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India and Emerging Global Powers: BRICS and Global South

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Abstract

The emergence of BRICS as an important platform of cooperation among emerging economies reflects the broader transformation of the international system from traditional Western dominance towards a more plural and multipolar global order. This paper examines India's role in BRICS and its contribution to the evolving agenda of the Global South, with particular emphasis on strategic autonomy, multi-alignment, global economic governance, development finance, trade, digital cooperation, and sustainable development. Using a qualitative analytical approach based on secondary scholarly literature, policy documents, institutional reports, and economic data, the study analyses India's engagement with BRICS and its interaction with other multilateral platforms such as the G20, SCO and Quad. The paper highlights the significance of the New Development Bank, Contingent Reserve Arrangement, intra-BRICS trade, local-currency settlements, digital payments, infrastructure investment and development cooperation in expanding the policy space of emerging and developing economies. The analysis suggests that India uses BRICS not as an anti-Western alliance but as an instrument of strategic diversification and multi-alignment. At the same time, differences among BRICS members, India-China strategic competition, trade imbalances, regulatory differences, financial constraints and geopolitical tensions limit deeper integration. The study concludes that India's ability to build issue-based coalitions, promote institutional reform, strengthen South–South cooperation and maintain balanced relations with competing power centres can enhance both its global influence and the representational capacity of the Global South.

Keywords: *BRICS; Global South; India; Strategic Autonomy; Multi-Alignment; Global Governance; New Development Bank; South–South Cooperation; Economic Cooperation; Development Finance; Multipolarity; International Relations.*

Introduction

The economic, political, and strategic influence is gradually shifting to other nations in the international system, and increasingly the emerging powers are demanding more influence on the formulation of global governance. The shift has led to a more plural and multipolar international order in which institutions and coalitions other than the traditional power centres of the West have gained in importance. The ongoing transformation holds significance for India due to its rising relative power in the global economy, its outreach and its long history of prioritizing strategic autonomy. Indian scholars have therefore explored the country not just as a new state, but as an actor trying to maneuverer between the old and the new institutions of international cooperation (Bava 2017).

One of the most important institutional manifestations of this reshaping of power dynamics is BRICS. The grouping, originally Brazil, Russia, India and China and later South Africa, grew from an economic idea to a political forum focused on the governance, development and representation of emerging economies. Its importance is part of its ability to unite the primary powers of the non-Western world with substantial economic, demographic and geopolitical resources. But its members are also diverse, and this aspect of its composition makes BRICS also qualitatively distinct from a traditional alliance, as it poses questions about its ability to create joint political positions (Nayyar 2016).

The development of BRICS is thus linked to broader discourses on the role of the Global South in international relations. Elusive powers have not just defied the institutions, they often have taken part in them, sought to reform their practices and to create new institutions.

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This is exactly what is being embodied in the BRICS, where developing countries are given more space while the emerging economies establish ways to grow their combined power. The notion of BRICS is thus not only a reaction to the shortcomings of the current global governance but also a search for new modes of cooperation, and the literature reflects this view (Juutinen 2019).

BRICS is more than an economic collaboration for India. Its involvement offers a way to boost ties with the key emerging powers and keep ties alive with current global centres of power. The BRICS engagement of India should therefore be seen in the backdrop of evolving India's foreign policy which aims to pursue strategic autonomy while participating in the new governance structures emerging on the international scene (Alam 2017).

Methodology

The study utilizes a qualitative analytical method, which is based on systematic analysis of the secondary scholarly literature, policy analysis, and institutional reports related to BRICS and India's foreign policy as well as Global south dynamics. It analyses the evolution of institutions, economic data from UNCTAD and official sources, and strategic discourses in the works of Bava, Nayyar, Chaturvedi and Saha, among others. The analysis covers the multi-alignment strategy of India; BRICS institutional innovations, such as New Development Bank and Contingent Reserve Arrangement; the intra-group trade and financial cooperation trends; and representational claims in relation to global governance reform. It critically analyses the complementarities, power dynamics, and constraints by analysing the interpretive synthesis as opposed to undertaking the primary data collection or quantitative modelling; places the engagement within the broader context of multipolar transitions and identifies continuity with the South–South cooperation heritage and contemporary geopolitical balancing.

