine the dollar's status or engaging in policies Washington deemed **"anti-American"**. In response, the summit's **"New Delhi Declaration"** included a prominent clause collectively criticizing the imposition of **"unilateral and arbitrary tariffs"** as a - threat to global economic stability - serving as both a veiled and direct message against Trump's economic policies.

2. Accelerating Alternative Payment Mechanisms (Without Abandoning the Dollar)

Tough US sanctions **- particularly those targeting Russia and Iran -** prompted the bloc's member states to accelerate discussions regarding alternative payment mechanisms. The summit saw proposals from countries such as Iran to bolster the use of **"local BRICS currencies"** and to establish a joint reinsurance company with a capital of $1 billion. Nevertheless, the summit ensured the retention of the "BRICS Pay" system as a parallel track promoting local currencies - **while keeping the dollar as an available option** - to avoid provoking Washington's intense ire.

3. India's Role in Curbing the Anti-Western Trend

The notion that the group lacks full geopolitical consensus was evident in India's stance, while China, Russia, and Iran pushed to transform BRICS into a solid anti-Western front, India - **as the host nation** - firmly resisted this trend. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized that the group is **"not against anyone"** and Indian diplomacy succeeded in crafting a final statement that criticized US economic policies without explicitly naming the United States, thereby preserving India's strategic partnerships with Washington within the **"Quad alliance**" and other frameworks.

4. Symbolic Solidarity with Members Isolated by the US

The impact of US military and economic pressure on Iran was reflected in the summit's agenda; the New Delhi Declaration condemned military attacks targeting Iranian facilities without explicitly condemning Washington by name. This reflected a delicate balance, granting US allies within the bloc **(such as the UAE and Indonesia)** room to maneuver and support regional stability without becoming entangled in a conflict between opposing axes.

4. How do you explain BRICS Power Triangle -India -Russia-China?

The power triangle within the BRICS group - **comprising Russia, India, and China** - is best understood as a complex geopolitical fulcrum that balances shared interests with quiet rivalry. This triangle serves as the group's primary balancing engine, as the three nations seek to reshape the multipolar global financial order, even while navigating sensitive points of contention among themselves.

- **The relationships and balances within this triangle can be analyzed, <u>through the following dimensions</u>:**

1. Shared Strategic Interests (Points of Convergence)

- **Multipolarity**: The three nations agree on the necessity of ending Western - **and specifically US** - hegemony over the global financial and political systems.
- **De-dollarization**: This trio spearheads efforts to utilize local currencies for intra-group trade and to develop payment systems that serve as alternatives to SWIFT.
- **Economic Integration and Energy:** Russia acts as the primary energy supplier and security anchor, while China and India serve as the largest consumer markets for Russian oil and gas, creating a robust network of economic interests.

2. Governing Bilateral Balances (Triangular Dynamics)

A. China and Russia (An Alliance of Strategic Necessity): Beijing and Moscow have drawn closer than ever in recent years; China provides economic support to Russia in the face of Western sanctions, while Russia backs China's geopolitical stances.

B. **India and Russia (A Trusted, Historic Partnership):** New Delhi maintains strong historical and military ties with Moscow. India views Russia as a vital safeguard that prevents Moscow from falling entirely into China's orbit.

C. **India and China (Rivalry and Border Tensions):** This relationship represents the weakest and most volatile side of the triangle due to border disputes in the Himalayas and a rivalry for influence across Asia - factors that occasionally drive India to move closer to the West through alliances such as the **"Quad"**.

3. The Triangle's Role in Shaping BRICS

Within BRICS, India acts as a counterweight to China's growing influence; while China and Russia push the group toward a stance of direct confrontation and anti-Western sentiment, India seeks to ensure that BRICS remains a **"non-Western"** platform rather than an **"anti-Western**" one, thereby preserving its balanced relations with Washington and Europe.

5. How do you assess India's BRICS Diplomacy?

India's diplomacy within the BRICS group is characterized by adeptness and keen political realism; New Delhi successfully maintains its status as a founding member and a key player steering the bloc's direction, all without abandoning its growing strategic alliances with the West and the United States.

This diplomatic approach was clearly evident during India's 2026 chairmanship and its successful hosting of the 18th Summit in New Delhi **(September 12–13, 2026)** an event that culminated in the unanimous adoption of the **"New Delhi Declaration"** amidst sharp international divisions and tensions.

- **<u>Indian diplomacy within BRICS can be assessed through several key dimensions</u>:**

1. Achieving "Strategic Balancing"

For India, BRICS serves as a vehicle to demonstrate its strategic autonomy. Despite participating in Western security and economic alliances **(such as the "Quad" with the US, Japan, and Australia)**, India remains committed to a strong presence within BRICS. India rejects transforming the bloc into an explicitly **"anti-Western"** front, insisting instead on shaping it as a **"non-Western"** platform that advances development interests.

2. Leading and Amplifying the Voice of the "Global South"

India leveraged its 2026 chairmanship to champion the aspirations of developing nations. The Indian agenda focused on four core priorities: building resilience, innovation, cooperation, and sustainability. India also leveraged the summit to showcase its digital technology model through events such as the **"BRICS Bharat Innovation Exhibition"**, designed to connect startups with international investors.

3. Managing Competition with China

BRICS serves as one of the few forums where India and China regularly sit together to look past their border and geopolitical disputes. India employs a cautious diplomatic approach to ensure that Beijing does not achieve absolute dominance over the bloc or steer it solely to serve its own economic interests; nevertheless, Indian diplomacy succeeded in securing a constructive strategic dialogue that paved the way for Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to New Delhi during the September 2026 summit his first since 2019.

4. Preserving Historic Ties with Russia

Despite intense Western pressure regarding the war in Ukraine, India continues to utilize the BRICS platform to deepen its bilateral and economic ties - **particularly in the energy sector** - with Moscow. This was reflected in New Delhi's warm reception of Russian President Vladimir Putin and his active participation in the 2026 summit.

- **Table: Summary Assessment of Indian Diplomacy:**

Point of comparison	**Indian diplomatic stance and approach**
The political identity of the bloc	Rejects turning BRICS into an anti-Western alliance, and insists on its role as a platform for economic and developmental cooperation
The relationship with the major powers	Is a clever balance between its partnership with Russia and China within the group, and its strategic partnership with Washington outside of it
The economic files	Support reforming the global financial system and increasing the representation of developing countries, while protecting their markets from excessive Chinese expansion

In general, India is successfully using BRICS as a geopolitical lever to enhance its image as a rising superpower, capable of bringing together disparate parties **(such as Russia, China, Iran, and Egypt)** under one roof and coming up with publicly declared collective agreements.

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10) Dr. MANAS CHAKRABARTY

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FPRC Journal- J-68 QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob-HT) Do you agree?

The statement by Happymon Jacob that "one should not mistake the noise around BRICS for impact" makes a direct focus on the important question relating to the actual influence of BRICS in matters related to world affairs. There is no iota of doubt about the fact that the BRICS has been successful in expanding in a considerable manner and also been successful in attracting significant diplomatic and political attention of the world community. But we have to accept the fact that its growing influence and presence does not automatically translate into its ability to reshape the total international order. The 2026 New Delhi Summit has definitely proved the fact that the BRICS should neither be dismissed as merely a talking shop nor it should be treated as an emerging alternative to the Western-led world system. We should agree with the statement that it should be considered as a loose coalition and pressure group whose influence is real but constrained.

Right from the time of its inception, the BRICS has undergone dramatic changes. It originally started with Brazil, Russia, India and China, with South Africa joining later. Now it has expanded to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates. In 2026 New Delhi Summit, all the member countries reaffirmed their commitment to a more representative and equitable international order. The New Delhi Declaration specifically called for introducing radical reforms in global governance and greater representation of the developing countries in the international institutions. One aspect that needs special focus is the strength of BRICS is its ability to exert pressure on existing global institutions and shape the pattern of international institutions. The greatest advantage of the BRICS lies in the fact that its members collectively represent a bulk share of the world's total population and also economic output. Their demand for reform of the UN Security Council, international financial institutions and global economic governance clearly reflects a wider and a strong dissatisfaction among the developing countries regarding the institutions which came into force mainly after the Second World War. The New Delhi Declaration emphatically argued for a more representative, democratic and accountable multilateral system. Most importantly, India and Brazil's aspirations for a larger role in the UN Security Council received massive support from China as well as from Russia. Again, the BRICS also provides a platform for the developing countries to coordinate their positions in an effective way. On issues like climate finance, development, trade, technology, food security and global financial governance, the position of BRICS can significantly increase the negotiating capability of the Global South. Undoubtedly, the New Development Bank (NDB) has acquired the position of an institutional mechanism for making finance for the infrastructure and sustainable-development projects. The 2026 declaration encouraged the NDB to expand local-currency financing and diversify its funding sources.

The BRICS also engaged for working in the domains of cross-border payments and greater use of national currencies. The 2026 Declaration clearly acknowledged the progress on studying interoperability between payment and messaging systems and promoting trade settlements in local currencies. By this act, the BRICS has proved the fact that it possess agenda-setting and institution-building power. Although, it is a fact that it lacks the coercive power associated with military alliances. We have to accept the fact that the BRICS has serious limitations. The central weakness of BRICS is its internal diversity and conflicting national interests. Both India and China have not been successful so far to resolve strategic and territorial differences. In the case of Russia and China, they reflect interests which is not compatible for India. Again, if we take the case of Iran and the UAE, they reflect different regional perspectives. As a result, reaching at a particular consensus on sensitive geopolitical issues is really difficult. The 2026 New Delhi Summit clearly pinpointed this complexity aspect. It was compulsive on the part of the BRICS to accommodate the countries which have sharply different relationships with the United States and differering positions on the issue of conflicts in the Middle East area. But in spite of the fact, the member countries could manage to produce a consensus declaration calling for dialogue, restraint and also diplomacy. It is a reality that this achievement is undoubtedly significant, but it is necessary to point out the fact that consensus documents should not be confused with binding commitments. Most BRICS decisions remain politically rather than legally binding. The most important aspect is that the organisation has no common foreign policy, military command, collective-security mechanism or supranational authority. We should also point out the fact that the same limitation applies to the idea of de-dollarisation. The BRICS has tried to promote local-currency settlements and explored alternative payment mechanisms, but this is very different from establishing a common BRICS currency capable of replacing the dollar. The 2026 declaration itself recognized the fact that there is “no one-size-fits-all approach” to payment arrangements.

So far as India is concerned, the BRICS has particular strategic value. It has paved the way to New Delhi to make engagement simultaneously with China, Russia, the Global South and other emerging economies without entering into a formal alliance. It is possible on the part of India to use the BRICS to push for strategic autonomy, reform of global institutions, greater representation for developing countries and diversified economic partnerships. It is an advantage on the part of India that for this, India need not abandon its relationships with the United States, Europe, Japan or other partners. As such, this has made the BRICS more useful as an instrument of multi-alignment rather than bloc politics. Therefore, I partly agree with Happymon Jacob's characterization. The BRICS should not be seen as a cohesive alternative government of the world or as a NATO-like geopolitical alliance. Its members have divergent interests and it must be accepted that many of its declarations lack enforcement mechanisms. We should also remember that calling BRICS *merely* a pressure group would also be an underestimation. The NDB, expanding membership, local-currency initiatives, sectoral cooperation and increasingly coordinated positions on global governance clearly demonstrate a tangible institutional development. A thorough and in depth analysis would reveal the fact that the BRICS is a pressure group with growing institutional capabilities and agenda-setting influence, but not yet a unified geopolitical or economic alternative to the existing international order. In short, the noise around BRICS should not be mistaken or misestimated for immediate systemic transformation or its gradual development loaded with effective influence should not be dismissed as mere noise. In short: the strongest answer is not a simple “yes” or “no.” Jacob's statement is convincing if BRICS is described as a geopolitical counter-bloc, but it would be too narrow if we deny or fail to assess the BRICS's institutional, economic and diplomatic impact in the present day world order.

2. How do you assess BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

The BRICS New Delhi Declaration 2026, adopted at the 18th BRICS Summit held in New Delhi during 12–13 September 2026, is crucially significant because of the fact that it represents the first major consensus document of the expanded BRICS under India's chairship. The 140-point declaration which was adopted by all the 11 members, covers various aspects of global governance, international security, terrorism, trade, finance, artificial intelligence, climate change, health and sustainable development. It is of utmost importance that we should assess its importance from a realistic point of view. The declaration clearly demonstrated the fact that it is possible on the part of the BRICS to find a common ground in the midst of diverse policies of the BRICS countries. Its principal achievement is perhaps not the creation of a new global order overnight, but the preservation and expansion of a platform through which the Global South can collectively articulate its interests.

The central focus of the New Delhi declaration had been the demand for a more representative and equitable international order. The BRICS once again reaffirmed the necessity of reform of the global institutions, including that of the United Nations and international financial institutions. The declaration clearly argued that the existing structures do not properly make a reflection on the contemporary emerging economic and demographic realities. On the part of India, this aspect is particularly significant and important. It has been seen that India has consistently advanced arguments in different international forums that the developing countries should have a greater role in global decision-making process. This aspect has been excellently described by the Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi during the summit. As he said, the Global South being at the "front row" of global crises but the "back row" of decision-making process. The declaration has undoubtedly strengthened the BRICS for being a platform for institutional reform rather than a forum for opposition to the West. A major priority area on the part of India in the summit was definitely the reform of the UN Security Council. The declaration once again hammered the point for a more representative UN system and greater participation of the developing countries in the process of global governance. This aspect is relevant to India's aspiration for a permanent seat ithe Security Council. We must accept the fact that the declaration provides ample diplomatic support for India's broader reform agenda, but at the same time it is also true that implementation of the idea remains to be much difficult.

A most important and significant element for India was definitely the declaration's outlook and attitude towards terrorism. The document vehemently condemned terrorism in all its forms and included a reference to the April 2025 Pahalgam terror attack. It also took into account the aspects of cross-border terrorism, terror financing and safe havens. This is important because terrorism has traditionally been an area of concern for almost all the nations. On the part of India, to secure consensus on terrorism matters within an expanded BRICS which includes countries with divergent relationships with Pakistan and different regional interests was definitely an important diplomatic success.

The declaration also laid stress on the aspect of greater economic integration among the BRICS members. It also focused on facilitating trade and investment, which would strengthen the payment mechanisms and increase the use of local currencies in cross-border transactions. This dimension clearly shows the broader desire among the BRICS countries to substantially reduce the problems of vulnerabilities which might arise from excessive dependence on any single currency or financial system. We should also point out

that it would be premature to brand it as an immediate challenge to the dollar. It should be remembered that the BRICS economies have different monetary systems, financial structures and trade patterns. In this background, increasing local-currency transactions is considerably easier than creating a common BRICS currency. As such, the realistic position lies in gradual diversification of payment mechanisms, rather than an immediate replacement of the dollar.

Another important dimension of the Delhi summit had been its focus on emerging technologies, specifically to Artificial Intelligence (AI). The declaration recognised massive potential of AI. This aspect is strategically important in view of the fact that the technological inequality could become a new form of global inequality. Since India posses considerable expertise in digital public infrastructure and technology, it is quite possible on the part of India to use the BRICS to promote technology cooperation among the developing economies. We should also point out the challenges which stands before the New Delhi Declaration. It is the diversity of interests within BRICS.As we know that the expanded group now includes altogether 11 countries with different political systems, economic structures and geopolitical priorities. For example, India and China have unresolved strategic differences; Iran and Saudi Arabia have competing regional interests; Russia has a confrontation with Western powers; and other members maintain close economic and strategic relationships with the United States and Europe.

The litmus test of the New Delhi Declaration will be the implementation part. As it is known that the Declarations adopted at multilateral summits are purely political commitments without any enforceable mechanisms. It should be pointed out that the BRICS possesses institutions like the New Development Bank, but the alarming point lies in the fact that its financial scale remains much smaller than that of the World Bank. As a result, the BRICS should focus on important areas where cooperation can produce tangible results like development finance, digital public infrastructure, health, food security, climate resilience, trade facilitation and scientific cooperation. We should assess the New Delhi Declaration 2026 as an important but incremental achievement. The most important significance of the New Delhi summit lies in demonstrating the fact that that an expanded and internally diverse BRICS can produce a consensus document on major global issues. As such, we can say that the document should neither be dismissed as merely symbolic nor portrayed as the beginning of an immediate post-Western world order. Its significance lies in institution-building, agenda-setting and providing developing countries with greater collective negotiating space.

3. Trump says BRICS has no consensus. How much did US pressure shaped the agenda of 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi ?

The 18th BRICS Summit, held in New Delhi during 12–13 September 2026, produced a significant paradox. On the one hand, the US President Donald Trump has repeatedly portrayed BRICS as a divided grouping lacking meaningful consensus. On the other hand, the New Delhi Declaration demonstrated that the expanded grouping could still agree on a wide range of issues, particularly trade, sanctions, multilateralism, development and global governance. It should be mentioned that the Trump administration's tariff and sanction policies created an unavoidable backdrop to the summit. We cannot deny the fact that the BRICS members have been directly affected by US trade measures. On the other hand, Russia and Iran have critically faced extensive American sanctions. As such, the issues of unilateral tariffs, economic coercion, sanctions and reform of the global trading system could occupy important prominence. The New Delhi Declaration categorically expressed "serious concerns" over the issues of unilateral tariff and non-tariff measures and argued that such measures distort trade and undermine WTO principles. It is true that the name of Trump and

the US were not mentioned clearly, but the American economic policies were clearly relevant to several paragraphs of the declaration. The analysts have described the document as an indirect response to Washington's tariff and sanctions policies. It should also be pointed out that the US pressure definitely influenced the summit most strongly through agenda moderation. This aspect is clear because of the fact of de-dollarisation issue. Many countries including Russia and Brazil advocated for reducing dependence on the dollar.

TRUMP'S "NO CONSENSUS" ARGUMENT HAS SOME BASIS—BUT ONLY PARTLY

We cannot dismiss Trump's argument because the BRICS does have serious internal differences. The New Delhi Summit clearly demonstrated the fact that absence of consensus on every geopolitical issue does not mean absence of consensus altogether. We should understand consensus of BRICS as issue-specific and negotiated, rather than as the kind of strategic consensus found within a military alliance. There is no denying the fact that the US pressure unquestionably shaped the context and certain priorities of the 2026 New Delhi BRICS Summit. Again, Trump's tariff policies, sanctions and opposition to BRICS definitely exerted influence on discussions of trade, economic coercion, the dollar and the future of the international economic order. Therefore, in this sense, Trump's pressure influenced the boundaries within which BRICS negotiated, but it did not determine what BRICS ultimately agreed upon.

4. How do you explain BRICS Power Triangle -India -Russia-China.

There is no iota of doubt about the fact that the India–Russia–China (IRC) triangle is one of the most important, significant and crucial geopolitical dynamics within BRICS framework. It should be specifically mentioned that it is not a formal alliance or a permanent strategic bloc. Instead, it is a flexible triangular relationship based on overlapping interests, strategic autonomy and issue-based cooperation. The 2026 New Delhi BRICS Summit has again highlighted the fact as to why the relationship among these three powers greatly matters for the future of BRICS and particularly the aspect of the emerging global order.

A million dollar question may come to the surface that Why these three constitute a power triangle ? For answer of the question, we should dive deep into the arena. The three countries bring different forms of power to BRICS. So far as **China** is concerned, it provides enormous economic weight, manufacturing capacity, trade networks, technological capabilities and diplomatic influence. Undoubtedly, it is the largest economic power among the three and gradually it has become central economic actor within the framework of expanded BRICS. Now if we come to **Russia, Russia** contributes military power, nuclear capabilities, energy resources, strategic geography and a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. We can easily assess its importance in the domain of BRICS.**Now if we take the case of India, India** occupies clearly a distinctive position. It combines a large and growing economy, demographic weight, technological capabilities, military strength and an increasingly prominent role in the Global South. One important aspect that should draw the attention of all is that India also maintains strategic relationships with both Russia and Western countries. Thus, the triangle can be broadly understood from a realistic point of view that the three countries exert considerable influence within BRICS.

We should also mention the fact that Russia acts as a strategic bridge. If we peep back, Russia played a crucial role in bringing India and China into broader multilateral frameworks. As we all know that both India and Russia have maintained a long-standing

strategic relationship in the areas of defence, nuclear energy, space, energy and diplomatic cooperation. At the same time, Russia has also maintained close strategic relations with China. This background has given Moscow an unusual position: **Russia can engage with both India and China even when their bilateral relationship runs through a difficult phase.** The Ukraine conflict has seriously complicated this triangular equation. In fact, Russia's increasing dependence on China has altered the balance within the relationship framework.

Perhaps the biggest weakness of the triangle is the India-China relationship. To be precise, India and China cooperate within BRICS but they also remain strategic competitors. Mention should be made of the 2020 border crisis. This crisis severely damaged bilateral trust between India and China. It is true that subsequent diplomatic engagement has definitely sought to stabilise relations, but differences remain to be there over the boundary, trade imbalance, regional influence and above all China's relationship with Pakistan. But the BRICS has created an important platform where both India and China must continue to communicate with each other. It is necessary to mention that the 2026 New Delhi Summit was particularly significant because Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping held important bilateral discussions alongside the BRICS meeting. Several issues like trade, supply chains, business links and border peace were part of the broader effort to stabilise relationship between India and China. We should also mention the fact that Russia and China have moved much closer, particularly since the Ukraine conflict and the deterioration of Russia's relations with the West. In addition to this, China has become an increasingly important economic partner of Russia, and Russia remains an important supplier of energy and strategic commodities to China. It is necessary to mention that this relationship also creates a challenge for India. If Russia becomes excessively dependent on China, India's traditional pattern of close relationship with Moscow could gradually go downwards.

A precise analysis would reveal the fact that India occupies an important place in the triangle. India follows strategic autonomy. It cooperates with Russia on defence and energy, engages China through BRICS and other multilateral platforms, and simultaneously develops strategic partnerships with the US, Europe, Japan and Australia. This aspect gives India a distinctive role within BRICS framework. India has always sought to ensure that BRICS remains a platform for Global South cooperation rather than becoming an anti-Western alliance. During its 2026 presidency, India emphasised development, technology, economic cooperation, multilateral reform and practical outcomes. From the angle of dynamism in international relations, the IRC triangle is very important because of the fact that it reflects the larger transformation from a predominantly Western-centric international system towards a more multipolar order.

The three countries have repeatedly supported reform of global institutions, including greater representation for developing countries in the UN system. The 2026 New Delhi Declaration recorded support from China and Russia for India's aspiration to play a greater role in the United Nations, including the Security Council. The real importance of the triangle is that BRICS allows India, Russia and China to cooperate without resolving all their bilateral disputes. In fact, the 2026 New Delhi Declaration clearly demonstrated this approach. The expanded BRICS, now containing countries with sharply different geopolitical interests, nevertheless reached consensus on a broad declaration. This achievement clearly suggests that BRICS works less like NATO and more like a negotiating platform for diverse emerging powers.

We can therefore very well say that the India–Russia–China power triangle is neither an alliance nor a stable strategic condominium. It is a dynamic triangle of cooperation,

competition and hedging. If we look to the aspect of contribution of the three countries, China contributes economic and technological weight; Russia contributes military, nuclear and energy capabilities; India contributes economic potential, diplomatic flexibility and Global South legitimacy. Their common interest lies in greater multipolarity, stronger developing-country representation and reform of global governance. Their differences lie in security interests, borders, regional influence and relationships with the West. We can say with a fair amount of certainty that the future of BRICS will much depend partly on whether these three powers can manage their contradictions without allowing them to paralyse the collective action. In this sense, the BRICS power triangle is best understood not as "India-Russia-China versus the West", but as a three-way balancing mechanism at the heart of an increasingly multipolar international order.

5. How do you assess India's BRICS Diplomacy.

In the true sense of the term, India's BRICS diplomacy in 2026 should be understood as an exercise in strategic balancing, coalition-building and institutional pragmatism. Instead of treating the BRICS as an anti-Western bloc, India has taken it as a platform for strengthening the voice of the Global South, reforming global governance, expanding economic cooperation and maintaining dialogue among countries with sharply divergent interests. The 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi on 12–13 September 2026, held during India's chairship, provides an important basis for assessing this approach.

The main feature of Indian diplomacy has been strategic autonomy. India has simultaneously maintained partnerships with the United States, Europe, Russia, the Gulf countries and other major powers but at the same time engaged China through BRICS and other multilateral mechanisms. This aspect is particularly significant because BRICS contains countries whose strategic interests do not always converge. India and China remain competitors, while Russia's relationship with the West remains deeply contentious. India has therefore avoided defining BRICS as an anti-American or anti-Western grouping. Instead, the New Delhi Declaration emphasised sovereignty, equality, inclusiveness, consensus and reform of multilateral institutions. This approach allows India to participate in a non-Western grouping without abandoning its wider network of partnerships.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of India's BRICS diplomacy is its simultaneous management of competition and cooperation with China. It is a fact that India cannot ignore China within BRICS because China is one of the organisation's most influential members. At the same time, bilateral disagreements, particularly over the boundary question and economic issues, constrain strategic trust. India's BRICS diplomacy clearly demonstrates a broader principle: competition does not necessarily require diplomatic disengagement. If we look into

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11) Dr. RAJAT GANGULY

FPRC Journal- J-68 QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at

best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob-HT). Do you agree?

I have a different view of BRICS. For me, BRICS represents the interests and perspectives of the Global South in world politics. Just as the NATO, G7 and the EU represent the core interests and narratives of the Global North. In that sense, BRICS is much more than simply a pressure group. It is in fact a "voice" of the Global South. The core members of the group are all leading Global South states. The group represents over 40% of global population and global GDP. The group has three nuclear weapon states (potentially four if Iran has developed nuclear warheads as some scholars such as Prof Ted Postol believes). And very importantly, the group speaks for issues that are hugely important for the Global South, such as equitable global trade, responsible sharing and use of technology particularly nuclear, quantum and AI technology, preventing disruptions and weaponisation of supply chains, upholding international law and norms such as state sovereignty, eliminating international economic and financial sanctions and war, etc. In tone and style, the BRICS offers a new kind of international relations, based on principles of equality, fairness, justice and diplomacy. That's a very different 'message' compared to what we keep hearing from institutions representing the Global North.

2. How do you assess BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

I think it is a very bold, appropriate, and pointed declaration, particularly for the ears of the Global North. The fact that the BRICS members could reach a consensus declaration speaks highly for the organisation. For me, the declaration demonstrates courage and resolve to chart a new type of international relations, where big powers take their stewardship of the international system seriously and act largely in cooperative and non-coercive ways. China, Russia, and India, the three Great Powers from the Global South, are steering the international system towards a different kind of international politics.

3. Trump says BRICS has no consensus. How much did US pressure shaped the agenda of 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi?

I do not take most of what Trump says very seriously. The man has limited cognitive ability particularly when it comes to understanding the nuances of international politics and is also a loudmouth and habitual liar. Under him particularly, the United States has acted in massively irresponsible and childish ways. That probably did influence the BRICS members, who demonstrated a clear willingness and resolve to come together to offer the world something new, if not in substance (at least not yet in major ways) but certainly in style and posture.

4. How do you explain BRICS Power Triangle: India-Russia-China?

I think all three countries understand that as Great Powers representing the non-Western Global South, they have a special responsibility to lead from the front and collectively guide the BRICS towards greater heights in the future. Bilateral differences and disputes between states may always be there, but as Great Powers these three states should never forget their collective responsibility towards the group, the Global South, and the world as a whole. From what I have seen and heard, I feel all three are mindful of this extraordinary responsibility that they carry on their shoulders.

5. How do you assess India's BRICS Diplomacy?

Absolutely brilliant! For me, the Delhi BRICS Summit was a triumph for Modi’s leadership and India’s diplomacy. The Indian diplomats who worked tirelessly in the background were the real heroes of this summit. Working with diplomats from other BRICS members and partners, they were the key to a successful summit with a consensus Summit Declaration. And PM Modi’s leadership from the top was absolutely brilliant. In style, tone, and substance, his speeches were spot on. And his handling of President Putin, President Xi, and President Pezeshkian was statesman like. Modi today is probably the only global leader who can talk simultaneously to Trump, Netanyahu, Putin, Xi and Pezeshkian. His core message—that is is not an era of war and that all disputes can and must be settled by diplomacy—is a powerful statement against the unilateral, proactive and naked use military force by certain powerful but misguided countries. In my opinion, Modi has emerged from the Delhi BRICS Summit as

the most trusted, respected and credible leader not just for the Global South but for the entire world.

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12) Shri SANJAY UPADHYA

Biography

(Sanjay Upadhya is a Nepali journalist, author and analyst based in the United States. He has worked for the British Broadcasting Corporation, The Times of London, Inter Press Service, Khaleej Times, and the United Nations. His latest book is Democracy in Turns: A Political Account of Nepal (Kathmandu: FinePrint Books, 2023).

FPRC Journal (J-68) Questionnaire

1. Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob-HT). Do you agree?

BRICS's expanding membership, summit diplomacy and multipolar rhetoric have increased its visibility. However, this prominence should not be confused with geopolitical influence. In many respects, characterizing BRICS as a pressure group is accurate. It provides major non-Western powers with a platform to coordinate positions, voice dissatisfaction with Western dominance and advocate reforms to international institutions. The central question is whether this coordination results in collective action.

BRICS members agree that emerging economies merit greater representation in global governance. However, they differ on how to pursue these reforms and who should lead them. Strategic rivalries, particularly between China and India, also constrain policy coordination. At the same time, countries such as Brazil, India, and South Africa oppose transforming BRICS into an explicitly anti-Western bloc.

The group's economic and demographic weight is substantial, but size alone does not translate into cohesive power. Diverse political systems, national interests and foreign policy priorities limit its capacity for collective action.

This is especially clear in the debate over de-dollarization. Although BRICS has promoted local-currency settlements and alternative payment mechanisms, establishing a common currency or a genuine alternative financial order would require levels of monetary coordination, institutional integration and political trust that do not yet exist. Diminishing reliance on the dollar in selected transactions does not replace the dollar-centered international system.

Nevertheless, characterizing BRICS solely as a pressure group understates its significance. The bloc seeks to shape international decisions through institutional reform, expanded South-South cooperation and alternatives to Western-dominated frameworks. The New Development Bank, for instance, is a concrete achievement, though it remains far from a substitute for the global financial architecture.

BRICS may therefore be most influential as a vehicle for promoting the individual ambitions of its members. China expands its international influence; Russia demonstrates its continued diplomatic relevance; India pursues a more leading global role while balancing against Chinese dominance; and Brazil and South Africa raise their voices on global issues. These objectives overlap sufficiently to sustain cooperation, even if they do not result in strategic unity.

The key distinction is between a coalition capable of challenging aspects of the existing order and one capable of constructing a viable alternative. To date, the evidence supports the former rather than the latter. BRICS is therefore commonly regarded as a pressure group of growing economic and diplomatic significance, but not yet as a consolidated force capable of fundamentally reshaping the international order. Its future influence will depend less on summit declarations and membership expansion than on its ability to translate common grievances into coordinated policies and institutional outcomes.

2. How do you assess the BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

The New Delhi Declaration is best understood as an effort to consolidate diplomacy rather than transform geopolitics. It demonstrated BRICS's lasting relevance and India's diplomatic effectiveness; however, it did not establish the grouping as a unified strategic bloc capable of reshaping the international order.

The declaration also emphasized practical cooperation in areas such as development finance, trade, supply-chain resilience, technology, and innovation. India's proposal for a Continuity and Implementation Mechanism addressed a recurring weakness within BRICS by seeking to ensure greater continuity between presidencies. The initiative's success will depend entirely upon its implementation.

Second, India sought to preserve BRICS as a forum for reform rather than as an explicitly anti-Western coalition. This is reflected in the declaration's emphasis on economic cooperation and institutional reform rather than dispute. Even discussions of de-dollarization were framed in terms of financial coordination rather than monetary rivalry.

Third, the declaration's breadth is both a strength and a weakness. By dealing with governance, trade, climate, health, technology, security, and development, it enables BRICS to project diplomatic relevance. However, it remains unclear which objectives members are willing to finance, defend, and implement. Shared language is easier to achieve than shared action.

Ultimately, the declaration's success will be judged by outcomes rather than rhetoric. Can BRICS deliver meaningful institutional reforms, expand development financing and sustain cooperation when national interests diverge? These questions are more consequential than the declaration's length or diplomatic visibility.

The New Delhi Declaration confirms that BRICS remains an important diplomatic platform that can accommodate different interests. It keeps reform agendas alive and broadens cooperation among emerging powers. However, it does not demonstrate that BRICS is emerging as a coherent center of global power. The central question remains whether diplomatic consensus can be translated into collective leverage.

3. Trump says BRICS has no consensus. How much did US pressure shape the agenda of the 2026 BRICS Summit in New Delhi?

US pressure shaped the environment in which the New Delhi Summit took place, but it did not determine the agenda. The summit addressed tariffs, sanctions, global governance reform, and regional conflicts while carefully avoiding direct confrontation with Washington. This combination of criticism and restraint shows both the impact of American pressure and BRICS's internal diversity.

First, US trade measures heightened worries about economic sovereignty. BRICS members used the summit to criticize unilateral tariffs and sanctions, particularly those considered inconsistent with World Trade Organization rules or lacking authorization from the United Nations. Although the United States was not explicitly named, the context was widely understood.

Second, India favored a careful approach. New Delhi continued to value cooperation with Washington on trade, technology, and security while facing pressure over issues such as Russian energy imports. Consequently, India supported broad principles opposing unilateral coercion without letting the summit take on an anti-American tone.

Third, debates over de-dollarization revealed the limits of BRICS cohesion. Although members endorsed the wider use of national currencies and stronger financial cooperation, they stopped short of promoting a common currency or presenting a credible alternative to the dollar-centered system. Internal differences were as significant as US opposition in explaining this restraint.

Fourth, the Iran crisis brought out the difficulties of maintaining a unified diplomatic position. Iran sought stronger condemnation of US and Israeli actions, while the UAE adopted a more reserved stance. The final declaration reflected compromise rather than strategic unity.

In this respect, Trump's criticism is partly valid. BRICS often finds it easier to agree on broad principles, such as support for a fairer global economy and opposition to unilateral sanctions, than to reach agreement on concrete actions or shared geostrategic plans. American pressure did not create these divisions, but it made them more visible.

Overall, US pressure greatly influenced discussions on trade, sanctions, and financial cooperation, elevating the prominence of economic and policy independence. However, the final agenda reflected a combination of India's priorities, China's ambitions, Russia's interests, regional disputes and the challenges of coordinating an expanded membership. Washington shaped the context, but divisions within BRICS ultimately defined the outcome.

4. How do you explain the BRICS power triangle – India-Russia-China?

The India-Russia-China triangle constitutes both the foundation of BRICS and its major constraint. The three powers share an interest in limiting excessive Western dominance. However, they lack the trust and strategic-oriented cohesion required to establish a coherent alternative order.

The most significant fault line remains the relationship between India and China. Both countries seek greater influence in global governance and leadership among developing countries, yet unresolved territorial disputes and strategic competition keep shaping their interactions. Recent diplomatic cooperation and growing trade have stabilized relations to some extent, but substantial strategic mistrust persists.

India's relationship with Russia remains durable, underpinned by decades of defense cooperation, energy ties, and diplomatic familiarity. However, the partnership has become increasingly asymmetric. Russia's growing dependence on China, accelerated by Western sanctions and the war in Ukraine, complicates India's efforts to maintain Moscow as an independent strategic partner.

China and Russia have strengthened their political and economic cooperation as both seek to reduce US influence. Yet their relationship increasingly shows China's superior economic weight. As this disequilibrium grows, India finds it increasingly difficult to regard Russia as an effective counterweight to China.

These dynamics both strengthen and weaken BRICS. They facilitate cooperation on development finance, trade, and institutional reform, while discouraging coordination on security issues, crisis management, and major geopolitical commitments.

Every member offers particular strengths. China provides economic scale and manufacturing capacity; Russia contributes military capabilities, energy resources, and Eurasian reach; and India offers a rapidly growing economy, diplomatic flexibility, and relationships across Western and non-Western countries.

The triangle is, therefore, not a strategic alliance but a balancing arrangement. Each country cooperates with the others where interests converge while guarding safeguards against their respective ambitions. This explains why BRICS can serve as an influential platform for selective cooperation without becoming a unified geopolitical bloc. Its strength resides in its members' complementary capabilities, while its weakness stems from persistent strategic mistrust.

5. How do you assess India's BRICS diplomacy?

India's BRICS diplomacy seeks to advance the wider strategic objective of enhancing the benefits of multipolarity while steering clear of dependence on any single power center. New Delhi seeks to boost its international influence through BRICS while ensuring the grouping does not become an anti-American alliance dominated by China or Russia.

