



INDIA RISING

A COMPENDIUM OF ESSAYS

EXPLORING INDIA IN THE
GLOBAL SOUTH

Edited by

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- 01** Editor's Note
Rahul Banerjee
- 02** India's evolving role in the global south
Athira B. Anil
- 03** Rise of a Leader in the global south
Ritika Goel
- 04** Rekindling Ties With the Global South
Nehan Abbas
- 05** Initiatives, Impacts & Challenges
Devaguptapu Sakshi
- 06** Exploring the Strategic Significance
Amey Velangi
- 07** India's Ascent & the China Challenge
Naina Sharma
- 08** India's G20: An Advocate for the Global South
Dr. Irfan Ul Haq
- 09** Anatomizing leadership dynamics in the Global South
Arth Agarwal
- 10** Brick by BRICS
Nishat Bhatotia
- 11** About

Editor's Note

India's role in the Global South has significantly evolved, especially highlighted by its presidency of the G20. India has taken a proactive stance as the voice for developing nations, addressing their concerns on international platforms. During the COVID-19 pandemic, India exemplified this leadership by distributing vaccines and medicines to nearly 100 countries, earning the moniker 'Pharmacy of the World'.

India's commitment to the Global South was further cemented by hosting the Voice of Global South Summit, where representatives from 125 countries participated. This summit, along with India's advocacy for adding the African Union as a full member of the G20, underscores its dedication to inclusive global governance.

Furthermore, India's approach to crises like the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Israel-Hamas War reflects its principle of dialogue and diplomacy. By calling for the cessation of hostilities and respect for sovereignty and humanity, India reinforces its support for a fair and equitable international system, which is crucial for the nations of the Global South.

India's evolving role in the Global South is marked by political leadership, economic cooperation, and a strong commitment to multilateralism and equity. This has not only strengthened the voice of the Global South but also positioned India as a pivotal player in shaping a balanced global order, ensuring prosperity for all.

"India Rising: A Compendium of Essays Exploring India in the Global South" attempts to trace the trajectory following India's emergence as a "Vishwamitra." It not only promotes the voices from the Global South on the world stage but also strives to ensure equitable opportunities for these nations to envision a prosperous future for their people.

This compendium features nine young thinkers exploring India's evolving role in the Global South as it navigates the ever-changing geopolitical realities and the tumults of an evolving world order.

Rahul Banerjee
Co-founder & Managing Director,
Raisina House.

1 India's evolving role in the global south

-Athira B. Anil

The term 'Global South' has emerged as a significant buzzword in world politics, particularly in Indian foreign policy, following India's presidency of the G20. The 'Global South' is an umbrella term encompassing countries across Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania (Dados and Connell, 2012). The concept originated from the historical colonization and economic and geopolitical divisions, tracing its roots to the Non-Aligned Movement and the 'Third World' nomenclature. It stands in contrast to the 'Global North.'

According to Dirlik (2007), the collapse of the Soviet Union, or the 'Second World,' rendered the 'Third World' nomenclature obsolete, leading to the adoption of 'Global South' terminology. The term gained popularity through its inclusion in the titles of the Brandt Commission reports of 1980 and 1983 and was further popularized by the United Nations Development Program's initiative in 2003.

The 'Global South' advocates for a New International Economic Order that addresses the needs of developing and underdeveloped countries. It calls for climate change mitigation programs and energy initiatives that consider the diverse contexts and histories of these nations, aiming for a reformed world order based on equality of voices and actions (Bardhan, 2023).

The debates and discussions between the Global South and Global North have intensified post-Covid-19 pandemic, with contentious issues such as vaccine distribution in the WTO, drug and travel disputes, and geopolitical shifts. India has been particularly vocal in advocating for the interests of the Global South.

However, whether the Global South is a homogeneous entity remains debatable. The region includes countries whose development challenges the status quo of the Global North. Furthermore, the varied interests and stakes of these nations often lead to conflicting interpretations and definitions of the concept. Thus, the Global South cannot be considered a monolith due to the heterogeneity it exhibits in its demands, ranging from climate action to energy, economy, trade, relations with the North, and visions of the world order (Taylor, 2018).

India's role in the Global South is two-fold. One to voice out the demands and opinions of global south and to forge the space for the countries, of this part of the world, as an emerging power in the world politics and two, to build a consensus and balance the differing interests and notions of each of the stakeholders associated with the concept.

The Bridge Between North and South.

India's relationship with Western nations positions it as a potential bridge between the Global North and the Global South (Malhotra, 2023). Since its inception as an independent nation in the 1940s, India has maintained strategic autonomy in its foreign policy. Despite this, the 21st century has seen India's relations with the West flourish, with its strategic autonomy remaining intact. The economic reforms of 1991 and the subsequent integration into the global economy—coupled with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, India's erstwhile ally—prompted India to seek new partnerships. Its relations with the West, therefore, embarked on a new trajectory.

The Indo-US nuclear deal acknowledged India as a responsible nuclear power and paved the way for further cooperation (Purushothaman, n.d). The concept of Indian exceptionalism, which India promotes in its foreign policy, has been recognized by Western nations, viewing India's ascent favorably in contrast to China's rise. Presently, India is involved in several plurilateral arrangements, such as the QUAD and I2U2 (Malhotra, 2023).

With its presidency of the G20 and the consensus-driven New Delhi declaration, India is poised to act as a mediator between the North and the South, marking a departure from the confrontational stance towards the West during the era of non-alignment. Dr. S. Jaishankar, the External Affairs Minister, reaffirmed this role, stating, 'India is a southwestern power with strong ties to the developed world, which, as it ascends in the international order, will enjoy a high degree of trust and confidence from other developing states' (Jaishankar, n.d., as cited in Malhotra, 2023). Thus, as Malhotra (2023) emphasizes, India's role is to be the bridge between the Global South and the Global North.

The Voice of the Global South.

India is often viewed favorably by the countries of the Global South due to its reputation as a benign power, in contrast to the perceived revisionist stance of China. As highlighted by Jaishankar, these countries regard India as a kindred nation capable of representing their interests on the global stage. India's vaccine diplomacy and advocacy for equitable vaccine distribution at the WTO during the COVID-19 pandemic garnered widespread appreciation (Quang, 2022). Additionally, initiatives like the International Solar Alliance, development and humanitarian assistance to other nations, the inclusion of the African Union in the G20, and strengthened bilateral ties with Pacific Island countries all underscore India's evolving role as a voice of the Global South. These actions advocate for an equitable and inclusive global order and cement India's status as a respected international partner.

India's ambition to be the agenda-setter in the Global South must be viewed alongside its strategic rivalry with China and its broader aspirations to become a global power. Events such as the Voice of the South Summit in January 2023 and India's G20 presidency are considered pivotal steps towards this goal. However, India's primary challenge as an emerging leader in the Global South will be to harmonize the interests of other stakeholders with similar ambitions. China's active engagement in BRICS and its expanding ties with Global South nations as trade and project partners reflect its own leadership aspirations (China Wants to Be the Leader of the Global South, 2023). Similarly, South Africa, as the advocate for the African continent and liaison with Western powers, and Brazil, with its unique perspective, contribute to the diverse tapestry of the Global South.

Therefore, the Global South is not a monolithic entity but a collective of countries with varied interests and relationships with the Global North. India's goals must acknowledge these differences and strive for consensus. Its role should be to foster this consensus among nations to ensure they play a more significant role in international affairs, which are currently marked by inequality. Embracing the motto of the Voice of the Global South Summit, 'Unity of voice and unity of purpose,' India has the potential to shape its position as the voice of the Global South (Voice of Global South Summit, 2023)."