India's Strategic Initiatives in BRICS and Emerging Global Order

India's presence in BRICS demonstrates its policy of strengthening its global footprint without falling under the sway of any one great power bloc. Its involvement has given New Delhi another avenue of foreign policy for dialogue with China, Russia, Brazil, South Africa and other emerging powers. Kumar says India's initial reason for entering into the BRICS was to get geopolitical and economic advantages from cooperation with the big emerging powers as well as to enhance India's international standing. Therefore, BRICS is not a replacement to India's other foreign engagements but just a component of the diversified approach (R. Kumar 2017).

India has also been an active member in the institutional development and economic program of BRICS. The involvement of India is significant in making BRICS a consultative forum to a mechanism for building institutions related to the regime of global governance, Chaturvedi and Saha argue. India's focus has been on reforming international institutions, development cooperation and providing more policy autonomy to emerging nations. The formation of the New Development Bank was a special aspect in this regard because it was an institution that could be used to cooperate in development finance without the Bretton Woods system (Chaturvedi and Saha 2019).

India's involvement in BRICS needs to be seen in conjunction with India's involvement in the G20. This is a "strategic balancing act for India where it is trying to be a recognized emerging power and a voice of developing nations", Kumar writes. BRICS is a platform for cooperation between the emerging powers and the G20 is a wider platform that brings together both emerging and developed powers. This bi-lateral posture would allow India to exert influence through other multilateral formats besides just one (A. Kumar 2023).

India's importance in the strategic framework of BRICS, therefore, cannot be only measured by its economic weight. It also stems from its capacity to balance the competing geopolitical interests and to position itself between them, and make statements that resonate with the broader Global South issues and interests in terms of the rise of new powers. With the recent addition of BRICS countries, opportunities and constraints have risen with India's diplomatic engagement having to rely on its capability to retain strategic autonomy while forming issue-based coalitions in the expanded group (Konwer 2025).

The role of BRICS as platform for cooperation and representation of the Global South.

Increasingly BRICS has become a forum via which emerging and developing economies can speak collectively on power imbalances in global governance. Its relevance for the Global South is that its members have high economic and political capacities and are interested in changing institutions, which have hitherto been dominated by the developed world. The grouping consequently opens the possibility for developing countries to exert more influence on international economic and political processes, but without forming a traditional military or ideology alliance.

One of the key achievements of BRICS has been the establishment of institutional channels of south–south cooperation. The New Development Bank is the most prominent such initiative. The study of the bank shows that BRICS has tried to look for other ways of development financing and to widen the policy space of developing economies. Meanwhile, scholarship warns that such institutions are far from supplanting the prevailing global financial system – they are important in providing additional options for institutional choice and policy space for developing countries (Duggan, Ladines Azalia, and Rewizorski 2022).

The role of BRICS as a representation has also grown with new avenues of cooperation. There is continuity in the search for development-oriented multilateralism as seen in the relationship of the earlier South–South cooperation initiatives, like the IBSA, and the later ones, like the BRICS. These include cooperation in development finance, poverty reduction, infrastructure and economic co-ordination for developing countries. It seems that the institutional development should be viewed as a part of the broader context of the Southern multilateralism and not as a standalone geopolitical initiative by the BRICS (Duggan et al. 2022).

Cooperation between the BRICS is also growing in new spheres, such as digital development and technological cooperation. Digital BRICS' research has been gaining momentum in recent times and it focuses on the opportunities of digital cooperation for intensifying South–South cooperation, which can include sharing knowledge, developing technological cooperation

and introducing new formats of economic cooperation. This expansion of the concept of Global South cooperation goes beyond the usual developmental and trade finance contexts, and adds technological capacity building as a new area of collective action.

The enlarged BRICS thus poses both possibilities and paradoxes for the cooperation of the Global South. It has seen a significant rise in its members, and this has extended its geographical and political reach, and divisions within the membership may not make consensus an easy process. BRICS' success as a platform for the Global South must therefore be judged by its ability not just to grow in number but also to develop concrete mechanisms for development, finance, technology and institutional representation that can address the different priorities of developing countries.

India, BRICS and the Transformation of Global Economic Governance

1. **BRICS and the Reform of the Global Financial and Multilateral Institutions**

Dedication for reform of the financial and multilateral institutions around the world has been one of BRICS cooperation's enduring goals. The concern is based on the fact that although emerging economies are increasingly becoming economically important, their weight in decision-making institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or World Bank is still relatively low. BRICS countries have thus always called for reform of voting patterns, quotas and institutional representation in order to ensure that decision making is more in line with the current economic realities. The emergence of BRICS has important implications, particularly for global economy governance, because developing countries are increasingly demanding more say in institutions that shape international economic policy, Nayyar argues.