Strategic autonomy is the guiding principle. India intends to maintain productive relations with Russia and China while deepening its partnerships with the United States, Europe, and key Indo-Pacific partners. At the same time, it uses BRICS to promote global institutional reform and advance its longstanding aspiration for a greater role in international governance.

India's 2026 presidency largely reflected these priorities. First, New Delhi secured outcomes consistent with key national interests. The New Delhi Declaration condemned the Pahalgam terrorist attack and reaffirmed support for India and Brazil to assume larger roles in the UN system, including the Security Council.

Second, India successfully prevented BRICS from adopting an explicitly anti-Western posture. Criticism of tariffs and sanctions remained general rather than directed at specific countries, while language concerning international conflicts was carefully calibrated to preserve consensus among members with divergent interests.
Third, India sought to strengthen BRICS institutionally. The proposed Continuity and Implementation Mechanism was intended to improve policy implementation across

presidencies, while initiatives on payment systems, development finance, investment, and economic cooperation emphasized practical outcomes over ideological messaging.

Nevertheless, major constraints persist. The first is China. India intends to improve its international standing through BRICS, but China's economic weight and institutional influence are considerably greater. New Delhi must therefore ensure that participation in BRICS does not unintentionally reinforce Chinese dominance.

The second constraint is Russia. India values its longstanding relationship with Moscow, but Russia's growing dependence on Beijing complicates India's efforts to maintain a strategic balance.

The third constraint is the United States. India continues to benefit from American technology, investment, defense cooperation, and market access. This limits India's willingness to back initiatives that could be perceived as efforts to establish a rival anti-Western bloc.

These constraints explain why India favors a flexible and pragmatic BRICS. New Delhi prioritizes selective cooperation over bloc discipline, reform over rupture, and consensus-building over confrontation.

The challenge is that India's success in moderating BRICS may also constrain the group's ability to challenge the existing international order. Conversely, a more assertive BRICS could increase China's influence within the bloc. India's BRICS strategy focuses on managing this tension rather than eliminating it.

India's diplomacy is therefore best understood as an effort to use BRICS as a multiplier of Indian power, rather than as a substitute for Indian strategic autonomy. Whether this approach produces lasting influence will depend on India's ability to translate diplomatic consensus into practical cooperation while preserving its room for maneuver as the balance of power within BRICS evolves.
the overall position, India's BRICS diplomacy in 2026 represents an attempt to combine strategic autonomy with multilateral activism. India's BRICS diplomacy can therefore be characterised as multi-alignment through multilateralism: engaging Russia without becoming dependent on it, managing competition with China without abandoning dialogue, working with the Global South while retaining partnerships with the West, and seeking reform of the international order without advocating its wholesale replacement. That balancing act is likely to remain central to India's diplomacy in an increasingly fragmented international system.

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13) Commodore RS VASAN

FPRC Journal- J-68 QUESTIONNAIRE

Responses by Commodore RS Vasan IN (Retd) Director General Chennai Centre for China Studies and Regional Director National Maritime Foundation Tamil Nadu

1. Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob-HT) Do you agree?

The way to look at it is, that, if it is only a pressure group, did it create ripples, or succeed in applying pressure on issues of relevance to the group. The answer lies in what happened in the recently concluded BRICS summit. That it brought about consensus on relevant issues despite such divergent groups during the two ongoing wars itself is a testimony that the "pressure group" has been successful and has acted with purpose. If it has managed to get important declarations such as on terrorism, then the pressure is working .One does not necessarily have to agree with all that has been said by various analysts including the one quoted above in the question. The amplifying notes in response to question 2 below makes it clear that this summit was successful in applying pressure where required and bringing about consensus even in delicate matters

2. How do you assess BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

By all yardsticks it was a feather in the cap for India's leadership of the summit. The 18th BRICs can be termed an unqualified success in terms of diplomacy, statecraft and in examining alternates to the existing west dominated global order. With over 50 percent of the global population from the member states contributing to over 40 percent of global GDP, BRICs as a functioning bloc has come off age. That conflicting member states such as UAE and Iran came together is indicative of the success of the tight rope walking for this edition with India at the helm. While Putin's participation was well known, Xi Jinping's participation was confirmed only on 10 th.

The unanimous declaration on condemnation of all forms of terrorism features a specific noteworthy diplomatic win for India by denouncing the April 2025 Pahalgam attack in Jammuand Kashmir.

3. Trump says BRICS has no consensus. How much did US pressure shaped the agenda of 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi ?

There is hardly any need to take the statements of Mr Trump seriously as his credibility has hit an all time low. The failure and setbacks in achieving his strategic/military aims in the US Iran war are clear indication that he would like to deflect and distract from his own failures. Here are some facts that dispel the notions of Trump.

The U.S. has threatened BRICS nations with 100% punitive tariffs on their exports if they actively seek to replace the U.S. dollar in global trade.

Washington views the push for systems like BRICS Pay or interconnected Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) as an explicit attempt by adversaries like Russia and Iran to evade Western sanctions. It is obvious the west led by US does not want to be out of the comfort zone/sanctuary provided by the dollar driven global economy.

The 18th BRICS Summit adopted the unanimous New Delhi Declaration on September 12–13, 2026, ("Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability"). The takeaways are result and mirror the phenomenal hard work in the run up to the summit just as it was done in the course of G 20.

The Key Takeaways from the 2026 Summit are indeed encouraging. On Trade &Tariffs, there was a calibrated push back against unilateral tariffs and restrictive trade practices (targeting U.S. tariff pressures without naming the U.S. directly).

All these remarkable decisions and the fact that there was unanimity in some of the key declarations make it clear that Trump was way off the mark.

4. How do you explain BRICS Power Triangle -India -Russia-China.

This is indication of how India is trying to work with diverse partners. While Russia has remained a strategic partner of great value, relations with China a neighbour have been tumultuous due to historical reasons. This shift culminated in Chinese President XiJinping's high-profile visit to New Delhi for the 18th BRICs summit from September 12–13, 2026, marking his first trip to India in nearly seven years. This definitely augurs well for improving bilateral relations between the two Asian neighbours who have had serious differences, more so, post Galwan, where there were violations of tranquility of decades leading to transgressions and losses.

This itself, merits deep discussion and analysis to see what the tea leaves read. The normalization of India-China relations transitioned from a deep, four-year freeze to a cautious diplomatic thaw. There has not been any letting up as for as keeping the troops numbering over 50,000 in constant state of readiness along the undemarcated /unresolved borders.

That the two leaders met and there is a process of greater dialogue at many levels would stabilize the relations. India has consistently maintained that the trust deficit particularly in maintaining tranquility along the borders will continue to affect bilateral relations. The post Galwan witnessed India's firm responses in terms of trade counter measures and denial of the ease of business that Chinese traders enjoyed till 2020. India initiated many measures to ensure that its growth rates are not affected.

China plus one(or many) was not just an option but an inescapable necessity to insure future growth trajectories. The economic stress faced both by India and China due to US trade tariffs was another compelling reason for the two nations to evaluate and reset the relations- This led to gradual thawing leading to face-to-face contact at Kazan, Bishkek and New Delhi. Beijing needs a cooperative India for multilateral group cohesion, while New Delhi hedges against external trade shocks. While Practical economic and diplomatic engagement is set to expand, deep strategic trust will not return soon. That the Troops completed disengagement from key friction points following the October 2024, regular border meetings, restoration of direct flights, fast tracking visas and Kailash manasarovar has allowed forward movement. Shared pragmatism has allowed the two sides to manage disputes and prevent stalling of such summits and dialogue processes. However, substantial military deployments remain locked along the 3,800-km LAC (Line of Actual Control, the de facto military boundary) with unresolved territorial disputes that flare over Arunachal Pradesh (termed Zangnan by Beijing) frequently.

The continued investments in China Pak Occupied Kashmir Economic Corridor (CPokEC) and not sharing of hydrological data and mega projects by the upper riparian state continue to be sore points and complicates trust. India seems to have expressed cautious optimism and continues to believe in time tested dictum of “trust but verify,” However, if past bitter experiences are any indication, India seems to believe now in a modified version that demands verification before trusting. This would be more evident as China would be hosting the next BRICS and appears to carry forward an agenda that would consolidate its position. It can be assessed that both sides will continue to work together though with a degree of skepticism. It can even be termed a mutually beneficial transactional relation as China needs the huge market of India and India continues to depend on China for heavy machinery, API, critical minerals etc., Large trade imbalances continue to persist; tech-security vetting has stalled digital linkages (such as UPI-Alipay+blocks). These are being addressed by both sides while the momentum is rather slow.

Returning to the India Russia relations, it has withstood global headwinds and continues to be a key diplomatic posture consistent with the strategic autonomy vision of India. Russia continues to be a reliable weapon supplier and energy provider. India is moving towards opening up the Chennai Vladivostok route for optimizing the trade routes. India is also closely observing the North Sea Transit routes. Despite the US sanctions, India continued to buy Russian oil signaling that it would protect its interests by scouting for energy roducts where ever they are competitive in the energy market. The China India Russia are not forming a bloc , however, there are areas in which all the three counties agree on areas that impact global governance.

5. How do you assess India's BRICS Diplomacy?

With the success of conducting the G 20 which lent its voice to the global south, India used the BRICS summit to champion the cause of emerging economies without joining or supporting anti-Western military coalitions. An analysis of the western biased media reporting and analysis of BRICS proceedings indicate that The United States and the Western coalition view the evolution of BRICS with a mix of sharp strategic anxiety and structural skepticism. While Western analysts acknowledge India's crucial role as a moderating force that prevents the bloc from turning into an overtly hostile, anti-Western military alliance, the deliberate movement toward parallel financial systems is seen as a direct challenge to the Western-led financial order fully driven by the dollar dominance.

The official stance under the Trump administration treats de-dollarization as an adversarial move. Ultimately, the Western view that India is the vital anchor keeping BRICS grounded is by and large reinforced during this summit. As long, as India maintains its multi-alignment strategy—expanding technology and defense partnerships with the U.S/Europe, while remaining in BRICS—the West views the bloc as a manageable diplomatic challenge rather than an existential threat.

On Geopolitical Balancing, the summit called for restraint in West Asia/Middle East conflicts (Iran/Israel), avoiding direct country condemnations to manage internal splits. On Reform of the Financial System the summit addressed long pending UN/IMF reform (pushing for UNSC representation for emerging economies like India and Brazil) and local-currency trade instead of dollar dominance. The emphasis on expanded practical cooperation into AI governance, climate finance, critical minerals, energy transitions, and digital health augurs well for the blocs.

In conclusion, India under the leadership of Modi has managed another demanding task of conducting the summit with professionalism, imagination and élan just on the lines of G20 though the challenges were innumerous. The focus both in India and China would be to continue to monitor the progress of bilateral relations as there are hopes. There can be no doubts that there are miles to go before enduring peace and stability are achieved together by the diverse members of BRICS . But these countries are willing to participate in the summits such as the G20 and the BRICS augurs well for the global development and governance where the global south seeks a voice.

14) Dr. MEENKSHI Ray GHOSH

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1. Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob – HT) Do you agree?

BRICS is not a formal alliance and will never be one. It is made up of states with very different political systems, bound by a few common interests. The most important of these are respect for state sovereignty, endorsement of the UN system, and focusing on shared challenges such as economic development. The newly expanded BRICS now spans practically all regions of the Global South and includes 11 full member states and 10 "partner countries." The coalition is not a formal organization, but rather a loose bloc of non-Western economies that coordinate economic and diplomatic efforts around a shared goal. BRICS countries seek to build an alternative to what they see as the dominance of the Western viewpoint in major multilateral groupings, such as the World Bank, the Group of Seven (G7) and the UN Security Council.

Initially BRICS was conceived as a forum for dialogue on major issues shaping the international agenda. Its early focus was on developing common positions on global political and economic matters. Promotion of a more democratic, legitimate and balanced international order was also its key objectives. The grouping also emphasised sustainable economic and social development, social inclusion and shared prosperity among emerging economies. Eventually, these priorities have provided a foundation for deeper and broader engagement among members.

Across successive summits, BRICS cooperation has progressively expanded to encompass strategic global issues and areas of practical collaboration. Its agenda covers terrorism, climate change, food and energy security, trade and agriculture. It also addresses labour and employment, telecommunications, international finance and the global economic situation. These efforts seek to make global governance more inclusive, effective and responsive to contemporary challenges.

One of the unique features of BRICS is that individual member countries use the platform to exert pressure on the West or negotiate for their own strategic advantages, rather than the group collectively advocating for its members on the global stage. For example, countries like Brazil and India have pushed for structural reforms in the UN Security Council and the IMF. On the other hand, China and Russia have frequently attempted to position BRICS as an explicit anti-Western counterweight. The bloc also includes nations with ongoing bilateral conflicts and divergent strategic outlooks, such as India and China, as well as recently admitted members like Saudi Arabia and Iran.
BRICS operates without a formal charter or a permanent secretariat. Its decision-making process is entirely consensus-based, meaning that contentious proposals are routinely diluted to accommodate the differing interests of its members. The limits of its cohesion are routinely

exposed when members attempt to address hard security crises. For instance, the inability of BRICS foreign ministers to generate unified policy action or even a robust joint statement on major geopolitical conflicts (such as the recent Middle East wars) underscores that agreements are limited to peripheral or status-quo issues. The 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi avoided radical measures towards de-dollarization or the creation of a common currency, instead favouring voluntary experiments in facilitating trade through local currencies.

In spite of the limitations characterizing BRICS as having no impact would mean overlooking several concrete economic shifts:

Unlike a pure pressure group that only complains about Western dominance, BRICS has built alternative infrastructure. The **New Development Bank (NDB)** has successfully funded billions in sustainable development projects without the political strings or veto structures typically associated with the World Bank. The group also holds a $100 billion Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) to buffer financial instability. BRICS has also taken up the issue of financial instability, to which Global South countries are especially vulnerable. In 2015, as the most visible institution established by the BRICS, the New Development Bank has worked on sustainable development projects for a decade. The Bank aims at mobilizing resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in emerging markets and developing countries (EMDCs). The Bank has approved over 120 investment projects, totalling US$ 40 billion in logistics, digital, and social infrastructure for its members. The Bank is open to all members of the United Nations and has Bangladesh, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt as new members, with Uruguay as a prospective member.
The Bank is transforming itself by adopting the latest AI and big data technologies and enjoying high credit ratings. The Bank also encourages the use of local currency in member countries' projects.
BRICS launched the **Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA)** a $100 billion financial stability initiative aimed at mitigating liquidity crises through establishing currency swap lines. China has committed $41 billion to the CRA; Russia, India, and Brazil have committed $18 billion each, and South Africa added $5 billion. Though member states have never used the CRA, including during the pandemic, it remains a latent mechanism that could be called upon in future crises, especially those in which the IMF may be found wanting. The CRA has so far conducted seven technical test runs to ensure readiness. BRICS' detailed proposal on IMF quota reform issued in 2025 is also noteworthy. It aims to make the world's dominant multilateral financial institution more equitable from a Global South perspective.
BRICS has also taken smaller steps toward institution-building in health and food security. The Partnership for the Elimination of Socially Determined Diseases was launched at the Rio summit in 2025, and its operational framework was endorsed in 2026. BRICS has focused on pooling research capacities on tuberculosis, mental health, and vaccine research, and it also launched a medical regulatory convergence initiative. Regulatory convergence could lower the cost of registering medicines across BRICS markets.

Collectively, BRICS+ now represents nearly 40% of global GDP in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms, outstripping the G7's share. By standardizing interoperable payment mechanisms and bypassing traditional financial rails, it gives heavily sanctioned member states like Russia or Iran a economic lifeline to continue trade. BRICS has a neutral ground where rivals like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE can engage in economic diplomacy under one umbrella, advancing multi-alignment strategies for countries that refuse to pick a side in major-power rivalries.

2. How do you access BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

The BRICS Summit 2026, hosted in New Delhi under the theme *"Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability,"* the summit emphasized digital transformation, sustainable development, and multilateral reform. Leaders from Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening South-South cooperation, enhancing global governance, and promoting inclusive growth. India's leadership highlighted the importance of digital public infrastructure, climate action, and equitable trade frameworks. The summit also underscored BRICS' role in shaping a multipolar world order, balancing geopolitical tensions, and advancing the interests of the Global South. By integrating ministerial tracks, bilateral engagements, and civil society dialogues, the New Delhi summit consolidated BRICS as a platform for resilience and innovation. Furthermore, the summit showcased BRICS' determination to institutionalize cooperation in emerging sectors such as artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and digital governance, ensuring that commitments translate into tangible outcomes for citizens.

The BRICS Summit 2026 in New Delhi consolidated the grouping's role as a platform for resilience, innovation, and sustainability. India's Chairship emphasized digital transformation, climate action, and multilateral reform, positioning BRICS as a credible voice for the Global South. While challenges remain in aligning diverse national interests, the summit demonstrated the bloc's capacity to shape global governance. If commitments are translated into measurable outcomes, the New Delhi summit will be remembered as a turning point in BRICS' evolution toward a multipolar, inclusive, and sustainable future.

Beyond immediate outcomes, the summit highlighted the importance of institutionalizing cooperation in emerging domains such as artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and digital governance. By embedding civil society participation and youth engagement, BRICS also signalled its intent to democratize global governance processes. India's leadership showcased how scalable digital public infrastructure and climate diplomacy can serve as models for other developing nations. Looking ahead, the credibility of BRICS will depend on its ability to deliver tangible results, expanding connectivity, strengthening financial sovereignty, and advancing climate resilience.

The New Delhi summit was consequently significant not only because it produced a unanimous declaration, but because it demonstrated that countries with divergent interests continue to find value in maintaining a common institutional framework. The 140-point New Delhi Declaration covered a wide range of issues, including terrorism, international security, trade, finance, development, technology, energy and reform of global institutions. Its unanimous adoption was itself an indication that the enlarged grouping remains capable of negotiating areas of common understanding despite substantial differences among its members.

It was the language on West Asia that emerged as one of the most closely negotiated parts of the declaration, reflecting the differences within the grouping. Yet the eventual language, unanimously adopted, refrained from naming any party — a formulation consistent with the approach seen in previous BRICS declarations, where language sought to avoid attributing responsibility to any single actor. In the New Delhi Declaration, these paragraphs expressed deep concern over the continued escalation of tensions in the Middle East/West Asia; recalled respective national positions while calling for exercising maximum restraint and avoiding actions that could further aggravate the situation; encouraged efforts toward lasting peace, security, and stability through dialogue and diplomacy; and stressed the need to work together to maintain the smooth flow of global trade, supply chains, and energy, in

accordance with applicable international law. The declaration also explicitly addressed the need for nuclear disarmament, arms control, and non-proliferation; made a strong statement on the Palestinian cause, calling for the October 2025 ceasefire to be upheld and for humanitarian access to be provided in Gaza; and called on Israel to respect the terms agreed with the Lebanese government and to withdraw its occupying forces from Lebanese territory. The Declaration also strongly condemned terrorism and specifically referred to the 22 April 2025 terrorist attack in Pahalgam, in which 26 people were killed.

The Ukraine war remains another source of tension within BRICS, particularly because Russia is a founding member of the group. The declaration issued a generic call for international disputes to be resolved through "dialogue, consultation, and diplomacy" without mentioning Ukraine. However, BRICS leaders criticised unilateral sanctions not authorised by the United Nations Security Council.

The New Delhi Declaration endorsed the BRICS Global Value Chains Action Plan 2026–2030, aiming to increase developing economies' participation in higher-value manufacturing, technology transfer and resilient supply chains. Members reached convergence on a proposed BRICS Agreement on Cooperation and Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters, subject to national procedures. The summit advanced work on interoperability between national payment and messaging systems and greater use of local currencies, but did not establish a single BRICS currency or a fully operational common payments system.

Energy cooperation included the BRICS Energy Cooperation Roadmap 2025–2030, guiding principles on smart grids and energy storage, and the BRICS Digital Centre of Excellence for Smart Grids and Energy Storage. Critical minerals cooperation focused on reliable and diversified supply chains. Technology and AI cooperation included the BRICS Science and Research Repository and quantum technologies. Logistics cooperation advanced through the BRICS Logistics Supply Chain Cooperation Framework. India proposed a BRICS Startup Innovation Fund. Bilateral outcomes included India–China restoration of direct Guangzhou–New Delhi flights and India–Russia agreement to continue their Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership, with Putin inviting Modi to Russia for the 24th Annual Summit.

The 18th BRICS Declaration signifies a key step in the development of the BRICS ESG framework. Its importance lies in providing a common policy direction regarding climate action, biodiversity, social protection, inclusive growth and accountability. The Declaration indicates that ESG cooperation within BRICS is increasingly being accompanied by efforts to develop more coordinated and measurable policy expectations. In the case of India, the implications are significant. Environmental initiatives concerning carbon markets, biodiversity, energy transition and climate resilience complement India's existing regulatory framework, while social initiatives relating to gig workers, gender inclusion, health care and MSME development broaden the scope of corporate ESG responsibility.

Greater BRICS interaction in anti-corruption, taxation, transfer pricing, standards and statistical transparency may also deepen expectations regarding governance reporting. Thus, the immediate effect of the Declaration is not the creation of new corporate liabilities but the gradual formulation of common ESG expectations across BRICS states. The Carbon Markets Partnership, Tax Working Groups, BRICS CONNECT and the Mental Health Centre of Excellence Network are expected to play a relevant role in the development of the BRICS agenda across future Chairships. The Declaration places ESG at the forefront of economic cooperation, corporate-governance practices and cross-border business within BRICS.

BRICS 2026 reiterated its "commitment to strengthening multilateralism and multipolarity", noting that a multipolar world can expand opportunities for Emerging Markets and

Developing Countries (EMDCs) to develop “constructive potential and enjoy universally beneficial, inclusive, sustainable and equitable economic globalisation and cooperation”.

3. Trump says BRICS has no consensus. How much did US pressure shaped the agenda of 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi?

The 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi (September 2026) provides an interesting example of how geopolitical pressure can influence the functioning and priorities of an international grouping. Although U.S. President Donald Trump has criticised BRICS for its lack of unity and a common agenda, the New Delhi Declaration suggests that pressure from the United States did not lead the bloc to abandon its objectives. Instead, it influenced the way these objectives were pursued. Washington's threat of imposing 100% tariffs on countries promoting de-dollarisation created additional challenges for BRICS members, particularly in balancing their economic ties with the United States against their efforts to reduce dependence on the existing global financial system.

A major factor shaping the summit was the possibility of higher U.S. tariffs on countries pursuing alternatives to the dollar. This placed BRICS members in a difficult position, given their varying levels of economic dependence on the American market. Under India's chairmanship, the summit avoided presenting BRICS as an explicitly anti-American alliance. India's approach reflected its need to maintain strong economic relations with Western countries while continuing to pursue an independent foreign policy. Consequently, rather than proposing a common currency to replace the U.S. dollar, the New Delhi Declaration focused on more gradual measures, including improving cross-border payment systems and encouraging trade settlements in local currencies.

The declaration also indicated that BRICS was not seeking an immediate replacement of existing global financial institutions. Instead of calling for the dismantling of the Bretton Woods system, the bloc advocated reforms to make institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) more representative and equitable, while retaining its quota-based structure and ensuring adequate financial resources. This approach reflects a preference for greater representation within the existing financial system rather than attempting to replace it entirely.

However, differences among member countries continued to limit the bloc's ability to develop a common position on major geopolitical issues. These divisions became particularly evident in discussions surrounding the escalating conflicts in the Middle East. With Iran among its newer members, BRICS had to accommodate different national interests and diplomatic priorities. Countries such as India and Brazil also had to consider their wider international relationships while addressing these developments. As a result, the summit's position remained relatively cautious, with the declaration referring to differing views and expressing concern rather than adopting a strong, unified position.

This approach differed from Brazil's 2025 chairmanship, during which it openly opposed unilateral sanctions against Iran. The comparatively restrained language adopted at the New Delhi Summit highlighted the difficulty of reaching a common position when members have different political and economic interests. Concerns over possible U.S. sanctions and their wider economic consequences further complicated the bloc's efforts to present a unified response.

Overall, the New Delhi Summit demonstrated how external pressure can influence the direction of BRICS without necessarily weakening its cooperation. Rather than pursuing immediate and far-reaching changes to the global economic order, the bloc focused on gradual reforms, greater financial cooperation and reducing its dependence on individual currencies. The outcome reflects BRICS' attempt to maintain cooperation among countries

with different strategic priorities while adapting to an increasingly fragmented and multipolar international environment.

4. How do you explain BRICS Power Triangle- India – Russia -China.

In contemporary International Relations, the India Russia China (RIC) grouping within BRICS reflects a complex strategic relationship shaped by both shared interests and competing national priorities. Although the three countries cooperate on issues such as global governance reforms and reducing Western dominance, they do not function as a formal alliance. The idea of RIC was originally proposed by Russian diplomat Yevgeny Primakov in the late 1990s as a way to promote a multipolar world order. Today, this relationship has gained importance within the expanded BRICS framework. However, cooperation among the three countries remains influenced by differences in their foreign policy objectives, economic interests and security concerns.

Russia and China share common concerns regarding Western influence and have strengthened their partnership in recent years. Both countries support changes to the existing global governance system and greater use of alternatives to the U.S. dollar in international trade. Their economic relationship has also become increasingly important. Russia supplies China with crude oil, natural gas and other raw materials, while China provides Russia with machinery, electronics and consumer goods. However, this growing dependence has created an imbalance in their relationship. With limited access to several Western markets, Russia has become increasingly dependent on China for trade and economic support, giving Beijing greater influence in the partnership.

India and Russia, on the other hand, share a longstanding relationship built on defence cooperation, energy trade and diplomatic engagement. Russia continues to be an important supplier of military equipment to India and has emerged as its largest source of crude oil imports. For India, maintaining close ties with Moscow is also important from a strategic perspective, as it helps prevent Russia from becoming entirely dependent on China. Similarly, Russia values its relationship with India as an important partner in the Global South and as a country with strong economic and diplomatic links beyond its immediate sphere of influence. Both countries are also working towards expanding bilateral trade, with a target of reaching $100 billion by 2030.

The India-China relationship remains the most challenging aspect of the RIC grouping. Despite their shared interest in promoting a multipolar global order, the two countries have significant differences concerning regional security and strategic influence. Border tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) continue to affect mutual trust and limit the scope of bilateral cooperation. India seeks a multipolar Asia in which no single country exercises overwhelming influence, whereas China views India's growing engagement with Western-led strategic partnerships, particularly the Quad, with concern. Economic relations present another challenge. Although China remains one of India's largest trading partners, India has been seeking to reduce its dependence on Chinese manufacturing and imports in strategically important sectors. Concerns about China's economic influence also contribute to India's cautious approach towards proposals such as a common BRICS currency.

Overall, the RIC grouping is better understood as a platform for strategic cooperation than as a unified political or military alliance. Each country approaches the relationship with different priorities. Russia uses its partnerships with India and China to strengthen its

international position and reduce its dependence on Western markets. China views the grouping as an opportunity to expand its influence in the developing world and support changes in the existing global order. India, meanwhile, uses its participation to advance strategic autonomy, cooperating with Russia and China on selected international issues while maintaining strong partnerships with Western countries. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the RIC grouping within BRICS will depend on how successfully India and China manage their bilateral differences while continuing to cooperate on areas of common interest.

5.How do you assess India's BRICS Diplomacy?

India's role within BRICS reflects its growing importance in global geopolitics and its efforts to strengthen the position of emerging economies in international decision-making. As a country that maintains close relations with both Western powers and the Global South, India occupies a distinctive position within the grouping. It has consistently supported reforms in global governance institutions, including the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, arguing for greater representation of developing countries. Through economic cooperation, technological development and initiatives in digital finance, India has also sought to contribute to a more inclusive and balanced global economic system.

However, India's participation in BRICS involves balancing different diplomatic and strategic interests. Although it shares common objectives with other members, particularly regarding reforms in global governance, its relationship with China remains a significant challenge. China holds considerable economic influence within the grouping, while India has its own concerns regarding regional security and economic dependence. At the same time, India's growing engagement with Western countries through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and its partnerships with the United States, Japan and Australia adds another dimension to its foreign policy. This requires India to maintain cooperation within BRICS without compromising its broader strategic relationships.

The expansion of BRICS has further increased its global significance, but it has also introduced greater diversity in the political and economic interests of its members. With countries following different political systems and foreign policy approaches, reaching a common position on international issues has become increasingly challenging. India's approach has been to promote BRICS as a platform for cooperation among developing economies rather than allowing it to become an explicitly anti-Western grouping. It has therefore emphasised practical cooperation, development priorities and reforms in international institutions while maintaining its independent approach to global partnerships.

The 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi should be understood in this broader context. Rather than representing the formation of a new geopolitical alliance, the summit reflected an effort to strengthen cooperation among countries with different strategic priorities but several shared concerns. Its significance lay not only in the declaration adopted by member countries but also in the discussions surrounding international security, economic cooperation, trade, investment and development. Reaching an agreement on a range of international and economic issues demonstrated that cooperation remains possible despite differences among members.

The summit also created opportunities for countries to pursue their individual priorities through a common platform. For India, it provided an opportunity to demonstrate its diplomatic leadership and ability to build consensus. China and Russia gained another platform to strengthen their engagement with emerging economies, while the Gulf members could explore wider trade and investment opportunities. African members gained an

additional avenue for cooperation in areas such as infrastructure, technology and development finance. Similarly, Latin American and other Asian members had opportunities to strengthen their economic and diplomatic engagement with a wider network of countries.

The long-term relevance of BRICS, however, will depend on whether these discussions translate into meaningful outcomes. The political commitments made through summit declarations need to be supported by practical arrangements for trade, investment, financial cooperation and institutional development. Bilateral agreements, business engagements and cooperation between member countries will play an important role in determining how effectively these objectives are achieved. The challenge ahead is to move beyond shared statements of intent and establish mechanisms that deliver measurable benefits across an increasingly diverse membership.

For India, the New Delhi Summit reinforced the importance of diplomatic engagement and strategic autonomy in an evolving international order. Its approach demonstrates that participation in BRICS does not require distancing itself from Western partners. Instead, India continues to engage with different power centres according to its national interests while advocating a greater role for developing countries in global decision-making. Ultimately, India's contribution to BRICS will depend on its ability to maintain this balance, strengthen cooperation among members and translate the grouping's common objectives into tangible economic and diplomatic outcomes.

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15) Major General Dr. S.B. ASTHANA ,SM ,VSM.PhD (Veteran)

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BRICS After New Delhi: Pressure Group, Platform or Power Triangle?

Interview of Major General (Dr) S B Asthana, SM, VSM, PhD (Veteran)

Former Director General of Infantry, Indian Army • Former Chief Instructor/Director, United Service Institution of India

Backdrop

The 18th BRICS Summit at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi (12–13 September 2026), was convened in one of the most turbulent strategic environments since the grouping was born. The Russia–Ukraine war remains unresolved; the US–Israel–Iran confrontation has disrupted the Strait of Hormuz and the energy lifelines of Asia; Trump 2.0 has made tariffs, sanctions and economic coercion the instruments of first resort; and the US–China contest has settled into what I call *Cold War 2.0* — adversarial coexistence under conditions of mutual dependence.



Against this backdrop, India hosted the Summit under the theme **"Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability"**, after more than 400 meetings across some 30 Indian cities. Only four months earlier, BRICS Foreign Ministers had failed to agree a joint communiqué over West Asia, forcing India to issue a Chair's Statement. That the leaders then adopted a 140-paragraph **New Delhi Declaration** unanimously on the very first day is the context in which the five questions below must be answered.

"BRICS has the numbers. India has the bridge. The real question is whether India can build the architecture."

Q1. Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob, HT). Do you agree?

Partly Agree: BRICS Is More Than a Pressure Group, but Less Than a Bloc

I agree with the first half of the proposition and only partly with the second. Professor Jacob is right that the noise around BRICS — the speculation about a BRICS currency, the talk of an "anti-Western front", the headlines generated by every expansion — has consistently outrun its delivery. Declarations have been more abundant than institutions. However, to describe BRICS merely as a pressure group undersells what it has become and misreads why so many countries still queue up to join it.

Why the 'noise' critique is valid

- **The trade asymmetry is the most honest metric.** Intra-BRICS merchandise trade is roughly US$ 700–800 billion a year, whereas BRICS members trade more than US$ 5 trillion with the US and the EU. A grouping whose members depend far more on the very economies they criticise cannot mount collective economic retaliation.
- **The central contradiction is internal.** India–China strategic rivalry, the unresolved boundary and China's nexus with Pakistan mean that two of the largest members do not share a common threat perception.
- **Expansion has imported fault lines.** Iran and the UAE found themselves on opposite sides of a shooting war; Egypt and Ethiopia remain at odds over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam; Saudi Arabia's status remains ambiguous. Consensus therefore drifts towards the lowest common denominator.

- **China's economic weight** — roughly two-thirds of combined BRICS GDP — carries the permanent risk of a Sino-centric BRICS, which India will never accept.

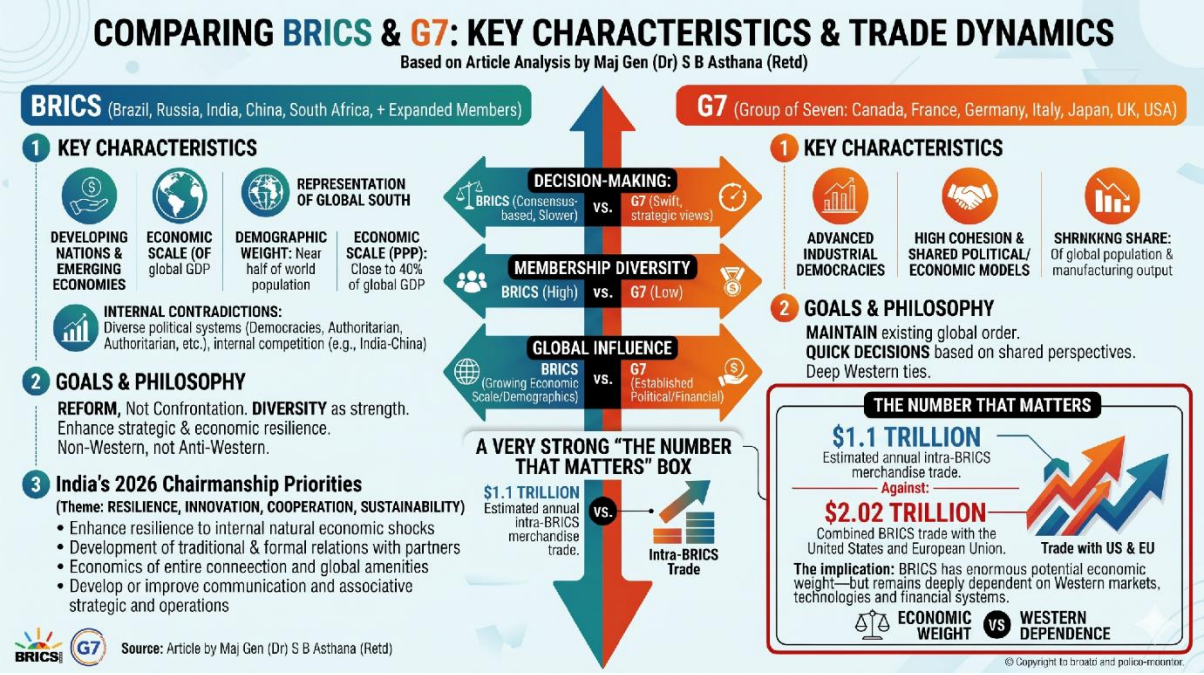


Figure 1: BRICS carries global weight, but its internal trade is a fraction of its trade with the West.

Why 'pressure group' is an understatement

A pressure group lobbies from outside a system without building anything of its own. BRICS, by contrast, has created the **New Development Bank** and the **Contingent Reserve Arrangement** (2014), is working on payment interoperability and local-currency settlement, and at New Delhi added an Incubator Network, a digital public infrastructure repository, further work on a BRICS Grain Exchange and a Logistics and Supply-Chain Cooperation Framework. It represents nearly half of humanity and close to 40 per cent of global GDP in PPP terms. That is not the profile of a lobby.

My own characterisation is that BRICS is a **platform of collective leverage for the Global South** — a reformist, not revisionist, coalition that seeks a fairer share in a Western-skewed order rather than its replacement. Pressure is its method, reform of global governance is its purpose, and institution-building is its test. The test is far from passed, but the platform is real.

Noise is not impact, but neither is silence. BRICS should be judged by what it builds, not by what it declares.

Q2. How do you assess the BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

A Declaration Written for Many Capitals: Consensus Without Capitulation

Diplomatically, the New Delhi Declaration is a significant achievement; developmentally, it is still a work in progress. The real yardstick is not the 140 paragraphs but the distance travelled from the Chair's Statement of May 2026 — when Iran and the UAE could not agree on the language on West Asia — to a unanimous leaders' declaration in September. Converting a deficit of consensus into a document every member could sign is the hallmark of a skilful chair.