Conclusion.

The twin factors can guide India to carve its role in the Global South. The Covid-19 pandemic, the G20, the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas conflict have all had a role in bringing out the similarities, differences and the demands of the global south and the same to become a buzzword of the time. India has been able to navigate through these tough situations and stick to positions which neither compromises its interest but which aligns with the common interest. As the emerging power, India needs to voice out the concerns to bridge the gap between the Global North and Global South and also be the bridge between the two.

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2

Rise of a Leader in the global south

-Ritika Goel.

India upholds the philosophy of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", which translates to 'the world is one family.' This ancient concept, deeply rooted in India's texts, promotes global unity and harmony. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, while addressing the United Nations on Mahatma Gandhi's vision of a united world, stated, "In Gandhi's concept of One World, nationalism is not the ultimate goal; rather, it is the idea of a world community that we must aspire to." Embracing this vision, India advocates for 'Cooperation in Collaboration.'

Continuing in this vein, India is emerging as a representative voice for the global south –nations in the developmental phase of their economies, primarily located in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Amidst the global scramble for resources and power, India champions a selfless approach, advocating for the often-overlooked interests of the global south.

Evolution of India's leadership

Following India's independence in 1947, the world was polarizing into alliances, with the capitalist West on one side and the communist East on the other. India chose to remain non-aligned, advocating for the newly independent nations that today form the global south. By establishing the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), India boldly stepped forward to guide these nascent countries through the complexities of the international arena.

In the absence of a Marshall Plan for the global south in 1948, India championed the cause of these countries in need of financial support, leading to the proposal of SUNFED (Special United Nations Fund for Economic Development). However, this initiative did not come to fruition. Instead, the International Development Association, proposed by industrialized nations, emerged to provide financial assistance to impoverished and low-income countries.

Moreover, India's commitment to amplifying the voice of the global south is evidenced by its involvement in various alliances, notably the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in 1997. IORA was established to enhance maritime security and safety in the Indo-Pacific region. As the Indo-Pacific becomes a focal point of geopolitical competition, India continues to advocate for mutual cooperation and collaboration to bolster security and economic growth in the area.

India Rising

India is currently at the forefront of leading the global south across various sectors. Notably, during its presidency at the G20 in 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the ancient shloka "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," emphasizing its profound meaning: "One Earth, One Family, One Future." Addressing the global crisis, the PM assured India's support for the global south, stating, "Your voice is India's voice, and your priorities are India's priorities." These affirming words underscore India's commitment to being the voice of the global south.

Some of the sectors, India is actively leading the Global South are:

- **Political Leadership and Defence:** India's initiatives have led to the African Union's inclusion in the G20, potentially expanding it to G21. This reflects India's inclusive vision, uniting countries from diverse blocs under the banner of equality and acceptance. India has also offered assistance to the global south in securing maritime borders, echoing Kautilya's Arthashastra, which prioritizes maritime over land security. Thus, promoting maritime security and economic development is a key objective for the global south, with India spearheading this effort through partnerships with northern nations, multilateral defense operations, and collaboration with the global south.
- **Climate Change:** India's vigilance on climate change and environmental health has garnered recognition for its adherence to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (2015), Sustainable Development Goals (2015), and the Paris Agreement (2015). India champions these causes within the global south through collaborative efforts. For example, India has been instrumental in securing financial aid under the Paris Agreement (2015) for the global south and hosted the "International Solar Alliance" in 2016, advocating for solar energy use and global sustainability.
- **Economic Development:** India is providing economic and technical support to nations through south-south cooperation, accelerating their economic growth. It has engaged in bilateral trade agreements aimed at mutual economic development and capacity building. A prime example is the "India-U.N. Capacity Building Initiative," a partnership with the United Nations to share India's developmental expertise and best practices with the global south.

Challenges

As the Global South strategically gears up to garner global support, economic development, and political backing, India confronts several challenges:

Geopolitical Competition: The Global South's pool of opportunities has attracted major players like the United States, China, and Russia, intensifying the geopolitical contest.

Resource Disparities: India faces the challenge of resource scarcity and the need for sustained financial aid. Addressing this, it's crucial to ensure a continuous resource supply to maintain economic growth within these nations.

Climate Change: This represents a significant contemporary challenge. Many Global South countries lack the financial means to transition towards technology adoption and alternative energy sources. India must champion the Global South's cause to secure financial support for sustainable development initiatives.

Resource Divide: The Global South nations vary significantly in their economic status, technological progress, and natural resource endowments, leading to a complex resource divide. Their diverse priorities and interests further complicate India's role in representing their collective voice on the global stage.

UNSC Reforms: The current dynamics within the United Nations are challenging due to the absence of veto power for the Global South. This underscores the urgent need for reforms in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Way Ahead for India.

To enhance the voice of the Global South, India can undertake several strategic efforts. Here are some refined recommendations:

Strengthening Connectivity and Capacity: It's essential for India to bolster its connectivity with the Global South nations. Establishing a robust communication network is foundational. Parallely, defense collaborations could align with this goal, fostering mutual security interests. Regular dialogues and discussions on shared concerns will further solidify these ties.

Innovative Engagement Strategies: India should adopt a comprehensive approach to tackle the complex challenges faced by these countries. Incorporating technology and innovation is vital; participating in joint ventures that focus on these areas can lead to mutual growth. Additionally, defense exercises could enhance border security and reinforce cooperative agreements.

Global Advocacy and Support: India is committed to not just elevating its presence on the world stage but also ensuring that smaller and developing Global South nations reap substantial benefits. This commitment is rooted in the belief that we share "One Earth, living as a family, working towards a common future." India's efforts will reflect this ethos, striving for collective progress and unity.

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3

Rekindling Ties with the Global South

-Nehan Abbas.

Upon assuming the G20 presidency from Indonesia on December 1, 2022, Prime Minister Modi announced that the G20's priorities would be shaped through consultations with both the Global South and G20 partners. Subsequently, the Indian government convened the Voice of the Global South Summit, a virtual assembly of developing nations, in January 2023. This initiative underscores India's pivot towards greater engagement with the Global South, reflecting a nuanced shift in its foreign policy direction.

Historically, India carved out a leadership role among developing countries and played a pivotal part in the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War. However, recent years have witnessed a discernible realignment in Indian diplomacy, with a focus on strengthening ties with prosperous Western nations, including the US and various European countries. This realignment has been particularly pronounced under Prime Minister Modi's administration.

The policies of Nehru have seen a departure under the stewardship of Prime Minister Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party, especially concerning the border dispute with China and the Kashmir issue. In a marked deviation from tradition, Modi delegated the vice president to represent India at the Non-Aligned Movement Summit, a role typically reserved for the head of state or government. The BJP has critiqued what they term "Nehru's grave error," proclaiming that current efforts are underway to rectify these historical missteps.

Return to Nehruvian Ideals.

India has undertaken several key initiatives to promote the interests of the Global South and enhance its own standing on the global stage. In light of recent developments, Prime Minister Modi's renewed focus on "solidarity with the Global South" raises intriguing considerations. Modi appears to be revisiting the foundational principles of Nehruism, which positioned India at the forefront of the developing world. This shift has sparked curiosity about its underlying motivations. The reemphasis on solidarity is particularly significant given the economic challenges the Global South faces due to the prolonged Ukraine conflict, which has exacerbated the divide.