However, the general pattern of the BRICS approach has been the institutional reform and institutional complementarity. Facing the challenge of the IMF, World Bank or WTO, BRICS countries have tried to shape its rules and established new ones. The research findings regarding the cooperation between the BRICS and G20 reveal that the cooperation has helped to give shape to discussions about financial regulation, international monetary governance and the reform of international financial institutions (Larionova and Shelepov 2022).

Moreover, BRICS has undermined the centralisation of power in the global financial system that has taken the form of its own financial architecture. The CRA was intended as a facility to provide liquidity to members in balance-of-payments difficulties. However, studies suggest that it is linked to the existing financial framework and is not yet a viable alternative to the IMF. In a similar vein, the attempts by BRICS to build alternative credit-rating arrangements reflect both a sense of ambition and limitations of institutional innovation: "old" financial actors have significant "structural" power (Gupta 2022).

BRICS' efforts for reform are not as much about replacing the multilateral institutions as it is about reallocating voice, expanding institutional options and exerting pressure on established institutions. This step-by-step has been very well suited to India's historical practice of gradualism and gradual change instead of radical break (Biziwick, Cattaneo, and Fryer 2015).

2. **New Development Bank and Alternative Development Financing**

The New Development Bank (NDB) is the most concrete institutional result of the economic cooperation between the BRICs. The NDB was founded by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) to raise funds for infrastructure investments and sustainable development in the BRICS nations and other emerging and developing economies. It was born as a result of the disillusionment over the lack of representation of emerging economies in existing multilateral development institutions and the financing deficit of infrastructure and sustainable-development projects. One reason for the creation of the NDB is the imbalance in the economic power of the BRICS economies and their representation on the current global financial institutions, Hofman and Srinivas note (Hofman and Srinivas 2024).

The NDB has a number of distinguishing features from traditional Bretton Woods institutions. One of its innovative governance structures is the principle of equality among the founding members instead of voting power being directly based upon the economic size of the state. This was to avoid having one big member being able to dominate the institution. The institutional design is thus not only important for financing reasons, but also as an experiment of alternative multi-lateral governance (Cooper 2017).

The bank's financing structure also introduces new development finance sources for emerging economies. It focuses on infrastructure, renewable energy and sustainable development and addresses the ongoing financing needs of developing countries. The NDB has also grown its membership of the founding nations, which further underlines the fact that it is not limited to intra-BRICS financing. For instance, the inclusion of Bangladesh shows the institution could expand to be a broader forum for development finance in the Global South (Chin and Kamal 2024).

However, the NDB must not be seen as an alternative to the World Bank or any other multilateral development banks. While the NDB is a new circuit for development finance, its structural ability to change the rules of global finance is still constrained, argue Duggan, Likewise, Cooper focuses on innovations at the institutional level, not the material level (Duggan, Ladines Azalia, and Rewizorski 2022).

The NDB can therefore be viewed and understood as an auxiliary alternative – it expands the financial possibilities; it strengthens the cooperation between the states of the South; it increases the institutional agency of the emerging economies in the context of the global financial system.

3. **India's Role in Promoting a More Representative Global Economic Order**

India's efforts to forge a more representative economic order for the world are based on a search for a combination of strategic autonomy, multilateral engagement and increased representation of developing economies. In BRICS, India has always been in favour of reform of the world institutions and against the group becoming an anti-Western one. This is in line with India's general stance of a multipolar world with a growing power sharing among the emerging players without neglecting the existing hierarchical structures.

India's value can be seen especially in the aspect of IMF governance. Studies on India's interaction with the IMF reveal that New Delhi has been actively engaged in quota reform and has tried to influence the rules of the game. Instead of stepping back from

existing institutions, India has sought to strengthen the link between the importance of today's economic powers and their participation in decision-making in the world.

India's contribution is not just in the area of institutional development of BRICS but also to the whole organization. Chaturvedi and Saha show that India has been a key player in establishing BRICS' agenda on 'development', 'equity', 'multilateralism' and 'institutional innovation'. The Indian effort for establishing a development bank for BRICS was significant as it tied the need for more representation to a financial mechanism for development.

India, on the other hand, is practicing multi-alignment, rather than bloc politics. The multi-alignment of India is documented to reflect the use of overlapping institutions with the purpose of serving India multiple, but parallel, goals by New Delhi, like the BRICS, the SCO, and other multilateral arrangements. This will allow India to join China and Russia in the BRICS without compromising with the United States and Europe as well as other nations (O'Donnell and Papa 2021).