The text is best read as a set of carefully calibrated messages to different capitals. As I wrote after the Summit, **India gave every member something and no member everything.**



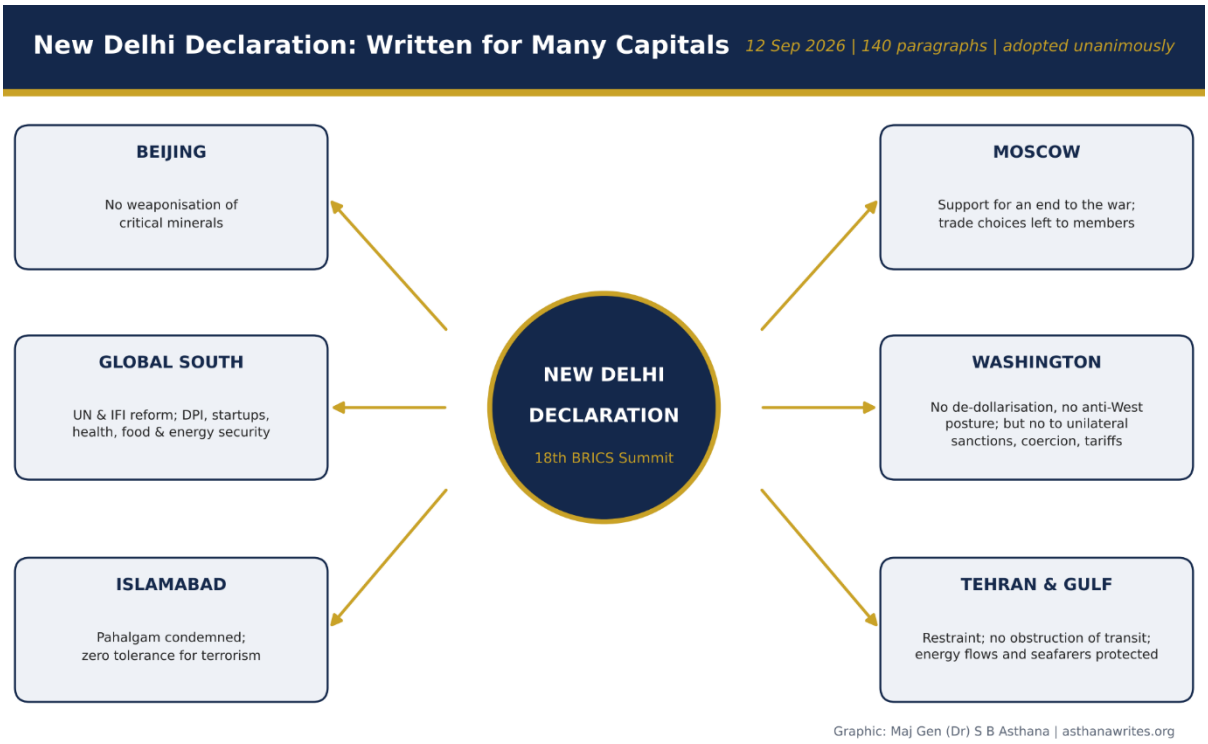


Figure 2: The New Delhi Declaration as a set of calibrated messages to different capitals.

Area	What the Declaration delivered	What it left unresolved
Terrorism	Condemnation of the Pahalgam attack; zero tolerance for terrorism, its financing and safe havens	No naming of state sponsors; implementation depends on member behaviour
West Asia	Deep concern, maximum restraint, protection of civilians, infrastructure and peaceful nuclear facilities	No consensus to condemn any party; Iran–Gulf divide papered over, not

Area	What the Declaration delivered	What it left unresolved
		bridged
Ukraine	Welcomes mediation and good offices; acknowledges differing national positions	No common position on the war
Trade & finance	Opposes unilateral tariffs and coercive measures not authorised by the UNSC; supports WTO-centred trade, payment interoperability, local currencies	No common currency; the de-dollarisation debate deferred, likely to resurface under China's 2027 chair
Development & tech	AI, quantum and DPI cooperation; Incubator Network; health mission; NIMHANS-led mental-health network	Several initiatives only "under consideration" — e.g. Startup Innovation Fund, Logistics Framework
Energy	Energy security as foundation of development; realistic role for fossil fuels alongside a just transition	No collective mechanism to secure Hormuz or energy flows

My assessment

- **Strengths:** It kept BRICS united without allowing it to become a bloc; it embedded India's priorities (terrorism, DPI, Global South voice, startups, health); it rejected coercion without naming or antagonising Washington; and it avoided the ideological maximalism that Russia, China and Iran sought.
- **Weaknesses:** Much of the text "welcomes", "notes" or "considers". Without timelines, funding and accountability, these risk becoming the next generation of declaratory diplomacy. The West Asia and Ukraine paragraphs record diversity rather than resolve it.
- **The real test lies ahead:** the follow-through through the Brazil–India–China troika, and whether Beijing, as the 2027 chair, consolidates India's development-centric agenda or swings BRICS back towards geopolitics and currency questions.

In sum, I would rate the Declaration as **a diplomatic success that must now become an institutional one.** Consensus has preserved engagement without requiring uniformity — that is precisely the BRICS model, and India has made it work under the most difficult conditions.

Q3. Trump says BRICS has no consensus. How much did US pressure shape the agenda of the 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi?

Washington Shaped the Margins, Not the Mandate

If consensus is defined as uniformity of strategic outlook, President Trump has a point — BRICS has never had it and never will. But if consensus is defined, as BRICS defines it, as the ability to agree on a common text despite divergent interests, then a 140-paragraph declaration adopted unanimously by ten members, including two that were on opposite sides of a war, is the most effective rebuttal. **Consensus is not unanimity of interests; it is the management of differences.**

US pressure was certainly a factor in the room. It shaped the *language* and the *red lines* of the Declaration, but not its agenda, which India had set months earlier around resilience, innovation, cooperation and sustainability.

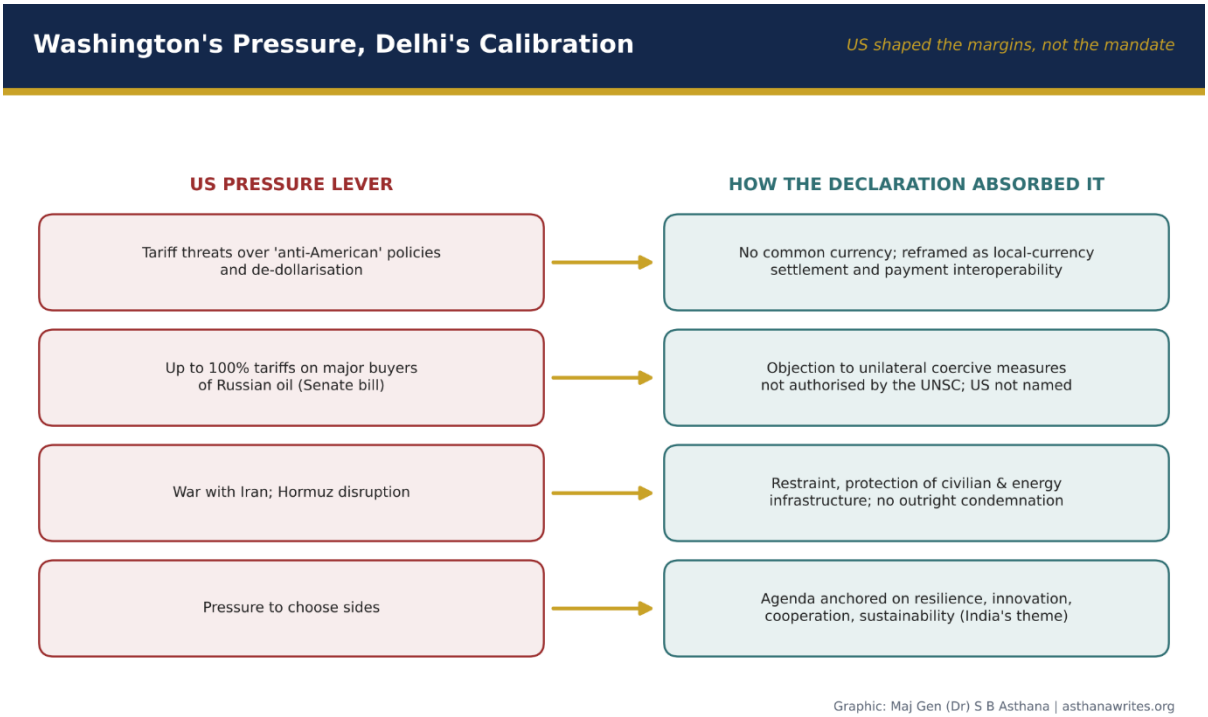


Figure 3: How US pressure was absorbed and recalibrated in the New Delhi Declaration.

Where US pressure left its imprint

1. **De-dollarisation was shelved.** Trump's repeated tariff threats against BRICS "anti-American" policies and any attempt to replace the dollar made a common currency a non-starter. The language was reframed into local-currency settlement and payment interoperability — practical de-risking, not a challenge to the dollar. India would have blocked a BRICS currency in any case; US pressure merely made the position easier to sell within the grouping.
2. **Washington was criticised but not named.** The Declaration opposes unilateral tariffs, sanctions and coercive measures not authorised by the UN Security Council, yet does not mention the United States. That is a deliberate calibration — firm on principle, restrained on targeting.
3. **The West Asia paragraph was moderated.** Iran wanted a condemnation of the US–Israeli military campaign; the final text calls for maximum restraint and protection of civilian and energy infrastructure. Notably, the SCO Bishkek Declaration ten days earlier had been sharper — Delhi used the SCO as a *dress rehearsal* and kept BRICS on a more measured register.
4. **The secondary-sanctions threat** — legislation authorising tariffs of up to 100 per cent on major buyers of Russian oil and gas — kept energy security, trade facilitation and resilient supply chains at the top of the economic agenda.

The paradox of coercion

There is an irony that Washington should note. Coercion aimed at several members simultaneously narrows the space for free-riding and pushes members towards coordination on payments, supply chains and finance — the very outcome it seeks to prevent. Tariff pressure has done more to give BRICS a common grievance than a decade of summit rhetoric.

It must also be remembered that India, as chair, faced pressure from **both directions** — from Washington against any anti-Western tilt, and from Moscow, Beijing and Tehran for sharper anti-dollar and anti-Western language. In military terms, it was a two-front

diplomatic battle, and India held both fronts. The outcome was a text that was **non-Western, but not anti-Western; strategically autonomous, but not strategically confrontational.**

Q4. How do you explain the BRICS Power Triangle — India–Russia–China?

Convergence Without Alignment: An Unequal Triangle with India as the Swing Vertex

The Russia–India–China (RIC) triangle is the core around which the original BRICS was conceived and, in the Trump 2.0 era, it has regained strategic relevance. Unilateral tariffs, energy disruption, sanctions and the US–China contest have given all three a shared interest in a multipolar order, in uninterrupted energy and trade flows, and in resisting coercion. But the triangle must be understood correctly: **strategic convergence is not strategic alignment.** Common interests must not be mistaken for common strategic intentions.

It is not an equilateral triangle. Each of its three sides is of a different nature and strength.

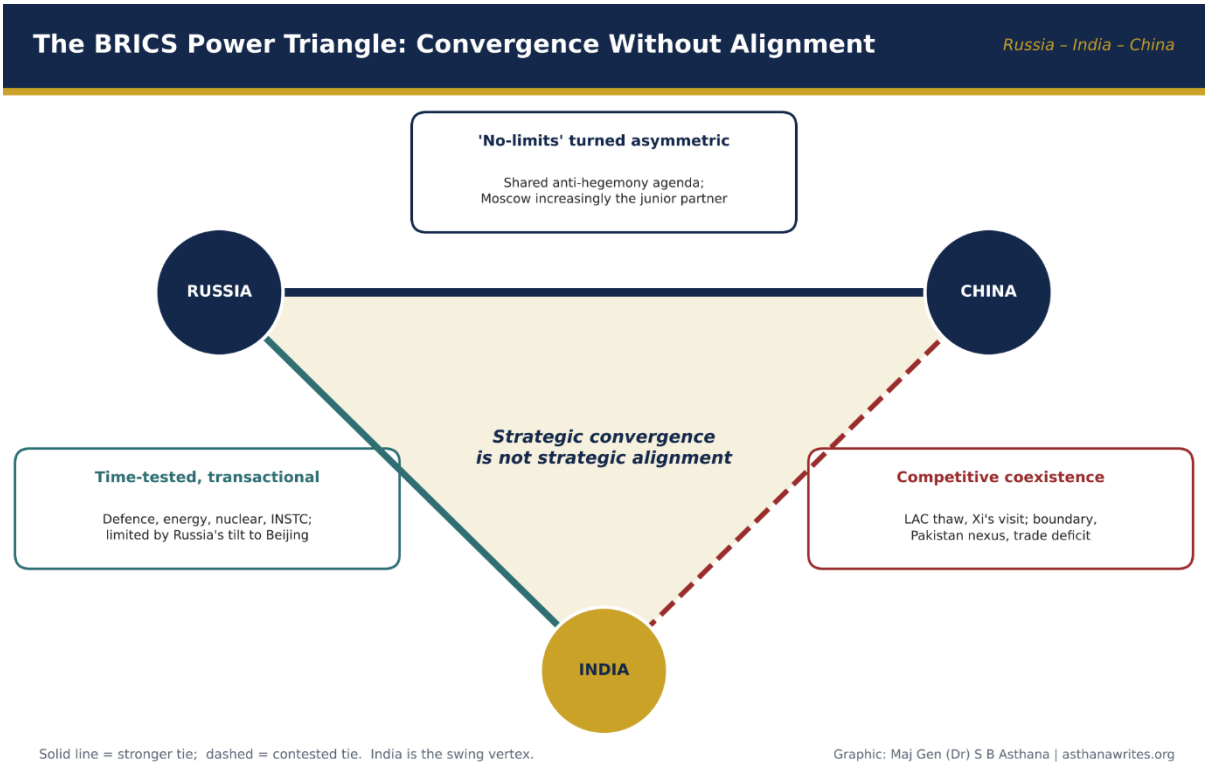


Figure 4: The RIC triangle — three sides of unequal strength; the India–China side determines its stability.

Side	Nature of the relationship	Convergence	Constraint
Russia–China	"No-limits" partnership turned asymmetric	Anti-hegemony, alternative financial and security architecture, energy trade	Western sanctions over Ukraine have made Moscow increasingly the junior partner
India–Russia	Time-tested, increasingly transactional	Defence, discounted crude, nuclear energy, INSTC and Arctic connectivity	Russia's growing dependence on Beijing; payment and sanctions friction
India–China	Competitive coexistence	LAC disengagement and normalisation since 2024; Xi's first visit to India since 2019; trade facilitation	Unresolved boundary, China–Pakistan collusion, a trade deficit near US$ 100 billion, critical-mineral leverage

How the triangle shapes BRICS

- **Purpose of BRICS:** China and Russia lean towards a geopolitical BRICS; India and Brazil towards an economic and developmental one. The RIC equation decides whether BRICS remains reformist or turns revisionist.
- **India is the swing vertex.** Without India, BRICS becomes a Sino-Russian bloc with satellites — and loses its claim to represent the Global South. That gives India the leverage of an indispensable partner, not a junior one.
- **The weakest side determines the stability of the structure** — and that side is India–China. A cordial Modi–Xi engagement does not eliminate the underlying security dilemma, but it demonstrates that BRICS' consensus model can accommodate rival visions.

Where RIC can genuinely help stabilise a turbulent world

1. **Energy and economic security** — protecting energy flows, shipping and seafarers, and building resilient supply chains.
2. **Eurasian Connectivity** – practical cooperation that does not encroach on sovereignty.
3. **Technology Governance** – Ensuring that the Global South is a rule-shaper, not just a rule-follower.
4. **Diplomatic facilitation** on major conflicts, including Ukraine, where India retains credibility with both sides.

For India, therefore, RIC should remain **issue-based rather than institutionalised as a strategic bloc**; progress with China must be tied to border normalisation and mutual security; Russian proposals must be assessed for feasibility and long-term cost; and the Western channel must remain open. RIC is a lever of Indian strategic autonomy, not a destination in itself. India must remain its architect, not become its junior partner — and India can afford to ignore neither China nor the USA.

Q5. How do you assess India's BRICS diplomacy?

Calibrated Activism: From Chair to Architect

India's BRICS diplomacy in 2026 is best described as **calibrated activism** — firm enough to hold the chair's agenda, and restrained enough to prevent BRICS from being captured by any single member's confrontation with the West. On balance, I would rate it as one of the more accomplished chairmanships in the grouping's twenty-year history, delivered in its most difficult year.

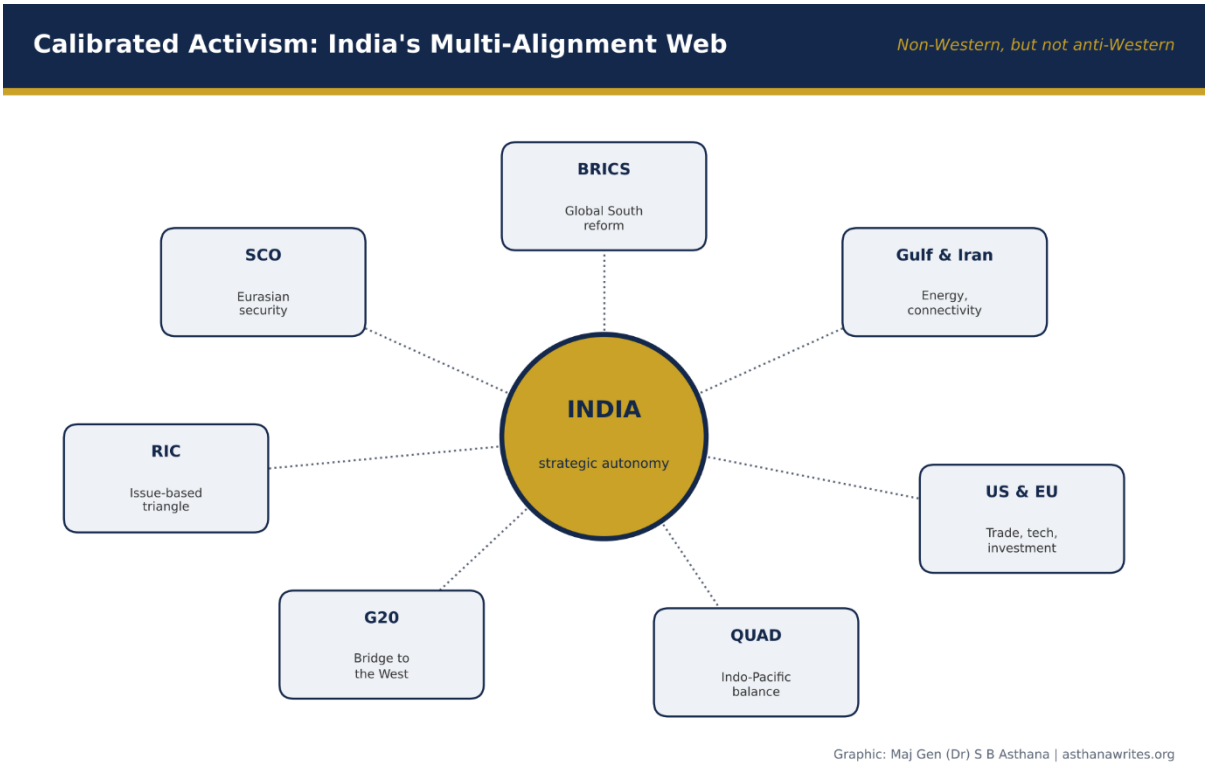


Figure 5: India's multi-alignment — BRICS as one lever among many in the pursuit of strategic autonomy.

What India got right

- **Sequencing to advantage.** The SCO Summit at Bishkek, a sequence not of India's choosing, became a dress rehearsal — allowing India to signal solidarity with Eurasian partners there, while keeping the BRICS text measured.
- **From Chair's Statement to consensus declaration.** Bridging the Iran–UAE divide within four months, and hosting both Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, while keeping trade talks with Washington alive, is multi-alignment in practice.
- **Keeping BRICS non-Western, not anti-Western.** India blocked a common currency, kept the US unnamed, and anchored the agenda in reform of global governance — the UN, the IMF and the multilateral trading system — rather than bloc confrontation.
- **Embedding India's priorities.** Zero tolerance for terrorism and the Pahalgam condemnation, digital public infrastructure, startups, health and Global South voice now form part of the BRICS acquis.
- **Taking BRICS to the people.** More than 400 meetings across 30 cities made the chairmanship a national rather than a Delhi-centric enterprise.

Where the challenge remains

- **Implementation deficit:** several outcomes are aspirational; without institutional follow-up they will be overtaken by China's 2027 priorities.
- **Cost of balancing:** India continues to face US tariff pressure over its energy choices; its multi-alignment is understood in Europe, but tolerated rather than welcomed in Washington.
- **The China variable:** the India–China thaw remains tactical. A BRICS chaired by Beijing in 2027 will test whether India's development-first framing survives.
- **Expansion fatigue:** further enlargement will dilute cohesion; India should favour consolidation and the partner-country model over new full members.

The way ahead: a subtraction and addition strategy

India should *subtract* from BRICS what divides it — ideological rhetoric, currency adventurism and bloc politics — and *add* what binds it: interoperable payment systems, a strengthened New Development Bank lending in local currencies, a BRICS Grain Exchange, joint investment in critical minerals and clean energy, maritime and energy-security cooperation, and an examination of a BRICS-owned insurance mechanism, subject to feasibility and safeguards. Simultaneously, India must sustain parallel engagement with the G20, the Quad, the SCO and its Western partners. Strategic autonomy is not equidistance; it is the freedom to choose partners issue by issue in India's national interest.

India ensured that BRICS did not become a bloc. Its next task is to ensure that BRICS becomes a builder.

Five Strategic Takeaways

- **BRICS is a platform of collective leverage, not a bloc** — reformist rather than revisionist; its credibility lies in institutions, not declarations.
- **The New Delhi Declaration is a diplomatic success** that must now become an institutional one; India gave every member something and no member everything.
- **US pressure shaped the margins, not the mandate** — and coercion is, paradoxically, pushing BRICS towards greater cohesion.
- **The RIC triangle reflects convergence without alignment;** India is its swing vertex, and the India–China side determines its stability.
- **Calibrated activism has served India well:** non-Western but not anti-Western, strategically autonomous but not confrontational.

About the Interviewee

Major General (Dr) S B Asthana, SM, VSM, PhD (Veteran) *is a strategic and security analyst and a veteran Infantry General. He served as Director General of Infantry, Indian Army, and as Chief Instructor/Director of the United Service Institution of India (USI). He has more than 600 published works in national and international journals and media, and has participated in over 5,000 television debates and panels across the world. His analyses are available at* ***asthanawrites.org****, on LinkedIn, and on his YouTube channel* ***@GenAsthanaAnalyses****.*

Views expressed are personal.

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16) Shri Niranjan Marjani,

Editor-in-Chief, Buena Suerte Media, Vadodara.

BRICS India 2026

1. Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob – HT).

At the moment, BRICS is somewhere between noise and impact. It would be wrong to consider BRICS and its activities as hollow or shallow. Growing number of countries across the world are looking to engage with BRICS. BRICS has projected the potential to reform global institutions that may not serve Global South's interests. In a way, BRICS may not be totally opposed to the West and the West-led institutions. BRICS could push for reforms in institutions like the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, something which India has also been vocal about for a long time. This process could take time. However, it would be equally improper to dismiss BRICS's importance in the current world order.

2. How do you assess BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration was significant since it stood out in several aspects. First, BRICS as an organization may be projected as a grouping of members that are either at conflict with each other or have some disputes among themselves. This Delhi 2026 Declaration brought together all the members irrespective of their individual friction between themselves. The fact that this summit achieved consensus on the declaration was a major success for BRICS as a grouping and for India as the host country. Second, the meetings on the sidelines were also an important factor which facilitated dialogue between conflicting parties like India and China and the UAE and Iran. Third, working around their differences, the member countries reiterated their commitment to the Global South and supported equal participation of Emerging Markets and Developing Countries and Least Developed Countries at global forums and in world affairs. Overall, the 2026 Delhi Declaration could be considered as a positive and constructive initiative on which the member countries would now need to work to achieve the goals stated in it.

3. Trump says BRICS has no consensus. How much did US pressure shaped the agenda of BRICS Summit at New Delhi?

While there do exist disputes and conflict among the member countries of the BRICS, it would wrong to say that BRICS has no consensus. Trump's criticism of BRICS stems from the fact that the BRICS member countries took a stand against tariffs. The BRICS members states also voiced their concern over unilateral imposition of tariffs and non-tariff impediments imposed by the western countries to practice protectionism. US pressure may not have been directly instrumental in shaping the agenda of the BRICS New Delhi Summit. However, it was natural that Trump's unilateral actions – military and economic – against several countries, including BRICS members would dominate this New Delhi summit. BRICS as an organization has drawn criticism from Trump since this forum provides an alternative to the US-led unilateral order, an arrangement that is suited only to American interests.

4. How do you explain BRICS power triangle – India-Russia-China?

With respect to India-Russia-China triangle this concept has always been viewed as one with a lot of potential. However, there have been no tangible results or developments from working these three countries working together as a trilateral organization. These three nations, at present, have demonstrated their capability to interact with each other only at bilateral level – India-Russia, India-China and Russia-China. India and China may be working around their differences on bigger platforms like the BRICS or the SCO. However, in case of a minilateral like the so-called India-Russia-China, it could be difficult for both New Delhi and Beijing to keep their disputes, particularly border disputes, aside. Besides, India and China also differ in

their respective world views. India calls for a global order that is rules-based and multilateral. China, on the other hand, aspires for a China-centric order. Therefore, at the moment, it would be difficult to explain or assess the power triangle between India, Russia and China.

5. How do you assess India's BRICS diplomacy?

India's BRICS diplomacy is concomitant to its vocal stand on a multilateral world order. In the current fragmented and conflict-ridden world, India has consistently called for dialogue and diplomacy as the means to resolve all the issues. Further, India also calls for an order where no single power should be dominant in the global system. Putting this principle into practice, India engages with the US and the West as well as with Russia and other countries that have disputes with the West, such as Iran. Through this balancing diplomacy India not only protects its own interests but also acts a bridge which, if necessary, could connect the conflicting parties. India's engagement with BRICS is not necessarily anti-US. BRICS offers an opportunity to India to diversify its foreign relations. By way of BRICS, India is able to interact more with Brazil and South Africa, countries with which New Delhi has otherwise limited engagements. So, BRICS offers India an avenue to expand the latter's global footprint and at the same time pursue the creation of a multilateral order.

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17) Prof. Yoichiro SATO

FPRC Journal- J-68 QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob-HT) Do you agree?

BRICS is less than a "pressure group" if it were to challenge and modify the course of global governance laid out by the G7. The current discord within the G7 (largely due to the Trump Administration's unilateralist orientations) gives a false impression that "alternatives" are available within BRICS. BRICS only offer limited "leverage".

2. How do you assess BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

It achieved several cooperative measures on SCO-like nontraditional security domains (such as health and agriculture). The meeting rejected establishment of a common BRICS currency and resorted to enhancing local-currency (non-US dollar) settlements of trade and emergency financing. The meeting also agreed on promoting Brazil and India and the Global South representation in reforming UN Security Council. None of these has full subscription by Brazil, India, or the Global South, whose interests are to leverage BRICS initiatives in their dealing with G7 countries or P5 countries in UNSC.

3. Trump says BRICS has no consensus. How much did US pressure shaped the agenda of 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi ?

US pressure against India and China's import of Russian energy has been one of the causes of the unity among the three since Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, the US stance on Russian energy export appears crumbling. US President Trump's conversation with Russian President Putin late September 2026 included possible energy cooperation between the two countries. As the stalemate in the US war against Iran chokes the Middle East energy exports and keep the global energy prices high, the energy price is contributing to the stubborn inflation in the US market and the growing dissent against Trump towards the mid-term Congressional election in November. Trump's approach to Putin seems to aim at easing the global energy supply and lead Ukraine to accept an early ceasefire. In this sense, there is no credible US pressure against the BRICS policy coordination on energy.

Russia and China (by courting Brazil and other "Expanded" BRICS members and interested sympathizers) are promoting energy trade denominated in non-dollar currencies. This challenges the existing financial flow, known as "petrodollar," which recycles revenues of the resource exporters (including Middle Eastern oil and gas producers) back into financing the US fiscal deficit through bond purchases. However, resource buyers like India are not signed onto such an initiative, which has no immediate benefit to India, yet helps China internationalize its currency. Russia and China are not likely to be able to promote de-dollarization, while the US largely ignores their initiative.

4. How do you explain BRICS Power Triangle -India -Russia-China.

The triangle is a complex mix soup of bilateral cooperations and confrontations.

China-India security rivalry foremostly puts a limit to closer alignment of the triangle. Bilateral diplomatic efforts between China and India attempt to stabilize the border disputes, while China's assertive maritime advances into the Indian Ocean Region are met by India with its efforts to enhance its own defense capabilities through cooperative partnerships with extra-regional powers like Russia, Japan, France, Korea, Israel, and the United States. Such partnerships encompass joint military exercises, research and development in arms, and arms procurements. China-Russia relationship has strengthened over the past decade, yet China's endorsement of the Russian military operations against Ukraine has remained limited and costly to Russia (i.e. below market energy exports to China). Russia is cautious about its growing economic dependence on China. India-Russia relations are stable, yet India is diversifying its security partnerships at a relative detriment to its previous dependence on Russia. Overall, the triangle lacks solid cooperation to serve as the core of the group and its "Expanded" outreach.

5. How do you assess India's BRICS Diplomacy.

India's BRICS diplomacy appears fully consistent with its effort to create a multipolar world of complex interdependence. The true arena of global governance then should be G20, where both G7 and BRICS members are represented. India from the BRICS side and Japan from the G7 side together hold a key to bridge the two groupings and promote overall voices of the Global South, as opposed to letting China and Russia hijack the Global South agenda and interests. The year 2023

witnessed a close cooperation between Japanese Prime Minister Kishida, who hosted G7 summit meeting in Hiroshima in May and invited many Global South leaders, and Indian Prime Minister Modi, who hosted the G20 summit in September. Close coordination of the meeting agenda and the transition between the two meetings showed a unique opportunity for global diplomacy amid the growing tension between developed democracies and the authoritarian revisionist states.

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18) Dr. Mark G. Rolls
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FPRC Journal – 68

Focus: BRICS India 2026

Questionnaire

Q1. Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob – HT). Do you agree?

The 'noise' around the recent BRICS Leaders' Summit in New Delhi, to which Happymon Jacob refers, was generated by the accompanying "media commentary" and its tendency to show "the summit as a moment of great geopolitical consequence." (Happymon Jacob, 'Don't mistake the noise around BRICS for impact', *Hindustan Times,* 14 September, 2026). Prime Minister Modi reinforced this sense of importance with his statement that BRICS had reached a "coming of age" point (Modi cited in 'BRICS summit 2026: What are the key takeaways?, *Al Jazeera*, 13 September, 2026). The tendency towards an episodic significance for organisations such as BRICS is one which often accompanies these summits: one only needs to think back to last year's SCO Summit in Beijing. A more realistic view, as Jacob goes on to outline, was that the New Delhi summit was "far more modest" (Jacob, *op cit.)*. This more measured view of the summit is one with which I would concur.

Regarding BRICS being, at best, "a messaging platform and a pressure group" *(Ibid*.), then, in a sense, it is living up to the role it foresees for itself. As the fact sheet the Indian government produced for the summit explains, BRICS "serves as a useful platform for consultation and cooperation on contemporary issues having global ... [and] regional significance, and issues of global and political and economic governance." (*About BRICS*, https://www.brics2026.gov.in/about-us/). Moreover, BRICS has sought to exert pressure to bring about reforms to international institutions such as the UN: reforms which prospective BRICS members have been expected to support.

Missing from Jacob's reportage, was India's efforts to try to give BRICS more institutional substance along with momentum from the chairing of one member to another. In this regard, Modi used the summit to propose a BRICS Continuity and Implementation Mechanism whereby a troika of the outgoing, existing, and incoming countries would seek "to track progress and systematically follow-up on outcomes." Furthermore, India also sought to

encourage BRICS to go further than “leader-level statements and towards mechanisms” which have “a more direct impact on trade, investment and business.” Furthering the BRICS Economic Partnership 2030 was an obvious example (‘Expert Explains. What the BRICS 2026 summit achieved – and what challenges remain’, *The Indian Express*, 15 September, 2026, https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/brics-summit-2026-outcomes-new-delhi-declaration-explained-10878812/).

Q2. How do you assess BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration

There are three main aspects to the 2026 Delhi Declaration which are worth mentioning.

First, it was possible for the members to reach a consensus and issue a declaration at all. Whilst all BRICS leaders' summit declarations require unanimous agreement among the member states, and *no* leaders' summit has ever failed to issue one, there were very real concerns at times that the New Delhi summit could be the first. For much of the year, it has been argued, the attention BRICS had attracted was due to friction between Iran and the UAE which
“threatened to derail consensus on several clauses of the declaration.” (Heena Makhija and Sandra Thachirickal, ‘Consensus amid Contestation: Reading BRICS’s New Delhi Declaration’, *Observer Research Foundation*, 16 September, 2026, https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/consensus-amid-contestation-reading-brics-s-new-delhi-declaration) Indeed, it had proved impossible for the foreign ministers’ meeting in New Delhi to issue a joint statement at all. According to an Indian statement released after that meeting, this was due to the “differing views among some members” about the crisis in the Middle East/West Asia. Instead of a joint statement, the members stated “their respective national positions and shared a range of perspectives” (‘BRICS ministers fail to issue a joint statement over differences on conflict in the Middle East’, *Los Angeles Times*, 15 May, 2026, https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2026-05-15/brics-ministers-fail-to-issue-joint-statement-over-differences-on-conflict-in-middle-east).

Secondly, its length and complexity. As has been widely noted, the New Delhi Declaration is the longest one ever to have been issued coming in at 140 paragraphs spread over 45 pages. It is organised around four themes: global governance and multipolarity; international peace and regional security; sustainable and inclusive global economic growth; and strengthening cultural and people-to-people cooperation (the shortest section). Each section contains the typical language of such documents, with the welcoming of meetings already held, the affirming and reaffirming of practical measures and principles, and outlining of aspirational goals. In other words, the declaration indicates the 'rising density' now associated with BRICS and an institutional thickening.

Thirdly, the inclusions and omissions in the language associated with some of the most sensitive issues concerning international peace and regional security. Given the aforementioned problems for BRICS surrounding the situation in the Middle East/West Asia, the Declaration's expression of "deep concern over the continued escalation of tensions" there and "call for exercising maximum restraint, as well as avoiding actions that could further aggravate the situation" *(New Delhi Declaration. Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability*, New Delhi, India 12 September, paragraph 28*)* attracted most of the headlines. That such wording appeared at all was highly significant, although it was notable that no state was mentioned by name. Similarly, the declaration condemned "the imposition of unilateral coercive measures that are contrary to international law .... and the Charter of the United Nations, including non-UN Security Council authorized sanctions (*New Delhi Declaration,* paragraph 22), but avoided the obvious reference to US transgressions in

this regard. It was by using such "carefully generalised language", according to a former Indian Foreign Secretary, Nirupama Menon Rao, that BRICS was able to maintain the appearance of consensus (Cited ‘BRICS summit 2026: What are the key takeaways?'). Careful avoidance of any language which had the potential to cause divisions in BRICS was also apparent in the declaration. Unlike the 2025 Rio Declaration, there was no specific mention of the war in Ukraine; only a call for international disputes to be dealt with through consultation, diplomacy and dialogue" (Bhagyasree Sengupta, ' Why Brics omitted Ukraine war in New Delhi Declaration, expert explains', *Firstpost*, 13 September, 2026, https://www.firstpost.com/world/why-brics-omitted-ukraine-war-in-new-delhi-declaration-expert-explains-14045420.html)

Q3. Trump says BRICS has no consensus. How much did US pressure shape the agenda of the 2026 BRICS Summit in New Delhi?