India's stance on the Ukraine crisis is noteworthy, as it has eschewed Western sanctions in favor of stabilizing its economy through the procurement of essential commodities from Russia, such as fertilizer and oil. This approach underscores India's strategic partnership with Russia, particularly in geopolitical and defense-related aspects.

In this context, reaffirming India's role in the Global South aligns with its historical leadership among developing nations. It allows India to address specific challenges faced by the developing world and maintain strategic alliances amidst the complexities of global politics. The Voice of the Global South Summit and India's commitment to the Global South represent diplomatic efforts that reflect historical precedents and aim to balance India's interests within the evolving global order.

The 2023 Republic Day celebration, with President Sisi of Egypt as the Chief Guest, signals India's intent to bolster its connections with the Global South, a sentiment rooted in the Non-Aligned Movement's legacy. The joint statement following the summit underscored the Non-Aligned Movement's core values and extended an invitation to Egypt to join the G20 as a Guest Country, indicating India's efforts to rekindle its historical bonds with the Global South.

Moreover, India's successful hosting of the G20 summit underscored its commitment to the developing world and its aspiration to cement its status in the international community. This achievement has invigorated discussions about India's foreign policy, which prioritizes solidarity with the Global South, while also raising questions about its compatibility with India's ambitions to emerge as a global superpower.

Conclusion.

India's hosting of the G20 summit marks a significant milestone in its foreign policy, underscoring a commitment to solidarity with the Global South. This successful summit showcases India's dynamic role on the world stage, highlighting the imperative to align its global aspirations with its longstanding dedication to the Global South. The manner in which India charts this course will attract keen observation from the international community and will shape its influence in global affairs for years ahead.

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4

Initiatives, Impacts, and Challenges

-Devaguptapu Sakshi.

The Global South, which represents more than 85% of the global population and a rapidly expanding 39% of global GDP, is the focal point of this article. The impact of India's emergence on the international stage has led to a dramatic shift in its standing in the Global South. India is the world's most populous country and has a rapidly growing economy. India has also been trying to strike a balance between advocating for a more equitable distribution of power in the international system while avoiding being seen as promoting an anti-Western agenda. This article explores the shift in global attention from the West to the South, India's main initiatives, its effects on relations with other developing nations, and the India-China dynamic.

India's role in the Global South has evolved significantly over time. From its early days, India adhered to the principle of non-alignment, especially during the Cold War. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was a coalition of developing nations with the objective of adopting a neutral position during the Cold War while concurrently fostering economic collaboration and solidarity within their ranks. The significance of India's involvement in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was particularly notable during the Asia-Africa Conference of 1955, a pivotal event in the decolonization movement.

The end of the Cold War saw India shift its focus from non-alignment to economic development and cooperation, further cementing the country's position as a major player in the Global South. India today has transformed into a major economic and geopolitical player, with a growing stake in the development and prosperity of the region. India's commitment to South-South cooperation, its desire to diversify its foreign policy partnerships, and its own economic growth are just a few of the factors driving its growing engagement with the Global South. Evidence of this can be seen in India's expanding participation in regional and multilateral forums like the G20, BRICS, the IBSA Forum, etc. In addition, India has played a significant role in South-South cooperation initiatives like the India-Africa Forum Summit.

Key Initiatives to Promote the Global South

India has undertaken several key initiatives to promote the interests of the Global South and enhance its own standing on the global stage.

- **G20 Presidency:** India's G20 presidency in 2023 marked a significant milestone, solidifying its position as a prominent global power. During the G20 discussions, India brought up a number of significant concerns that are of particular relevance to nations in the Global South. These concerns encompassed various topics, including the inclusion of the African Union as a member of the G20 under India's presidency, the need for reforms within global financial institutions, the restructuring of sovereign debt, and the provision of supplementary climate financing.

- **Global South Science and Technology Initiative:** India launched the Global South Science and Technology Initiative in 2023, which aims to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise in fields such as space technology and nuclear energy among countries in the Global South.
- **Global South Centre of Excellence:** India established the Global South Centre of Excellence for research on development solutions or best practices that can be scaled up and implemented in developing nations. In this context, India cited its digital public infrastructure in sectors like electronic payments, healthcare, education, and e-governance that other developing nations can use.
- **India-UN Capacity Building Initiative:** India and the United Nations jointly launched the 'India-UN Capacity Building Initiative' to enhance the capabilities of Global South countries. The goal is to share India's development experiences, best practices, and expertise through capacity-building and training programmes with the global south.

India encourages cultural exchanges as a means of promoting cooperation and the sharing of best practices among countries located in the Global South. Agriculture, healthcare, and renewable energy are just a few of the fields in which India is committed to imparting its expertise through programmes like the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and cultural festivals.

One of India's central initiatives is South-South cooperation, which involves providing technical and financial assistance to fellow developing nations. This cooperation extends to capacity building, sharing expertise, and offering financial support for development projects. Moreover, India has launched the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme, which has been instrumental in training professionals from other developing countries in diverse fields, including agriculture, information technology, and public administration.

In addition to bilateral efforts, India actively participates in regional organisations such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and promotes economic and technical cooperation among Indian Ocean littoral states. Furthermore, India's participation in international organisations, such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation, allows it to advocate for the interests of the Global South on the global stage.

Impact on Relationships with Other Developing Countries.

India's initiatives in the Global South have had a substantial impact on its relationships with other developing countries. India's increasing prominence on the global stage has positioned it as a mediator between various factions, enabling it to effectively navigate and bridge international divides. For example, its role in brokering peace in regional conflicts, such as the Sri Lankan civil war and the Afghan peace process, has earned it the respect and admiration of other developing nations. This diplomatic success has further solidified its leadership within the Global South.

India's strategy towards the Global South entails prioritizing targeted initiatives aimed at restructuring the existing global economic and financial institutions with the aim of enhancing their efficacy in addressing the requirements of developing nations. India is also positioning itself as a bridge between traditional U.S.-centered Western alliances and the developing world. India's clear and consistent articulation of the Global South's perceptions and challenges has contributed to a belated but necessary shift in European thinking. However, India's push for an expanded role for the Global South also faces geopolitical hurdles, and it will be challenging for India to win hearts and minds of developing countries in its geopolitical competition with China.

India has effectively fostered stronger bilateral relations with nations in Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America by actively engaging with them. These relationships have facilitated the establishment of economic and strategic alliances, resulting in the formation of an interconnected network of developing nations. Furthermore, India's endeavours to advance the interests of the Global South have presented an alternative to the conventional Western-dominated global framework, thereby facilitating the creation of a more equitable and diverse global landscape.

The World's Attention is Moving South.

The classifications of North and South developed and developing, or First World and Third World, are significant conceptual frameworks that exert substantial influence on the geopolitical dynamics of the global landscape. This has been changing and has far-reaching implications for the international landscape as the centre of attention moves from the west to the south. Countries in the Global South, led by India and China, are becoming increasingly influential in setting international policy as a result of the shift in economic power in this region. Consecutively, the world now features multiple competing centres of power, posing a new challenge to the West's long-held hegemony. Opportunities for cooperation and competition among emerging powers have arisen as a result of the shifting global focus, ultimately redefining the international order. The rise of the Global South is altering the structure of international politics and the world economy.

Conclusion.