India's role in a representative international economic order must, therefore, be considered from the perspective of institutional voice, agenda setting, development finance and coalition building. It's not to dismantle the existing global economic architecture, it's to ensure that it is more representative of the current economic realities and the interests of developing countries.

Economic, Financial and Development Cooperation within BRICS

1. **Intra-BRICS Trade, Investment and Economic Partnerships**

Trade is one of the most tangible aspects of economic cooperation within BRICS. This growth of the grouping has resulted in a large economic space where natural resource, manufacturing capacity, technological, energy and consumer markets differentials can provide significant complementarities. UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) reported that in 2024 the value of intra-BRICS merchandise exports grew by over 13 times from 2003 to US$1.17 trillion. However, while the volume of trade among the BRICS countries has grown rapidly, intra-BRICS trade still represents about 20% of the total volume of South-South trade, thus suggesting there is still a significant potential for further integration in the economies of the BRICS countries (unctad 2025).

The broader economic impact of the grouping is also significant. BRICS countries had around 27% of world's GDP, nearly 45% of the world's population and around 19.6% of global merchandise trade in 2023. The markets of the BRICS are also significant for India: India exported almost 18% to the BRICS markets. The numbers showcase that BRICS is not just a diplomatic alliance but a powerful economic network that can shape trade dynamics.

Table 1. Selected Economic and Trade Indicators of BRICS

Indicator	Latest reported value	Significance
Intra-BRICS merchandise exports, 2024	US$1.17 trillion	Demonstrates substantial internal trade
Growth in intra-BRICS trade since 2003	More than 13-fold	Indicates rapid expansion of economic linkages
BRICS share of global GDP, 2023	≈27%	Indicates major global economic weight
BRICS share of world population, 2023	≈45%	Demonstrates enormous consumer and labour-market potential
BRICS share of global merchandise trade, 2023	≈19.6%	Shows significant position in global commerce
India's exports going to BRICS, 2023	≈18% of India's total exports	Indicates substantial importance of BRICS markets
BRICS share of South–South trade	≈20%	Shows that intra-BRICS trade still has room for expansion

Sources: UNCTAD and Government of India, Department of Commerce.

The composition of trade reveals considerable economic complementarity. UNCTAD reports that China remains the central actor in intra-BRICS trade, while Brazil, India, Indonesia, Russia and the United Arab Emirates have also generated important trade flows. China and India are particularly significant as exporters of manufactured products, whereas several other BRICS economies remain strongly dependent on primary commodities. In fact, seven of the ten BRICS members—Brazil, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Russia, South Africa and the UAE—derive more than 60% of their exports to other BRICS members from primary products. This creates both opportunities for complementarity and concerns regarding unequal patterns of structural transformation.

India occupies a particularly important position because its export structure provides a potential bridge between resource-rich BRICS economies and markets requiring manufactured goods and services. Indian pharmaceuticals, engineering products, chemicals, automobiles, information technology and business services can contribute to diversification of intra-BRICS commerce. UNCTAD specifically identifies China and India as the leading intra-BRICS manufacturing exporters, illustrating the importance of these two economies in strengthening manufacturing-oriented South–South trade.

Table 2. Major Trade Characteristics within BRICS

Dimension	Current pattern	Implication for India
China	Central participant in intra-BRICS trade	Major market and supply-chain partner
India	Major manufacturing exporter	Scope for higher-value exports
Brazil	Strong primary-product orientation	Opportunities for agricultural and commodity trade
Russia	Strong energy and commodity position	Energy and raw-material partnerships
Indonesia	Growing trade importance	Manufacturing and resource cooperation
UAE	Important trade and logistics hub	Investment and re-export opportunities
South Africa	Resource-rich African economy	Gateway to African markets
Egypt/Ethiopia	Emerging BRICS trade partners	Opportunities for Indian exports and investment
Iran	Energy and geographical connectivity	Potential transport and energy cooperation

The tariff situation has also undergone a significant transformation. UNCTAD's analysis reveals that many bilateral tariffs among the BRICS countries in the 10–20% band in 2003, were in single digits by 2021, but there are some significant differences. This is reflective of a gradual trend towards decreasing trade costs, although deep economic integration has not been achieved through tariff liberalisation. Actual volume and composition of intra-BRICS trade remain to be influenced by regulatory differences, institutional capacity gaps, logistics and divergent trade policies and geopolitical tensions.