It is certainly no secret that, at best, President Trump, has an antipathy towards BRICS as a whole and, on occasion, an outright animosity. The latter manifested itself most clearly in his threatening in January 2025 to impose 100% tariffs on its members should they seek to develop a joint currency. He even went as far, in July last year, as to accuse the organisation of pursuing "anti-American policies" ('Trump says alignment with BRICS' 'anti-American policies' to invite additional 10% tariffs', *Reuters*, 7 July, 2025 https://www.reuters.com/world/china/trump-says-alignment-with-brics-anti-american-policies-invite-additional-10-2025-07-07/). In general, US policy on BRICS has been described as swinging "between two unhelpful poles ... contemptuous dismissal or overhyping the threat of BRICS' alleged attempts at de-dollarization." (Sarang Shidore, 'Crying Wolf? The United States and BRICS in the Global Order', *Quincy Brief* #105, 31 August, 2026, https://quincyinst.org/research/crying-wolf-the-united-states-and-brics-in-the-global-order/)

One can never be quite sure whether Trump's dismissal of meetings such as last year's SCO summit or the BRICS Summit in New Delhi is driven more by concerns about US leadership being challenged, or just that he personally is not involved in them. Perhaps inviting him to attend the next BRICS leader's summit under the "BRICS Outreach" mechanism would obviate the problem? Overall, however, he does appear to have an implicit sense that BRICS lacks a certain cohesion

Whilst it is hard to argue that direct US pressure shaped the New Delhi summit's agenda, this being decided upon by India as Chair in consultation with the other members and partner countries in advance, the influence of the US was readily apparent. This was particularly so in terms of those areas of the summit which sought to address matters pertaining to how to reduce the members' dependence on the US dollar. Consideration of the US was also apparent in India's clear attempts to make sure that the US was not singled out for criticism and, more generally, that BRICS did not portray itself as "becoming an anti-US alliance" (Ilan Kapoor, 'Trump may be BRICS's best recruitment agent', *Al Jazeera*, 12 September, 2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2026/9/12/trump-may-be-bricss-best-recruitment-agent).

Q4. How do you explain the BRICS Power Triangle: India-Russia-China?

On first appearances, the so-called 'BRICS Power Triangle', comprising India, Russia and China, seems to indicate both the preponderance of power those three states possess within the organisation as well as the idea that the three of them coordinate their positions to determine the agenda at BRICS' meetings. Whilst the former is undoubtedly true, especially

given the power asymmetry between them and some of the newer members, there is little or no evidence that the latter occurs. Indeed, discussion of the three states and BRICS often begins with the observation that they have significant differences between them and that what BRICS really offers is "different opportunities" for them ('India-Russia-China: BRICS Power Triangle Explained. Spotlight, *Firstpost*, https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=%27India-Russia-China%3A+BRICS+Power+Triangle+Explained). In recognition of these differences, one former Indian diplomat has contended, bilateral issues between India, Russia and China are strictly kept off the BRICS agenda (Ashok Sajjanhar cited *Ibid*.).

Where the power triangle seems to have most effect is in shaping BRICS's orientation towards the prevailing international order, although there are, again, degrees of difference seen most notably in India's efforts to ensure the New Delhi Declaration/Leaders' Summit did not become overtly anti-Western. All three undoubtedly want BRICSs to play a key role in promoting multipolarity and the interests of the Global South. In this regard, there are clear links between BRICS, RIC (Russia-India-China) and the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) which has led to the argument that the three organisations share a 'nested geometry' (Prashant Kumar Singh, 'Strengthening the Nested Geometry of RIC-SCO-BRICS', *Issue Brief,* 24 June, 2026, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses). The power triangle, therefore, is operative elsewhere too.

Q5. How do you assess India's BRICS Diplomacy?

I will confine my comments to India's diplomacy regarding its time as the current BRICS chair and, especially, the 2026 New Delhi Leaders' Summit. As the *Hindustan Times* proudly proclaimed following the summit's adoption of the New Delhi Declaration, India had clearly "pulled off a diplomatic victory" ('How India pulled off BRICS consensus on Delhi declaration amid West Asia crisis', *Hindustan Times*, 13 September, 2026, https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/how-india-pulled-off-brics-consensus-on-delhi-declaration-amid-west-asia-crisis-101789230276713.html). This view was also shared by Nirupama Menon Rao who said that by reaching a declaration, India had achieved a "significant diplomatic success" (Cited in 'BRICS summit 2026: What are the key takeaways?'). Even more so in the light of the "sharp differences between Iran and the UAE" *(Ibid*.). These, of course, had derailed the BRICS foreign ministers' issuing of a joint statement earlier in May. Such differences, which were indicative of both "clashing strategic interests" and the wider geopolitical situation, had led some to contend that there were low expectations for the summit in advance of it ('BRICS summit 2026: What are the key takeaways?').

The final BRICS summit declarations are not solely the product of the summit itself, but also of considerable work beforehand by diplomats and officials (the so-called 'Sherpas' and Sous-Sherpas') as well as working groups of ministers covering specific sectors (Joydeep Chakraborty, 'Behind Closed Doors: How BRICS Sherpas Are Charting 2026's Global Course', *EconomicDiplomacy.in*, 15 February, 2026, https://www.economicdiplomacy.in/post/brics-2026-india-economic-chairship). All these meetings are arranged by the country that is currently chairing BRICS so effective Indian diplomacy had to be sustained throughout the lead up to the summit. This occurring at a time when the country's foreign ministry and diplomatic service is widely regarded as being under pressure to keep up with the increasing demands placed upon it without a matching increase in personnel (See Nayan Chandra Mishra, 'From Ambition to Action: India's Quest for Global Diplomatic Influence', *South Asian Voices*, Stimson Center, 19 July, 2024, https://southasianvoices.org/geo-m-in-n-india-global-diplomacy-07-19-2024/).

The most testing time of all for India's diplomacy, it has been contended, was in the days just prior to the summit when the differences over the wording of the text on the Middle East/West Asia were centre stage. Indeed, it was reported that the negotiations on this issue lasted until 4 in the morning on the summit's opening day ("BRICS adopts New Delhi Declaration after marathon negotiations; India bridges Iran-UAE differences', *The New Indian Express*, 13 September, https://www.newindianexpress.com/india/2026/Sep/12/brics-adopts-new-delhi-declaration-after-marathon-negotiations-india-bridges-iran-uae-differences). For India, the stakes were extremely high with a difficult "three-way compromise" being required to reach a final consensus. This compromise reportedly involved Iran giving up its demands for condemnation of US and Israeli attacks (along with the killing of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei); the UAE its demand for condemnation of Iranian strikes on the Gulf states; and India's desire to ensure any language condemning Israel was diluted (Israel was eventually directly called upon in the New Delhi Declaration to respect the ceasefire agreement with the government in Lebanon and to withdraw its troops from Lebanese territories). ('BRICS Summit: How India forged consensus on the New Delhi declaration. Worldview, *The Hindu* and *The Hindu Originals*, 15 September, 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nf6A62V8hk0&t=202s).

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19)Dr.ArabindaAcharya

(Director, Center for Peace & Development Studies; Former Visiting Professor, Center for International Studies and Development, Jagiellonian University, Poland; Associate Professor and Senior Research Advisor Rabdan Academy, Abu Dhabi, UAE; Associate Professor, National Défense University, USA; & S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore).

Q1. Don't mistake noise around BRICS for impact. BRICS, at best, is a pressure group (Happymon Jacob-HT) Do you agree?

The answer is yes, but with a significant caveat. BRICS matters more as a forum for negotiating and coalition-building than as a coherent alternative to the existing world order. But to call it just a "pressure group" is to understate some of its institutional and economic importance.

Why the label “pressure group” works

There is no shared foreign policy, no obligatory security obligations, no supranational body, no system akin to the EU. Its members have very different interests also. India and China are strategic rivals, Saudi Arabia and Iran have distinct regional priorities and India, Brazil and several others do not share Russia's fight with the West.

It follows that BRICS are more likely to express their discontent with Western domination than to coordinate a common approach.

Its statements on restructuring the UN Security Council, international financial institutions, sanctions, development funding and the international monetary system are indicators of political unity on some broad concepts. But putting those beliefs into concerted action is a whole lot harder.

But BRICS is more than words. If the implication of “pressure group” is that BRICS has no material value, then the argument loses its punch.

The inclusion of new members has altered the economic and geopolitical weight of BRICS. The club currently includes significant energy producers, large rising economies, important commodity exporters and some of the world’s most populous governments. The New Development Bank is a real organization, not just a talking shop for diplomats.

The issue to note is these capacities do not immediately convert into collective power. The core problem is that BRICS lacks strategic coherence

This is arguably the greatest argument in favor of Jacob's formulation. BRICS is not an alliance with a uniform view of threat. Indeed, the members sometimes see each other as strategic competitors.

India for example has been part of BRICS and the Quad at the same time. It has close strategic ties with the United States, Europe, Japan and Australia and is active in BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

That’s not really a contradiction. This suggests that India views BRICS mainly as a means of strategic autonomy, not as an alternative bloc.

China, by contrast, has much stronger ambitions to reshape the international system than most other BRICS members. Russia partly regards BRICS as a counter to the West. Brazil’s emphasis is more on reforming global governance and more representation for developing countries. Gulf members have their own economic and strategic calculus.

Thus, BRICS has an identity problem. It is a coalition of governments upset with elements of the existing order, but not necessarily a coalition that agrees on what should replace it.

De-dollarisation is a prime example of the difference. The BRICS discourse on lessening the dependency on the currency gets huge attention. But there is a big difference between cutting the dollar’s role in some bilateral exchanges and building a viable alternative international monetary system.

The first is already happening in many ways. The second demands deep and liquid financial markets, confidence in institutions, convertibility, broad international payments infrastructure and a great deal of trust among the participating states. So far, BRICS has not shown that it can offer such an alternative in concert.

Therefore, reports about an emerging “BRICS currency” or the imminent demise of dollar domination should be handled with caution.

Where BRICS might really mean the most

Its most important meaning may not be the substitute to the Western-led order but the extra complexity of the working of the order without the Global South. That's a subtler sort of power.

BRICS can talk, coordinate, negotiate and constrain, without necessarily being able to substitute, govern and enforce. This is why Jacob's 'pressure group' definition is helpful, if viewed as pressure without unified strategic command.
The India piece is really significant. For India, BRICS need not be seen as an anti-Western project.

New Delhi may utilize BRICS to advocate for increased presence of emerging countries; overhaul of the international financial structure; more space to manoeuvre policy; more usage of national currencies where it is economically viable; more Global South representation; diplomatic outreach to China and Russia; and expanding India's strategic alliances.

At the same time India may strengthen its ties with the United States, Europe, Japan and Australia. This is not bloc politics but multi-alignment.

My evaluation

I would therefore slightly amend Jacob's suggestion:

BRICS should not be relegated to mere diplomatic din, but neither should it be confused with a developing alternative world order. Its main strength is its capacity to aggregate the bargaining power of large non-Western governments. Its main shortcoming is its lack of strategic cohesion to transform that bargaining power into a common geopolitical project.

In that sense, BRICS now is best seen as a forum for negotiating the conditions of the international order, rather than an organization capable of overturning that order.

And that point is particularly significant for India: New Delhi doesn't require BRICS to turn into an anti-Western bloc for BRICS to be beneficial. That is exactly where India may gain, for BRICS offers another arena in which it can exercise strategic autonomy.

Q 2. How do you assess BRICS India 2026 Delhi Declaration?

My reading of the 2026 BRICS New Delhi Declaration is that it is diplomatically significant, but institutionally lacking. It reinforces the notion that BRICS is developing into a major Global South bargaining platform but it does not yet establish that BRICS can act as a coherent alternative center of world governance.

The New Delhi proclamation, adopted unanimously during the September 12-13, 2026 conference, is unusually extensive, running to 140 paragraphs. It covers global governance, UN, IMF and World Bank reform, WTO reform, sanctions, conflicts, terrorism, technology, AI, commerce, development financing, climate, health and people to people collaboration.

But more importantly, the proclamation goes beyond broad rhetoric in a number of areas. On global economic governance, for example, BRICS specifically demands for improved

representation of emerging and developing economies in the IMF and World Bank and pushes for progress on IMF quota reform. It also supports the restoration of a functioning WTO dispute settlement mechanism.

That's not insignificant. That is to say, BRICS is not simply rejecting the existing institutions, but striving to modify its norms and representation.

The declaration frequently refers to multilateralism, to the UN, IMF, World Bank and WTO. It needs reforming them, not abolishing or replacing them. That makes BRICS fundamentally different from a revolutionary alternative system.

The declaration effectively underlined that the present international order is not representative enough, but its institutions are still indispensable. This is considerably closer to a Chinese or Russian aim of building a separate order than to India's conventional posture.

Indian achievement: UNSC reform

Perhaps the most consequential language for India relates to UN Security Council reform.

The declaration clearly endorses expanded representation for developing nations, and expressly notes that China and Russia back the ambitions of Brazil and India to play a greater role in the UN, including the Security Council.

This is politically good for New Delhi. However, there is an important gap between support for India's objectives and agreement on a clear formula for India's permanent membership. The declaration does not establish a framework to deliver Security Council reform. So, this is a diplomatic victory, not yet an institutional victory.

The declaration also reveals the main contradiction of BRICS. It is notable partially because it comprises 140 paragraphs of consensus among countries with huge differences. But that is its weakness, too.

Think about the membership itself. Now BRICS is India and China; Russia and India; Iran and UAE; Saudi Arabia and Iran; and countries with very diverse relationships to the US and Europe.

Earlier in 2026, BRICS foreign ministers failed to issue a joint declaration due to differences about Iran, the UAE, Palestine and Yemen. India, however, issued a chair's statement. That makes the unanimous Delhi Declaration interesting.

But it also tells us something about what's in it. Agreement was reached partially through the use of terms general enough to include differing national perspectives. That's diplomacy, but it's not the same thing as strategic cohesiveness.

Take the Middle East sector for example. The proclamation expresses worry about the crisis in the Middle East, appeals for maximum moderation, protection of civilians and diplomacy, and underscores the need to sustain trade, supply chains and energy flows. It also has a lot of language on Gaza and Palestine. However, BRICS lacks a mechanism to enforce its proposed settlement.

Thus the BRICS have a shared viewpoint, a collective diplomatic voice and an increasingly collective coercive capability albeit at a limited scale.
But there is something of unique relevance to India on terrorism. The declaration expressly condemns terrorism and the terrorist attack on April 22, 2025 in Jammu and Kashmir and reiterates opposition to cross-border terrorism, terrorism financing and safe havens. It also supports enhanced collaboration through the BRICS Counter-Terrorism Working Group, including on terrorist funding, illicit financial flows and virtual assets.

This is one area where the declaration's relevance to India's security concerns is direct. But again, the test is in the implementation. A declaration to cooperate against terrorism is significantly easier than agreeing which states, organizations or networks should be held responsible. This is where geopolitical differences frequently re-emerge.

The economic component is potentially more important than the geopolitical rhetoric. Instead of supporting the dramatic idea of an instant BRICS single currency, the focus is on increased use of local currency; enhancing cross-border payments; compatibility of payment schemes; strengthening the New Development Bank; borrowing in local currencies; and creating a BRICS investment platform.

India also got support for a BRICS Risk Lab at the GIFT city. This is considerably more plausible than announcing a new BRICS currency.

Instead of trying to replace the dollar wholesale, it implies the BRICS may slowly try to establish financial alternatives at the fringes of the dollar-centred system. That might add up over time.

The Delhi Declaration itself calls for stronger institutional continuity and "outcome oriented" collaboration and welcomes projects like the BRICS Online Archival Database and continued institutional development.

So BRICS is no longer a summit for leaders to release communiqués. Underneath the political rhetoric lies a rising institutional superstructure.

But the bigger test is yet to come in Delhi. And this is where I think the declaration should be evaluated.

The real question is not, how magnificent is the Delhi Declaration? What will BRICS members actually do between Delhi 2026 and the next few summits?

My overall evaluation

I would therefore see the New Delhi Declaration as an important consolidation of BRICS, rather than a revolution of the international system.

It is important for three reasons. First, it indicates that an expanded BRICS can still reach consensus even with deep internal disagreements. Second, it institutionalizes the South's desire for increased representation in the UN and international economic institutions. Third, it moves part of the BRICS objective from political rhetoric to real collaboration in payments, development finance, technology, counterterrorism and economic resilience.

But its shortcomings are just as obvious. BRICS does not have strategic cohesion, binding promises, enforcement mechanisms, and a clear understanding of what should replace the current order.

Which leads us to what I think is the most practical way to put it. The 2026 Delhi Declaration does not make BRICS an alternative world order. That makes BRICS a more powerful bargaining instrument in an increasingly disputed world system.

Q 3: Trump says BRICS has no consensus. How much did US pressure shape the agenda of 2026 BRICS Summit at New Delhi?

Importantly, the United States was at the table, but Trump was not. The most telling characteristic of the New Delhi Declaration is that the United States is rarely mentioned, yet numerous of Washington's policies are obviously evident in discussions.
The proclamation condemned unilateral tariff and non-tariff measures, unilateral coercive measures, sanctions and limitations that impact trade and supply chains. It also expressed concern over the interruption of international commerce, and advocated for strengthening the WTO. This matters because the 2026 BRICS agenda was being created under three key pressures relating to the U.S. - Trump's Tariff Policy; U.S. sanctions, especially on Russia and Iran; and U.S.-Iran military confrontation.
Thus, Washington set the terms of the problem, without controlling the vocabulary in which the problems were presented.

Tariffs were arguably the most obvious conduit of U.S. influence. And this is where we see the Trump effect most clearly.

The U.S. had placed high tariffs on some BRICS economies. India was also under considerable U.S. tariff pressure and likewise Brazil. In this context, unilateral tariffs and protectionist measures received great attention in the New Delhi Declaration.

But there is a pleasant irony. The New Delhi declaration did not mention "Trump," "United States," or "American tariffs," instead decrying the larger practice of unilateral tariff and non-tariff measures as being at odds with WTO standards. In all likelihood it was a calculated diplomatic move.

India had to reconcile two realities; one being the BRICS where New Delhi had to oppose unilateral coercive economic measures. The other is the real fact that India also had to negotiate a trade pact with Washington.

The stress was particularly great because by February 2026 the US and India had already achieved a framework for a preliminary trade deal that included tariff reductions, market access and deeper economic-security cooperation. Just as recently as September 30, Modi and Trump were still talking bilateral trade and Indian officials were in talks with Washington as U.S. tariff measures tied to India's Russian oil purchases were still in place.

So India had a significant interest in ensuring that BRICS took a critical stance on the principle, without turning the summit into an outright anti-Trump fight.

That's the hardest issue for India. Iran made the U.S. aspect considerably harder. At the May 2026 meeting of the BRICS foreign ministers, participants could not agree on wording about the Iran conflict and hence could not issue a joint statement. Iran called for criticism of the US-Israeli military action, while the UAE, a US security partner and member of BRICS, has its own stance.

The New Delhi Declaration urged for greatest moderation, discussion and diplomacy and voiced alarm over growing tensions. It did not clearly name the United States, Israel, Iran or Gulf states as the culpable parties. That's really indicative.
The May 2026 failure was a reminder of BRICS consensus constraints. India's capacity to navigate these constraints was evident in the September 2026 compromise.

There is some factual basis to Trump's assertion that BRICS has no consensus. There were real disagreements, and they were obvious before the conference. But what Trump omitted was the takeaway from New Delhi – that the members did eventually reach accord, but not the maximalist consensus that certain members had sought. In this sense, in fact, U.S. pressure helped shape the boundaries of BRICS.

It wasn't only the U.S. factor that pushed BRICS into an anti-American posture. It put BRICS to the test with a more difficult question: how far can 10 very different countries go in opposing U.S. policy while staying united?
Delhi's response was not very far on explicit geopolitical confrontation but substantially further on principles of economic sovereignty and multilateralism.

That explains the verbiage in the declaration. It attacks unilateralism, without mentioning the United States. It criticizes tariffs, but does not name Trump. It talks about the Middle East war and does not blame anyone. It talks about sanctions, without building an anti-U.S. "sanctions coalition." This is not an arbitrary ambiguity. It's consensus engineering.

So the claim "BRICS has no consensus" needs to be qualified in light of Trump. There are actually two different senses of consensus. First, the Procedural consensus. The issue is if BRICS members can reach consensus on a joint declaration? The response was yes. They did it in New Delhi.

The second was on strategic agreement. The topic was do BRICS members have a common vision of how the international order should respond to the United States, China, Russia, Iran, the Middle East and the global economy? Unfortunately, the answer was no. We see this in the failure of ministers in May 2026 and in the careful phrasing of the declaration in September 2026.

That established a curious Indian diplomatic objective: make BRICS significant without making BRICS anti-American. AS PM Modi said, "BRICS is not against anyone. It should take everyone along." He also stressed on translating the BRICS consensus into tangible action and advocated a continuity and implementation mechanism. This is a far different project from building an anti-American. block.

To summarize, the United States did not write the 2026 BRICS agenda, but U.S. power helped to set the framework around which BRICS had to negotiate. The summit's debates on trade, finance and geopolitics were held against an essential background of Trump's tariffs, sanctions and Iran policy. India's diplomacy, however, turned that external pressure into a

carefully calibrated statement that condemned unilateralism but did not make BRICS a blatantly anti-American coalition.

That is why the Delhi Declaration is more interesting than the slogan "Trump says BRICS has no consensus." BRICS does have consensus – but mostly at the level of principles. There's no consensus on it at the strategic level yet.

Q 4: How do you explain BRICS Power Triangle India-Russia-China.

The India-Russia-China (RIC) triangle is arguably the most crucial and the most misunderstood power geometry in BRICS. It is not an alliance. It is not a stable three-way collaboration. It is better viewed as a strategic triangle in which each side requires the other two for various reasons, but India and China remain strategic competitors. This is especially apparent in the 2026 New Delhi Summit.

Of the three economic powers, China is the largest and it is increasingly trying to create the architecture of a more multipolar international system. Russia has military might, oil resources and a determination to stand up to the West. India has something else to offer: credibility across rival geoeconomics blocs.

This makes India vital to the triangle, but it also precludes the triangle from being a typical anti-Western coalition.

At the same time China and Russia are closer to each other than to India. That is the hard reality which should not be obfuscated by the BRICS framework.

Moscow and Beijing have built a very tight strategic relationship, especially since Russia's struggle with the West heated up after 2022. India's relationship with Russia is a strategic cooperation; with China, a strategic rivalry.

India's membership in RIC/BRICS does not imply New Delhi's acceptance of the Beijing conception of the international order. RIC research has indicated that India has not seen RIC, BRICS and the SCO as a unitary alliance structure, but has used these overlapping institutions to promote different elements of its foreign-policy agenda.

Russia has a strange position in this tringle. It is closely tied to China, but it has also a very strong historical ties with India. This provides Moscow an incentive to manage India–China competition so that it doesn't damage the broader Eurasian partnership. Therefore, Russia can act as a bridge.

This is one reason why Moscow has encouraged better India-China relations. Recently, Russian officials have pointed to the development in India–China relations and Beijing has also publicly asserted that good India–China relations are in the interests of all three nations.

But Russia's ability to play this role should not be overestimated. Moscow's rising economic dependency on China is an asymmetry in the triangle. Moscow has far less clout over Beijing than it used to.

Anyway, the most complicated position is India's. India does not wish to choose between Washington and Moscow, or between the Indo-Pacific and Eurasia. That is exactly why BRICS is important for New Delhi.

India can do BRICS; keep the Quad going; develop ties with the United States; keep defense and energy ties with Russia; engage China through BRICS, SCO and bilateral institutions; and promote itself as a leading voice of the Global South all at the same time.

It is not bloc formation but strategic autonomy through numerous institutional affiliations.

Indian strategic experts have therefore called the RIC-SCO-BRICS relationship a form of "nested geometry. " India balances its interests in the Eurasian and Indo-Pacific regions through overlapping Eurasian institutions.

India got something in the Delhi Declaration 2026. The declaration says that Russia and China back India's hopes to play a larger role in the UN including on the Security Council.

That is important because India is getting something out of the RIC/BRICS partnership that it cannot get only through bilateral relations with Washington or Beijing. It is converting the combined weight of Russia and China into institutional backing for India's Global South leadership aspirations.

But there is a big proviso, support for India's desire is not the same as an accepted mechanism for Security Council growth. This is diplomatic leverage, not institutional transformation, not yet.

China holds significant economic power within BRICS, but if it were merely a China-led alliance, BRICS would be considerably different. India puts a stop to it. India adds more Global South credence to BRICS. It is also a key player in the Indo-Pacific, an economy with strong ties to Western and non-Western markets, and a country that can talk to Washington, Moscow, Beijing and developing countries.

That's why Beijing can't just approach India as an enemy inside BRICS. The Chinese purpose is partially to control competition with India, but also to ensure that BRICS does not become a clearly Western-oriented institution.

Moreover, Russia needs both India and China. For Russia, the triangle is even more strategically advantageous. China offers Moscow markets, trade, technology and diplomatic backing, while India offers energy demand, a big diplomatic connection and strategic diversification

That matters because Russia does not want all of its external economic and diplomatic emphasis to be reduced to China.

This is shown by the current energy relationship. China has recently fought harder for Russian oil supplies, although Russia remains the biggest supplier of petroleum to India. Thus, we have the cooperation and the competition in the triangle.

That is why BRICS can't be a China-led anti-American coalition. This is likely the most important finding.

A stronger BRICS will be good for China. Russia hopes BRICS will assist to push back against Western economic and political pressure. But India has no interest in transforming BRICS into a formal anti-American group.

This Indian predilection is mirrored in the Delhi Declaration. It favors multipolarity, representation of the Global South, reform of the UN and WTO, resistance to unilateral sanctions and more financial autonomy, but does not seek to build a collective anti-U.S. security architecture. The declaration clearly states that BRICS cooperation is aimed at building a more representative and equitable international system, not a military or ideological bloc.
The real power triangle is not symmetric then. Hence it is more correct to speak of it as a "triangle" than as a "axis."

Q 5: How would you assess India's BRICS Diplomacy?

My assessment of India's BRICS diplomacy in 2026 would be one of "strategic autonomy through institutional activism." India is not aiming to make BRICS an anti-American bloc nor is it allowing China to define BRICS on its own. Instead, New Delhi is aiming to make BRICS beneficial for Indian interests, Global South representation and a more plural international system while keeping room for manoeuvre with Washington, Moscow and Beijing.

The 2026 Chairmanship is particularly telling, as India had to navigate three simultaneous relationships: Russia-China collaboration, India-China competitiveness, and India-U.S. strategic engagement

India has sought to shape what BRICS is about. The hallmark of Indian diplomacy was its attempt to pull BRICS out of a mostly anti-Western/de-dollarisation narrative toward a wider agenda of development and governance.

This was mirrored in the Indian theme, "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability" and Modi's emphasis on a "people-centric" and "humanity-first" BRICS. India hosted hundreds of meetings in about 30 Indian locations and purposely widened the agenda beyond elite politics.

Strategically, it was beneficial since it made BRICS tougher to dismiss as solely a China-Russia-Iran vehicle targeting the United States. This conflict was exactly what Chatham House pointed out: India was happy to play down the more controversial de-dollarisation goal and instead highlight local currency settlements and digital payments, rather than a distinct BRICS reserve currency.

Certainly, India has sought reform of the system, not abolition of the system. This could be the clearest imprint of Indian diplomacy in BRICS. The Delhi Declaration expressly advocates for a more representative international system and increased participation of emerging and developing economies, especially in the Security Council.

This is what Modi's formulation tells us: the aim is to convert the Global South from being a "rule-taker" to a "rule-shaper". Classic Indian strategic autonomy. India is not saying Destroy the existing international system. It is saying Make the existing order more representative, and give countries such as India a stronger role in defining it.
India's BRICS diplomacy is consequently different from that of China. China has more economic weight within BRICS and greater incentives to exploit the organization as part of a wider strategy to strengthen its influence over international organizations. But India wants a BRICS without Chinese supremacy.

The Delhi meeting was marked by palpable tensions. China used the meeting to push for deeper economic integration and efforts such as a BRICS, while India refused Chinese-led payment infrastructure like mBridge.

This is India's primary strategy: cooperate with China where interests align; push back against Chinese institutional domination where interests vary. That is a far more sophisticated policy than either alignment or confrontation.

Russia is another pillar of India's BRICS policy. India has also used BRICS to keep its ties with Moscow without making Russia an exclusive strategic partner.

India's approach to de-dollarisation is particularly instructive. This could be the clearest test of India's strategic calculus.

Some members of BRICS have urged more decisive movements away from dollar dominance. Instead of a BRICS currency and an alternative monetary union to rival the dollar, India has emphasized local currency settlement, cheaper cross-border transactions and payment interoperability.

This was identified by Chatham House as a key aspect of India's BRICS strategy. This is a very practical distinction. India wants to end its reliance on financing but not necessarily a financial confrontation with the United States. India has also attempted to transform BRICS into a Global South institution, rather than a BRICS institution.

Conclusion

Strategic autonomy is the best way to understand India's BRICS diplomacy. New Delhi wants to bolster BRICS as a forum for Global South representation, institutional reform and collective bargaining, but not allow it to become an anti-American bloc or a China-dominated grouping. The 2026 Delhi Summit showed the possibilities and the constraints of this strategy. India can set the agenda, and build agreement, but cannot wish away the strategic divisions between India, Russia and China.

Hence, BRICS is not an alternative alliance framework for India. It is yet another instrument of influence in a multipolar world.

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Invited Articles :

(1) India's Amb.(R) PREET MALIK

Causes for the Distrust Between the Bamar and the Ethnic Groups In Myanmar

"Burma came into being as an independent nation 'with a second-eleven cabinet.'" Sir Nicholas Fenn (from 'Who Killed Aung San')

Introduction

Ever since Burma/Myanmar gained Independence from Britain the relations between various groups of Ethnic States and Territories have been one's that were overwhelmed by distrust between the Ethnic minority and the Bamar majority.

The roots of this lie in the manner in which the Colonial Administration of Burma distinguished between the Frontier areas and 'Burma Proper" as the former were administered loosely where the people of these areas exercised full control over local administration, granting full play to their cultural mores and in sharp contrast to this style of governance the centrally administered and controlled Ministerial Burma hosting the Bamar majority were administered by the colonial authority.

This segregation between the two geographies was in direct contrast to what transpired during the past relations between Monarchical Burma (pre-colonial times) and the Frontier areas. Where the relations could best be described as one's reflecting a system of the hill areas being treated as "fluctuating tributary and suzerain" in practice with relations varying in qualitative terms, depending on whether Central Burma was ruled by a strong monarch or a weakened one. However they were never under direct centralised administration, continuing always to exercise **domestic autonomy**. This was the exercise of the typical pattern of non-territorial sovereignty over fixed frontiers or uniform control.

During the Colonial period with Divide and Rule as integral to the way in which the British conducted their policies to keep the occupied regions under control, the policy of discrimination against the majority by granting preference over them to the trusted Ethnic Groups, in both, employment in the security services and education ensured, that the loose but effective understandings between the Bamar majority and the people of the key frontier areas, during the Monarchical era were replaced by distrust between them. As the Kachin's, the Karen's and the Chin's were seen as the direct beneficiaries, along with the Indian's and the Gurkhas, of colonial preferential treatment.

There was a fall out of this. As the areas freed jointly by the BIA and the Japanese forces from the retreating British forces these areas came to be administered by the Bamar dominated areas openly discriminated against the Karen and Indian communities creating communal unrest and the killing of numerous people of the two targeted

communities. Where the Karen were concerned, they did not sign the Panglong Agreement and were openly distrustful of Aung San stickingto the letter and spirit of Panglong. However their protests at this stage were generally peaceful

The Panglong process that had its beginnings in 1946 when the Shan led meetings took place with General Aung San settled the anxieties over how a Union of Burma, based on a constitution that would grant both equality and autonomy that would apply equally all parts of Geographical Burma.

This trust between the leaders of the frontier areas where the Shan Saophas and the Kachin Duwas had taken the lead with the involvement of the Chin and Aung San; created a unity of purpose that informed the agreement that would grant Independence to a united Burma endorsed by the Panglong Agreement of February 1947.

This trust was openly defied by the U NU led AFPFL, as they overturned the Framework Agreement, that had spelt out the manner in which the draft Constitution, being debated at the Constituent Assembly, would adhere to the principles agreed to at Panglong, of a federated Union with full internal autonomy to the states and territories forming Burma. Where Central Burma, that was overwhelmingly Bamar, would also be constituted as a state with its own legislature, placing it on par with what would be the structure of all the other states.

The 1947 Constitution, that came into force on the day Burma attained Independence, was nominally federal but in essence Unitary, where Bamar dominated Central Burma would not be constituted as a separate state but would be part and parcel of the Union Administration, reconfirmed the legitimacy of the traditional distrust that the people of the frontier areas felt towards the Burman's of 'Burma Proper', the plains people the inhabitants of Central Burma

As this has remained the prevailing sentiment that has seen major insurgencies that have ensured that the Union Government, whether civilian or military, could never exercise full control over the geographical territory that constitutes the nation. It is important to spell out what continues to dog the Myanmar of today, that once again is governed by a nominal civilian government that is nothing but the Tatmadaw dressed up in the esoteric term 'mufti'. (Civilian dress)

What marked the beginnings of Independent Burma under the Premier Ship of U Nu was described by American historian John F. Cady most tellingly in his book entitled 'A History of Modern Burma' as

"The Launching of the newly independent state of Burma was the prelude to the outbreak of a series of rebellions, which narrowly missed destroying the government of Premier Nu within little more than a year."

While U Nu with the help of the Burma Defence Forces originally led by the Karen General Dun Smith and subsequently by General Ne Win was able to consolidate his position and contain the moves by the Than Tun led CPB and the KNDO/KNU Karen use of violence, the poison of rebellion had been laid on the soil of Myanmar and the rebellions against the 2021 coup by a composition of EAOS and the Bamar led and composed PDF's that are engaged in a civil war against Naypyitaw now threaten a possible Balkanisation of Myanmar. What is noteworthy in what is prevailing situation

is the coming together of the Ethnic Groups, like the Kachins for instance and the Bamar youth led PDF's

The prevailing situation, where large tracts of the nation lie outside the control of Naypyitaw, have a historical connotation that deserves to be analysed setting out the causes responsible for it.

Pre-Colonial Historical Relations

Prior to the British Occupation of Burma there were only, what may be best be described, as peripheral relations between Monarchical Burma and the Ethnic Groups. In context to the modern nation state of Burma/Myanmar, it was never a Centralised nation State. The Bamar Majority, including during the Pagan, Ava and the Konbaung Dynasty rule was confined to the Irrawaddy plains. The relations with the Ethnic controlled regions were tributary in nature without interference in the manner in which the different states administered themselves with complete autonomy being exercised by the Ethnic Groups.

As this period stood in stark contrast to what happened to the relations after Burma's independence its worth re-emphasizing that during the pre-colonial period the interactions between the Monarchy and the Ethnic Groups were a combination of Tributary and local autonomy between the two entities. These relations were at their strongest and more ritualised with the Shan Sawbwas (these relations, with Shan Saowbwas were largely hierarchical but autonomous in nature) and very weak with the Chins, the Kachin and the Karen. One interesting detail was the manner in which the Burmese monarchs and the Shan rulers; the former portrayed themselves as the "Kings of the sunrise," recognizing the Shan rulers as subordinate to themselves as "Kings of the sunset."

The pre-colonial reality was that the relations were one's entirely guided by the extraction of richer tribute when the Burman King was strong and could threaten the use of military power, a situation that was largely reversed when the King was weak.

In a nutshell the arrangement was where the Shan Saophas and other ethnic Chiefs were 'semi-autonomous tributaries' of the Burmese Kings; tribute was paid, and on demand provided military assistance, and in the case of the Shan's at times subjecting to hierarchical oversight, but all of them exercised substantial local self-rule.

Colonial Burma

The British adopted a dual administrative approach differing between 'Burma Proper' or 'Ministerial Burma', that comprised the lowland areas hosting the majority Bamar demographic group and the Frontier Areas. In the Bamar area the British exercised direct rule. While in the case of the Frontier Areas, occupied by the Shan's, the Kachin the Chin, the Karenni and in other frontier areas, the colonial authority exercised indirect rule under a separate Frontier Areas Administrative Service. To further complicate issues, the Shan States were treated on par with the Indian Princely States, where a British Resident/Commissioner influenced the decisions made by the saophas, while at least on paper, the ruler was supreme.

Again while Ministerial Burma was subject to heavy bureaucratic rule and interventions, as well as a substantial push towards development and trade, the frontier areas were loosely administered by the Frontier (Burma) Administrative Service, that left local

authority in the hands of the ethnic chiefs. In strategic terms the frontier areas served as buffers, that were economically less developed and politically separate from the Bamar majority areas.

Here the question arises was the British approach a recognition of the existing structures that prevailed during the now abandoned Monarchy or was this a measure defined by the colonial penchant for retaining control through 'divide and rule?' The latter assumption gained credence by the steps adopted to include the Kachin, Karen and the Chin along with the migrant Indian and Nepali Gurkha communities into the Burma Security Services while the Bamar, less trusted, were excluded.