The dynamic transformation of India's position in the Global South is indicative of the nation's extraordinary ascent from a recently independent state to a prominent participant in the global arena. In addition to bolstering its own reputation, India's initiatives in the Global South have contributed to the formation of more robust bilateral ties, the contestation of conventional Western hegemony, and the restructuring of the international order. As the world continues to shift its focus from the West to the South, India's role in the Global South will remain pivotal in shaping the global future.

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5

Exploring the Strategic Significance.

-Amey Velangi.

In a rapidly changing scenario of global power dynamics, where the world is moving towards a multipolar world order, the Global South as a group of developing and underdeveloped nations has a vital role, especially to make the necessary changes and drive the rules of the new world order that may chalk out a decisive road map for the world.

The term Global South was first coined in 1969 by political activist Carl Oglesby. It gained momentum after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which marked the end of the "Second World." The term 'Global South' began by loosely referring to those countries that were left out of the industrialization era and had a conflicting ideology with the capitalist and communist countries, accentuated by the Cold War. These nations typically experience higher levels of poverty, income inequality, and challenging living conditions compared to the wealthier nations of the Global North (Rising, September 7, 2023).

Willy Brandt, former German Chancellor, in 1980s as a visual depiction of North-South divide based on GDP per capita, drew a line running from north Mexico, across northern Africa, Middle East, looping around India, China before dropping down to encompass most of East Asia, avoiding Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

The Strategic Significance of the Global South.

The growing economic and political influence of the Global South carries significant implications for global geopolitics. Experts predict that Asian nations will play a pivotal role in what is being termed the "Asian Century." Currently, the Global South accounts for 85% of the world's population and 40% of its GDP. Its geographical expanse is poised to play a decisive role in the geopolitical arena, extending from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indo-Pacific, encompassing the traditional Silk Route, the Indian Ocean, and the Caribbean. The region also controls some of the most critical maritime trade routes, including the Suez Canal, Strait of Hormuz, Malacca Strait, and Strait of Gibraltar, each of which can serve as strategic choke points.

In November 2011, during the Obama administration, the United States adopted the "Pivot to Asia" foreign policy strategy. This strategy was designed to redirect U.S. foreign policy focus from the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific region, acknowledging its growing significance for American economic and security interests. Since its inception, there has been a robust debate regarding the implications of this region for U.S. foreign policy, American grand strategy, and the broader global context (Saha, 2020).

India's Connection with the Global South.

Since its independence, India has been a prominent member of the developing nations. Its growing stature and influence in the global arena impose a greater responsibility to articulate its concerns clearly and emphatically. India's engagement with the Global South, and its philosophical alignment, began in the early 1950s, even before the term "Global South" became common in diplomatic and geopolitical discourse. The Cold War's geopolitical pressures to choose sides led to the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which reflected India's diplomatic ethos and that of many Third World countries.

As an emerging power, India has launched numerous forums and focus groups to address issues critical to smaller nations. These include the International Solar Alliance (ISA), the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), and initiatives for Climate Justice and Climate Financial Equity through Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), with a focus on Climate Action.

India's initiatives in financial inclusion and aid, such as sharing best practices of the India Stack, Aadhaar, and the expansion of digital payments, along with Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with various nations for UPI and its digital framework, have significantly impacted cooperation. Additionally, timely financial assistance to countries in need, exemplified by the aid to Sri Lanka, positions India as a natural ally of the Global South.

India's commitment to Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) has solidified its role as a proactive member of the Global South, extending support during emergencies such as floods, earthquakes, and tsunamis. The assistance provided to Turkey and Syria following the devastating earthquake, despite differing worldviews on various issues, underscores India's dedication to the global well-being.

Connectivity and commerce are pivotal in India's engagement with the developing world. The Indian-funded Greater Male Connectivity Project in the Maldives, which links the archipelago, facilitates commercial activity and improves the quality of life. India's contributions to infrastructure development in Afghanistan, including roads, dams, hospitals, and the parliament building, have cast the nation in a positive light, reflecting altruistic intentions without ulterior motives (Mohan, 16 January 2023).

Politically, India has responded positively to the concerns of many Global South nations. During its G20 Presidency, India extended invitations to three Asian nations (Bangladesh, Singapore, Mauritius), two African nations (Egypt and Nigeria), two Middle Eastern nations (UAE and Oman), and two European nations (Spain and the Netherlands). The New Delhi Declaration welcomed the African Union as a new G20 member, showcasing India's inclusive approach. The Voice of the Global South Summit, held prior to the G20 Leaders' Summit, was an initiative by India to amplify the voices of the Global South, allowing them to shape the agenda based on their current challenges (Tran, 2023). Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized this sentiment at the summit, stating, "We believe that no plan for the future of the planet can be successful without the representation and recognition of all voices" (corresponder, 2023).

Voicing the Global South: Not so Easy.

Being the Voice of the Global South is a role that demands extensive engagement. The challenges are numerous and often involve going against the prevailing currents, adding to the complexity and difficulty of this responsibility. A primary challenge for India, which also represents a potential strategic battleground, is its relationship with China. China plays a significant role in the Global South, where its substantial material wealth and financial influence, achieved through shrewd development financing, have allowed it to assume a position akin to a banker rather than merely a voice within this community. To put China's monetary assistance into perspective, it spends nearly 15-16% of India's total GDP. Consequently, matching China's financial clout is a formidable challenge for India (Chatterjee, 2023).

Beyond the rivalry with China for influence over the Global South, being a champion for developing countries entails meeting their high expectations and being subject to intense scrutiny. For instance, food security is a critical concern for the Global South. India has faced criticism for causing disruptions in the global market by banning rice exports to stabilize its domestic conditions. Such actions can cast doubt on India's leadership role in the Global South.

Moreover, being the Voice of the Global South means navigating the complexities and addressing the paradoxes that arise from the disparities between developed and developing worlds. Issues such as power distribution and the reform of multilateral institutions require nuanced diplomacy and the ability to bridge gaps between these two spheres (Kasturi, 2023).

India as a Bridge.

India's middle-path approach, since its emergence as a modern nation-state, has captivated the Global South and vexed the Global North. This balancing act is evident in India's participation in ideologically diverse multilateral groupings such as the QUAD, BRICS, I2U2, and SCO. No other country enjoys such a broad spectrum of global support and trust, positioning India uniquely in the arena of global power dynamics as a mediator reconciling differences between opposing factions.

Amidst escalating geopolitical tensions and widespread disillusionment with the state of multilateral institutions, India is striving to augment its Global South strategy by forging robust strategic partnerships with Western nations. This approach has extended India's foreign policy outreach to both the developing world's populace and the developed world's policymakers. India possesses the capability and determination to restore confidence in the efficacy of multilateral processes and structures, steering the global governance agenda away from hyperpolarized debates. In doing so, India bolsters its standing as a prominent force in the global order, increasingly proactive and capable of influencing global outcomes rather than passively accepting decisions imposed by others. Therefore, India must preserve its current diplomatic posture, continue advocating for the marginalized, and simultaneously consider the sensitivities of the West.

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6 India's Ascent and China's Challenge

-Naina Sharma.

The "Global South" has emerged as a term that resonates with geopolitical significance in recent years, representing a diverse group of countries across Asia, Africa, South America, and beyond. India, as one of the rising powers within this constellation, is increasingly asserting its leadership role in this realm. At the same time, China, with its economic might and assertive foreign policy, is positioning itself as a significant player in the Global South. This shifting dynamic presents a compelling narrative of India's ascent and the challenges it faces from China.