The other important dimension is investment. The original five BRICS have also risen in importance in international investment flows, with FDI inflows more than quadrupling since 2001, according to UNCTAD's BRICS Investment Report. This investment growth has aided productive capacity and capital building, but investment relationships are imbalanced among members. Greater cooperation between businesses, financial institutions and governments can enhance the investment relationship. The BRICS Business Council offers an avenue for the private sector to interact, and the expansion of the New Development Bank offers an institutional avenue for infrastructure-related investment. It is clear that it is time to understand trade and investment as a whole: greater trade will generate demand for cross-border investment; and investment in logistics, manufacturing and infrastructure will help to lower the costs of intra-BRICS trade.

The statistics also show an important failure, however. In spite of the fact that the economies of the BRICS countries have huge economic weight, the volume of the trade within the bloc is relatively small vis-à-vis the total economic potential of the bloc. It is worth noting that intra-BRICS trade is still only about one-fifth of the South–South trade, meaning that being a member of the group does not automatically mean that the economies are necessarily integrated.

This poses a double policy challenge to India. Firstly, BRICS can provide diversification of export markets and enhance engagement in value chains of emerging markets. Second, the country has to do something about the imbalance in trade that still exists, and that is to boost the value of exports, which can be done by focusing on higher-value manufactured goods, pharmaceuticals and technology products and services. The Indian way of doing things should therefore go beyond mere volume of bilateral trade toward development of balanced and value added economic partnerships (unctad 2025).

In general, the evidence suggests that intra-BRICS economic cooperation has evolved from a limited trade cooperation in the early 2000s to a network of trade in merchandise exchanges in excess of US$1 trillion per year. On the other hand, the fact that BRICS countries' internal trade intensity remains relatively low reveals that great potential exists for further collaboration. The future pathway will most probably be based on the field of trade facilitation, investment connectivity, value-chain integration, logistics, digital commerce and regulatory coordination, and not only on tariff reductions.

2. Local Currency Trade, Digital Payments and Financial Cooperation

The most concrete is the local currency settlement, which was recently identified as the best part of payment cooperation between the BRICS. Meanwhile, Lyu believes the cooperation has gradually extended from bilateral cooperation to local currency settlement and cross-border digital payments discussions. The goal is to create a more diversified international payment system, not a common currency right away.

With the advancement and evolution of financial technology, the significance of this issue has also grown. Digital payment infrastructure can improve the speed and, in some cases, the cost of cross-border transactions, especially for small enterprises and those who rely on remittances for livelihood. When comparing the digital-payment environment and financial inclusion among the member countries of the BRICS group, there were noticeable differences in financial inclusion and the digital-payment environment, highlighting the opportunities and institutional gaps that need to be filled.

De-dollarisation is therefore to be approached with caution. The move away from dollar usage for some intra-BRICS trade does not automatically lead to a dollar-less global financial system. Instead, the more realistic scenario is currency diversification. This is a significant difference for India, which has so far preferred tangible financial cooperation rather than commitments that might unnecessarily jeopardize the country's broader International Economy Ties.

Digital payments potentially offer a more helpful pathway as they don't so much compete over the geopolitics of currency and payment as over the efficiency of the transaction. The possibility for interoperability between national payment systems would enable the BRICS economies to expand cross-border trade without the need to establish a common currency or supranational monetary authority.

Thus, the future impact of BRICS financial partnership is related to building a more diversified and interoperable payment system. Technical compatibility, cyber security, regulatory coordination, currency convertibility, and mechanisms to deal with trade imbalances will be key to its success.

3. **Sustainable Development, Infrastructure and Development Finance**

Sustainable development and infrastructure finance is another key area of cooperation in the economic field within the BRICS. This is because the volume of infrastructure needs is significant for the emerging economies, and the funding deficiency is continuing to be a problem for climate adaptation, renewable energy, transport, urban development and basic public infrastructure. The requirements can be addressed through the institutional framework of BRICS cooperation in the form of South–South development finance.

The New Development Bank plays a key role in this process. The NDB was launched by the BRICS countries to provide funds for infrastructure and sustainable-development projects. The institute served as an important instrument that advances BRICS' cooperation beyond the annual summit meetings to more institutionalised cooperation (Hooijmaaijers 2022).

What is unique about the NDB is not only the amount of financing, but also its institutional structure. Cooper's contribution is that it is based on novel institutional features, such as the rule of equality among its initial members. This is a distinction from conventional development institutions where voting is more based on economic weight.