As a consequence the Karen, the Chin and the Kachin communities developed close ties with the British. They remained loyal to the British during the Japanese occupation of Burma, participating in the intelligence led British operations against the Japanese

These groups were also active operationally when the British and Indian armed forces re-engaged and defeated the Japanese. Aung San and the renamed Burma National Army as it joined hands with the British forces, had a first-hand observation of the fighting abilities of the Karen, the Kachin and the Chin forces. Aung San, not only included them as part of the Burma Army called the Burma Tatmadaw at independence, but placed the Karen, General Dun Smith at its head with suitable command positions for the senior ethnic officer on their being absorbed in the Tatmadaw.

There was little doubt that the way the Colonial Administration discriminated against the Bamar majority the seeds of distrust that may have already existed in the normal course among the hill people of the frontier states, and the plains people of Central Burma were considerably enhanced by the policies followed. To this could also be added the promises made to the Karen and the Kachin that they would be treated effectively as independent entities. A promise that was never quietly forgotten as the move towards an Independent Burma took root.

The BIA and the communal acts against in particular the Karen and the Indian communities.

Ba Maw's memoir and other minor historical references clearly point to the violence committed against the Karen ethnics in 1942, in Myaungmya (Delta Region of the Irrawaddy). This was an important factor that added to the differences that have continued to dog the relations between the Union Governments and the Karen, after Burma's independence.

The developments took place as the BIA and local Baho (Thakin and BIA run administrations) inexperienced administrations were heading districts, as they came to be freed from British control, as the Japanese forces advanced into Burma. This was in a sense filling the vacuum as the colonial administration fled the Japanese advances.

The BIA, entirely manned by the Bamar ethnicity, held the loyalty of the Karen and the Indian communities to the British against them. They (the Karen) were also suspected of harboring British arms and were called upon to surrender them. As a surrender of some arms took place the BIA personnel resorted to looting, this in turn forced the Karen's to resist and largescale violence took place resulting in the killing of hundreds of Karen's and a number of Indian's.

There was clear bias shown against the Karen's and this led to the demand not only for a separate state, that they could call their own, but also the violence that surfaced between the Karen and the Union Government, that continues to this day.

For all practical purposes the BIA and the Thakin administration came to exercise acts of terrorism that were not just seen as directed at the Karen and the Indian communities but were seen as examples of what could happen to all the non-Bamar ethnicities once the Bamar gained control.

This was the existing scenario when the British came back to control Burma and resumed the administration along the pre-war format that kept the frontier areas isolated from Burma Proper.

Negotiations for Independence and the Panglong Process

1. ***The proposal for a Crown Colony by Robert Reid in November 1941***

Before coming to the developments that followed the path of negotiations between General Aung San and Prime Minister Clement Atlee of Britain, that led to the Independence of Burma, it is important to track another attempt at mischief by the Colonial authorities, mainly in India and the Department of State in London proposing a Crown Colony that would comprise of the Assam Hill States and the adjoining frontier areas of Burma. This was a proposal initiated in its formal form by the Governor of Assam, Robert Reid, in 1941, and was forwarded by Viceroy Linlithgow to London.

There is some degree of confusion over the degree of support the proposal may have secured in Rangoon. It is however clear that the then Governor Reginald Dorman Smith opposed it. What is more Sir Andrew Clow who was the Governor of Assam in 1945, pointed out, that the suggestion would be strongly opposed by Indian opinion. He took responsibility to writing it off.

Anyway with the defeat of the committed imperialist, Winston Churchill, and his replacement by Atlee strongly opposed to Britain retaining its colonial hold on South Asia, the proposal died a natural death. But it had created mischief in its suggestion that the new governments, that would take charge of Independent India and Burma, would not have the fundamentals of understanding and handling of the tribal areas, and this would create permanent fissures difficult to overcome.

In one sense there has been a degree of predictability that conditions of insurgency in North East India and the Frontier Areas of Burma/Myanmar that have followed independence would be difficult to deal with and control. To a reasonable extent the Government of India has been able to contain the insurgencies with restructuring the Tribal areas by granting them states of their own, with development and participation in the decision making at all levels of the democratic structures of governance.

In Myanmar, on the other hand the situation has remained violence prone, and violence led, against the Union, furthered by distrust between the national minorities and the Bamar majority. Where today the nation is faced a wide ranging civil war and the possibility of balkanization.

2.***The Panglong Process***

The Attlee-Aung San negotiations for the Independence of Burma did not in any automatic sense include the Frontier Areas, the understanding between the two was that while both parties desired the unification of these areas with 'Ministerial Burma', it

required the 'free consent of the populace (inhabitants) of the frontier areas. Until that consent had been given the frontier areas would have only a loose association with the interim government covering matters of common interest.

It was in this context that the 1947 Panglong meeting was planned to determine the type of association that they could accept during the period of transition to a constitutional Burma, It was also agreed to set up a special enquiry committee (Rees-William Commission) that would examine and report on the manner in which the frontier people could participate in the drafting of the Constitution, of a unified Burma.

The Rees-William Committee had before it, three clear specifics:

a. The British would not impose union. Role at Panglong would be as a facilitator

b. A unified Burma could only be claimed till the leaders of the Shan's, the Chins, the Kachins and the Karens gave their consent.

c. The negotiations would be between Aung San and the Supreme Council of the United Hill Peoples, that was meeting at Panglong.

Aung San assisted by U Tin Tut ICS (as legal advisor), U Chan Htun also addressed as Htoon was te main adviser on the drafting of the Constitution. He was also in touch with B.N Rau the Indian constitutionalist who was an external consultant, and U Nu as Vice President of the AFPFL negotiated with the Shan saophas, the Kachin Duwas and the Chin chiefs. The Karens and the Karenni were there as observers.

The Panglong Agreement was signed on 12th February 1947. To sum up the Leaders of the Frontier areas and signatories to the Agreement, agreed to cooperate with the interim government to advance the process of independence, where it was agreed that the frontier areas would:

. Appoint a counsellor for the Frontier areas on the Governor's Executive Council.

. The granting of Full autonomy in their internal administration

. Financial autonomy "as far as possible."

. Equality of rights with Ministerial Burma.

.The setting up of a Kachin State was considered "desirable" to be considered by the Constituent assembly. The details of the manner in which the Frontier Areas expected to be part of united Burma were spelt out in the report that the Rees-William's committee

Findings of the Rees-William Commission known as the Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry (FACE) On How To Associate the Frontier Peoples with the drafting of the Constitution

The findings of this Commission were of paramount importance in the drafting of the Constitution, that was entrusted to Aung San, ensuring that it would be in line with the Panglong Agreement and the proposals of the Commission. The proposals constituted the following:

1. The Frontier peoples would be fully associated with the drafting of the Constitution. They would have 45 seats of the total seats in the Constituent Assembly:
2. The seat allocations would be 26 for the federated Shan Syates; 2 for the Kachin Hills; 6 for the Chin Hills District that included the Arakan Hill Tracts; 3 for the Karerreni States; 2 for the Salween District for the Karen's; and 1 for the Somra Tract/ Naga Hills.

3. The frontier areas were to have equal status in the Assembly but joining it did not commit the area to union or federation.
4. These 45 members would hold full voting Rights on all matters. With full autonomy in internal administration.
5. Overwhelming consensus among the leaders of the Frontier peoples. No decision on a federal constitution, was to pass unless it had a majority of the members present from the unit or the frontier states concerned.
6. Full Internal Autonomy over local administration, customs, land laws, education and public health.

DIVISION of Powers:

Federal control over: "External Affairs, national defence, currency, customs, coinage and trunk communications."

State/Provincial subjects "All residual powers and domestic administrative functions to be retained by the States/regions."

7. Right of Secession: incorporating the right to secede after a designated trial period
8. Constitutional safeguards: Amendments to the Constitution affecting the "rights or Borders of specific Frontier areas required a super majority (a two-thirds vote) of the representatives from the affected area."

Executive Representation: representatives of the FA's to be part of the Cabinet and a designated Counsellor to the Governor to oversee the transition policies.

I have detailed the Findings of the Commission as these were the areas that the Frontier Areas leaders insisted upon. More importantly they reflected an overwhelming consensus.

What followed were two clear developments that reflected on the drafting of the Constitution, that came finally to be adopted as the 1947 Constitution. The first development was the unanimous adoption of the draft, popularly known as the Aung San draft, at the May 1947 AFPFL Convention. Once the deliberations commenced at the Constituent Assembly, after Aung San was assassinated, there were substantial changes made to the draft framework approved at the AFPFL Convention. The second development took place on the Constituent Assembly adopting a nominally federal structure of governance that failed to honour both the findings of the Rees-William Committee and the promise of the Panglong Agreement. This derailing of the Aung San framework led to the hardening of the distrust between the two demography's that constituted the Union of Burma/Myanmar into the insurgencies that despite all efforts, sincere and insincere, by the Union Government of the day have failed to achieve a settlement.

In fact the betrayal of the trust that had so delicately been established by Aung San set in place the environment that has continued to stand in the way of a United Myanmar.

Aung San's political philosophy Detailed:

Aung San Predicts His Own End.

"*How long do national heroes last? Not long in this country, they have too many enemies. Three years is the most they can hope to survive" Aung San in conversation with Governor of Colonial Burma Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith. In 1946 He then went on to say, "I do not give myself more than another eighteen months of life."* Quoted by Benedict Rogers from his book 'Burma A Nation at The Crossroads'

How was Aung San Trusted while the Bamar as a whole were distrusted by the Ethnic Groups:

"The greatest impression he made on me was one of honesty. He was not a politician; he was a patriot. He was realistic, hard headed negotiator who stood up for his rights...I liked Aung San. He was a genuine leader." (Field Marshall William Slim.

The Ethnic Leaders with whom he negotiated the Panglong Agreement were impressed by his "*uncompromising honesty and lack of chauvinism."*
The Leaders made it clear that while they harboured "*deep suspicions" of Bamar politicians* (in this they were to be proven right when these politicians reversed all that Aung San had agreed to and meant to follow) They held that Aung San was different. They viewed him as a "*straight forward patriot who respected their demands for:*
Internal autonomy
Federal equality and
Right to Secede."
Then there is the quote from Arthur Bottomley from his official report on the Panglong process and Agreement. Bottomley was the official observer representing Britain at Panglong overseeing that the agreement was freely and voluntarily arrived at. This was his observation of Aung San that I am quoting as no other Bamar leader civilian or Military at the command of Burma/Myanmar has ever achieved this degree of trust between the leaders and people of the Frontier areas and the Union Government.
*"I was impressed by the bearing of Aung San at the Conference and the obvious sincerity of his readiness to grant internal autonomy and financial assistance to the Frontier peoples. I do **1**sincere implementation of agreement from any other politician or party in Ministerial Burma."*
Arthur Bottomley
(British Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs).
His (Bottomley's) official report was responsible for Britain's then Labour Government and the British Parliament going ahead to endorse a Union of Burma that included the Frontier Areas. It's also telling that the views on the Bamar politician held by the leaders of the Frontier Areas *were* also endorsed by Bottomley in his official report.

To define the immense trust that Aung San was able to achieve with the Ethnic Leadership in his meetings with them at Panglong that initially, in 1946 had commenced on the suspicions of the Shan, the Kachin and the Chin leaders; that Aung San by his qualities of person was able to reverse to trust. Two quotes from

Panglong, expressed by the Ethnic leaders is great significance and of lasting importance. They define the reasons why in failing to keep this trust, the Union Governments since Burma/Myanmar's independence, have failed to secure the security and unity of Myanmar, with insurgencies preventing earlier Yangon and subsequently Naypyitaw to exercise control over the whole of Geographical Myanmar.

Equality pledge: "*If Ministerial Burma gets one Kyat***,** *then you will get one Kyat*.

Seen as evidence that he would treat all regions with absolute fairness.

"If you want to join us, we will welcome you. If you do not want to join us, you are free to stay out."

Seen as emphasising freedom of choice.

The Narrative:

Unlike what was the majoritarian approach of the Bamar community, its greatest leader, who negotiated Burma's independence from colonial rule, General Aung San, believed that:

"If Burma receives independence, the Frontier Areas must receive independence at the same time."

This is a quote that in substance reflects what he believed; that the constitution, that would establish how Burma was to be ruled, had to be **federal i**n nature and not **Unitary.**

This was reinforced by the approach that he adopted and asked the drafters to follow

"Ensure a clear division of powers between the Union and the constituent states."

Full autonomy where the state legislatures would have unrestricted authority over land, culture and administration.

Union Government would fundamentally be confined to defence, foreign affairs and currency.

To sum up what Aung San was working towards was a Parliamentary form of governance, federal in nature, with safeguards against authoritarianism, a union based on the Panglong spirit that ensured that the federal arrangement was participatory and voluntary in nature. Keeping this factor in mind he endorsed the principle of right to secede by the Shan States, for instance after a 10n year period, if they felt that the letter and spirit pf the Panglong Agreement had not been followed.

Fleet Footed Aung San:

During the first Panglong Conference of March 26-28 1946 and then subsequently in September 1946 exchanges between the Shan States Sawbwas, along ,with Kachin, Chin and Karenni leaders watching what was transpiring in the talks with Aung San made clear their apprehensions these being spelt out as follows:

1. British withdrawal would leave them exposed to domination by the Burman majority.
2. The AFPFL was already attempting to build political organisations inside the Shan States, which the Sawbwas saw as interference in their internal affairs.
3. Once independence was achieved, Rangoon could simply absorb the Shan States into centralised Burman State.

In response to these apprehensions Aung San's approach displays the sincerity with which he delt with sensitive issues that could stand in the way of the unity that he was set on achieving. He knew how important in this regard was the winning of the trust of the Shan States. Among the Frontier States they were the most organised and had been infected, in a logical manner, with the experiences of the WW II influencing them, like the Burmese people as whole, in a 'contagious desire for a greater measure of self-government free from British control.' He countered the Shan Sawbwas misgivings during the 1946 visits and discussions at Panglong and the February 1947 Panglong meetings he offered a ready solution. This also covered the other leaders from the Frontier areas who harboured the same apprehensions expressed by the Shan Leadership. He reportedly told them that "you write the terms on which you will join the Union, and we will negotiate from there."

This is the spirit of genuine accommodation that won over the support of the Ethnic (national minorities) leaders ending in the adoption of the Panglong Agreement.

The obvious conclusion, of any analyst would be, that Aung San had worked out a strategy that would secure not only the immediate trust of the people and leaders of the Frontier areas but would form the permanent basis, on which both sides would together form the Union of Burma, that would ensure its unity, integrity and sovereignty. Placing it among leading economic and strategic Asian Powers.

The unfortunate factor was that the rest of the leadership of the Bamar majority did not have the vision, to follow through on what he had achieved and ended up with a Burma that has continued to live on suspicion between the different communities that formed it. Opening itself to exploitation by external powers where China has come to achieve a position with Burma/Myanmar; subordinating its interests to the interests of China

Constitution making and the violation of the Panglong spirit as reflected in the Panglong Agreement.

Prevalence of majoritarianism over the Panglong Vision (that was close to Aung Sans political philosophy):

The developments that covered the timelines over which the Panglong Agreement was signed, the Aung San draft was approved, and the final Constitution was adopted were the following dates.

1. **TIMELINES**:

March 1946. Panglong I These were the meetings confined to interactions between the AFPFL leadership with the Sawbwas of the Shan States. The first meeting took place reportedly on March 26, 1946. Discussions involved exchanges between a group from the AFPFL led by U Nu (Vice Chairman of the AFPFL) assisted by U Saw (former wartime premier of Burma) and according to some records by U Tin Tutt. Representatives of the Karen, Kachin and Chin were also present at the discussions.

On the Shan States side the chief discussant was Sao Shwe Taik assisted by Sao Khun Kyi and Sao Sam Htun.

During this meeting a message from Burma's colonial Governor was read out specifying that "no decisions on the Frontier Areas would be made without the free consent of their inhabitants."

This was the first 'major' direct meeting, at a political level, between frontier leaders and Burman politicians. In keeping with the nature of relations, or rather non relations between the two sides, not surprisingly, mutual suspicions of the intentions harboured by both sides was a dominant factor in play The Kachins expressed open skepticism on Burman sincerity referring in this regard to the critical speeches made by U Nu against British policy. The Karens held to their insistence of a separate State. Eventually both sides agreed to set up a United Burma Cultural Society to be headed by Sao Shwe Taik as Chairman and U Saw as Secretary. Aung San was not present at this meeting. On the whole this meeting showed the distance between the Burman and the Ethnic minorities and the mutual suspicion that governed their attitude towards each other.

September 1946.

There are some references to exchanges between the two sides but there is apparently no definite record of any formal meeting at the top leadership levels. However two factors do find pace touching September.

First was the replacement of the hardline colonial Governor Dorman Smith by Sir Hubert Rance who was more in line with Whitehall, on the moves towards granting Burma its independence. Around September 27, 1946, Aung San was appointed as Deputy Chairman (effective he was now the Prime Minister) of the new Executive Council, The AFPFL was now seen in a governing role and thus seen, in a political light, as forming the future government of and independent Burma. As such it was now being regarded as a legitimate power with whom negotiations could take place and what was agreed to could be implemented.

Second were the meetings that continued to take place between the Ethnic and Burman contacts that helped create a better atmosphere, overcoming the coolness that was seen in the March 1946 exchanges. There was a definite positive move towards a better understanding between the Burman and the Frontier Areas leaders.

November 1946

November saw the constituting of the Supreme Council of the United Hill Peoples (SCOUHP) headed by Sao Shwe Taik as President. It brought together the leaders of the Shan States, The Kachin and the Chin together in one representative body. This Council became the intermediary in the negotiations that followed leading to the Panglong Agreement of 1947.

Late November 1946 Aung San visited Myitkyina and held extensive discussions with the Kachin leadership, also addressing a public rally and conferred with the Kachin military personnel who had served with Brish allied forces against the Japanese. Aung San succeeded in winning the trust of the Kachin people by emphasising unity, equal rights and self-administration while fighting together for a "joint independence."

Moreover, it was Aung San who influenced the Kachin elders to ask for a Kachin State. A state that would contain within it the Bhamo and Myitkyina districts with its boundary "stretching as far as the borders of Katha District".

Here again, Aung San was looking at the future of a united Burma that by winning the support of the Kachin elders would shut the door of any interference by China. For a better understanding of what was involved during the negotiations between the British and Chinese authorities that ended in the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1894 (subsequently modified and adopted in 1897), the Chinese had attempted to convince the British to include Bhamo and its river port complex on the Irrawaddy as part of China. This was denied to them, but Aung San was keeping in mind that the Chinese could revive this claim as they had held during the negotiations with the British that the border here between Burma and China should be at the Irrawaddy.

Aung San met the Shan leadership in Taunggyi (actual date not on record) where he addressed a public meeting urging the Shan people to join in the efforts to work jointly for an independent and united Burma.

Panglong II

1.**Panglong Conference 7-12 February 1947**

(This followed on the first gathering at Panglong in March 1946)

(The First Panglong Conference that took place in March 1946 was organised by the Shan Princes (Saophas) to work out the "future status" of the ethnic groups of the Frontier areas. On behalf of the AFPFL Aung San met with the Shan, Kachin and Chin leaders and it was during these discussions that Aung San established the trust that broke down the "colonial era barriers," paving the way to the second Panglong Conference and the adoption of the Panglong agreement.)

2.Panglong Agreement signed on 12th February 1947.

3. The Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry; also known popularly as the Rees William Committee. The Committee had apart from the Burman representatives led by U Tin Tutt, and including the Shan, Kachin and Chin leaders, also included Saw Sankey representing the KNU (Karen National Union). The committee made one eleven-day preliminary tour from Myitkyina to Loikaw held hearings in Rangoon from March19 to 26, 1947 and at Maymyo from March 27 to April 24, 1947 adopting its report on April 24 1947.

4. AFPFL convention in Jubilee Hall in Rangoon, where Aung San 'presented the 14-point framework for the Union Constitution.' This was adopted by the Convention on 23rd May 1947. The text was then forwarded to the Constituent Assembly

5. On 19th July 1947 Aung San and most of his cabinet excepting both Tin Tutt and U Nu who were absent, were assassinated. Aung San's draft was still before the Constituent Assembly.

5.The Constituent Assembly had its first sitting on 9th June 1947, Aung San was assassinated on 19th July, the framing of the Constitution ended in the unanimous adoption of the Constitution on 24th September 1947, and it came into force on 4th January 1948, Burma's Independence Day.

2. AUNG SAN DRAFT: Main Points

Composition of the Union: The Union shall comprise Ministerial Burma (Burma Proper) along with the Frontier Areas (Shan States, Kachin Hills, Chin Hills, Karenni States, etc.).

Classification of Component Units: The constituent parts of the Union shall be divided into three tiers based on territory, language, culture, and economic viability:

Union States (e.g., Shan State) with full internal autonomy.

Autonomous States (for areas possessing distinct characteristics but lacking complete economic self-sufficiency).

National Areas (for distinct cultural/linguistic groups lacking larger defined territories or economic self-sufficiency). •

Union Legislature: Legislative power shall be vested in a bicameral Union Assembly consisting of the **Chamber of Deputies** (based on population) and the **Chamber of Nationalities** (based on ethnic/territorial representation).

Distribution of Powers: Clear separation of legislative powers between the Union Assembly and the legislatures of the individual States/Units.

Right of Secession: Autonomous constituent States reserve the right to secede from the Union after a specified period (10 years) under stipulated constitutional conditions.

3. Aung San's Clarificatory statement to the AFPFL Convention held at Jubilee Hall, in Rangoon (19-23 May1947) made on 23rd May, 1947.

He explicitly described the Framework for drafting of the constitution as a 'skeleton' to be used by the Constituent Assembly (Incidentally the Constituent Assembly was elected under the limited franchise defined under the 1935 Constitution). Some extracts from his statement are being included as they provide an important insight into not just the approach but the sincerity with which he looked upon a United Burma where everyone would be equal and equally empowered.

. "when we build our new Burma, shall we build it as a Union or as a Unitary State? In my opinion it will not be feasible to set up a Unitary State. We must set up a Union with properly regulated provisions to safe guard the rights of the national minorities."

. "The Union was to consist "Union States" (or national states) (here he included specific mention of a Myanmar(Burman) as among the frontier areas to have its own constitution) .... **would have their own constitutions, parliaments, governments and judiciaries."**

The form of government of the Union was described as a composite drawn from the constitution processes of the Constitutions of America, the UK, the Soviet Union, the Yugoslav model, the Canadian 9selective utilisation to set out the Union State provisions South Africa (for Autonomous State/National areas) etc. The argument here was to ensure that the Constituent Assembly could draw upon the experience of other Staes to ensure that the Constitution adopted was "suited to Burmese conditions and long-term economic policy, not a copy of any single system."

These extracts and clarifications selected from Aug San's 23rd May 1947 speech not only make his intentions clear, reflected in clear terms the agreement that he had achieved from the leadership of the Frontier Areas; but how he could convince the Bamar majority, including those who preferred majoritarian rule, that it was in their interest to accommodate, to the fullest extent, the multi-ethnic Burma that would function as a Union with the equal participation of the "National Minorities." This was statesmanship of the highest qualities. Unfortunately, those who finally exercised their authority at the Constituent Assembly, permitted majority views to overcome the essence of the framework that they had unanimously adopted under their fallen leader Aung San.

During the drafting process Aung San was assisted by U Chan Htoon who was the legal architect not only for the Aung San draft but eventually what came to be adopted as the 1947 Constitution. It was U Chan Htoon who was sent by Aung San to visit India and consult with Sir Benegal Narsing Rau (constitutional advisor to the Indian Constituent Assembly). Sir B N Rau was treated by Aung San as the External Constitutional Consultant. (Rau was involved at almost all stages of the drafting of the Constitution of Burma including the Framework that Aung San had presented to the AFPFL Convention of May 1947).
The others assisting Aung San, were U Nu and U Tin Tutt (ICS). U Nu was the senior Minister under Aung San in the interim Cabinet and Vice Chairman of the AFPFL under Aung San who was the Chairman. Aung San's principal advisor, Tin Tutt, was also at that time, the Finance Minister in the interim cabinet. He was the senior most administrator, being the first Burmese to be admitted to the ICS, in 1922.
Provisions relating to the powers and executive authority of the Union Government were, it appears, deliberately left out for the Constituent assembly to answer. One thing however was made clear that the 1935 British imposed Constitution would not be followed but a process that would establish a new sovereign framework suited to Burma's multi-ethnic demography would be adopted.

4 Full Trust In Aung San

Josef Silverstein described Aung San as:
"an eminently pragmatic leader focused on attaining both national unity and social harmony."

One thing that bears mention in capital letters is the immense trust the frontier areas leaders had come to repose in Aung San. A trust that every action taken by him in the post Panglong period he acted to confirm and retain. His assassination was perhaps the greatest damage to the political developments that followed on his removal from the scene. He was the one Bamar leader who could have kept the opposition within and without the AFPFL at bay and could have forced the establishment of a democratic Burma, based on equality and autonomy, to prevail over Bamar majoritarian instincts that favoured a unitary Burma. Unfortunately, his successor U Nu, was unable to ensure what Aung San had set in motion, but to all intents and purpose was complicit in weakening the bonds that Aung San had so obviously established between the majority and most of the minorities. The only large exception being the Karen community.
Here it is worth reiterating the point that the reason why the ethnic groups leadership, leaving aside the Karenni and the Karen, placed trust in Aung San, as

they witnessed how firmly he stood at fulfilling the guarantees promised and formulated in the Panglong Agreement; making it clear in the 14 point framework, for drafting the final Constitution, that the promises of Panglong were being followed both in letter and spirit.

In plain terms Aung San was standing by the promise that the Constitution would ensure a:
1.A decentralised state, guaranteeing autonomy. Ensuring equality between Proper Burma (constituting the Bamar Majority) and the Frontier Areas.
2.Dynamic and active administrative autonomy to be exercised in full by the 'constituent states forming the Union.
3.Equality of political representation and territorial recognition for all non-Burman nationalities.

These three factors have been spelt out as these were what came to be attacked by the representatives of the Bamar majority and in effect were replaced by provisions in the 1947 Constitution, reversing the promise that Aung San had held out to the Ethnic groups. The failure to keep to the Aung San proposals, on these key issues, was responsible in changing the atmosphere of accommodation to rebellion. A rebellion that had many tentacles that eventually denied democracy to the people of Myanmar with ruthless military rule replacing it.

5. The Constitution Of 1947 and Betrayal of the Aung San Framework:

What Aung San wanted and assiduously worked for, was a Union, where both the Majority and the Ethnic communities shared space as equals and the Union of Burma would be a 'true federal union built on mutual trust.' This was in keeping with the trust he had managed to establish with the Kachin, Shan and Chin leadership involved with him around the Panglong process. A process that helped structure the understandings that had first taken shape in what came to be known as Panglong I that was held between both parties in March 1946.
Once he and most of his Cabinet were assassinated the whole atmosphere changed and the Burman majority asserted itself behind a Unitary constitutional structure that was nominally federal in nature.

6. Comparative Analysis Between the Aung San draft and the 1947 Constitution:

The main differences occurred around 5 different provisions that in effect challenged the adherence to the Panglong process to which the AFPFL, under Aung San, a signatory to. All of which had been included in the 14 point framework that had been drawn up by Aung San and unanimously endorsed by the party while forwarding it to the Constituent Assembly.

A. **Federal Structure**: the Aung San (AS) draft sought a federal union based on equality between the states forming the Union. Here it was categorically spelt out that the Bamar majority 'Burma Proper' would have its own separate national state that would functionally be on par with the other states forming the Union.

The 1947 Constitution (the Constitution) created an asymmetric and unequal federal structure, that did not create a separate state for Burma Proper but instead permitted the Bamar majority to weld it to the Union Government. This granted the majority control over the National or Union Parliament, as well as on the executive authority of the Union and the Judicial authority.

B. **State Constitutions and Residual Powers**: AS had provided for each state forming the Union to draft its own Constitution, covering and defining the control over their internal affairs and defining their organs of government.
The Constitution did not permit separate state Constitutions instead adopting provisions granting control over the state affairs to the Union Constitution. Thus in effect, ensuring a unitary system of government, that subordinated the states to the actions of the Central Government. “Federal in theory but unitary in practice”

C. Representation: Aung San safeguarded the rights of representation ensuring equality for all including the minorities where their presence in the Upper House would balance the actions of the Lower House safeguarding the interests of the minorities both national and non-Burman.

The Constitution adopted a bi-cameral Union Parliament that would be dominated by the Bamar majority by granting it disproportionate influence over the Union Parliament’s activities. With the Upper House lacking effective power, and where actions could be forced by the Lower House on the states.

D. **Religion**: The AS draft spelt out Burma as a secular state, emphasising the separation of religion and politics. In other words, religious freedom.
The Constitution recognised the “special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union.” This was U Nu’s doing latter on he went on to declare Buddhism as the State Religion.

E. **Right to Secession and Autonomy Guarantees**: While both texts covered the right to secession, in keeping with the original commitment to the Panglong Agreement. The Constitution while fixing a 10 year period restricted the right primarily to the Shan and Karenni/Kyah states. On the issue of local administrative autonomy, where the AS draft was federal in design with equal statehood, making autonomy more robust in principle the Constitution made it more restrictive and under centralised control, denying the right to states to have their own constitutions that would spell out the administrative controls they would exercise.

The Frontier Peoples Representatives place their opposition on record at the Constituent Assembly:

Looking at the manner in which the AFPFL now led by U Nu betrayed the trust, not just of the people and leadership of the Frontier Areas, but of their recently assassinated leader Aung San, whose 7 point basic principles had been unanimously endorsed at the May 1947 AFPFL convention, there was a justification on the parts of the ethnic minorities feel betrayed and to be reinforced in their distrust of the Bamar majority.
The representatives of the frontier areas, participating in the deliberations at the Constituent Assembly, expressed deep concerns and reservations on the way in

which the Aung San proposed provisions on Federalism and local autonomy were being diluted as the draft for the 1947 Constitution, increasingly moved in the direction of a highly centralised structure. As openly admitted by U Chan Htoon, the AFPFL's legal advisor, (who had drafted the changes towards that end), confirming that the "structure was nominally federal but functionally highly centralised."
The Shan, Kachin, Chin and Karen representatives protested that what was being adopted would grant to the Central Government, in Rangoon, 'almost all real fiscal, legislative and executive power.
To sum up, the objections centred around:

1. The setting up of a Unitary State disguised as a Federal State. The Ethnic Delegates demanded a 'genuine federal structure where central and state powers were strictly separated. '
2. Control over Natural Resources. The Shan and the Kachin delegates objected to the provisions that consolidated revenue under the Central Government from timber, minerals and land. This they rightly claimed went against the promise at Panglong of financial independence under local administration.
3. Reduced powers of the state legislatures over law making and the veto over them held by the Central Government.
4. Objections to the provisions that automatically made the head of each ethnic state a member of the Central Cabinet, making the 'Chief Executive' of each autonomous state answerable to the Central Prime Minister rather than to the state council of the state that they headed.

To overcome these valid objections and to appease the ethnic groups representatives the Right to Secession was introduced into the Draft. Permitting the states to secede after a period of ten years after the Constitution came into operation, on certain spelt out conditions. However, this right was confined to only the Shan and Karenni States, rousing vigorous objections by the Kachin and the Chin states to their states being excluded from exercising this right and being treated on an equal footing on states' rights and constitutional guarantees.
There is little doubt that the letter and spirit that had informed the draft that Aung San had sent on its unanimous adoption at the May 1947 AFPFL Convention, to the Constituent Assembly had lost out to what the Bamar majority, now unleashed from the control that Aung San had come to wield on it, moved swiftly to establish a strongly unitary state over the objections of the representatives of the ethnic groups.
Despite these developments and being let down on the key demands of a federal structure and full autonomy, the representatives of the frontier areas 'ultimately signed off on the 1947Constitution".
They did so because of three considerations.
a. The constraint imposed by the timeline for the ending of colonial rule.
b. Fear of complete political breakdown following Aung San's assassination.
c. Appeased by the "10 year review/secession clause. This though limited to the Shan, and the Karenni Sates, did not lead to an immediate breakdown.
Perhaps it should be seen as a practical approach by the frontier peoples leadership but soon the cauldron of the ethnic states had boiled over and ethnic armed insurgencies soon broke out.

My Comment

It is ironical that the very trio that had worked on the Framework for the Constitution adopted by the AFPFL's Jubilee Hall Convention of May 1947:
U Nu.

U Tin Tutt and
U Chan Htun (Htoon)
Worked together, intellectually, to dismantle the core elements that were promoted by Aung San, in his clearly defined strategic approach, that were to invest the future Constitution of the Union Of Burma. Resulting in the establishment of a Unitary State over a Federal State giving full reign to Majoritarianism and the eventual insurgencies carried out by almost all the ethnic groups against the Central Government. In the process also permitting the interventions of external powers, like China for instance, in Burma/Myanmar's internal affairs.

Let's consider what happened immediately following the assassination of Aung San
U Nu, now the boss, directed Chan Htun to redraft the unanimously adopted AFPFL Convention draft effectively reshaping what Aung San had put together and promoted.
Tin Tutt set up a group of fellow Bamar Cambridge graduates including Sir Ba U, E Maung, Kyaw Myint, to assist Chan Htun in the redrafting and to all practical purposes changing the federal structure based on equality to a unitary one that would suit majority control.
This approach and divergence was not merely retrospective. The speed with which the redrafting took place at the involvement of the Bamar professional elites who were trained and familiar with the colonial administrative practices and the legal system were committed to the establishment of a strong centre firm in their belief that it needed a functioning unitary state to keep the Union functionally safe and secure. A strategic mistake for which a price continues to be paid.
It is also interesting that in their private conversations and statements they openly claimed that "we never meant equality." This clearly indicates that they were not sincere in the support they had offered Aung San when he was heading the process of Constitution making. Nor were they sincere in their acknowledgement of the principles enunciated in the Panglong Agreement.

Brief assessment of the obvious difference of approach between Aung San and U Nu.
Aung San: His vision was of a Burma that was voluntary, celebrating its multi-ethnicity as its strength, governed by a genuine federal structure underwriting autonomy for all the constituent units, secular and obviously rejecting both unitary centralism and Bamar majoritarianism. While insisting on a Union that constitutionally protected minority rights and categorically opposing a unitary state he famously declared that the slogan "one race, one religion and one language" were obsolete.
U Nu almost immediately on Aung San's assassination abandoned the federal secular foundation tat was part of latter's vision, came instead to promote a 'cultural-religious assimilation' He worked to get adopted a Constitution that was a 'highly centralised homogenous unitary state that denied ethnic rights, language and culture' in the name of "national Unity".

The result was obvious. By adopting a unitary state that favoured majoritarianism U Nu and his Bamar colleagues, both political and professional, discarded Aung San's original and well thought out strategy promoting equality and voluntary association ended up facing, what he was bent on preventing, a permanent feeling of distrust, and a civil conflict that sees no end.

Ne Win as he took over control of the Union, only confirmed and entrenched the centralised state and a state of insurgency continued to prevail, where post 1967 riots against the Chinese in Rangoon and elsewhere, the Chinese furthered their support, both material and feet on the ground, to the CPB rebellion against Burma.

The Rebellions against the Union Government immediately after Independence (CPB and Separately KNU):

Before we deal with the serious rebellion by the Karen that commenced soon after the independence of Burma, a point needs to be inserted here that the very adoption of the 1947 Constitution unanimously was a short lived unity. Aung San had as part of his approach of treating all communities on the basis of equality and in order to build trust with the Frontier Areas, had seen to the Constituent Assembly being presided over by the Shan leader Sao Shwe Thaik Subsequently, U Nu tried to maintain the symbolism resulting in Sao Shwe being elected as the first provisional President of the Union of Burma following on its independence from Britain.

Subsequent developments showed that the palliatives put forward to get the Frontier Areas leadership to vote in favour of the Constitution came to be treated as a "**forced consensus.**"

Soon after independence the scene was charged with a multiplicity of rebellions against the Union Government under Prime Minister U Nu. The first one's were set off by the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and the ethnic (at this stage Karen) led by the Karen National Union (KNU).

1. **The CPB Rebellion**

The Than Tun led CBP (White Flag) had been forced out of what could be described as open politics (Legal Politics), and soon after resorted to violence to gain its ends. In the initial stages no ethnic groups were involved in its rebellion.

The CPB had been expelled from an AFPFL that had come to be dominated by the moderate socialist group. While the Communists had been expelled the AFPFL remained faction ridden albeit dominated by the moderate group.

After its forced removal from legal politics the CPB resorted to strikes, protests and a rising threat of violence. The actions of the CPB led to counter actions by the U Nu led Government eventually leading to the CPB leaders being 'expelled from Rangoon.' Forcing the leaders to go underground.