India's growing prominence in the Global South is evident in its diplomatic endeavours and strategic outreach. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in particular, has consistently emphasized India's role as a leader of the Global South. His vision focuses on enhancing cooperation among developing nations in Asia, Africa, and South America. This aspiration materialized in the "Voice of Global South Summit," hosted by India, where leaders and representatives from over 120 countries gathered to discuss shared interests and collaboration. This summit underscored India's intention to bridge the divide between the Global North and the Global South, advocating for the developing world's greater access to development-related public goods. As a further testament to its commitment to the Global South, India assumed the presidency of the G20, and has aimed to amplify the voices from the "third world", emphasizing the importance of a just, affordable, and inclusive clean energy transition for developing nations.

It is evident that India is actively working to align itself with the interests and aspirations of the Global South. India's deepening engagement with the West has further solidified its role as an advocate for the Global South. By positioning itself as a bridge between the Global South and Western nations, India aims to play a pivotal role in multilateral institutions historically dominated by the West. Additionally, India's pursuit of full, permanent membership in the African Union demonstrates its commitment to fostering ties with the Global South in multilateral forums.

The China Challenge

China's emergence as a significant player in the Global South is marked by its assertive foreign policy, economic prowess, and initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Beijing's approach aims to leverage this region in its strategic competition with the United States, it presents itself as the leader of the Global South, promoting greater representation for developing nations in existing multilateral institutions. The BRI is a cornerstone of China's engagement with the Global South. It provides developing countries with infrastructure investments, enhancing connectivity through road, rail, and sea routes. These endeavours have propelled China to the position of a leading trading partner, investor, and lender in the developing world. Consequently, Beijing seeks to balance American influence by emphasizing its status as a major power with close ties to the Global South. Notably, China's rhetoric positions it as a champion of independent foreign policies and a proponent of breaking away from Western narratives and the so-called rules-based international order. These narratives align with its vision of a "community with a shared future for mankind," an alternative world order that emphasizes collective development.

The BRICS grouping, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, has played a role in discussing common concerns and economic development within the Global South. However, India and China's divergent approaches to the Global South have implications for the future of BRICS. While India seeks to act as a bridge and foster collaboration, China's perspective is coloured by competition with the West and its ambition to shape a new form of multilateralism.

Future Implications

The competition between India and China for leadership within the Global South has broader implications for international relations and the evolving world order. While the United States and China engage in systemic competition, the India-China contest reveals a unique dimension of global affairs. China's strategy in the Global South challenges India's historical role as the advocate of postcolonial developing nations. Beijing's growing influence and engagement in South Asia, often seen as encroachment into India's sphere of influence, have forced India to recalibrate its foreign policy. India has adopted a "Neighbourhood First" Policy, strengthened diplomatic relations and increased investments in South Asian nations. It also seeks to enhance engagement with Southeast Asian countries and the Asia-Pacific region through its "Act East" Policy. These policies are supplemented by extending lines of credit to neighbouring countries, investing in infrastructure, and fostering corporate involvement through concessional loans.

Despite these efforts, both India and China face challenges. China's BRI initiatives have drawn criticism for predatory loans, and the dominance of Chinese lending poses risks to borrowing nations. India's regional engagement has also raised concerns, particularly in countries like Bangladesh and Nepal, where India's perceived interference in domestic politics has generated anti-India sentiment.

The increasing competition between India and China in South Asia occurs in the context of broader China-US competition, offering smaller South Asian nations opportunities to navigate between these two rising powers. However, such manoeuvring risks entangling these countries in complex geopolitical rivalries.

In the midst of their rivalry and as they endeavour to leave their mark on the Global South, India and China must remember that being a power broker in these regions involves not only offering diplomatic words but also getting involved in the intricacies of regional politics. When crises like the Israel-Hamas conflict emerge, the countries of the Global South expect more than neutrality—they anticipate a proactive role in shaping political realities. The path to global power demands more than being an observer; it necessitates strategic and diplomatic engagement to tackle the challenges of an ever-changing world. As the India-China rivalry continues to unfold, their evolving roles in the Global South will have lasting implications for the future of global order and international power dynamics.

Conclusion.

In a world marked by the ever-shifting tides of geopolitics, the ascent of India within the Global South, coupled with China's formidable challenge, has breathed new life into the age-old tale of great powers and their ambitions. The unfolding narrative of India's surging influence and China's assertive engagement in the Global South embodies a captivating and complex saga, much like a dramatic interplay on the global stage. The rivalry between these two Asian giants, set against the backdrop of China-US competition, presents an intriguing dynamic where smaller South Asian nations find themselves at a crossroad.

They possess the opportunity to deftly manoeuvre between these behemoths, seeking to harness the opportunities arising from their competition while guarding against undue pressures and influences. As we witness this modern-day geopolitical drama, the choices made by nations in the Global South hold tremendous significance. They must navigate the currents of international relations, balancing their interests and aspirations with the competing narratives of India and China. The outcome will undoubtedly shape not only their destinies but also the future of global governance and the very fabric of the world order.

In this grand theatre of international relations, the rise of India and the challenge posed by China remind us that while the world may change, the age-old narratives of power, ambition, and influence continue to captivate our imagination and shape the course of history.

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7

India's G20: An Advocate for the Global South

-Dr. Irfan Ul Haq.

The concept of the "Global South" has significantly influenced international discourse, with India playing a pivotal role in its widespread adoption. Historically, this term was used to describe nations labeled as "third world" or "developing," setting them apart from the industrialized nations of the "Global North." The Global South includes a diverse range of countries across Africa, Central and Latin America, and most of Asia. Interestingly, it also encompasses regions traditionally considered part of the "North," such as Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean.

Nations within the Global South face numerous challenges, such as escalating debts, the detrimental impacts of climate change, and often being sidelined in important international discussions. The dominance of Western economies is evident, with entities like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund frequently influencing the economic paths of these countries. This dominance is reflected in the digital divide and the stark differences in handling global crises, highlighted by the varied responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this scenario, the G20 emerges as a potential catalyst for significant change. Representing 65% of the world's population and 80% of its GDP, the G20 has considerable influence within the United Nations and various multilateral development banks. Nonetheless, effectively addressing the deep-rooted problems of the Global South requires a fundamental change in approach. This involves prioritizing innovative solutions and ensuring the participation of a wide range of voices in leadership roles, with countries like India taking the lead in advocating for the interests of the Global South.

Pioneering the Voice for the Global South.

India has consistently championed the causes of Global South nations. Its steadfast commitment to addressing their challenges is evident in international forums like the United Nations. India's approach has been unique, setting it apart from other emerging powers such as China. Unlike attempts to dominate, India has strived to create a collaborative platform that values diverse perspectives, encourages innovative solutions, and highlights voices often marginalized by wealthier nations.

The G20 with a Troika representing 3 Nations of the Global South, i.e. India, Brazil and South Africa is presenting an opportunity to transform global governance into a more equitable and inclusive system. India's deep historical ties with many Global South nations, rooted in its universal cultural appeal and a legacy of peaceful, inclusive movements, make it a source of inspiration. This consecutive G20 presidency held within the Global South reflect an opportunity to work together and overcome the critical challenges faced by the Global South.

Global Impact of India's G20 Leadership.