Development mandate is an important element in the case of banks, especially in the context of infrastructure. Its work includes the following areas: renewable energy, transport, water and sanitation, urban development and other sustainable infrastructure. The Sustainable Development dimension of sustainability focuses on the connection between development finance and the Sustainable Development Goals as a whole, not just on infrastructure as physical capital.

A recent study on "BRICS+ Development Cooperation through the NDB" underscores the significant role of the NDB in sustainable infrastructure investment and ecological transition. The NDB is therefore an important tool to bridge the gap between South–South cooperation and financing needs for sustainable development.

The cooperation of BRICS also has a broader dimension of the Global South in the field of renewable energy. The study on the BRICS–Africa cooperation for the development of renewable energy and green growth shows that the cooperation grouping can play a role in developing renewable energy and green growth, but that it has not advanced as swiftly as political declarations. Additionally, the study underscores that individual BRICS countries continue to be the main initiators of several projects, highlighting the need for tangible and national-level policies and investments to implement these pledges (Gu, Renwick, and Xue 2018).

Another key aspect is the infrastructure-structural transformation link. The development finance can contribute to the BRICS countries to shift away from commodity-driven growth and enhance the transportation system, electricity systems, digital infrastructure, and industrial capacities. This is particularly true of renewable energy, urban infrastructure, logistics, and digital infrastructure and climate-resilient development for India (Braga 2025).

But the NDB and the BRICS development-finance system has its limitations. The financing capacity is less than those of established multilateral development banks and some have divergent views on priorities. The challenge is not just to grow the number of projects, but to enhance project quality, attract private capital and create new financial tools to meet climate and infrastructure risks.

The growing focus on transition finance is significant. Financing for non-decarbonisable sectors like steel, cement, transport and chemicals is needed in increasingly large amounts for developing economies. That is a step beyond traditional green projects, such as blended finance, guarantees, local-currency financing and other tools that enable access to increased capital volumes.

Thus, the future of BRICS development cooperation will rely upon how its financial institutions are able to link infrastructure investment and climate action, technology upgrading and inclusive economic growth. If the NDB is scaled up and implemented with institutional innovation, and if it remains project specific and has a long-term development perspective for productive and environmental outcomes, it could be a major tool for the development of the Global South.

The role of India in the Indo-Pacific Region

1. **The Government's Approach to Strategic Autonomy.7.3 India's Multi-Alignment Strategy.**

The concept of strategic autonomy is one of the core concepts of India's foreign policy in the modern era and is an important framework to understand India's relationship with BRICS. Strategic autonomy was not what was implied in the Cold War era non-alignment but is something more in the current multipolar world. India wants to retain its freedom of diplomacy and build relations with those countries that can help it in its economic development, security and international standing.

India's BRICS membership is not exclusive; hence, it is not aligned with the non-Western world. But in a sense, Rajan Kumar has explained that one reason for India's membership in the BRICS was that it would allow the government to play in multiple major emerging markets at once and boost its international profile. BRICS thus served as a vehicle for India to advance several interests instead of being a replacement for its ties with the traditional powers.

There is also flexibility regarding the forum in India's approach. New Delhi does not have any specific ideology associated with a particular institution; it is the problem that is being addressed that determines the institution to be used. Dialogue with Russia and China can be initiated via the RIC and BRICS and the SCO, while cooperation with the United States, Japan and Australia is possible through the Quad. Academic studies have identified this simultaneous institutional engagement as "forum-shopping" – a strategy which can enable India to achieve its objectives through several institutions, without relying on any single one (O'Donnell and Papa 2021).

The strategic-autonomy relationship also shows up in India's ties with the United States. Despite a wide range of defence, technology and Indo-Pacific and economic cooperation, India and the United States have clear boundaries in their relationship. Abraham and Purushothaman say that India's strategic autonomy and multi-alignment philosophy limit the depth of alignment it can have with Washington. India's stance over the Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its preference towards Moscow is a testimony to its independence.

China is a much more complex situation. India also works with China within BRICS while at the same time dealing with territorial issues, economic rivalry and competition, and strategic differences. India's reaction to China's rising geoeconomic influence is one of confrontation and pragmatic cooperation, says Yoshimatsu, so as to "manage risk without giving up engagement (Yoshimatsu 2022). So this literature indicates that the strategic autonomy of India is not synonymous with being neutral or bi-lateral towards the opposing powers. Instead, it is about selective alignment based on issue, interest and strategic situation. India's goal is to maintain its decision independence while also harnessing its economic, diplomatic and security interests from ties with various centres of power.