The leadership now regrouped in the rural areas, where it formally adopted armed struggle as its future course. The decision was taken in May 1948 and a 'Liberation Army,' for achieving its aims was created. Interestingly, the People's Volunteer Organisation (PVO) a paramilitary group created by Aung San also split into factions and a large group (The PVO-White Brand) of them joined the CPB. These were trained armed groups and formed the base of the early Liberation Army.

Ironically the initial occupation of major towns like Prome and the threat of a violent takeover by the CPB ,of central Burma, was defeated by the Karen dominated, but including Burman, forces, led by General Dun Smith (an ethnic Karen) Commander-in-Chief of the Burma Defence Forces. Not only that the early KNU led violence against the Union Government was also put down by the same Dun Smith commanded forces.

2. The Karen rebellion:

"The Karen of this area (Salween) claim that their right of self-determination be recognised by the concession of a separate colony for the Karens. If the British fail to honour this great responsibility of theirs, the Karens should not be blamed if they think of other alternatives to achieve their legitimate objectives." This was the statement made by the Karens to the Colonial authority announcing that they would fight for their rights, with the implication that they would resort to violence if they did not achieve their objectives.

The Karen rebellion against the Union of Burma is being detailed by me, to an extent as it is separate from what happened in the case of the other Frontier areas. Who initially not only placed their trust in Aung San's word but went along with the adoption of the nominally federal structure of the Constitution of 1947. In contrast the "three Kareni states… reflected unconcealed distrust of Burman intentions."
The spokesperson for the three Kareni states, made it clear that they would participate in the Constituent Assembly, but 'declined to commit themselves to membership in a federated state **until it had demonstrated to their satisfaction that the Burmans would live up to their promises.'**
To the Rees William Committee (Frontier Areas Committee) 'nine representative Karen elders in a prepared statement' reflecting the decisions taken at meeting held in Shwegyin. Categorically stated that the karens "opposed entering into any constitutional relations with an independent Burma.'
There was a consistent expression by the Karen, particularly those of the Karen National Union that apart from the 'historical factors' the Karen pointed to "**bitterness arising from Burma Independence Army excesses in the Salween District area perpetrated in April and May of 1942."** Because of the BIA connections and the actions taken by them, in particular, against the Karen, Aung San, despite his efforts to placate them, continued to be distrusted.

The Karen community taking this from the post-Independence period could be taken as concentrated in the Kayin State, the Irrawaddy Delta, the Pegu Yoma Hills, Tanintharyi and the Salween River Basin during the Colonial period. In todays Myanmar they remain in most of these areas with concentrations also in Mon State and of course the Karenni State. As a result of the insurgency related disruptions there is a considerable presence of the Karen in adjoining border areas of Thailand.
During the colonial period the Karen were a favoured group, being treated on par with the people of the frontier areas, keeping them separate from the centrally administered Burmans. They were thus largely left to manage their affairs being only administered indirectly, even though they were not in a state, where they were separated from the centrally administered Burmans.
In areas of education and recruitment to the Security Services they held a favoured position over the Burman's and were encouraged, by the colonial administrators dealing with them, to form associations and to petition for autonomy in local administration.
However, their demand for a separate state (Kwathoolei) was never met, not by the Colonial Authority, nor included in the Atlee-Aung San agreement nor by the Union Governments that followed. The Karen were suspicious of the entire Panglong process and of Aung San and did not trust the promises held out by him on the Union Constitution. They had suffered at the hands of the Army that he led during

the Japanese occupation of Burma and continued to harbour distrust in the Bamar majority.

The Karen have remained in rebellion against the Union Government and carrying actions against it since 1949, with open violence against the state from the end of January 1949. The Karen National Union leadership (KNU) following the 112 day siege of the Rangoon suburb of Insein by the Karen National Defence Organisation, went underground.

The Karen community continues to adhere to the four principles that were announced by Saw U Gyi at the 1950 Congress:

1. No surrender
2. Full recognition of the Karen State
3. Retention of arms
4. Right to decide their own political destiny.

Articles 180-181 created what was defined as a placeholder for the Karen community comprising of the Salween District with some adjacent areas, subsequently spelt out more clearly by amendment 1951 and the Act of 1952, as

A. The Old Salween district

B. The townships of Kya-in, Kawkareik, Hlaingbwe, Pa-and Thandung

This is what contains the existing Kayin State, located along the Thai border that was originally called The Kawthulay Special Region. This region did not have the right to secession added to it.

To conclude the Karen movement began on a peaceful note seeking the immediate grant of a Karen State. For this a peaceful mass demonstration took place in February 1948. When the petions presented by them, to the U NU Government failed to get a positive response, they took to open rebellion and occupied Insein. Aung San and the AFPFL leadership had never agreed to the Karen demand for a fully independent or sovereign Karen state that being the demand of the KNU. The 1947 Constitution, as we have seen above, contained only a limited and conditional provision that was rejected by the KNU. In October 1947 the KNU formally rejected the Constitution.

The situation of the Karen rebellion could be summed as follows:

1. 1948-2011 this period saw almost constant conflict between the KNU and the Union Governments both civilian and military controlled
2. 2012-2021 decided to work out a deal with President Thein Sein signing the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) promoted by Thein Sein, in 2015. When Suu Kyi heading the GOM launched the 21st Century Panglong process, the KNU participated, but in both cases it maintained that both processes were “insufficiently sincere on federalism and power-sharing.”
3. Post 2021 and the military coup carried out by the then Senior General Min Halaing, the KNU ‘declared the NCA void,” resuming its military actions against the military regime and remain an important part of the ‘Spring Revolution’ that continues.

To sum up:

The KNU has remained consistent in its demand for self-determination, opposed the unitary system of governance that was seen as serving the interests of the Bamar majority. Whatever the original importance that was attached by the Karen leadership to an Independent state with an established sea front, the insistence since 1976 by the ‘mainstream leadership favoured federalism (with full autonomy) within the Union of Myanmar over independence’f. After 2021, the insistence has been on the establishment of Kawthoolei, as a strong federal state within a authentic

Union of Myanmar structured as a Federal democracy representing the will of all the people.

Real problem that continues to seperate the frontier areas from mainstream Burma/Myanmar

While there was a degree of expressed unanimity in the adoption of the Constitution of 1947, in fact there were considerable reservations and as time went ahead there was increasing distrust between the Ethnic minority and the Bamar majority. The situation was best reflected in the discussions that took place among the people of the Shan State. As 1957 drew near and the ten year period, where the Shan State could exercise its right to Secede, under the provisions of Chapter X of the Constitution, approached, there was public debate that took place on whether the Shan should secede from the Union. The main grouse under which this was being debated, was the lack of satisfaction over the 'quasi-federal nature of the 1947 Constitution, central government interference, and the unfulfilled promises of equality and autonomy.' There was a degree of support expressed in favour of secession, but the situation did not reach the point where a 2/3rds majority in its favour was reached in the Shan State Council. Here the claim has always been that Central Government pressure, that probably also involved monetary considerations helped ensure that the 2/3rds majority was not reached.

What did happen were two significant developments.

1. The feeling among both the Burman civilian and military leaders that even the discussion on secession was a threat to national integration and territorial sanctity, amounting to an attack on sovereignty.
2. Shan accusations and mounting grievances against the central governments heavy handed interferences that curbed autonomy, had to be acted against. These feelings were now directed towards effective Constitutional reform favouring genuine federalism and full autonomy.

Eventually the Shan deliberations crystallised into what came to be known as the 1961 Federal Movement putting forward the Shan Federal Proposal.

These developments were marked by the emergence, in 1958, of the armed resistance groups complicating the geo-strategic factors that had already been set in motion by the CPB and the Karen rebellions.

The **federalism discussions** were launched in January 1961 with the Shan state Government adopting the **Shan Federal Proposal.** It was adopted in a show of unanimity that in itself, carried a strong message of dissent, against both the Constitution and its actual functioning that reflected its unitary status.

The following, All states Conference at Taunggyi, held over June6-16 1961, was attended by some 226 delegates all of whom were from the Ethnic States and Groups. No one from 'Burma Proper' viz., the Bamar majority were included. The Conference endorsed the Federal amendment Proposal that made the following points:

1. **A separate Bamar state on equal terms to all ethic state units.**
2. **Creation of Mon and Arakan states.**
3. **Equal powers for both houses of the Union Parliament.**
4. **Equal representation of the states to the House of Nationalities. (The Upper House of Parliament.)**

5. **Restricted powers of the Union Government to a limited list of functional subjects covering mainly Foreign affairs, Defence, Currency etc. All residual powers resting with states.**
6. **Full autonomy with legislative, executive and judicial powers lying with the states.**
7. **Right to self-determination and to Secession.**

To achieve all of this a All States Unity Organisation was formed

Facing immense pressure Prime Minister U Nu was forced to call a Federal Seminar, in Rangoon, on 24th February 1962. The seminar comprised of Burman and Non-Burman leaders and legal experts to hold discussions on an agenda that covered the twin areas of federalism and minority rights.

The deliberations of the Seminar were interrupted by the Ne Win led Coup d' Etat that he carried out on March 2, 1962. All the participants were arrested, parliament was dissolved, the 1947 Constitution at this stage was suspended subsequently being replaced, all open discussion of federalism was permanently stopped.

Ne Win, to justify his act; that under the Constitution amounted to an act of treason, carried out by a cabinet Minister who was also the Commander-in Chief of the Armed Forces (Tatmadaw), cited as the justification of the action, the danger to the nation, of national disintegration, created by the demands raised in favour of federalism.

This was the act that in the long run not only ensured the dominance of the military over governance but as we must note, has in practice, ensured that Myanmar could only have a limited democracy, entirely under the control of the military. It is against these developments that the prevailing civil war, that in a sense has brought large elements of the Bamar majority, particularly its youth, in common cause with the Ethnic Groups, in the mutual fight against the Tatmadaw controlled Union Government at Naypyitaw. What Ne Win set in motion in 1962 has controlled the direction in which Myanmar has continued to exist till this day.

The impact of Burma/Myanmar developments on India since 1948.

Myanmar has large land and maritime borders with India and what has happened within its borders, after its independence, have held consequences for India. The main factor has been that with the Union Government having little or no control over the frontier regions. One natural consequence has been the presence of common tribal connections that were cross border in nature. This has led to insurgent groups from India's northeastern region taking shelter on the soil pf Myanmar. From where they have carried out operations that have often created a security threat for India.

The presence of these insurgent groups, particularly in the Kachin state and the Sagaing Division of Myanmar have been exploited by China directly in the past and now indirectly through its links to the Wa and the Kokang tribal groups of Myanmar.

This factor has understandably influenced the nature and direction of the relations between India and Burma/Myanmar informing the approach of Indian policy, both domestic and external, towards Myanmar. Cooperation with its Military forming a key aspect of the relations between the nations from 1948 onwards.

This factor has also invested itself in the strategic and security approaches adopted by India in the past, as they continue to do so till this day. A case in point is the problems of the Indian State of Manipur whose internal turmoil, it is claimed has been complicated by the internal developments in Myanmar with the Kuki tribals on

both sides of the border making an already complex situation more difficult to resolve.

The assumption that Myanmar would be the bridge between India and the ASEAN region that would establish land based connectivity linking our NE region to Southeast Asia, creating positives for its economic and social development. Further, lay the consideration, that the Kaladan corridor, linking Mizoram to the port of Sitwe in Myanmar, would help create a strategic alternative to the Siliguri Corridor, as a major connectivity and industrial complex that would be of mutual benefit. Acting as a major factor towards the strengthening India's presence and worth to Myanmar. Current developments that have placed Chin and Rakhine states outside the control of Naypyitaw, now require a more crafted approach that keeps both the rebels who control the location, and the Union Government have to be dealt with to secure the conclusion of this long delayed project.

All these factors that both impact and impinge on the relations that over the years have largely been warm but somewhat limited in scope have now to take into account not just the security factors arising out of the activities of our insurgent groups but also the negatives being created by the massive intrusions of drugs, arms and ammunition and the growing presence of refuges escaping from the civil war taking place in Myanmar are an important, in fact determining factor, for the practical aspects of the relations between the two countries. Forcing them to function along a multiplicity of approaches taking all local factors into account.

Conclusion:

Unlike in India, where despite the complications arising out of the partition of the sub-Continent, that led to the migration of millions and a refugee problem that followed there was a stable government structure, that helped alleviate the situation. Following within the space of a short span three years of the Dominion status, to the adoption of a well-crafted Constitution, enabled Indian democracy to settle down and curbed for the first fifty years the disruptions that have followed the emergence of majoritarianism. Burma, now named Myanmar, adopted a Constitution that went against the grains of geography and from the inception of Independence led to the rebellions and insurgencies that continue to dog the country to this day. This was the direct consequence of the equality of federalism with full autonomy that Aung San had sought to establish, being overturned immediately on his assassination, by the assertion of Bamar majoritarianism, that has only been muted to some extent, in joint opposition of the Bamar led and composed of Bamar youth, the Peoples Defence Forces (PDF's) and key EAOS to the military coup of 2021 and the continued dominance of a Bamar dominated Tatmadaw (Armed Forces). A civil war that contains within it the threat of the Balkanisation of Myanmar

The military coup of 2021 against the civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi, that led the civil war that continues to prevail, has given way to an elected by a flawed election and presided over by a recently retired Senior General, who has donned, Mufti, elected by the military dominated political structure as the President of Myanmar. He certainly has his work cut out. The only meaningful way he can bring peace to the country, is by showing a great degree of pragmatism, overthrowing the current 2008 Constitution and replacing it with a Federal Constitution that follows the Aung San model and grants both equality and autonomy to the component geography and demography's that constitute the entirety of

Myanmar today. He seems to be ready to discuss the future but the distrust against him runs deep and there is little leeway over an agenda that he has to put across that would satisfy the opponents who now also stand firmly by the demand that the Armed forces return to the barracks and be placed under civilian control

Of course, there is always the old tried and tested format adopted by the military leadership, originally shaped by Ne Win. Its worth mentioning that among the Thakin's, particularly among Aung San and his supporters Ne Win was largely distrusted. There was also a belief that he also had a hand in the assassination off Aung San and most of his trusted Cabinet colleagues. Min Hlaing has shown himself sold on the Ne Win approach of a ruthless action to put down any opposition. With the help of two other authoritarian powers, China and Russia, who would continue to supply the Tatmadaw with lethal military equipment to use against its own people. These actions that include air and artillery involvements against the civilian population would continue to help the Tatmadaw to retain control over Central Myanmar. Will this cow down the opposition, particularly the EASO's some of whom have both direct and indirect support from China would however continue in their of violence and they may well also have young Bamar elements alongside them continuing to carry out actions acts that may well end up in Myanmar being balkanised.

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(2) Dr.Richard Rousseau

a) BRICS Summit in New Delhi: China and India Say They Want to Mend Fences

Richard Rousseau

The 18th annual BRICS summit concluded on Sunday, September 13, in New Delhi, with the main tangible outcome being the stated commitment by Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to find common ground to end an era of frosty relations between the two Asian giants, against a backdrop of unprecedented geopolitical tensions.

The somewhat disparate informal BRICS group, created in 2009 with the founding goal for Beijing and Moscow of reshaping a U.S.-dominated world order in their favor, originally comprised China, Russia, Brazil, India, and South Africa. It has since expanded to include Iran, Indonesia, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates, becoming BRICS+.

The ten member countries of BRICS+ account for nearly half of the world's population and more than 40% of global GDP in purchasing power parity—more than the G7, the club of major Western powers. The group sees itself as the voice of the "Global South" and calls for a reform of global governance, which it considers too favorable to rich countries.

The handshake between the two leaders made headlines around the world: it lasted 23 seconds, but Modi did not embrace him, as he usually does when welcoming his guests. It illustrates that a new chapter may be beginning, turning the page on decades of tensions and violence along the shared border between China and India, although the rivalry between the two Asian giants remains deeply embedded in their shared history.

This trip to New Delhi was Xi Jinping's first visit to India since a deadly clash in 2020 in a disputed border region that claimed the lives of 20 Indian soldiers and four Chinese soldiers, according to New Delhi and Beijing. The thaw in relations between the two historic rivals began in October 2024, when India and China reached an agreement on patrol arrangements along their Himalayan border, the scene of recurring tensions since a deadly territorial conflict in the Himalayas in 1962.

But while the two men were all smiles, the Chinese president remained on Indian soil for less than twelve hours, conspicuously absent from the official dinner. They emphasized that "differences should not turn into conflicts" and that it was necessary to address concerns related to trade and supply chain issues.

The Indian prime minister stated that both sides should be guided by "mutual respect, consideration for each other's sensitivities, and mutual interest," and that "peace and tranquility in the border areas remain an essential foundation for the further development of bilateral relations." " According to a statement from the Indian government, Modi and Xi "reaffirmed that the two countries must adopt a strategic

and long-term perspective regarding their relations," remarks that were not reported by Chinese state media.

China-India: Between Political Rhetoric and Reality, the Road Is Long

The Chinese leader, for his part, added that the two countries should advocate for "a fair and orderly multipolar world, as well as a form of inclusive and mutually beneficial economic globalization," vague terms typical of the Communist Chinese leader's rhetoric, which carry no binding commitment.

Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping last met in 2025 in the Chinese city of Tianjin, on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit, shortly after U.S. President Donald Trump imposed 50% tariffs on Indian goods as a sanction for New Delhi's purchases of Russian oil.

At that time—just as they did on Saturday in the Indian capital—the two leaders hailed the "steady progress" made in their bilateral relations, as they sought to diversify their trade ties in the face of Trump's unpredictability.

But between diplomatic rhetoric and the realities on the ground, the Sino-Indian rivalry is such that these declarations of intent must be taken with a grain of salt. On the Chinese side, the stated desire for détente with its neighbor is primarily driven by Beijing's perceived priority of fostering a semblance of unity in Asia against the erratic and turbulent policies of the United States, with China hoping to use this to position itself as a beacon of peace and stability.

As Ronald Reagan's now-famous statement goes, "Trust, but verify." The ball is in China's court. Given the significant lack of trust toward China, it must demonstrate that it values its relations with India by agreeing to address certain long-standing Indian concerns regarding the economy and trade—notably by tackling the massive trade deficit and ensuring better market access for Indian products.

There are good reasons not to be very optimistic. One must ask: What has changed since the 2020 border standoff? Have the Chinese renounced their claims to the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, the Union Territory of Ladakh, as well as parts of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand? The answers to these questions are all no.

China is offering its AI models as open source, but is this true sharing?
Xi Jinping has called for new AI "initiatives" "to light the way toward shared prosperity," according to the Chinese state news agency Xinhua, as Beijing seeks to promote its locally developed AI models in developing countries.

China, unlike the United States, will take the initiative to create a "BRICS open-source AI zone" to promote cooperation on large language models, AI training, and an open AI ecosystem, the Chinese president added, without specifying the exact details.

He also proposed a partnership centered on a BRICS special economic zone and indicated that China would host a BRICS forum on trade in services next year to strengthen trade ties and investment.

Vladimir Putin, making his first in-person appearance at a BRICS summit outside Russia since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, supported calls for a new world order oriented toward the South and the East and attacked those who "refuse to accept the changing reality and are attempting by every means possible to contain rising competitors."

The other major achievement of the summit was the adoption of a joint statement expressing "deep concern" over the continuing escalation of tensions in the Middle East and calling for maximum restraint.

Narendra Modi, however, was keen to set the record straight by expressing reluctance to portray BRICS as an anti-Western bloc, stating at the summit that the group was not directed "against anyone"—an important distinction for New Delhi, which wishes to preserve its relations with nations that are at odds with one another.

Other participants included Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa. These leaders are hardly natural allies. Their history is marked by border disputes and even military clashes.

In addition to recurring Sino-Indian border disputes, Iran and the United Arab Emirates have found themselves on opposing sides in the war in the Middle East, with Tehran having launched missiles and drones against its fellow BRICS member.

The fact that India managed to bring these leaders together in person may seem like a feat in itself and attests to its diplomatic influence. This summit also offered participants an opportunity to reassess their relationships in light of the war in Iran.

A Mixed Success for Indian Diplomacy

The mere fact that BRICS leaders are meeting is very significant at a time when the world is so unstable and multilateralism faces major challenges. Virtually all BRICS heads of state were present.

However, agreeing on what a new world order should look like and achieving clear, concrete results proved to be a much more arduous task, and this tension stemming from a near-impossible mission marked the summit. Some countries in the group would like the BRICS to become anti-Western, but that is not the case. India succeeded in promoting strategic autonomy in times of war and in implementing initiatives aimed at strengthening collaboration among members.

The summit nevertheless managed to produce a 45-page joint statement, even as divisions among members have rarely been so glaring. Regarding the war in the Middle East, the statement calls for "maximum restraint," condemns "attacks on civilian infrastructure and peaceful nuclear facilities," but assigns no blame.

While the "New Delhi Declaration" was adopted on the first day of the summit, what is striking is what it does not say. Although it reiterates its support for a two-state solution (Israel and Palestine) and opposes the forced displacement of Palestinians or any action likely to "legitimize or prolong the occupation, "—thereby carefully

aligning itself with existing UN resolutions—it makes no mention of Russia's war in Ukraine, marking a departure from previous BRICS declarations.

On two occasions this year, meetings among BRICS ministers failed to produce a joint declaration. A consensus was therefore reached in New Delhi, but by sidestepping the issues on which members are deeply divided, without offering any solutions. The same caution is evident on trade matters. The statement expresses concern over "the indiscriminate rise in tariffs" and condemns unilateral sanctions, but refrains from naming the United States.

Growing frustration with "Trumpism"

Several BRICS members reportedly hesitated to incur the wrath of President Donald Trump, who had previously labeled the group's proposals "anti-American"—particularly the one aimed at linking central banks' digital currencies for cross-border trade.

It must be said that refraining from naming any country—even when condemning the conflict in the Middle East—is a hallmark of India. Nevertheless, the overall tone of this document reflects the member countries' growing frustration with the policies pursued by the United States and President Donald Trump regarding tariffs and economic retaliation.

What we saw in New Delhi during the summit was growing frustration with "Trumpism." The BRICS are neither a political bloc nor a trade organization, but this statement is the closest thing to a common political stance taken by the member countries. And in a sense, "Trumpism" has brought this upon itself.

China, which will host the next summit in 2027, views this bloc and other groupings—such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which brings together Eurasian countries—as alternative forums for redefining the world order, reducing U.S. influence, and establishing its leadership in technological fields such as artificial intelligence. BRICS serves as a vital platform for coordination between China and other countries of the Global South.

This summit also provided a platform for meetings that would have seemed almost unimaginable just a few months ago. Iran's Pezeshkian and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi held a one-on-one meeting—the highest-level encounter between the two countries since the start of the war waged by the United States and Israel against Iran.

The summit gave Tehran an opportunity to demonstrate that it is not alone in facing military attacks and economic pressure from the United States and Israel. It also showed that the BRICS can create a space where rivals can engage in dialogue and maneuver outside of Western-dominated institutions. The main achievement of the New Delhi summit was to underscore that a more fragmented world requires more—not less—concrete cooperation among major nations. The emphasis is on reforming the international order, not on destroying it.

The thorniest question, however, remains unresolved: what will happen next at the next summit in Beijing in 2027? While it is clear that the members agree they need a new world order more than ever, determining exactly what should replace it and how to achieve it is a far more difficult question to answer.

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Article 2) China's ties with Pakistan: India's Vulnerability and Europe's Opportunity

Richard Rousseau

Following the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir on 22 April 2025 that killed 26 Indians, the four-day war between India and Pakistan in May has ushered the two countries into a new era of conflict. Beyond the deterioration of their bilateral relationship, this episode has cast doubt on the prospect of improved relations between India and China, particularly given Beijing's steadfast support for

Islamabad. However, India's economy is dependent on China, which limits New Delhi's room for maneuver. The war in May 2025 exposed the strength of the Sino-Pakistani bond and India's vulnerability as a relatively isolated state. This marks a turning point in regional geopolitics.

Since these two countries were born in 1947, there have been so many wars between India and Pakistan that it would be tempting to view the recent conflict as part of a continuum. However, the features that distinguish it from previous armed conflicts are undoubtedly qualitative as well as quantitative.

India's response to the 22 April attack, which New Delhi attributed to Pakistan, was much greater in scale than its response to the Pulwama attack in 2019, which killed 40 Indian soldiers. The Indian army targeted nine camps and other jihadist training centers, some of which were located in Punjab, behind an internationally recognized border and not in the part of Kashmir claimed by India. In response to Pakistan's actions, the Indian army attacked military bases and, according to multiple sources, even targeted a base housing nuclear weapon.

What matters here is not only the scale of the operations, but also the fact that they are automatic. It is now widely accepted that, under Modi, India will respond to terrorist attacks on its soil attributed to Pakistani jihadists with a large-scale military deployment. India may even use ballistic missiles to target locations deep inside Pakistan. In his speeches after the fighting stopped, Narendra Modi presented the sequence of events that had just unfolded as a doctrine. The aim is to deter terrorists from attacking India and prevent the Pakistani army from 'sponsoring' them. A key part of this doctrine involves confusing state and non-state actors.

This logic underpinned the attack on the jihadist camp in Balakot following the Pulwama attack. However, it did not prevent the attack in Pahalgam. Will escalating the response this time change future outcomes? Two decisive factors suggest that it will not.

Firstly, even if the Pakistani state and non-state actors do not collaborate as closely as India assumes — which cannot be verified — they still maintain very close ties. Above all, they both have a quasi-objective interest in repeating the recent scenario. This is obvious in the case of jihadist groups, whose reason for existing is to carry out terrorist attacks against India. However, it is also true of the Pakistani army. The army derives major benefits from Indo-Pakistani tensions. For decades, these tensions have been the army's main justification for its budget and its status as a state within a state — or even an economy within an economy. The army's propensity for conflict increases further when it is facing difficulties on the national scene. The lightning war in May is an example of this: the Pakistani army had never been so unpopular since its defeat by India in 1971. The population rejected the military because of the privileges it had taken for itself during the country's deep social crisis and because of the imprisonment of Imran Khan, the former prime minister who opposed the army chief. The military leadership needed to restore its image more than ever, and it did so spectacularly, even if the disinformation it orchestrated helped greatly in this endeavor. In just a few days, Chief of Army Staff Munir went from being a pariah to Field Marshal — a title previously held only by Ayub Khan, the country's strongman from 1958 to 1969.

Secondly, Pakistan can afford to 'bleed India' (a term originating from the country's jihadist movement in the 1990s) with virtually complete impunity due to the nuclear ratchet effect. Since the 1998 nuclear tests, nuclear weapons have played a paradoxical role in South Asia. They facilitate low-intensity clashes and jihadist terrorism due to the fear of global consequences if these two powers were to engage in open conflict. As in 1999 and 2019, the United States intervened in 2025 to separate the belligerents, fearing they might resort to nuclear weapons. This was especially likely since Indian strikes hit a site close to a nuclear storage facility, further escalating Pakistan's response. This intervention deprived India of a clear victory and enabled Pakistan to claim victory. Donald Trump exacerbated the situation by raising the issue of Kashmir. Marco Rubio, the U.S. Secretary of State, invited the two countries to negotiate in a neutral location. Despite India's efforts since the 1970s to avoid internationalizing this issue, which it seeks to resolve bilaterally, Washington swiftly returned India to its original position.

Overall, Modi's doctrine fuels a new kind of conflict that differs from that of his predecessors in that it involves launching larger and more systematic strikes in response to terrorist attacks. While it is conceivable that New Delhi could reverse this doctrine in the future, two factors make this unlikely. Firstly, Narendra Modi (and the BJP) has built his popularity on his firm stance towards Pakistan. Secondly, the opposition is constantly trying to outdo itself so as not to fall behind the new standard.

Towards a Change of Tone

The idea that relations between India and Pakistan have entered a new era is reinforced by two other unprecedented variables.

Firstly, New Delhi has stated its determination to challenge the Indus Water Treaty, which has governed the sharing of water from the Indus River and its tributaries since 1960. If India deprives Pakistan of its allocated water, agriculture in Punjab (and other downstream provinces) will eventually be unable to ensure the country's food security or produce the cotton that significantly impacts the country's trade balance. Pakistan will not allow its agriculture to suffer without reacting.

Secondly, while India's military superiority is undeniable, the gap between the Indian and Pakistani armies narrowed during the four-day war due to Pakistan's performance with its Chinese-made arsenal. This arsenal inflicted heavy losses on the opposing side, including the destruction of at least one Rafale aircraft. China, as in many other areas, is playing the role of chief 'game changer'.

From Geopolitics to Geoeconomics: India's Vulnerability to China

The May 2025 blitzkrieg occurred after nearly six months of Sino-Indian relations being on the path to normalization, following clashes between Chinese and Indian soldiers in the Himalayas in 2020. These clashes resulted in twenty Indian casualties and numerous verbal exchanges. By October 2024, Indian and Chinese officers had held seventeen rounds of talks on border demarcation, known as the Line of Actual Control, without reaching an agreement. This line separates the two countries on

either side of Nepal. According to New Delhi, the Chinese army was still illegally occupying around 2,000 square kilometers of Indian territory. In an official communiqué, the Indian Foreign Secretary (the equivalent of the Secretary-General of the Quai d'Orsay) stated: 'An agreement has been reached on the modalities of patrolling along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China, with the aim of disengaging and resolving the issues encountered in these areas in 2020.' New Delhi thus showed itself willing to overlook the loss of certain territories in order to continue normalizing its relationship with Beijing. In January 2025, the two countries re-established direct air links.

This move was clearly driven by economic considerations. A few months before the aforementioned statement by the Foreign Secretary, the Indian budget vote presented an opportunity for fairly unprecedented overtures towards China. The 2024 Economic Survey, an official document published by the Ministry of Finance every year just before the vote on the finance bill, argued that Chinese investment could increase India's participation in the global supply chain and boost exports. It indicated that attracting Chinese investment 'seems more promising for boosting India's exports to the US, similar to how East Asian economies did in the past'. This reasoning highlights the limitations of relying on foreign investment from Western countries to develop India's industry and create jobs. This is problematic given the country's population growth of 10 million people per year and its high unemployment rate.

In response, Chinese diplomats altered their approach. The Chinese ambassador to India has repeatedly reached out to New Delhi, expressing his desire for India to invest more in China, and for the two countries to intensify their scientific and technical collaboration. On 10 April, S. Jaishankar, India's foreign minister, once again welcomed the improvement in Sino-Indian relations.

It was in this context that the war in May 2025 broke out, during which China supported Pakistan much more strongly than in previous conflicts. From the 1965 war to the 1999 war, including the 1971 war, China had shown restraint. However, this time, China made its position clear as soon as India's threat of massive retaliation became credible. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi then made the following statement (quoted in English from the official translation): 'As an ironclad friend and an all-weather strategic cooperative partner, China fully understands Pakistan's legitimate security concerns and supports Pakistan in safeguarding its sovereignty and security interests.' According to Indian sources, during the conflict China assisted Pakistan with air defense and provided satellite imagery.[3] [4]

How can China's unusual bias be explained?

Firstly, Pakistan has become a major customer of Chinese arms dealers, acquiring 80% of its arsenal from China. Pakistan is an attractive market for China and allows it to test battlefield weapons developed jointly by the two countries.

Secondly, despite the recurring tensions between Beijing and Islamabad — whether concerning Pakistan's late payments or attacks on Chinese engineers by Baluch separatists — China has invested heavily in Pakistan. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, with $68 billion in direct investment, is the flagship of the new Silk Roads.

Some of this investment has funded the construction of roads, railways and power plants in areas claimed by India, such as Gilgit-Baltistan.

Thirdly, China has undoubtedly wanted to seize the opportunity to teach India a lesson, given that two points of contention have emerged since Narendra Modi came to power. Firstly, in line with Hindu nationalist ideology, Modi has embraced revisionism by expressing his desire to restore 'Greater India', or Akhand Bharat, which would encompass the part of Ladakh conquered by China during the 1962 war. Secondly, India is resisting China's push into other South Asian countries, starting with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

Fourthly, India has alienated China by building closer ties with the US, as evidenced by the good relations between Modi and Trump, and India's invitation to US companies to relocate their Chinese factories to India.

If China is Pakistan's 'all-weather friend', can India turn away from China? Beijing is providing unwavering support to India's public enemy number one at a time when India is more dependent on China than ever in economic, industrial and commercial terms.

In 2024–25, China's exports to India reached a record high of $113.5 billion, while India's exports to China fell to $14.3 billion. This resulted in a staggering trade deficit of $99.2 billion. This reflects the weakness of Indian industry, which cannot compete with Chinese manufactured goods and is dependent on Chinese suppliers.

Finished products accounted for just 6.8% of India's imports from China in 2023–24. Most of these imports consisted of intermediate goods (70.9%) and capital goods (22.3%), which are needed by India's industries and services to produce and export goods. Consequently, the more India exports, the more it imports from China. This is particularly evident in the electronics and pharmaceutical sectors. While India exports an increasing number of smartphones, including iPhones, it imports the components from China. India has become known as "the world's pharmacy" thanks to its exports of generic drugs, but many of the active ingredients originate from China. India's only comparative advantage is low labor costs. However, its companies are no longer competitive in terms of design, assembly or manufacturing.

India's dependence on China is greater than the statistics suggest, as it imports products manufactured by Chinese companies based in Malaysia or Vietnam. These companies have relocated in order to circumvent tariff barriers or import quotas imposed by many countries, including India. India's reliance on China for its energy transition is particularly evident in the case of solar panels.

Against this backdrop, the crisis between India and Pakistan in April–May provided China with an opportunity to pressure New Delhi. On 28 April, the Indian press reported that the Chinese had imposed additional delays to iPhone part deliveries to India. Shortly afterwards, China restricted access to rare earths, putting the Indian automotive sector in a difficult position. Consequently, New Delhi decided to send a delegation to Beijing to negotiate an exemption for India.

In early June 2025, the Indian government announced that it would permit Chinese investment in India, thereby reversing its decision from 2020, which was made following a confrontation between soldiers from the two countries. On 5 June, the Indian ambassador met with Sun Weidong, the Chinese Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs. Both parties pledged to "jointly implement the leaders' important consensus, foster people-to-people exchanges, and promote win-win cooperation, driving China-India relations forward on a healthy and stable path".

The Long and Short Term

The dynamics of the India–China–Pakistan triangle can only be understood by combining structural and cyclical perspectives, and by considering both the long and short term. Only such an approach can grasp the acceleration of history that we are witnessing. A geopolitical turning point usually only occurs when the time is right. The spring 2025 crisis will suddenly reveal the effects of a structural evolution whose origins date back to the previous century. Pakistan's relationship with China has deepened to the extent that Beijing now provides Islamabad with full political and military support against India. Conversely, India's dependence on China, coupled with its strategic and military inferiority, has grown to such an extent that New Delhi appears incapable of standing up to Chinese support for Pakistan.

India's isolation naturally exacerbates this situation, as it cannot rely on either Donald Trump or Vladimir Putin to take a tougher stance towards Beijing. While India's isolation is not irreversible, it is significant in the short term.

In these circumstances, the dynamics of this triangular relationship may not align with India's interests, especially given the intensifying collaboration between China and Pakistan, which could manifest in three ways.

Firstly, collaboration has intensified following China's sale of increasingly sophisticated weaponry, including the J-35A fighter jet, to Pakistan. This has attracted the attention of Pakistan's allies, who are interested in acquiring such weapons. One example is Saudi Arabia, whose leader, Mohammed bin Salman, invited the Pakistani prime minister to a prestigious religious festival in June. This will force India to import more weapons, notably S-400s from Russia.

Secondly, Pakistan has increased its diplomatic activity. The army has taken advantage of the recent lightning war to regain prestige and silence its opponents. Following China's mediation between Islamabad and Kabul, and India's receipt of support from the Taliban during the May confrontation, Pakistan has just opened an embassy in Kabul. Pakistan has not had diplomatic representation in Kabul since 2021. Meanwhile, Pakistan is capitalizing on Sheikh Hasina's absence to strengthen ties with Bangladesh, particularly with regard to military cooperation. India fears that jihadist groups based in Pakistan will gain a foothold in Bangladesh as Islamists return to favor.

Thirdly, a new 'water war' could strengthen the relationship between Islamabad and Beijing. By withdrawing from the Indus Waters Treaty, which regulates the sharing of water from the Indus River and its tributaries between India and Pakistan, as well as the construction of dams and canals, New Delhi could deprive Pakistan of vital water

resources for agriculture and its population. Conversely, China has suggested that it could take similar action, given that the Brahmaputra River crosses the Tibetan plateau before entering India.

However, the prospect of water wars replacing conventional warfare is just one of several possible scenarios. A new attack is more likely, particularly given the ongoing tensions in Kashmir.