Since gaining independence in 1947, India has remained committed to the principles of the Non-Alignment Movement. This commitment has been instrumental in creating a space for developing countries to navigate the complexities of superpower politics while fostering solidarity among nations of the third world. This enduring legacy resonates with India's current leadership role within the G20, where it underscores the importance of not solely aligning its priorities with those of other G20 nations but also collaborating with the often-neglected countries of the Global South.

In a demonstration of this commitment, India invited six guest nations from the Global South to the G20 summit, including Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, Nigeria, Oman, and the UAE. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address at the "Voice of the Global South" summit struck a chord, emphasizing the critical need to address challenges intensified by the pandemic, rising fuel costs, and geopolitical tensions. The summit, under the theme "Unity of Voice, Unity of Purpose," brought together 125 countries from the Global South, providing a platform for these nations to collectively articulate their hopes and concerns.

India's overarching goal, a first in G20 history, is to unite the nations of the Global South into a cohesive bloc that advocates for a pragmatic, action-oriented agenda. This consultative approach actively encourages contributions from countries beyond the G20, seeking their developmental aspirations and expectations from India's G20 Presidency.

Prime Minister Modi delineated a global agenda termed the 4Rs during his inaugural address, encompassing:

Respond: Addressing the priorities of the Global South.

Recognize: Upholding the 'Common but Differentiated Responsibilities' principle.

Respect: Honouring the sovereignty of all nations.

Reform: Adaptation of international institutions to make them more pertinent.

India's advocacy extends to the empowerment of the Global South through its instrumental role in integrating the African Union into the G20 as a permanent member. This historic inclusion has effectively transformed the G20 into the G21. It augments its inclusivity and elevates it to a platform representative of emerging global dynamics. The inclusion of the African Union (AU) carries profound implications. It substantiates New Delhi's commitment to fostering a more inclusive and cooperative approach to the global world order. This move broadens the scope of representation within the G20 and empowers the African continent to push for critical global governance reforms. These reforms encompass significant areas, including the overhaul of the global financial architecture, the reformation of the UN Security Council, and a heightened focus on issues such as climate change and developmental challenges, particularly from the perspective of globally marginalized regions. Moreover, the Prime Minister of India's initiative, the "Voices of the Global South Summit," further underscores its commitment to championing the voices of marginalized nations. It provides them with a strong platform to express their global concerns and aspirations. India's proactive measures, from voicing concerns to effecting transformational changes, underscore its unwavering commitment to fostering a more inclusive and equitable international system.

Global Response to India's G20 Presidency.

India's G20 presidency has elicited a range of reactions from developed nations. Some have warmly welcomed India's initiatives and the renewed focus on issues pertinent to the Global South, recognizing the importance of equitable global development. Conversely, others have expressed skepticism and, in certain instances, resistance. The G20, traditionally dominated by major Western powers, has experienced a dynamic shift under India's leadership. The emphasis on addressing the concerns of the Global South, redefining global governance norms, and fostering inclusivity has received mixed responses.

Developed countries that support India's approach view it as a necessary and long-overdue step toward rectifying historical imbalances in global decision-making. They acknowledge the imperatives of promoting economic justice, equitable growth, and addressing the unique challenges faced by the Global South. These nations see India's presidency as a pivotal opportunity to reform global institutions and reorient them to better serve the needs of all nations.

However, some developed countries have shown resistance, rooted in concerns about potential changes to the established global order. They fear that India's advocacy for the Global South may lead to shifts in power dynamics, potentially diminishing their influence in international affairs. This skepticism is particularly pronounced in discussions on financial reform, where proposals for restructuring global financial institutions may encounter resistance from established economic powers.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, India's G20 presidency has surfaced as a transformative element in global politics, challenging the traditional dominance of Western and other major Asian powers. By elevating the issues of the Global South and championing equitable global development, India has highlighted the urgency of adopting a multi-polar world where collective voices dictate global decisions. This shift toward inclusivity questions established hegemonies and suggests a future where diplomatic and economic leadership is determined not by might or wealth alone, but through cooperative efforts and ethical guidance. As the world progresses, the direction set by India compels future global leaders to make pivotal choices: either to nurture this inclusive vision or to revert to entrenched power dynamics. The course of future geopolitics is poised at a critical juncture.

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8

Anatomizing leadership dynamics in the Global South

-Arth Agarwal.

In the contemporary geopolitical landscape, the revisionist efforts of India and China can hardly go unnoticed. The G20 Summit held on 9 September 2023 witnessed India's Positioning as a contender to China for leadership of the Global South. On the occasion of the European Union-India Pacific Ministerial Forum, Indian External Affairs Minister, BSubramaniam Jaishankar had affirmed that a Multipolar world is feasible only by Multipolar Asia. 'India will make Reformed Multilateralism and Institutions for the 21st century a priority during its Presidency with focus on decision, strong collective actions to accelerate progress on the SDGs', said the Indian Foreign Minister during his opening remarks on the Voice of the Global South Summit.

Africa forms an integral part of the Global South. Recent developments on the diplomatic front suggests that New Delhi is taking keen interest in giving representation to Africa, a region which has vast trade relations with India's counterpart, China. It is rather true that Chinese economic involvement can be measured to be significantly higher than that of India's in the African continent. However, India's roadmap to build a close nexus with the African Union and strengthen its position as a possible leader of the Global South can be seen in some recent developments. The level of trust experienced by the Indian Geopolitical Apparatus is a concern for Chinese Interests in the African Region.

China's Enduring Geoeconomic influence vis-a-vis India and The Western narrative of Neo Colonialism.

Brautigam (2020, p.12) argues that the real picture of Chinese lending is far more complex and potentially developmental than it is currently portrayed. China is helping Africa in its roadmap to reduce economic dependency on raw material. The region is experiencing fiscal diversification or economic complexity due to Chinese financing. Nkurunziza's idea of "chronic dependency" fits well with the case in point. Nkurunziza essentially argues that the dependency has arised due to the economic model left behind by the occupying colonial powers. This model, according to them, was designed to make Africa a reliable source of raw materials which would feed the needs of Western industrial economies. It can be argued that China's contrasting approach is actually aimed at the development of Africa. African countries have seemed to be more receptive to the Chinese developmental approach. 'China is a model for developing countries, and the BRI provides the rest of the world with the opportunity to share in China's great experiences', said the Director of the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation.

Mark Langan has argued that actors of the West paint China as the sole perpetrator of 'conditions of mal-governance and ill-being' in Africa. The West has engaged in implicit presentation of neocolonialism as a novel and distant practice.

The former European colonial powers continue to facilitate their own interests in the region. In fact, Africa has often been referred to as the region which remains underdeveloped in comparison to the rest of the world. In reality, Africa is bearing the aftermath of Imperialism. ‘Dependency theory surrounds itself on the idea that flow of resources happen from the ‘periphery’ comprising underdeveloped states to ‘core’ that comprise wealthy states. In this process the ‘core’ grows at the expense of the ‘periphery’. It can very well be argued that the West has furthered its industrialist endeavours at the expense of the natural resources of Africa.

In comparison to India, China’s trade with Africa has grown at a significantly faster rate. The table below (fig 1) shows the rampant growth Sino-African trade has experienced (2002-2021).