Therefore, India's strategic autonomy through BRICS has to be seen as autonomy through diversification. The idea behind this is to avoid being too reliant on any single power and to bolster its bargaining power in an increasingly multipolar world by having simultaneous ties with BRICS members, Western powers, and other plurilateral institutions.

2. **India's Contribution to the Development of the Global South in International Organizations**

India's traditional assertion to be a representative of the Global South has grown into an overt part of its modern foreign policy. The role is not merely about India's geographical characteristics as a developing country, but more related to its economic heft, diplomatic influence, institutional engagement and voice in key international platforms to promote developing country concerns. One of the most significant platforms for this strategy is provided by BRICS – the grouping links up to a larger agenda for reform of global governance and major emerging economies.

India's Global South diplomacy has picked up significant momentum during its presidency of the G20 in 2023. India did not only include G20 nations in the list of countries to be part of the presidency; it also introduced new issues such as debt, climate finance, food security, digital public infrastructure and development into the mainstream of the presidency's focus. A study on the G20 presidency in India, on the other hand, asserts that the event helped build the identity and the political salience of the Global South in the evolving international order (Rodríguez and Ranjan 2023).

The attitude has then been carried over to BRICS. The Verma's recent study reveals strong resurgence of the "Global South" focus under the Modi government and that India has made a concerted effort to promote itself as a voice and flag bearer for the interests of the developing world. This approach involves discussion of topics of concern to developing economies, provision of development-related public goods and identification of Global South priorities through the action of multilateral institutions.

This role is important because the Global South is not a homogeneous political bloc. There are great differences among the developing nations in political institutions, economic organization, and security interests and relations with the United States, China, Russia and Europe. What India needs to do is, therefore, not to build a rigid coalition but to find common developmental interests.

Here, the usefulness of BRICS comes into picture as it provides access to multiple major economies at once. Questions of institutional fairness, rather than opposition to the West and in particular Western states can be put on issues like reform of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and United Nations Security Council, development finance, climate financing and more representation of developing economies.

The Global South agenda is also very economical in nature. In terms of access to finance, technology and decision-making structures, inequality persists in developing countries. The advocacy of India thus becomes more and more political and development-oriented. BRICS cooperation can be connected to wider goals in the Global South through the New Development Bank, local-currency financing and infrastructure investment and digital public infrastructure.

India's leadership role is also to fill the gaps between various diplomatic positions. Countries in BRICS do not necessarily share the same views on the West and the Global South. Some members are for an increased degree of resistance to the west, while India does not want to establish a front explicitly against the west but wants to reform the institutions. This creates a potentially important middle game for India.

The Latin American aspect is particularly pertinent. Studies pertaining to India's G20 presidency reveal that in the eyes of the Latin American countries, New Delhi was gaining importance as a member of the Global South, in addition to the role of India in relation to the rest of the developing world.

India is also competing with China in its Global South policy. India also competes with China in its Global South policy. One of the recent scholarships suggests that part of the renewed focus on the Global South is due to the competition for leadership and influence between the two countries, China and India. Both countries desire to be more influential among developing countries, but have different preferences in terms of institutional preferences, economic instruments, and political narratives.

This competition has gained significance due to the expanding of BRICS. BRICS now includes the representation of developing economies across a wider geographical spectrum with the addition of participating members from Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Thus, India's leadership can be more substantive, if it leverages the institution for building consensus on the issues of development, climate finance, health, food security and technology and institutional reform—which are central to the country's interests—and not letting the group fall prey to great-power rivalry.

Thus, India's Global South leadership is a form of representational diplomacy, coalition building, and the provision of public goods. However, the success of this role will be determined by India's ability to translate diplomatic advocacy into tangible results for developing countries.

3. **Balancing Relations with BRICS Members and Western Powers**

In the end, India's BRICS diplomacy is driven by the desire to preserve a relationship with two different groups of partners, one within BRICS (China and Russia) and the other from the West, dominated by the US and the European countries, which are politically different. India's policy is not to take a stand on one side for good. Rather, it aims to ensure maximum cooperation with various partners, but without being dependent upon any one.

The ties with the United States are a good example of this balancing focus. India and the United States have already established a wide-ranging defence, technology, maritime security, and Indo-Pacific cooperation and now, the bilateral ties in the Quad have

helped further boost strategic convergence. Yet, India continues to have considerable defence, energy and diplomatic ties with Russia. This is known in the academic literature as "limited balancing," in which India engages in close collaboration with Washington without sacrificing strategic autonomy (Abraham and Purushothaman 2024).