In this context, New Delhi is relatively isolated and vulnerable to China. India had hoped for more support from the US and Moscow in the recent crisis, but neither provided it. This was evidenced by Putin's announcement of arms sales to Pakistan last June.

Europeans have an opportunity

This prompted Narendra Modi and his ministers of foreign affairs and trade, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and Piyush Goyal respectively, to pursue closer ties with the European Union, both geopolitically and geoeconomically. Indeed, after nearly two decades of negotiations, India and the European Union concluded a landmark free trade agreement on 27 January 2026.

On the geo-economic front, the time was right to address the 'sticking points' in the negotiations for a free trade agreement with India. New Delhi was eager to demonstrate its closeness to Brussels by reaching an agreement, and the Modi government was willing to make further concessions to do so. In any case, this treaty will only be successful if it is backed by the political will to overcome the reluctance of interest groups that have pressured the negotiating delegations for months. Otherwise, it will be an empty shell.

Geopolitically, India was affected by the unpredictability of Donald Trump's foreign policy during the crisis in May last year. This has created conditions for closer relations with France and Europe, as New Delhi requires additional security guarantees with regard to China. This could manifest as closer military cooperation with France, particularly in the maritime domain. In parallel, India could establish a mechanism to complement the Quad, uniting three European countries that are increasingly collaborating on strategy — France, Germany and the United Kingdom — and three regional countries: India, Indonesia and Japan. This initiative would demonstrate India and France's desire to exclude NATO from the Indo-Pacific, while also highlighting the stabilizing potential of European involvement in the face of unpredictable US policy. This option is likely to be well received by India, as they generally favor the 'minilateral' format.

European involvement in the Indo-Pacific alongside regional countries, particularly India, could strengthen regional stability. This is due to the strategic autonomy that Europeans are increasingly advocating, and which is valued by all regional actors, including China. However, this approach's credibility hinges on the Europeanisation of European strategies in the Indo-Pacific, in terms of both interoperability and industrial cooperation. Now is the time to conduct joint exercises and propose infrastructure projects involving Germany, France and other champions within the framework of the Global Gateway.

In the Indo-Pacific region, South Asia is the subregion where India's isolation concerns New Delhi the most, given that China has established a presence among all of its neighbors. The loss of Bangladesh as an important partner is a major concern, particularly since the departure of Sheikh Hasina, especially as Pakistan, in addition to China, is regaining a foothold there. New Delhi would undoubtedly welcome a similar European or French initiative to that taken by Paris with regard to Sri Lanka: the establishment of a Regional Centre for Maritime Studies to train civilian and military personnel.

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Article 3) Chips: Competition in Asia is intensifying.

Richard Rousseau

Competition among Asian nations in the chip industry is intensifying. However, some countries and companies are reluctant to relinquish the Chinese market in order to appease the United States government.

Global demand for semiconductors witnessed another year of growth in 2026. This can be attributed to a surge in demand for electronic devices that require semiconductors in their production. Expectations of robust demand in 2027 mean that significant chip manufacturers continue to invest in major Asian markets, while governments also continue to invest in fortifying the domestic industrial infrastructure. Attaining self-sufficiency, whether partial or complete, remains a crucial objective for major global powers in this sector. Additionally, leaders are striving to strengthen their competitive advantage.

Japan and South Korea have been particularly active in recent months. Japan, a country that was once a leader in the chip industry but has since fallen behind, is trying to close the gap by encouraging investment and forming alliances with current leaders from Korea and Taiwan. Conversely, South Korea and Taiwan, which both have a strong industrial base in this sector, are struggling to maintain their market share and develop local manufacturing.

Japan's market share has decreased significantly from 50% in the 1990s to 10% today, resulting in it losing dominance to Taiwan and South Korea, which have proven to be more competitive. Tokyo is currently trying to ensure the stability of its semiconductor supply by aiming to increase sales of domestically manufactured semiconductors to $112 billion by 2030 — more than three times the current amount. The government is facilitating the relocation of factories within the country by promoting partnerships with industry leaders and arranging tax breaks. Within this framework, Japan has successfully concluded significant agreements, including a partnership with Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) to build a cutting-edge chip manufacturing facility in Kumamoto Prefecture worth around $7 billion, and a $221 million plant in Yokohama with the South Korean firm Samsung. However, the chip market continues to face intense competition, further compounded by geopolitical tensions between the United States and China. Additionally, Japan is actively pursuing enhanced security measures.
On 17 May, Prime Minister Kishida Fumio held a meeting with industry leaders from companies such as Intel, Samsung and TSMC, which are renowned for their expertise in producing memory chips and advanced semiconductors. During the meeting, Kishida advocated for increased investment in the nation, and Micron, a

company headquartered in the United States, announced its intention to invest $3.6 billion in a memory chip production facility in Japan with government backing.

The United States' strategy

This gathering of industrial stakeholders is taking place at a time when the United States is urging its allies to collaborate in order to restrict China's technological progress.

The United States' strategy

A conclave of industrial stakeholders is taking place at a time when the United States is urging its allies to collaborate in order to restrict China's technological progress.

In October 2022, the Biden administration modified the U.S. Commerce Control List to include advanced semiconductors and the corresponding production machinery, as per the Export Administration Regulations. This effectively ceased the export of semiconductors produced using US technology, particularly to China. Furthermore, the CHIPS and Science Act, which allocates $52.7 billion in federal subsidies for newly established plants in the United States, introduced guardrail provisions in March 2023. These provisions prohibit industries that have received subsidies under the Chips Act from expanding production facilities in foreign nations deemed to pose a threat to the United States' national security, specifically China.

The Chips Act aims to bring semiconductor manufacturing back to the United States, given that the percentage of semiconductor production in the U.S. declined from 37 percent in 1990 to just 12 percent in 2019. Meanwhile, the export controls aim to prevent the Chinese semiconductor industry from dominating the market.

However, the segmentation of the semiconductor value chain implies that restrictions imposed by the United States alone may not be sufficient to exclude Beijing from the market. Biden has launched an initiative to engage key partners in the supply chain, such as the Netherlands and Japan, which are leading manufacturers of advanced chip fabrication equipment. After some initial hesitation, Tokyo has adopted the United States' stance by imposing export restrictions on 23 types of machinery used in computer chip production in Beijing.

This aligns with the policies of the United States and the grievances of its allies.

Not all of the United States' allies seem inclined to emulate its export controls, nor are they enthusiastic about the conditions that have been incorporated to gain access to CHIPS Act subsidies. South Korea relies heavily on revenue generated from semiconductor sales to China. This market, along with Hong Kong, accounts for 60% of the total export market in this sector. By contrast, the United States only accounts for 7.7% of the semiconductor export market. Consequently, South Korea's market is currently dependent on China and cannot be substituted by any other market. Furthermore, the region's leading corporations, Samsung and SK Hynix, have significant manufacturing facilities in China. Around 40 per cent of Samsung's NAND memory chips and 40 per cent of SK Hynix's DRAM chips are produced here.

In October, Samsung and SK Hynix secured a one-year concession permitting them to procure US machinery for chip production for use in their Chinese factories.

During this challenging period for Korean industries, which have experienced a decline in exports for several months, it is anticipated that Washington will extend the exemption allowing machinery to be exported to China without a license. The impending expiration of the exemptions granted to two major Korean companies in October has raised concerns about the significant costs of relocating to a different country. Despite the potential risk of facing competition from firms that receive subsidies from the U.S. government, these companies are reluctant to forego their expansion plans in the United States. Samsung and SK Hynix are keen to explore opportunities for setting up manufacturing facilities in the United States in order to access Chips Act subsidies.

Notably, not all of the policies implemented by the Biden administration have been well-received in Taiwan. Over the past month, reports have emerged suggesting that certain high-ranking Taiwanese officials have reportedly requested that U.S. allies temper their rhetoric on the risks of overreliance on Taiwanese chip production (which currently dominates the production of the most advanced chips by 90%).

Some members of the US legislative body have characterized this reliance as 'insecure' due to the hypothetical scenario of a Chinese incursion onto Taiwan. The potential efficacy of US policies aimed at repatriating the chip production chain has raised concerns about the island losing its strategic advantage. In May, Warren Buffett, CEO of Berkshire Hathaway Inc., announced that he had sold all his Taiwanese industry shares due to geopolitical risk concerns. TSMC has been very open about its manufacturing facilities in the United States, particularly its $40 billion projects in Arizona. Taiwan is reluctant to relinquish its most lucrative sector and security assurances. However, Taiwan may be concerned in light of the significant investments made by major semiconductor manufacturers in Europe, Japan and the United States.

The semiconductor market remains active due to competing interests: countries seeking to maintain their competitive advantage, and those seeking to enhance their domestic production. In the coming months, companies will need to weigh up the pros and cons of US subsidies against the potential impact of losing access to the Chinese market.

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Echoes from Tibet:
China's Elite Strategy and India's Quest for Strategic Autonomy

Introduction

China's rise as a strategic superpower defines geopolitics in the 21st century. From being an export-driven economy to a significant world power, China has influenced international trade, technology and security over the last two decades. China's ability to influence is not only shaped by armies, trade or diplomacy but also by its capability to influence individuals who affect policy. This strategy is important since elites hold important positions in academia, business, government and the media, allowing China to influence policy discussions and strategic choices. China's "Elite capture" strategy refers to the purposeful, systematic attempt by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to co-opt, influence and align international commercial, political, media and academic elites with Beijing's goals through incentives, access and relationship-building. Rather than relying on explicit coercion or hard power, The United Front Work Department and associated state-linked networks coordinate elite capture through covert routes like expensive delegations, charity, research money and people-to-people exchanges. This shows how the elite capture remains a key component of China's framework of external influence because it allows the CCP to affect foreign policy situations from within elite circles, lowering opposition to its key goals while maintaining legitimacy. Such influence is beneficial in times of great-power competition because it enables China to achieve its economic and geopolitical objectives like international backing on human rights concerns and Belt and Road collaboration, without risking the response that direct pressure causes. Therefore, understanding elite captures is needed for analysing how China transforms economic advantages into long-lasting political influence in both democratic and authoritarian settings.

Conceptual Framework

To understand how this strategy operates in reality, it is important to examine the particular players and industries China uses to expand its influence. Elite capture is best described as an indirect power tactic where a state tries to influence the tastes and actions of powerful people instead of depending solely on coercion. This tactic is closely related to the larger concept of United Front activity in China which seeks to create networks of support, neutrality or reliance among foreign elites. The idea is that a state can affect institutions policy results in public discourse without seeming to directly intervene if it can influence those who make decisions. Foreign policy can be shaped by politicians, investment decisions can be influenced by business executives, disputes can be framed by academics and public narratives can be influenced by media personalities. China may foster an atmosphere that softens criticism, makes cooperation more appealing and lessens opposition success to its goals by developing connections with such people. In this way, elite capture involves more than just

bribery or corruption. It also involves creating long-term reliances through opportunities, access and rewards.

The strategy uses a number of overlapping techniques. They include financial incentives, collaborations with institutions, research finance, invites based on status and entry into the Chinese market. On the surface, these instruments can seem harmless but they can create unequal tools that make foreign elites hesitant to publicly oppose Beijing. This can eventually reduce the room for autonomous decision-making and promote self-censorship, especially in fields that depend on Chinese investment, diplomatic involvement or academic collaboration. The fact that elite capture operates covertly is what makes it strategically significant. It shapes the preferences of people in the ebay position to influence state behaviour rather than bringing instant control. Due to this, it becomes an extremely helpful tool for China in situations where using direct pressure would result in retaliation. Hence, it is viewed as an architecture rather than a supporting strategy.

China's Elite Influence Network: Actors and Methods

The CCP uses the United Front system which is the foundation of China's elite influence network to seize, neutralise and activate prospective supporters beyond the Party's official framework. The scope and resources of United Front activity have increased under Xi Jinping and foreign influence is now viewed as an important component of China's larger foreign policy approach. Rather than depending primarily on state-to-state diplomacy, Beijing also works through organisations, diaspora routes, academic institutions, median contacts and economic ties to build influence among well-placed individuals and groups abroad. The network is important because it links people who are already powerful in their own communities to China's external influence. Politicians, corporate executives, diaspora organisations, journalists and academics are examples of these actors who have the power to influence institutional priorities, public policy and public discourse. China establishes ties with these individuals through frequent access which may start off as cooperation by eventually leading to reliance, self-censorship or open to public criticism. In this sense, the influence network can impact the behavior of institutions without directly controlling them.

China's instruments of influence are diverse and mutually supportive. They allow Beijing to influence over actors who rely on Chinese economic benefits, commercial relations including market access, trade possibilities, investment and financing are important. At the same time, non-economic methods like partnerships, awards, exchanges help normalise access and generate social prestige around involvement with China. Though these channels are portrayed as constructive ways to work together, they can also lead to unequal relationships where satisfaction becomes appealing and criticism becomes expensive. Academic and Media domains too play an important role. Agendas, visibility and framing can be influenced by research funding, media access and institutional alliances in cases when institutions depend on Chinese funding. As a result, the context in which foreign elites make decisions is altered, creating a simple but strong influence that is hard to demonstrate in a single instance but effective over time.

Case Illustration: Tibet and India

China's use of elite co-option has been defined as a part of a larger pattern of influence that combines access, rewards and selective interaction with local elites in South Asia, the Tibetan plateau and other neighbours. Tibet is the best example in this case because it demonstrates how political influence may be developed gradually through elite alignment before it completely manifests as coercion. The Party-State frequently aims to co-opt politically non-communist actors and expand influence through networks that combine pressure, diplomacy

and persuasion. This shows how influence can be institutionalised over time as opposed to being imposed at a single event.

Dr. Lobsang Sangay's warning is blunt: China's expansion approach is not limited to border crossings or military threats. It works through a covert and tried-and-true strategy called "elite co-option" seen in Tibet, Xinjiang and Mongolia. This tactic attracts intellectuals, journalists, corporate elites, political figures and YouTubers to join its sphere of influence. They reward those who influence the public view in favour of China with favours, financial incentives or post-retirement roles. In his NDTV interview, Dr. Sangay claimed that the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi had gone so far as to try to "regime change" using National Day celebrations to buy politicians and leaders. For Tibet, China's Elite Capture is a lived history. Beijing ensured a peaceful takeover by gradually recruiting Tibet's elites before completely taking over and Dr Sangay thinks that India too will face a similar scenario. The trends are seen in neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan's political groups banded together to back its agenda and the Sri Lankan and Maldivian leaders are obedient to China. As border tensions rise, the warnings are issued. Dr Sangay calls out China's "next big move" as China renames communities, establishes military outposts and strengthens ties with Pakistan in Arunachal Pradesh. He brings to attention the slogan "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai" (India-China brothers), reminding India of the past betrayals, from the 1962 war to Galwan in 2020, warning India not to get too close. More alarming, he points out China's grand Himalayan ambitions and its "Palm and five fingers" doctrine, where Tibet is the palm and Ladakh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh are the fingers. He cautions against securing them and not allowing Beijing to take over South Asia.

Implications for India

India has realised that China poses a threat on many levels, including military, economic, political and cultural. India's larger attempt to safeguard strategic autonomy is linked to its worry about the influence of the Chinese elite. In Indian foreign-policy thinking, strategic autonomy is the capacity to make decisions on one's own without becoming reliant on any one outside force. This principle is important because India's challenge to China is not just military or territorial but also the control of the political and informational arena where public institutions, discourse and elites function. The foreign influence has the power to change elite preferences even in the absence of direct coercion and shape the boundaries of policy choice.

India's open democracy and numerous centers of power make it vulnerable. Influence can enter through multiple areas because academic institutions, corporate players, political figures, media outlets and think tanks all contribute to the formation of national discourse. This does not mean that interactions with China are harmful. When unequal ties are created via access, investment, status or funding, there is a risk that some elites will be less inclined to publicly criticise Beijing. In this way, elite influence works best when it reduces the room for judgement while appearing normal or advantageous.

The policy implications are important. India may have fewer options in areas like trade restrictions, technology governance, regional strategy and border policy if powerful players start to view China as too significant to oppose. In addition to military power, strategic autonomy rests on the ability to make decisions under pressure. If the elite network grows reliant on connections with China, the ability may be weakened. This makes vigilance around foreign funding, institutional linkages and elite relationships more critical. Public discourse is also affected. Open discourse is essential to democracies but can be abused if external players promote selective silence or self-censorship. If they worry about losing access or opportunities, policy forums and others may stay clear of challenging inquiries about China. The outcome is cautious and less critical where China-related concerns are treated in a softer

way than the strategic situation may require rather than direct propaganda. This plays a vital role because public discourse influences how societies perceive threats and decide how to respond to them. Additionally, democratic institutions are at jeopardy. Transparency and accountability may be weakened when foreign influence via elite channels, especially if institutional or financial relationships are hidden from the public. The rish is less about quick capture and more about gradual normalisation. Relationship-building, repeated access and selected advantages can make foreign engagement seem harmless while still having an impact on behaviour. This can eventually erode confidence in institutions and make it harder to differentiate between proper diplomacy and improper influence.

Therefore, India's problem is to maintain its openness without becoming vulnerable. The challenge is to make sure that foreign engagement does not undermine democratic supervision or policy autonomy and not to give up on it. Elite influence is important because it can impact sovereignty not just at the border but also within the areas where the decisions are made.

Policy Responses

In order to fight Chinese elite influence, India needs a set of policy solutions that combine institutional control, openness and public knowledge while adhering to democratic norms and open engagement. The difficulty is not keeping India out from the world but rather making sure that interactions with China do not undermine the policy autonomy, institutional independence or popular confidence.Transparency in political and financial transactions is the first step. Establishing clear disclosure guidelines for institutional relationships, foreign funding, think-tank grants and political donations might assist in pinpointing situations in which privileged connections could lead to reliance. Parliamentary scrutiny, public databases and reporting requirements can make these interactions more obvious so that influence is not hidden under the disguise of cooperation. These steps are particularly crucial in sectors like commerce, research cooperation, technology and investment where China has significant economic advantage. Stronger institutional scrutiny is equally important. Significant international engagements especially those involving strategic industries and sensitive infrastructures that are crucial to policy should be reviewed by security agencies, regulatory authorities and legislative committees. Institutions involved in national security, defense, energy or key technologies must have clear guidelines and oversight procedures for international collaborations. This does not imply that all Chinese engagement should be viewed as hostile. In the legislative, executive and judicial branches, where the issue of responsibility may arise, institutional capacity to evaluate foreign influence should be reinforced.

India can tackle the influence operations by strengthening watchdog organisations with more investigative capabilities. Public awareness should educate on spotting and resisting co-optation tactics. Journalists, editors and public commentators may unknowingly replicate narratives that advance the objectives of other nations if they are ignorant of the ways in which foreign influence may function. Campaigns to raise public awareness, training and policies for media organisations can assist in lessening the vulnerability to covert influence operations. Universities and research centers should promote critical discourse on foreign influence especially China while avoiding becoming propaganda tools.Additionally, there must be clear regulations on foreign influence and lobbying. Since India does not have a thorough legal framework on foreign lobbying, it is challenging to keep track of who is representing the foreign interest, what their goals are and how they are financed. It would be simpler to spot instances where elite networks are being exploited to forward the goal of another state if a well-crafted lobbying statute and transparent regulations for foreign-funded

organisations were paired. The China situation demonstrates why such regulations are necessary and should be enforced uniformly, not just to China. Together, these actions aim to make Chinese elite influence public and balanced by robust democratic institutions rather than to isolate India from the outside world. As China's multifaceted strategies reshape South Asia, India's alertness, resilience and flexible diplomacy will determine whether it achieves a future defined by autonomy and regional leadership, considering Tibet's important warning.

Conclusion

China's elite strategy is a type of indirect power that acts through access, co-option, relationship-building rather than overt force. In order for Beijing to affect foreign policy environments from within elite circles, it shows that elite strategy is essential to China's external influence architecture. China fosters long-term dependencies that reduce the area of autonomous decision-making in target states through United Front strategy, rewards and institutional alliances. Dr. Lobsang Sangay's cautions underscore the applicability of this tactic for India while the Tibet store shows how elite alignment comes before political power. These processes put out public discourse, democratic oversight and strategic autonomy at danger especially when elite networks are hesitant to publicly oppose Beijing.

India however does have some choices. Stronger institutional oversight, transparency in financial and political dealings, regulations on foreign lobbying and media literacy can all contribute to preserving democratic integrity without cutting India off from the world. The difficulty lies in maintaining the transparency while strengthening defenses against the covert influence operations that take advantage of the democratic liberties. India's response will determine whether it maintains its strategic autonomy or gives in to the constraint as China's complex policies continue to change South Asia. The lesson from Tibet is obvious. Military pressure may have just as much impact as influences developed through elite networks. India must be vigilant in institutions where national decisions are made as well as at the border or preserve its sovereignty.

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The Doctrine of Hunger: Starvation, Military Necessity and the Myth of Collateral Damage

Abstract

Despite global food production being at an all-time high, the deliberate deprivation of basic human sustenance has re-emerged as a primary instrument of strategic control in modern conflict. This paper investigates how food weaponization has evolved from traditional geographic encirclement into a sophisticated, supply-chain driven tactic of 21st century statecraft. Focusing on the contemporary crisis in Gaza as a primary case study, alongside historical and active comparative cases from Leningrad, Syria and Sudan, this paper analyzes the compounding sequence through which blockades, livestock collapse, agricultural destruction and kinetic strikes on aid logistics transform civilian dependency into structural starvation. Furthermore, the paper interrogates the persistent enforcement gap in international humanitarian law, demonstrating that the failure to prosecute starvation crimes stems not from a lack of evidence or clear intent *(mens rea)*, but from geopolitical shielding, UN Security Council vetoes and strategic impunity guaranteed to protect certain state leaders and actors.

Keywords: *Food Weaponization, Siege Tactics, Starvation Warfare, International Humanitarian Law, Scorched-Earth Strategy, Livestock Collapse, Humanitarian Aid Obstruction, Structural Scarcity, Supply-Chain Vulnerability, Geopolitical Shielding, Collateral Damage*

Introduction

Throughout history, our imagery of war has been dominated by kinetic violence: the thunder of artillery and bombs, airstrikes, blood, gore, major casualties and cities turned to rubble. But long before the first shell tears through a neighbourhood, a quieter, far more deliberate and deadlier form of structural destruction takes hold. War does not just destroy physical infrastructure; it shatters the fragile systems that sustain human life.

When food imports are restricted, agricultural land is destroyed and distribution routes are blocked, hunger stops being an accidental byproduct of combat. It becomes a strategy, a policy tool designed to wear down a civilian population until their capacity to resist collapses. As Henry Kissinger remarked, *"Who controls the food supply controls the people; who controls the energy can control whole continents; who controls money can control the world"*.

To look closely at how food is weaponized is to confront a very bizarre paradox of our time. Global food production is at an all-time high thanks to modern industrial farming. The fact is that we produce more than enough food to feed every human on Earth, yet the deliberate starvation of human beings has simply adapted to 21st century warfare [1]. Modern conflicts show us a chilling truth: starving a population is no longer confined to medieval castle sieges

or isolated naval blockades. Today, it operates on a global scale, exploiting international supply chains, turning densely populated cities into traps and using civilian dependency as leverage [2].

Historically, starvation was often a passive strategy, an opportunistic weapon. An invading army surrounded a fortress and simply waited for supplies to run out. In contemporary times, however, the weaponization of food is characterized by targeted disruption. Belligerents do not merely wait for famine to set in; they accelerate its arrival by targeting critical supply chain bottlenecks, like processing plants, fuel depots, transport hubs and automated irrigation systems. In doing so, highly efficient agricultural networks are turned into single points of failure [1, 7].

This paper examines how starvation and restriction on food supplies function as tools of warfare. By analyzing the mechanics of sieges, blockades and the destruction of agricultural capacity, focusing on the crisis in Gaza alongside historical parallels ranging from Leningrad to modern Sudan and Syria, this investigation uncovers how dependency is weaponized during conflict and turned into despair.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative case study methodology, synthesizing secondary academic literature, international legal frameworks and empirical reporting from humanitarian and intergovernmental organizations. The research relies on data triangulation across multiple authoritative streams: official United Nations documentation (including reports from the Food and Agriculture Organization {FAO}, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights {OHCHR} and the World Food Programme {WFP}), geospatial satellite assessments (UNOSAT), legal analyses from specialized international law bodies (including Global Rights Compliance and the Lieber Institute) and verified primary ministerial declarations. By examining the operational mechanics of food denial in Gaza alongside comparative historical and contemporary case studies in Leningrad, Syria and Sudan, the paper evaluates how statutory protections under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) intersect with enforcement bottlenecks, evidentiary burdens and geopolitical realities.

The Anatomy of Food Weaponization: Sieges, Blockades and Scorched Earth

The deliberate manipulation of food supplies to subdue a population relies on three military strategies: withholding food and other essential supplies through blockades, rendering land uninhabitable through scorched earth tactics and surrounding urban centers via total siege [3, 13].

1. The Strategy of the Siege

Siege warfare is one of the oldest tactics in military history, documented from ancient Egyptian records to classic literature [3, 13]. The logic is straightforward. A siege is simply a game of resource exhaustion. By encircling an adversary and cutting off their access to external markets and supply lines, an attacking force seeks to weaken combatants and erode civilian morale to the point of collapse.

Applying siege tactics to modern densely populated urban areas leads to severe humanitarian consequences. Modern urban cities mostly do not produce their own food and are mostly or

entirely dependent on external supply lines for the same. And, when an opposing force severs these lifelines, it is the civilians that experience the impact immediately.

As military legal scholars note, while international law permits the starvation of enemy combatants as a tactical objective, applying the same logic to densely populated urban spaces inevitably creates catastrophic civilian suffering [6]. The modern urban siege exploits civilian dependence, turning the most basic biological necessity of eating into a fatal liability.

2. Blockades and Long-Range Starvation

In the contemporary era, food weaponization does not require troops stationed directly outside city walls. In fact, now, maritime blockades and economic embargos can project starvation thousands of miles away from an active front.

When major powers restrict agricultural exports or close port infrastructure, the shockwaves are felt across global markets. For countries that are heavily reliant on food imports, a distant blockade acts as a long-range weapon of mass disruption [1]. This was evident during Russia's invasion of Ukraine, where the blockade of vital Black Sea ports disrupted millions of tons of grain shipments meant for global markets, instantly inflating food prices across developing regions and weaponizing global trade dependencies [1].

By restricting grain shipments from the Black Sea region, which typically accounts for nearly 30% of global wheat exports, the conflict converted local agricultural destruction into coercive bargaining power over import dependent countries in Africa and Middle East [1]. This demonstrates how modern food weaponization exports vulnerability across international borders.

3. Scorched Earth and Agricultural Devastation

The destruction of food infrastructure, ranging from granaries and irrigation canals to bakeries, greenhouses and agricultural machinery, represents the scorched earth doctrine brought into the industrial age. By dismantling the capacity of a society to feed itself long after a conflict comes to an end, belligerents ensure long-term structural dependency. When agricultural lands are contaminated or destroyed, recovery becomes a generational challenge, leaving the surviving community trapped under the control of others for years to come.

Historically, scorched earth policies mainly focused on destroying immediate yields, burning standing crops or slaughtering livestock to prevent an invading army from living off the land [3]. Today, scorched earth operations focus on long-term ecological and mechanical destruction. The deployment of unexploded ordnance, soil compaction by armored vehicles, contamination of groundwater and systemic destruction of seed banks ensure agricultural productivity remains crippled long after fighting stops [7, 8].

Gaza as a Contemporary Case Study: Siege, Infrastructure Destruction and Starvation

Few contemporary conflicts illustrate the mechanics of food weaponization as starkly as the ongoing crisis in Gaza. The crisis in Gaza offers a clear case study of how different forms of food weaponization combine in modern conflict [11, 13]. Prior to recent escalations, Gaza was already subject to a strict land, sea and air blockade that created high structural vulnerability. Over 80% of its population relied on international humanitarian aid, living in a bounded

territory where external entry points for food, water, electricity and fuel were tightly regulated [4, 11].

This existing vulnerability was reinforced by explicit policy statements from high-level state leadership at the outset of the war. Former Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant announced a complete siege on the territory, referring to Palestinians as "human animals", while ordering a total cutoff of food, electricity and fuel. These remarks were echoed by Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who asserted that blocking humanitarian aid to Gaza was "justified and moral", even if doing so resulted in starving millions of people [11].

As military operations expanded, this policy framework translated into ground-level operational control [11]. Commercial food shipments were largely halted, while internal food production facilities were damaged or destroyed through bombardment and ground operations [4, 11]. Industrial bakeries, flour mills, commercial greenhouses, solar power systems and water desalination plants were directly damaged or rendered non-operational due to fuel shortages [4, 11, 12].

This process developed through a distinct, compounding sequence:

1. ***Pre-existing Blockade and Aid Dependency:*** Long-term trade restrictions left over four-fifths of the population reliant on external aid conduits [4, 11].
2. ***Infrastructure Destruction:*** Essential processing facilities, including central bakeries, flour storage, irrigation systems and water plants, were knocked offline [4, 11, 19].
3. ***Severe Restriction of Aid and Supplies:*** Daily truck entries dropped significantly from a pre-conflict baseline of roughly 500 trucks per day, severing basic caloric supply lines [11, 12].
4. ***Agricultural Collapse:*** Local farming, poultry and dairy production collapsed due to a lack of fuel, imported animal feed and safe farmland access [8, 11].
5. ***Malnutrition and Famine Conditions:*** Severe caloric deficits, alongside physical hazards at aid collection points, resulted in widespread malnutrition and famine conditions [11, 14, 15, 16].

In an area where agriculture requires imported fuel, fertilizer and electricity, shutting down supply routes is a horrific act that turns the territory into a zone of extreme food deprivation [11, 19].

Physical Damage to Agriculture and Livestock

Geospatial data and satellite assessments from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and UNOSAT document the systemic extent of agricultural damage:

- ***Cropland Damage:*** Between 68 and 80 percent of Gaza's total agricultural land was damaged, bulldozed or destroyed [8, 11]. In North Gaza and Gaza City, over 80% of farmland became unusable [8].
- ***Support Facilities:*** Over 50% of agricultural wells, 70% of commercial shade houses and hundreds of agricultural storage units were directly damaged or destroyed [8, 11].
- ***Livestock Sector Collapse:*** Stopping animal feed imports caused the livestock sector to collapse. Roughly 95% of cattle died or were slaughtered, while over 98% of commercial poultry farms stopped operating, removing primary local protein sources [8, 11].

- ***Fisheries Impact:*** Coastal fishing was halted due to naval enforcement and the destruction of fishing vessels, port facilities and cold-storage units [11, 19].

Direct Risks in Food Access and Targeted Strikes on Aid Convoys

Alongside infrastructure destruction, obtaining food became an immediate physical hazard. As local markets collapsed, civilians heavily depended on humanitarian distribution points, aid convoys and emergency kitchens [14, 15, 16].

Delivery systems faced double disruption: severe entry limitations at border crossings and kinetic strikes targeting logistics inside the territory. Human rights organizations and UN bodies, including the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the World Food Programme (WFP), documented strikes carried out by Israel on clearly marked aid convoys, UNRWA transport trucks and humanitarian worker accommodations. Notable incidents include naval and drone bombardment of aid vehicles, airstrikes on coordinated relief convoys such as the World Central Kitchen fleet and direct shelling of warehouses and distribution nodes.

Concurrently, civilians gathering near aid vehicles or distribution hubs routinely came under fire. Over the course of aid distribution operations, the UN Human Rights Office reported over 400 civilian fatalities occurring specifically near aid collection sites and convoy routes [14, 15]. Civilians attempting to secure the most basic supplies like flour and clean water encountered small-arms fire, tank rounds and sniper fire near militarized transit points [16, 17, 18]. When basic aid gathering and transport carry such physical risk, social cohesion breaks down, leaving civilians exhausted, traumatized and entirely dependent on external decisions for basic survival calories [11, 14, 17].

Long-Term Biological Impacts

Beyond immediate hunger, severe and prolonged malnutrition in young children, pregnant women and nursing mothers leads to lasting health complications [4, 12]. Medical evaluations highlight acute wasting, stunted growth and potential cognitive delays among children experiencing extreme nutritional deficits [4, 11]. And when combined with damaged water treatment systems and sewage overflows, malnutrition increases vulnerability to infectious diseases, driving up infant mortality risks [4, 12, 19]. Restricting access to essential nutrients and therapeutic food negatively impacts the long-term biological health and development of an entire generation [4, 11].

Structural Scarcity and Corporate Market Dynamics

The kind of deprivation observed in Gaza does not simply occur in a vacuum; it reflects a broader global system where food security is governed by market power and policy leverage rather than universal human rights guarantees [11]. Global hunger is rarely caused by an absolute shortage of production; it is a function of supply chain bottlenecks, market mechanisms and concentrated control. While hundreds of millions experience hunger and over 3 billion cannot afford a healthy diet, nearly one-third of global food production is wasted annually [20].

At the institutional level, major agricultural corporations hold extensive control over seed patents, land usage and distribution networks, creating structural dependency for small

agricultural systems [11]. This commercialization of survival extends into diplomatic arenas. International initiatives attempted to formalize the Right to Food as an enforceable human right within the United Nations General Assembly. In several recurring United Nations General Assembly votes (such as the 2021 Third Committee vote on the "Right to Food" resolution), the United States of America and Israel were the only two countries to vote against the motion, choosing to protect commercial interests instead of supporting one of the most fundamental human guarantees [11].

Historical Precedents: From Leningrad to Modern Conflicts

To view Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan or Syria solely as isolated anomalies is to misunderstand the recurring patterns of military history. The deliberate use of starvation as an instrument of statecraft has deep historical roots that transcend ideological eras.

- ***The Leningrad Benchmark***

During World War II, the Nazi regime's "Hunger Plan" *(Der Hungerplan)* and the subsequent 872 - day blockade of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) stand as one of the most brutal historical benchmarks of starvation warfare. The deliberate encirclement of the city was designed not just to defeat military resistance, but to systematically eliminate the population through hunger and exhaustion. Over a million civilians had died, exceeding the combined civilian casualties from several major allied bombing campaigns [3]. The Leningrad siege established a rather chilling precedent: the use of total geographic encirclement to induce mass civilian mortality as a primary military objective [3, 13].

- ***The Syria "Starvation Until Submission" Campaign***

During the Syrian Civil War initiated in 2011, the regime of Bashar al-Assad implemented localized sieges under an explicit strategy of "surrender or starve". Towns like Madaya and Eastern Ghouta were completely sealed off and populations were forced to consume grass, household pets and leaves as government forces blocked humanitarian convoys from entering [1]. This campaign demonstrated how modern authoritarian states could utilize bureaucratic obstruction along with military encirclement to break opposition-held areas.

- ***Sudan and the Sahel***

In Sudan, the deliberate destruction of agricultural regions and the systematic looting of humanitarian warehouses have plunged millions into terrible famine conditions [4]. Here, warring factions use food insecurity both as a weapon to depopulate contested territories and as an incentive mechanism to control recruitment and population movement [1].

In the Darfur region and Al-Jazirah state, Sudan's main agricultural region, the rapid mobilization of paramilitary forces led to the targeted burning of grain silos and the systematic disruption of seasonal planting cycles. By driving agrarian communities off their ancestral lands, armed factions effectively transformed productive agricultural terrain into active battlegrounds [1, 4]. Humanitarian aid trucks entering from neighbouring Chad have been repeatedly hijacked or delayed at military checkpoints, showing how non-state armed groups and state militaries alike exploit territorial and administrative controls to exert total control over civilian populations.

Across these historical and contemporary examples, a clear trajectory emerges: whether through the artillery-backed blockades of the 20th century or the bureaucratic and technological sieges of the 21st century, starvation remains a remarkably cheap, efficient and devastatingly effective tool of repression [1].

International Legal Frameworks and Enforcement Challenges

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) strictly prohibits the starvation of civilians as a weapon of war. However, a significant gap remains between legal statutes and practical enforcement.

Key legal instruments protecting civilians from starvation include:

- ***The 1949 Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I (1977):*** Article 54(1) explicitly bans the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare. It prohibits attacking, destroying or removing objects indispensable to civilian survival, including food stocks, crops, livestock and drinking water systems [5].
- ***The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998):*** Article 8(2)(b)(xxv) classifies intentionally starving civilians, including willfully impeding humanitarian relief supplies, as a war crime [5].
- ***UN Security Council Resolution 2417 (2018):*** This resolution formally condemns the weaponization of hunger and the unlawful denial of humanitarian access, affirming that such acts can constitute war crimes [1].

Enforcement Challenges and Legal Ambiguities

Despite these statutory protections, prosecuting starvation crimes remains exceptionally complex due to critical legal distinctions, high standards of proof and political hurdles [5, 9, 10].