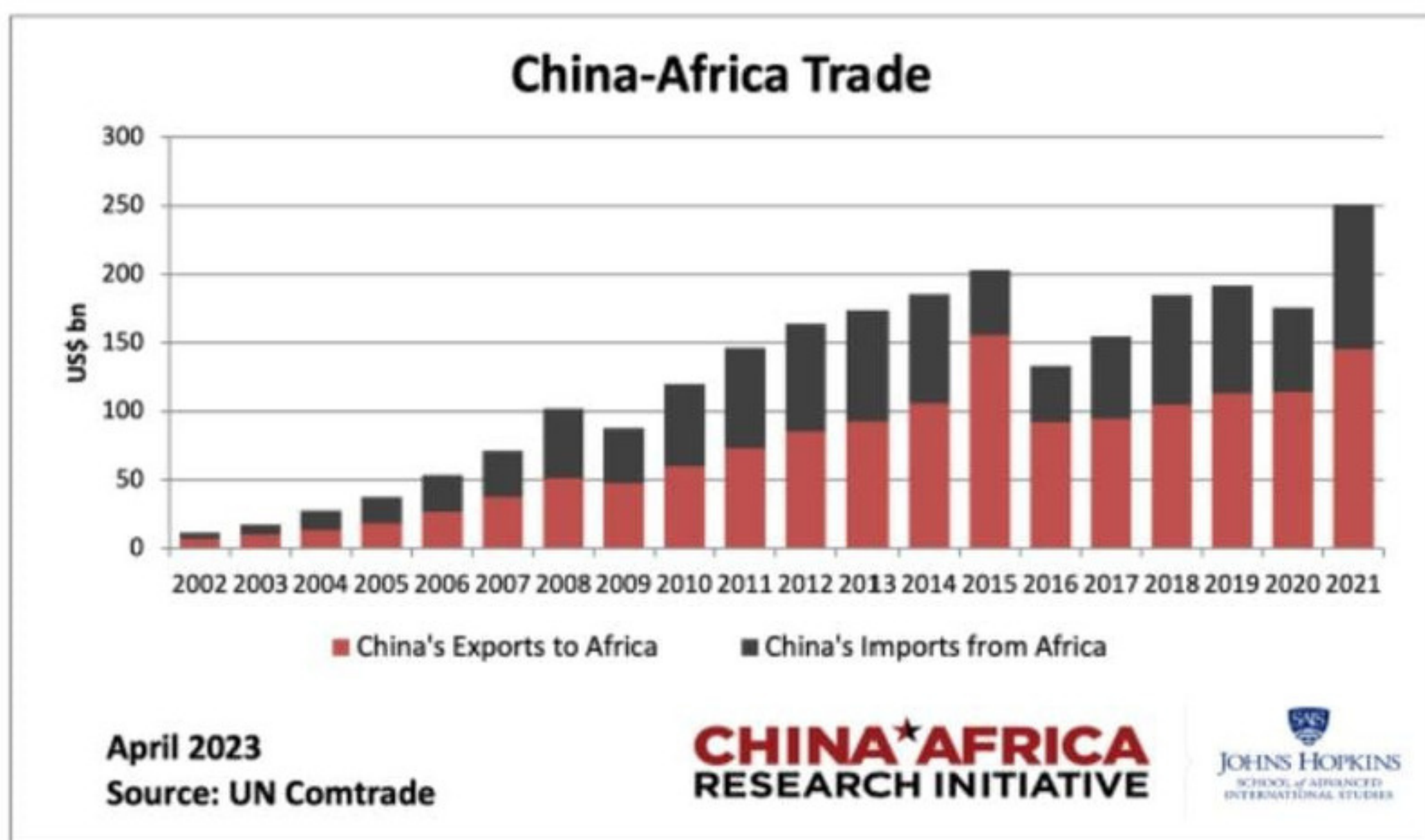


Fig 1- China-Africa Trade (2002-2021),
Source: John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies

Earlier, Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) gave a head start to China, which has started its diplomatic relations in 2000, and over time gave rise to the incubation of vested Chinese interests in the African continent. At the 2018 FOCAC in Beijing, China offered Africa US\$60 billion for development financing until 2021. China’s BRI focuses more on Africa when compared to the newly launched India Middle East Economic Corridor (IMEC). Both, the BRI and IMEC encounter significant logistical challenges and geopolitical exigencies. However, it must be noted that China does not have to rely on other actors for the supply required for their infrastructural endeavours unlike India. The Chinese hold the capacity to supply everything that can bring any project to life.

Perilous Africa and nefarious 'Creditor Imperialism'

The action of 'Debt Trap diplomacy' has emerged to be a global cause of concern in contemporary times. By August 2020, China through her BRI had invested in 52 African Countries at a bilateral level. In order to repay loans obtained from Chinese creditors, the resource-backed lending model is still used to finance infrastructure projects in nations like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ghana, and Guinea. Under this model, the borrowing country commits to using future revenues from the export of its natural resources.

Vast amount of academics think that China's debt trap diplomacy is nothing but a myth created by the Western world. Faris Al-Fadhat and Hari Prasetyo (2022) argue that the debt trap has been caused by the existing structural disparity between China as an investor and the African investment recipients. Despite Chinese efforts, bridging the structural gap emerges as a huge challenge. China is well aware of its strategic intentions as China had specified that the Port of Mombasa would be taken by them if Kenya were to default on the US\$2.3 billion loan for the Standard Gauge Railway Project. Cited by the Zimbabwe Coalition of Debt and Development (2021), Milhayi argued that despite the much needed infrastructure provided by these loans, they have severe implications on the advancement of unsustainable debts and the danger of losing collateral looms large. China is blamed for offering loans for projects that offer limited or temporary economic benefits. For example, Zambia's national debt had tripled as a percentage of national income between 2013 to 2018. Most of it was owed to China. Juan Pablo and Heriberto Araujo write in their investigative book, *Silent Army*, that common trends at Chinese businesses in Africa comprise hostile attitudes towards trade unions, unfair practices and poor working conditions. Michael Sata, a former leader of Zambia, was well recognized for his opposition to Chinese labour practices. In his campaign, Sata promised to stop Zambia from turning into a 'dumping ground for their human beings' and criticised China's involvement in Africa.

India's geopolitical acumen:

Solidifying Global South Leadership aspirations

India's diplomatic shrewdness hit several signposts over the past year. Under India's Presidency, the African Union upgraded its status from an invited international organisation to a Permanent Member of the G20. India came through on her agenda of focussing the attention on the Global South during the recent G20 summit. Xi Jinping's absence from the 2023 G20 summit hints towards China's growing isolationism, a serious concern for the international political landscape. It must be noted that it was the first time a Chinese leader had failed to attend the summit since its inception in 2008. China had not participated in the Voice of Global South Summit (VGSS) organised by India prior to the G20 summit either. China's absence definitely worked in India's favour to set the tide towards its own direction of emerging as the leader of the Global South.

During the Indian Prime Minister's opening remarks on the occasion of the VGSS, he stressed upon the importance of 'Respond, Recognize, Respect and Reform' in order to 're-energise' the world. The speech witnessed aspirations towards strategic rebalancing of the global order. Indian Leadership continues to call upon other member states to recognise the principle of 'Common but Differentiated Responsibilities'.

China's relations with the West have dramatically worsened over the years. India maintains a better dynamic with the Developed world. As an aftermath of VGSS, the Indian government had announced certain initiatives to foster South-South cooperation. For example, the Global South Center of Excellence was established to conduct research on developmental approaches. Many other initiatives were launched aimed at knowledge sharing between Global South Countries. The Global South Science and Technology initiative was created to share ideas in the field of space technology and nuclear energy; the 'Aarogya Maitri Project' was announced to provide medical supplies to developing countries affected by natural disasters and crises. In order to synergize the youth of the Global South, several Global South Scholarships to pursue higher education in India and a 'Global South Young Diplomats Forum' was also established.