Russia is a unique element in the BRICS policy of India. The historic cooperation in defence, energy and diplomacy remains a basis for bilateral cooperation today. India's deepening engagement with the United States and other Indo-Pacific partners, however, also makes it interested in not allowing Russia to become too reliant on China. The ongoing interactions with Russia can then be in service of India's traditional bilateral and strategic autonomy goals.

China is a unique part of India's balancing act. India and China co-operate in BRICS and other multilateral forums, but face strategic competition in South Asia and the Indo Pacific region. In his research, Yoshimatsu shows that India has not taken any extreme path of either complete accommodation or full confrontation, but has taken a path of confrontation and practical cooperation towards China's geoeconomic expansion (Yoshimatsu 2022).

The same is evident in India's involvement in the Quad. India sees the Quad as a way of enhancing cooperation in the maritime, technological and strategic spheres with the United States, Japan and Australia, but it is not interested in turning the Quad into a formal military pact explicitly aimed at China. The same is the case with India, which backs the BRICS and opposes to making it an anti-Western alliance. This 'double engagement' with the competing power centres is a defining feature of India's hedging strategy, according to Kara's analysis.

Such a balancing stance is not to be understood as a lack of decision. It is a sign of a bid to create strategic space for manoeuvre. India wants to maintain its flexibility with China on development, Russia on defence and energy, the USA on technology and security, and Europe on trade, investment and advanced industrial cooperation.

The danger is, if great power rivalry is intensified, India may not be able to sustain this balance over time. Strong association between BRICS and anti-western politics may put pressure on India's western partnerships. On the other hand, if India conforms to Western strategic architecture, the trustworthiness of Indian autonomous role in the Global South would be diminished.

Preserving India's what can be called multi-alignment is therefore a challenge for the Indian Diplomacy. This calls for a differentiation between cooperation and alignment and between institutional change and geopolitical confrontation. Whether India's BRICS diplomacy is successful or not will largely hinge on its capacity to keep this separation.

Challenges and Limitations

There is an ongoing discrepancy of political systems, economic structures, political priorities, Western relations, etc., that hinders BRICS from reaching consensus and a coordinated political stance. Bigger competition for regional and institutional influence exists between China and India, high reliance on primary-product exports among many BRICS members and low intra-BRICS trade intensity (still only around 20% of SST) are factors that limit deeper integration. Structural issues like trade imbalances, exchange-rate volatility, limits on convertibility, different regulations, etc. pose a problem to financial cooperation, including local-currency settlement and payment interoperability. The New Development Bank and Contingent Reserve Arrangement offer new options but are complementary, not mutually exclusive of, Bretton Woods institutions, with limitations of scale, private-capital mobilisation and divergent priorities. Power imbalances within the enlarged membership and the danger of the grouping being seen as anti-western or Chinese-led, pose challenges to India's strategic autonomy in gaining representational legitimacy for the rest of the Global south.

Opportunities and Policy Recommendations

BRICS provides India with opportunities to diversify its partnerships, improve the institutional reform of the international financial institutions, extend south-south cooperation in the area of development finance through the NDB, and strengthen digital public infrastructure interoperability (building upon UPI experience) and make India a respectable voice for the Global south on climate finance, infrastructure, and equitable multilateralism. Value-added intra-BRICS trade and investment (particularly higher value Indian manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, and services) and deeper technical interoperability of payment systems and CBDC need to be priorities, while India must not try to roll out its own CBDC, and its chairmanship of BRICS should be used to focus on building consensus for development rather than geopolitical confrontation. India should maintain multi-alignment by working with BRICS on mutual interests, while maintaining ties with Western countries and the Indo Pacific frameworks to ensure maximum strategic space, no bloc politics, and bring representational claims to fruition for developing countries.

Conclusion

The experience of India with BRICS is an example of a strategic pattern of calibrated strategic autonomy and multi-alignment in a multipolar order. Its grouping is important for institutional innovation, development finance and collective action for emerging economies and the Global South, but faces challenges due to internal asymmetries, weak economic integration and geopolitical tensions, especially with China. The expansion of membership is less important than it is crucial to have concrete approaches to achieve balanced trade, interoperable finance, sustainable infrastructure and the reform of the existing global institutions without turning BRICS into the anti-western bloc. India's ability to build coalitions around issues, build on its developmental experience and maintain balance among power centres will help it to increase its own power and also the representational capacity of the Global South, thereby strengthening the international order.

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