Since the 1863 Lieber Code, military guidelines allowed armies to starve their enemies into surrendering. This created a long standing doctrine of "military necessity" around starvation, an idea that still influences how modern militaries plan their strategies today [7, 9]. Under current International Humanitarian Law (IHL), cutting off supplies to enemy combatants remains permissible, but a siege becomes illegal the moment it deprives civilians of essential food and water or impedes humanitarian relief.

Under the current framework of the International Criminal Court, prosecutors face an exceptionally high burden of proof regarding dual intent *(mens rea)*:

1. Proving that the perpetrator deliberately deprived civilians of objects indispensable to survival [9, 10].
2. Proving that this deprivation was explicitly executed as a method of warfare [9, 10].

As legal scholar Alex de Waal notes, this strict intent requirement creates an unprecedented loophole [10]. Defense lawyers and military commanders frequently argue that civilian starvation was merely an unintended side effect, "collateral damage" as they term it, of legitimate targeting against enemy combatants embedded within urban areas or the result of logistical delays caused by active combat conditions [10].

Because state actors rarely leave paper trails stating a formal intent to starve a population, starvation crimes have remained, in de Waal's formulation, a "stagnant backwater of

international criminal law". Consequently, immense human suffering continues to yield minimal judicial accountability.

However, we must know that the core reality of international law is simply that a lack of evidence is rarely the reason starvation crimes go unpunished. When commanders state their intentions explicitly, whether through ministerial decrees (Gaza), checkpoint slogans (Syria) or aid vetoes (Sudan), the evidentiary hurdle or intent *(mens rea)* is effectively met. Instead, the failure to prosecute stems from geopolitical shielding, Security Council vetoes and non-enforcement by powerful allies, ensuring that some state leaders remain insulated from the legal consequences of weaponizing hunger.

Conclusion

When food becomes a weapon, war stops being a contest of armies and becomes an assault on biology itself. The systemic starvation witnessed across Gaza, Syria, Sudan and historical siege sites demonstrates that the most devastating casualty of modern conflict is not just the physical infrastructure we build, but the baseline social contract that allows human life to endure.

International Law clearly has no shortage of eloquent prohibitions against the weaponization of hunger. From the Geneva Conventions to the Rome Statute to UN Security Council Resolution 2417, the statutes are unequivocal. Yet, as this paper has shown, the persistence of mass starvation is rarely a failure of law of evidence and is rather the failure of political will. When explicit ministerial declarations and documented mass atrocities are neutralized by diplomatic vetoes and great-power protection, international law is reduced to an ethical abstraction for the powerless and a shield for the protected.

Until the global community treats the deliberate denial of food not as an unavoidable byproduct of "collateral damage", but as the foundational atrocity it is, the weaponization of hunger will remain a cheap, quiet and tragically effective tool of absolute control.

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Nuclear ambitions and rise of rogue states in 21st century

An Indian perspective on geopolitical flux , deterrence and the changing nature of warfare

Nuclear ambitions and changing nature of warfare

Wars in the twenty-first century are being fought in regions that reveal a clear shift in geopolitical flux when compared to the classical Westphalian order. This shift may appear under the flag of deterrence, yet it has fundamentally altered the nature of warfare with the steady rise of nuclear arsenals.

Retrospecting into the past, the idea of building nuclear weapons was carried forward by J. Robert Oppenheimer in order to bring the Truman Doctrine-induced Manhattan Project into reality. As a result, the foreign policy of the United States transformed from the isolationist Monroe Doctrine to engagement-driven activism. The end of the Second World War, achieved at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, opened the eyes of the world to how devastating nuclear attacks can be. This dreadful event shook the international community and gave rise to the concept of the "nuclear taboo," a term coined by Nina Tannenwald. She notes that after the attacks on Japan, the United States launched its Atoms for Peace program. This presented the world with a remarkable rhetorical shift towards non-proliferation and the ideal of a nuclear-free world.

The non proliferation regime & the charge of nuclear apartheid

With the entry into force of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, disarmament became the new declared goal of the liberal institutional order. However, post-colonial states viewed the treaty as an instrument of Western hegemony that practiced selective non-proliferation for nations other than the P5. It was India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who, grounded in his ethical foundation of non-alignment, described the nuclear treaty as the West's "nuclear apartheid."

This was because nations such as Russia, China, the United States, the United Kingdom and France were recognized as nuclear-weapon states merely for having conducted tests before the NPT came into force. Joseph Stieglitz has highlighted a related irony of democracy: while liberal democratic states propagate democracy at home, their international institutions often lack democratic character.

From the Indian perspective, the NPT and its associated regimes have consistently sought to freeze a hierarchical nuclear order that privileges the original five while denying legitimate security concerns of rising powers in Asia and the Global South.

Cold war crisis & birth of extended deterrence

With the hostilities of the Cold War era, particularly the Cuban Missile Crisis, the world stood at the brink of a third world war led by nuclear arms. Such an outcome could have completely altered the picture of the world we see today. However, the Kennedy–Khrushchev dialogue, sometimes referred to as K2 diplomacy, resulted in de-escalation and gave new hope to the international community.

This episode also gave rise to the concept of extended deterrence, under which nuclear-weapon states would provide nuclear security guarantees to like-minded non-nuclear-weapon states. For instance, the United States extended deterrence to Japan, and similar arrangements covered Germany and Italy. While this created a security chilling effect in the West, it simultaneously generated a security dilemma in the East and the South.

The Global South viewed the North as opportunists playing their great-power games in newly independent states. John Mearsheimer describes this as a “buck-passing” strategy, in which major rivals, instead of fighting one another directly, use third parties to achieve their objectives. This dynamic gave many states a new instinct to develop independent nuclear capabilities for their own security.

India’s nuclear journey: from peaceful intent to strategic autonomy

Diving into Indian policy, Homi J. Bhabha laid the scientific foundation of India’s nuclear program. Under Nehruvian guidance, the core idea remained centered on nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Changing political dynamics under Lal Bahadur Shastri briefly opened the possibility of a more security-oriented approach. However, the mysterious death of Shastri in 1966, followed only thirteen days later by the death of Homi J. Bhabha, the father of the Indian nuclear program, raised serious questions. Some observers have pointed to the possible role of international intelligence agencies in eliminating nuclear ambitions around the world.

These developments contributed to the emergence of a more muscular nuclear policy under Indira Gandhi, culminating in Operation Smiling Buddha in 1974. Later, under the Vajpayee government, Operation Shakti in 1998 demonstrated India’s resolve. The era of sanctions that followed did not intimidate India; rather, it ignited a determination to become a responsible nuclear-weapon state on its own terms. India’s nuclear trajectory has always been guided by the principle of strategic autonomy and the refusal to accept a discriminatory global nuclear order.

The south asian security dilemma

When Pakistan conducted its own nuclear tests only months later, it gave birth to a new security dilemma, not only for South Asian states but also for the liberal world order. This was particularly concerning because of Pakistan’s close proximity to Afghanistan, a region that has long served as a hub for ISIS-K and Taliban-linked terrorism.

Moreover, Pakistan has frequently been accused of cross-border, state-sponsored terrorism and of the weaponization of its intelligence agency, the ISI. The ongoing conflicts between India and Pakistan highlight that the mere possession of nuclear arms has not automatically produced stable deterrence.

Over the years, the nuclear ambitions of states that have acquired nuclear warheads have further escalated conflicts and deteriorated global security. From New Delhi’s

perspective, the combination of nuclear capability with a history of sponsoring terrorism creates a uniquely dangerous challenge that conventional deterrence models struggle to address.

East Asian flashpoints & the North Korean challenge

North Korea's withdrawal from the Non-Proliferation Treaty and its successful nuclear tests opened a fresh security dilemma in East Asia. The Republic of Korea and Japan are often regarded as the soft underbelly of the United States. Their close proximity to an authoritarian nuclear state raises serious concerns about the possible misuse of nuclear arsenals.

The entire world has feared the use of nuclear weapons by the North Korean regime, which continues to hamper stability in Asia. It is often said that the twenty-first century is the Asian century, yet this nuclear race risks turning Asia into a hotbed of conflict. For India, the North Korean example underscores the dangers of unchecked proliferation and the failure of the existing non-proliferation regime to restrain determined outliers.

West Asia , Iranian ambitions & regional militarization

Turning to West Asia, Iran's nuclear ambitions have fueled intense rivalry and proxy wars across the region. Israel's policy of strategic ambiguity regarding its nuclear status, combined with the normalization of its diplomatic relations with several Arab states, is viewed by Iran as a direct threat to its theocratic order.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, popularly known as the Iran Nuclear Deal and negotiated by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council along with Germany, sought to limit Iran's nuclear enrichment. However, the enactment of CAATSA in 2017 and the assassination of Qasim Soleimani, the commander of the Iranian Quads Force, acted as a catalyst that further intensified Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Through its role in supporting proxies—the so-called "triple H" of Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis—the Middle East has become a heavily militarized zone. Conflicts ranging from the Saudi–Yemen war involving the Houthis, to Hezbollah's confrontations with Israel in Lebanon, and the long-standing Hamas–Israel conflict have caused severe harm to non-combatants and violated basic human rights. Periodic escalations involving Iran, Israel and the United States have repeatedly threatened regional security, energy supplies and trade while producing large numbers of civilian casualties. These developments have once again given rise to nuclear ambitions among states, while the growing role of non-state actors raises the specter of a new age of neo-world war.

When nations possess nuclear arms in such a volatile environment, the risk of catastrophic destruction and the elimination of large sections of the human race becomes real. When people die in large numbers, civilizations themselves come under threat.

Geopolitical flux in the broader Middle East & beyond

West Asia could once have served as a repository of knowledge for future generations. Syria, for instance, was regarded as one of the earliest centers of great civilization, with flourishing cities such as Damascus. In today's world, however,

rising ethnic and sectarian conflicts among Shia, Sunni and Kurdish communities have destabilized the region.
The ostracisation of Bashar al-Assad, the Shia Alawite leader, came as a shock to his supporters in Iran and Russia. Geopolitical flux is also visible in the aftermath of arrangements such as the Mecca Pact, a trilateral understanding involving Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan that speaks of collective defense.
Foreign policy thinkers such as Samuel P. Huntington have described such developments in terms of a “clash of civilisations.” The rise of visions resembling an “Islamic NATO” directed against the West-dominated liberal institutional order, particularly after Israel’s actions against certain regional bases, has signaled growing divergence among regional powers.
The Islamic world has often looked upon Pakistan as the sole Muslim-majority nation possessing nuclear arms. If such escalations continue, the world may witness some of the deadliest conflicts of the contemporary era.

NATO expansion, the Russia-Ukraine war & the erosion of arms control

The origin of collective defense lies in NATO, formed in 1949 against the Soviet Union. The recent expansion of NATO to include Finland and Sweden has generated a sharp security dilemma for Moscow. Ukraine’s declared intention to join NATO added fuel to a long-standing fire and ignited a prolonged war.
Europe’s support for Ukraine, including discussions about deploying nuclear-capable systems closer to Russian borders, has escalated the conflict, with hundreds of thousands of lives lost on both sides. Russia’s nuclear rhetoric has become a central subject of analysis among geopolitical experts seeking to understand how nuclear-weapon states behave during acute security crises.
Robert Kaplan, in The Revenge of Geography, explains how Russia’s geography—the frozen Arctic and the Far East—has historically pushed it to expand and secure access to the Black Sea for maritime routes. Alfred Thayer Mahan long argued that control of the oceans and critical choke points determines global power.
Russia’s reaction to Ukraine’s engagement with the European Union and NATO also contributed to the non-renewal of the New START treaty between the United States and Russia. The original objective of such treaties was to control and limit nuclear arms, yet today disarmament and non-proliferation have taken a back seat.

Indo pacific rivalries & China’s nuclear posture

As we examine the weaponization of trade routes such as the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea and the Persian Gulf, we see a multipolar world standing at the brink of scattered regional wars. In this context, the South China Sea has become part of a new great-power rivalry.
India’s Indo-Pacific vision stands in clear contrast to China’s salami-slicing tactics along the nine-dash line. With respect to nuclear and disarmament agreements, it is ironic that Beijing is not a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Wassenaar Arrangement or the Australia Group, even while it remains part of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.
The dichotomy is striking: China has repeatedly blocked India’s membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group despite India’s record as a responsible nuclear-weapon state, while itself remaining outside several key export-control regimes. This contrast

between horizontal and vertical proliferation, and the selective application of global norms, continues to spark debate about the credibility of the existing nuclear order.

Towards a responsible nuclear frame

The use of nuclear technology for clean energy should have remained the core purpose of scientific innovation, including advanced concepts such as tokamak reactors that seek to sustain nuclear fusion—a step beyond conventional fission. Instead, the essence of nuclear technology has often shifted towards enrichment for dual-use purposes, raising fundamental questions about the effectiveness of global agreements aimed at a nuclear-free world.

In this multipolar world, interstate relations remain uncertain, rendering geopolitical flux a borderless and bottomless ocean of risk. Yet the world must come together for the greater goals of sustainable development and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Regional rivalries must be set aside so that zones of rogue behavior can be transformed into zones of responsible security and deterrence. Only then can states contribute to peaceful coexistence, as envisioned in the Panchsheel doctrine of India.

India's own journey—from Nehru's moral critique of nuclear apartheid to the responsible stewardship of its nuclear capability—offers a distinctive Asian voice in this global conversation. The challenge before the international community is to move beyond hierarchical and discriminatory regimes towards an order that respects the legitimate security interests of all nations while prioritizing human survival and civilizational continuity.

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EXPLORING INDIA'S YOUTH DIPLOMACY: THE GROWING POTENTIAL OF YOUTH IN INDIA'S DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT

Abstract

Youth diplomacy transcends the boundary of traditional diplomatic framework and reliance on protocols to actively shaping policies, providing evidence-based recommendations, fostering dialogue among stakeholders, forging relationships, and asserting participation in decisions that define their future. The growing relevance of youth diplomacy has become impossible to overlook. The study investigates on the pattern of youth diplomacy in India through participation in dedicated youth summits, multilateral forums, non-state organizations, utilization of social media, harnessing student exchange programs and scholarships and as an instrument of nation branding. The paper also analyses the primary challenges in the field and proposes actionable recommendations. Although youth diplomacy has transformed how youth engage, India's utilization of the massive diplomatic resource remains at a nascent stage.

Keywords: Youth diplomacy, nation branding, youth summits, multilateral forums, social media

Introduction

Youth diplomacy marks a dynamic shift in the contemporary global politics, adding a new dimension to modern diplomacy. It represents the transition of youth from passive recipients of global affairs to active participants in informing, inspiring, and influencing international relations. It encourages a global framework that is proactively shaped by youth discourse *(Rajput, 2025)*. Youth bring diverse perspectives that not only enrich conversations but also inform critical decisions. Youth are the active users of technological innovation, means of cultural preservation, contributors of evidence-based recommendations, beneficiaries of government policies, and the catalysts of societal change; collectively they are the means of soft power projection for a country *(Modaber, 2016)*. Youth mobilize societal change in focal areas, such as gender equality, social equality, human rights, and climate action and function as the central forces of social development. They add accountability, representation, and inclusivity to the global political infrastructure and strive to create an intellectual front fueled by intent. In doing so, they are not only bringing diverse voices to the table but also raising the next generation of leaders. Youth diplomacy is not confined only to formal front; multilateral forums and non-state actors also constitute major arenas of conducting this kind of diplomacy *(Modaber, 2016)*. They provide formal beginnings to able and enthusiastic persons, steer confidence in them, and generate social capital. India constitutes the highest percentage of youth population, with 65% under the age of 35 *(Press Information Bureau, 2025)*. Strategic utilization of this demographic asset can help India leverage key opportunities internationally. Youth are emerging as the major driving force of India's diplomatic framework. Earlier, India's foreign policy was operated predominantly by diplomats in a curated sphere, away from any kind of public diplomacy, but now the public is no longer at bay *(Taneja, 2021)*. Through participation and advocacy in multilateral forums, they have emerged as a powerful diplomatic asset

that showcases India's commitment to a more equitable, peaceful, and sustainable future in international relations. Youth diplomacy can allow India to be informed in a broad range of experiences and remain responsive to global realities. However, the capacity of youth in the diplomatic front remains under-harnessed. The study adopts a qualitative approach on analyzing patterns of youth diplomacy through multiple diplomatic forums and interprets its impact. Therefore, the study seeks to explore patterns of youth diplomacy in India, subsequently examining challenges and devising recommendations to realize the full potential of youth in diplomacy.

Literature Review

India's foreign policy has been widely analyzed and debated from scholarly perspective. Scholars have examined wide range of power politics used by India, ranging from cultural diplomacy, diaspora diplomacy, medical diplomacy, humanitarian diplomacy and multilateral diplomacy. However, one element of India's diplomatic framework remains overlooked, i.e., youth diplomacy. This review synthesizes gaps in linking Indian youth to foreign policy outcomes and recognizes youth demographics as active agents in global governance, shifting the paradigm from viewing them as passive beneficiaries to essential stakeholders in international dialogue.

With increasing tumult in international order, there is blurring in role of government and new players have emerged, i.e., the youth. Youth are the carriers of "social capital." Youths' role in diplomacy is amplified through non-governmental organizations that not only create an active global youth network but also influence programs in international realm. Modern diplomatic needs can no longer be served exclusively by traditional diplomacy *(Modaber, 2016)*. The study outlines the role of youth diplomacy using Youth Non-Governmental Organizations (YNGOs); however, it does not assess its effectiveness compared to traditional diplomacy.

Scholarship diplomacy is a secondary tool used by countries to improve bilateral engagement and intercultural collaboration. It entails a less confrontational method of improving ties involving the youth. India utilizes scholarship diplomacy primarily with its neighbouring countries to counter China's growing influence in the region *(Tang, 2021)*. However, the study focuses on India's intent but does not examine the perspective of recipient countries.

Youth diplomacy has emerged to serve modern diplomatic requirements, which remain less fulfilled through traditional statecraft. The study analyzes the role of youth diplomacy in strengthening bilateral relationship between India and Russia and places youth diplomacy as a central tool of soft power diplomacy. It employs multiple areas of harnessing youth diplomacy in Indo-Russia relations like defense, digital connectivity, energy security, entrepreneurial initiative and people-to-people ties *(Sharma, 2015)*. However, the study remains descriptive and does not highlight benefits quantitatively.

Existing studies on youth diplomacy recognize it as complementary asset to traditional diplomacy and reiterate its importance in the age of digital innovations. Despite scholarly studies, potential of youth diplomacy in India remains underexplored. Existing studies tend to address the subject through separate heads, like scholarship diplomacy, educational diplomacy or youth in multilateral forums. The separatist approach tends to overlook the integrated effect of youth diplomacy in India's foreign policy from a multidimensional perspective.

The overall literature suggests that youth are the intangible assets in international relations. Youth diplomacy empowers the youth to influence nation's global standing. In India's context, youth diplomacy is a secondary tool to strengthen bilateral ties through education, innovation, cultural exchange and other facets of diplomacy. This paper aims to explore the patterns of India's youth diplomacy and understand emerging challenges and further elaborate on steps to fortify youth diplomacy in the diplomatic framework.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative methodology centred on examining existing literature, articles and scholarly reports to explore India's youth diplomacy and critically examine how India's youth are shaping diplomacy, the challenges they face and the policy pathways needed to improve engagement. The research is interpretative in nature as it tries to identity the patterns of engagement of India's youth.

Objectives

- To understand the patterns of India's youth diplomacy.
- To examine diplomacy through youth forums, social media and non-state actors.

- To analyse youth diplomacy through nation branding.
- To analyse the emerging challenges in the field of youth diplomacy.
- To recommend pathways to navigate barriers and improve participation.

Pattern of Youth Diplomacy

1. Youth Diplomacy as a Tool of Nation Branding

The term nation branding was coined by Simon Anholt in 1996. It implies conveying a curated image of country with an aim to increase its influence and reputation. It is not merely a marketing tool, rather a diplomatic tactic *(Murphy, 2022)*. A country's image does not depend upon how it behaves, but what it advocates and the social groups that actively engage in such advocacy.

Nation branding is different from soft power. Soft power was first used by Joseph Nye, which means the ability to influence or shape the preferences of other countries without using coercive power, whereas nation branding means how a country can frame perceptions and opinions of the country internationally *(Fan, 2008)*. However, broadly, both the concepts deal with leveraging influence globally.

Youth diplomacy is a subset of nation branding. Youth diplomacy transforms diplomacy not as a mere act of negotiation or discussion, but as projection and direction. Youth diplomacy popularizes national interests, interacts with foreign masses, spreads dialogue among countries and influences universal norms *(Modaber, 2016)*. It is instrumental in driving India's advancing global stature and creating a positive image of the nation. Through youth diplomacy, youth not only champion their cause, but also remain the main carriers of "social capital," *(Modaber, 2016)* thereby contributing to nation branding. Youth diplomacy being an instrument of nation branding caters to numerous role; first, maintaining nation's international prestige; second, ensuring global legitimacy and; third, influencing public opinion.

2. Youth Diplomacy through Scholarships and Student Exchange Program

India leverages education to build its youth diplomacy. This not only helps in empowerment of students and reflects India's inclusivity, but also highlights soft power diplomacy *(Kapur & Behl, 2024)*. Indian Council for Cultural Relations offers multiple scholarships to foreign nationals to pursue higher education in India, especially to member countries of South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

The student exchange program allows students to have an immersive experience in networking and building transnational understanding *(Perumal, 2025)*. When countries provide exchange programs, the sending and the receiving countries gain an opportunity to strengthen bilateral ties. For instance, each year at least five students are offered Indo-Sri Lankan Cultural Exchange Program for higher studies at post graduate or research level *(High Commission of India Colombo, Sri Lanka, n.d.)*. This allows both countries to embrace their shared cultural heritage through the deployment of youth diplomacy. In addition, the Government of India reserves about 40 seats in courses such as medicine, pharmacy and engineering for Sri Lankan students in prestigious institutions.

In context of Sri Lanka, post 2022, these subtle mechanisms have become imperative for India to follow to prevent cultivation of offensive diplomatic measures in its backwaters. This signifies indirect leveraging of youth diplomacy. It is crucial to note that student exchange programs and scholarships are not youth diplomacy in themselves, but they are an essential pillar of youth diplomacy that reaffirm wider diplomatic objectives.

3. Youth Diplomacy through Dedicated Youth Forums

a. India ASEAN Youth Summit

India ASEAN Youth Summit is an extension of India's Neighbourhood First Policy. Youth from both sides collaborate on trade, climate change, tourism, governance, innovation, entrepreneurship, security, education, digital ecosystem, etc. India and ASEAN countries have a huge demographic dividend which remains underutilized in diplomatic avenues. Young leaders from different countries interact and engage in dialogue to build a coherent global vision.

In August 2025, fifth India ASEAN Youth Summit was organized under the theme "Connecting the Youth: Shaping our Future." The youth in this summit reflected the power of youth leadership, trans-boundary engagement and future in digital connectivity in the world. The repeated interactions among future leaders contributes to formation of shared goals and norms. Through emphasis on digital connectivity, youth can increase economic collaboration, which in turn will help build soft power. Youth engagement unintentionally allows India to have dialogues in regional security, building maritime dialogues and build humanitarian cooperation.

Although youth are not primary diplomats, yet their engagement acts as a pivotal confidence building measure among nations. India ASEAN Youth Summit becomes particularly important in the context of India's opportunity to redirect its relations with ASEAN nations amidst growing apprehensions of China's regional hegemony.

b. India Russia Youth Forum

The second India Russia Youth Forum took place from June 16th to June 17th, 2026. The historically "time tested" bilateral relations seek to utilize the people-to-people connect through youth engagement. Young participants are fostering human connection to ensure continuity of the historic friendship amid rising global tensions. Youth engaged in several dimensions ranging from education, human capital, innovation and science to sustainability. The forum brought together young minds from both sides to strengthen growing partnership between India and Russia through dialogue, discussions and innovation.

The youth forum was particularly important in context of fraying bilateral relations between India and Russia amid US sanctions. Washington's threat of imposing bone crushing sanctions on India for purchasing Russian oil has spawned India to reduce its oil purchases from Russia. Although India continues to purchase Russian oil, the numbers have fondled. However, post US waiver, in the first quarter of 2026-27, India's crude and its derivative imports from Russia have seen a 23.11% growth, rising from $49.24 billion during the April-June quarter of last year to $60.62 billion this year *(Padmanabhan, 2026)*. Washington's sanctions on Russian oil purchases forced India to rethink and balance its energy security while assessing the evolving China-Russia relations.

Amidst the tensions, a framework to improve people-to-people ties helps preserve the legacy of relations. Along with this, youth driven entrepreneurial initiatives from both sides can guide a roadmap in trade and investment. Through this, India and Russia can lay the groundwork of economic diversification in their ties. Defence infrastructure has been the bedrock of Indo-Russian relationship; youth can further drive research, and developmental projects to eliminate delays and disagreements *(Sharma, 2015)*.

Diversification of diplomatic engagements can allow India to foster confidence building measures beyond formal intergovernmental mechanisms. India-Russia relations are majorly based on premises of defence and energy cooperation; therefore, alternative diplomatic mechanisms can make the partnership all-weather and resilient. This people-to-people ties can help cultivate trust, foster cooperation, drive innovation, build respect for cultures and nurture resilience in partnership. Thus, India can effectively utilize the medium of youth diplomacy to bring two nations closer transcending cultural, territorial boundaries and showcasing that meaningful changes can be brought when we choose to act.

c. India China Youth Dialogue

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4th India China Youth Dialogue was organized on March 28th, 2026 to deepen bilateral relations. The event focused on strengthening bilateral relationship beyond conventional leadership and engaging young generations in the field of artificial intelligence, green technology, digital economy and other fields of cooperation. This youth dialogue marked a new era in the India China relations.

This youth engagement was an essential display of youth diplomacy as it allowed both sides to experience each other's existing perceptions, goals, and divergences and foster a more rational understanding *(Embassy of People's Republic of China in Republic of*

India, 2026). In case of India-China relations, youth diplomacy can be decisive as it allows two civilizational powers to build understanding, much of which has been eroded due to border disputes. Youth diplomacy can create a splendor in dynamics between India and China which will have implications for regional stability.

d. United Nations ECOSOC Youth Forum 2026

Youth diplomacy holds an indispensable importance in multilateral forums. The UN ECOSOC Youth Forum hosted young people for member states of United Nations to discuss on the theme of the 2026 High level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). It allowed youth from partner countries engage in dialogue, attain innovation and infrastructure, build partnerships, coordinate actions to achieve 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

Youth from India communicated about power rise of India in the decade and reflected on digital innovations, investment attraction, balanced position in global realm and its civilisational philosophy. Therefore, youth diplomacy through multilateral forums provides an opportunity to lay a spotlight on the opinions, experiences and voices of youth, which are often discounted in conventional diplomacy. It can be reasonable to conclude that the future of multilateralism will be shaped by youth leadership, global cooperation and emphasis on humanism.

4. Youth Diplomacy through Social Media

Proliferation of social media is a defining feature of contemporary youth culture *(Bammanal, 2024)*. There is an intricate relationship between youth and social media; it allows them to leverage the platforms to voice their opinions, build dialogue, incorporate recommendations and refine conversations. Beyond being the platform of communication, it has become an instrument of advocacy.

Social Media is a tool for active engagement, advocacy, public mobilization, continuous learning, participatory ecosystem, interaction with policymakers and a channel to raise demands. It transforms closed door discussions to public negotiation. It has led to "global informatization" *(Wang, 2026)*. Social media has become a repository of social opinions that shape international relations, often unconsciously *(Taneja, 2021)*. As a tool of public diplomacy, it has become a rapidly advancing space. How the youth discuss about global affairs or convey perception of countries on social media, provides a fertile ground for inferring country's international relations *(Barnett et al., 2017)*.

Youth diplomacy bypasses traditional diplomacy, forces the world to notice and creates urgency, hence, social media becomes its channel. Youth combine informal negotiation with technology, and connect ground realities with global reach. India's youth presence in social media is enormous. 80% of Indian youth between the age of 18-25 years have over six hours of social media usage *(Singhania, 2023)*. Redirection of this social media presence to diplomatic framework can be strategically advantageous.

For Indian youth, social media has transformed into a powerful advocacy tool to carry out strategic operation and has become a kind of diplomatic force for youth. It allows Indian youth to become a socially responsible generation by creating a broader audience that exposes global monopolies. For instance, Fridays for Future India is an interest group founded by Disha Ravi on the lines of Greta Thunberg and led by youth activists to drive action to combat climate crisis. The decentralized organization leverages social media to

mobilize youth with a common objective to stimulate climate action and challenge governmental apathy *(Roy, 2023)*.

Therefore, social media provides a medium that allows youth to integrate their voices in the broader global policies. However, India has been trailing in operationalization of social media for youth diplomacy. Most of the diplomatic engagements that occur via social media are either of informal nature or are confined to officials. Although social media reinforces the importance of diplomacy, lack of any training in formal use of social media results in improvised and informal use that not only reduces credibility of the engagement medium but also dilutes diplomatic influence. Additionally, youth diplomacy through social media is deeply fragmented, with different factions advocating different opinions *(Wilbur, 2026)*. Without proper formal, coherent engagement in social media, youth voices might go unheard in official diplomatic spaces.

5. Youth Diplomacy through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Non-governmental organizations, as non-state actors that are instrumental in advancing youth diplomacy beyond traditional diplomatic channels. Unlike traditional diplomacy, which is reserved for state actors, NGOs offer greater flexibility and scope for innovation in youth diplomacy. Through advocacy, policy recommendations, and cross-cultural collaboration, NGOs empower emerging youth leaders to lead dialogue, enrich conversations, amplify voices, foster mutual cooperation and drive meaningful change in international relations.

For instance, Indian Youth Diplomacy Forum (IYDF) is a non-profit organization based on cultivating stronger ties of India "bilaterally and multilaterally." It allows youth to cultivate a space for themselves where their voices are heard and integrated in global politics. It shifts tokenistic participation to active engagement and spreads young diplomats to international platforms *(Indian Youth Diplomacy Forum, n.d.)*.

The Indian Netizens is a non-profit youth-led think tank that leverages youth diplomacy through social media. It advocates that "young people should not only consume information but also help create ideas and narratives" *(The Indian Netizens, n.d.)*. Through social media, it confers youth with an opportunity to transcend political boundaries, cultivate ideas, recalibrate policies, and forge international interconnectedness. It seeks to democratize diplomacy and reflect goals of inclusivity, equality, justiciable governance, shared knowledge and collective action.

Challenges

Youth diplomacy allows the youth to take on bigger roles in political process. Although, it upholds hope and aspirations for new channels of diplomacy, it comes with its fair share of challenges.

i. In the technology driven age, youths' primary diplomacy tool is social media. However, youth led initiatives face censorships, propaganda, calculated misinformation and media narratives. They also lack institutionalized training for formal use of social media and coherent vision.

ii. Youth diplomacy faces tokenization. Youth are put in formal positions without any substance, position or power. It reduces the entire initiative into a symbolic gesture meant only to appeasement or branding.

iii. Youth led forums are often occupied with elite, English speaking, urban populous, excluding many talented, intelligent and skilled youth behind in the diplomatic stages.

iv. Youth led conferences and forums constitute little or no representation of marginalized communities, despite possessing deep, granular understanding of grassroots level issues.

v. Youth lack a structured pathway or directions to navigate a career in diplomacy, which inevitably leads to underutilization of potential. Educational curricula do not a constitute a systematic roadmap to build a career in diplomacy. Although the New Education Policy 2020 has made educational curricula multidisciplinary, dedicated modules on diplomacy are not included. 6

vi. Diplomacy as a career remains underutilized for youth since there absence of adequate mentorship, support, and training to guide their path. The absence of dedicated mentorship by senior diplomats contribute to stunting of youth capital.

vii. Absence of institutional funding mechanisms hinders financial support necessary to build a career in diplomacy, especially for the youth from less privileged background.

viii. The absence of formal structure and participation process complicates youth entry and training in diplomacy. Diplomacy in India is highly state centric, with no formal mechanisms for entry. Although institutions like Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) ensure participation, they are not embedded in diplomatic systems *(Rajput, 2025)*.

ix. Although youth-centric non-governmental organizations offer experience and skills, but they do not always offer global networking opportunity or integration in global governance, necessary for reshaping narratives.

Despite challenges, youth diplomacy is striving in India because youth continue engaging in dialogue, shaping narratives, leveraging digital platforms to widen participation and bringing collaborative energy to international dialogue.

Recommendations

To address the hinderances and leverage the complete potential of youth in diplomacy, following recommendations are proposed:

i. The educational curriculum should incorporate modules on diplomacy and global studies, so that the new generation can navigate a career in diplomacy and are well versed in international relations *(Sharma, 2015)*.

ii. Expansion of youth programs across different countries can cultivate mutual understanding and long term relationships. Currently in India, youth summits are organized with limited countries only; hence, the programs need to expand across countries.

iii. Increase in funding and resources for youth led initiatives is critical in capacity building and translating vision into impact. The dedicated youth summits or conferences in India should constitute a provision of full or partial funding for talented youth to assist them in accessing diplomatic stage.

iv. Leveraging digital platforms to its full capacity, youth can democratize access to democracy and mobilize collective action *(Sharma, 2015)*. Formal training in influencing public opinion via social media and advocacy with a consistent vision can allow capitalization of digital platforms.

v. Encouraging youth participation in multilateral forums enhances the legitimacy of global governance, encourages intercultural dialogue and democratizes decision-making *(Sharma, 2015)*. Indian government can collaborate with leading multilateral forums, wherein

talented students exhibiting interest in diplomacy are provided an opportunity to participate in the forums, using educational institutions as conduit.

vi. Encourage collaboration between non-state actors and governments actors to capitalize on potential of youth and provide a platform to youth to access official diplomatic channels. In India, formal mechanism and non-state actors operate as two different channels; hence, a collaborative environment between them will allow youth to have greater access to diplomatic structures.

vii. Formalize informal youth summits and conferences under Ministry of External Affairs to provide mentorship and guidance to youth.

viii. Reserve seats for youth in diplomatic or multilateral summits mandatorily. Allowing seats to youth in formal multilateral forums can help the youth in gaining necessary experience, exposure, and training required in formal diplomacy.

Therefore, youth face multifaceted hurdles in diplomacy from direction to funding, however, they are the agents that can bridge the gap between vision and collective action. They possess transformative capacity.
By harnessing institutional support, leveraging digital platforms and sufficient funding, youth can innovate global diplomacy mechanisms.

Conclusion

By excessive reliance on conventional diplomacy, countries undermine a serious asset that can be an instrumental in projecting their soft power – youth. Youth no longer discuss problems, but they actively imagine solutions. The government can effectively reposition their international relations by integrating youth diplomacy in foreign relations. A country's foreign policy derives its legitimacy from the aspirations of broader section of citizens; youth being the largest section has a critical role in public discourse. Young can advocate for long-term solutions that will directly affect future generations that they will inherit. Youth diplomacy is no longer a rhetoric; it is a growing political reality.

The emerging trend in cross-border youth diplomacy is consistent advocacy through social media, utilizing it as a tool of nation branding, participation in multilateral forums and dedicated youth forums. The youth forums organized encourage cross-cultural collaboration among emerging changemakers and provides a platform to engage in meaningful conversations on global affairs. They enable young individuals to grow as thoughtful leaders through exposure, experience and cooperation. It pushes conversations to transform into actions. Youth forums are an effective way of shaping youth confidence.

Youth diplomacy has created opportunities for young people to influence, but greater institutional support is required to ensure their voices are heard in global governance. Youth diplomacy can also strengthen relationship between government and society through advocacy and innovative solutions.

India suffers from multiple impediments in the field of youth diplomacy, despite a huge demographic dividend. This is primarily due to lack of formal mentorship, no targeted educational modules on diplomacy, tokenization, large representation of urban elites, lack of formal structure and absence of institutional funding.

Although India has been unable to employ youth diplomacy to its fullest potential, it also hasn't completely overlooked its significance in nation branding and soft power

projection. India organizes several bilateral youth forums to build collaboration, establish economic connectivity, enhance people-to-people ties and deepen relations without state interference. These youth forums or multilateral forums allow youth to take the centre stage and complement formal diplomacy. It has also started harnessing social media as a tool, driven by youth, to shape international opinions, discuss issues overlooked by formal diplomats and democratize diplomacy.

It is imperative for young generation of India to study the various dimensions of international governance through which harmonious relations are established between countries and to acquire expertise in its various dimensions. India can advance its "Vishwaguru narrative" only by establishing India's future generation as strong, capable, ingenious, progressive and leading in innovation. As international relations grow more complex, so must our approach to navigate them. Youth are encouraged but not trusted, applauded but not empowered. So, it is high time to let youth expand their space in diplomacy from passive recipients to an indispensable partner.

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