Furthermore, India is a member of the Quadrilateral Dialogue or QUAD which comprises India, Japan, US and Australia and it has various dialogue mechanisms with the European Union. The current policy setting makes India a better contender who would represent the goals of the Global South on an international stage. India's geopolitical strategy is in tandem with India's aim at the gradual development of a Multipolar World, in general and a Multipolar Asia in particular. India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ruchira Kamboj further hinted at a more holistic nexus of the Global South by reiterating that India's engagement with the Global South is a matter of policy, culture and philosophy of the country on the occasion of India-UN for Global South. Furthermore, she added that India's development partnerships have expanded significantly. The India-UN Development Partnership Fund at the United Nations holds a portfolio of 75 projects across 56 developing nations in a six year period. India holds capacity building at the core of their developmental approach which provides New Delhi a significant edge over Beijing.

Despite China's established geo economic hegemony, the Indian Geopolitical Apparatus has achieved extremely favourable conditions to further its leadership aspirations in South-South Cooperation. The leadership dynamics of the Global South is rebalancing itself towards multipolarity which stands as a key element of Indian Foreign Policy.

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9

Brick By BRICS

Rubric for New Delhi's Multi-Polarity Leitmotif in an Emerging World Order

-Nishat Bhatotia.

In 2001, Jim O'Neill from Goldman Sachs authored a report titled "Build Better Global Economic BRICs", an acronym for the emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China. In the report, Jim O'Neill projected that over the coming 10 years, the weight of the BRICs-especially China's-in world GDP would grow significantly, therefore, the fiscal and monetary policy in the four countries will have huge reverberations on the global economy. The first annual BRIC Summit took place in 2009 in Yekaterinburg, Russia, bringing together leaders of the BRIC countries to discuss policy issues and common challenges. The following year, the group voted to invite South Africa to join, leading to the inception of present day BRICS.

Fast forward to today, these economies are yet to live up to their potential barring China, though its economy is also going through an ebb tide, after an ephemeral flow post-pandemic. This comes in the backdrop when China's economic recovery was supposed to be the engine powering the global growth. On the contrary, the deflation and the corresponding slump revealed deeply-entrenched structural issues in China's real estate sector, in tandem with a burgeoning domestic debt.

Brick by BRICS: An emerging global order

The BRICS' ability to steer the global economy is limited and its role in influencing global geopolitics is overestimated. And yet, it can be the very forum to forge a representative, inclusive global order, going forward. If BRICS was in doldrums before the summit in South Africa, then the overnight doubling of its membership and the current flux and churn in global geopolitics has truly rendered a new lease of life to the grouping, with major implications for the international order and global governance. The fact that as many as 40 countries from the Global South evinced interest in joining BRICS, with at least 22 formal applications, corroborates the rising importance and clout of BRICS. The strategic autonomy asserted by its members, in tandem with the allure of a more democratic model of global governance, is what attracts so many from the Global South to the grouping.

BRICS may not rival the wealth of the G-7, and its appetite to create economic agreements among its own members comes with a caveat, but it does rival G-7's GDP now (The G7's share of global GDP will fall from 43.5 per cent this year to 41.1 per cent in 2028, while the 11-member-version BRICS will account for 29.1 per cent of GDP this year to 31.4 per cent in five years' time, based on IMF data) and perhaps has even surpassed it by some estimates. As a grouping, it is also a more equitable representation of the world, accounting for 40% of the world's population in comparison to G-7's 10%. In 2014, the sixth annual BRICS summit at Fortaleza, Brazil, gave birth to the colloquial 'Fortaleza Twins' viz. BRICS New Development Bank and Contingency Reserve Arrangement, touted to act as counterweight to the Bretton Woods Duo. NDB, with an initial subscribed capital base of US\$50 billion, was established with the purpose of mobilizing resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in emerging markets and developing countries (EMDCs).

So far, the NDB has funded over 100 projects. And the CRA, comprising a pool of US\$100 billion, aims to provide short-term liquidity support to the members through currency swaps to help mitigate the BOP crisis situation, in case such a situation arises. Once the new members are formally inducted, 6 of 10 of the biggest oil suppliers will be BRICS countries, giving the group an unprecedented heft in the field of energy. It has also shown an ability to work on practical initiatives.

Not that BRICS is a panacea to the challenges plaguing global governance, or it can lead to bona fide democratic multi-polarity. Its appetite to create economic agreements among its own members suffers from internal rivalries, tacit hierarchies and competing interests. And yet, it can be the very forum to ignite genuine conversations revolving around making global order and governance more equitable; representative; and inclusive. BRICS will not be an alternative to the Western/Eurocentric forum(s); rather it is seen as a counterweight and an alternative model to the shibboleths of the post-Second World War order. This right here is the gist of BRICS. As Happymon Jacob states "In global governance, more imperfect institutions reflecting the realities of today are better than one imperfect institutional structure that is alien to the world of today. International politics should not be the place for hegemonic perfection, but of democratic imperfections".

The assertion of strategic autonomy by BRICS members and the allure of a more democratic model of global governance will continue to enthuse many from the Global South, as corroborated by the number of applications for the BRICS membership in the pipeline. For New Delhi, events like the BRICS, G-20 summits will continue to be stress tests for its strategic autonomy, neutrality and multi-polarity leitmotifs and tropes.

By being a member of BRICS or SCO, New Delhi would have to make sure that the 'Voice of Global South' connotation should outweigh the anti-West/ anti-Eurocentric optics. A cleft stick indeed for New Delhi, given the presence of Russia-China combine in these forums, who seek to challenge the status quo order led by the U.S. and allies. It would also have to temper the increasing influence of Beijing in these forums, making sure not to alienate the members in these forums who see credibility in China's maneuvers.

Predicament or Prerogative?

One question that is of much debate in today's geopolitical zeitgeist is "How can New Delhi be part of Quad (Australia, Japan, USA, India), BRICS, SCO, G-20, champion the causes of Global South, have strategic bonhomie with the G-7, and is being courted by NATO Plus at the same time?" Well, it's a prerogative that few enjoy in today's geopolitical zeitgeist. Newly unveiled BRICS members viz. Egypt, UAE, Brazil, Saudi Arabia can also be slotted in that bracket. New Delhi is part of the non-Western/non-Eurocentric forums, as well as those dominated by the West. It is being courted by either side, yet belongs to neither truly. And this right here is either the biggest predicament for South Block or unprecedented elbow room and strategic autonomy.

On the basis of significant development parameters, it still belongs to the ‘Developing’ part of the world. But, there’s an increasing appetite within the country to sit in the upper echelons of the global order, ergo, in that sense, it is essaying to reserve a seat for itself at the high table of global governance i.e. ‘Developed’ part of the world. New Delhi, as a result, lies right in the middle of this geopolitical fault line. A contributing factor in New Delhi being placed at the intersection of this geo-political juxtaposition is the commensurate rise of the Global South. As a corollary of this fault line, New Delhi is bound to get drawn into rivalries, competing interests and one-upmanship. Either it will get drawn into the flux and will be a victim of these contests or it will act as a civilizational bridge between the great geo-political chasms. To avoid the former, it will have to navigate through Machiavellian choices and geopolitical headwinds, and the corresponding tightrope walk will require deft diplomatic acumen from New Delhi.

Prima facie, it is a leviathan challenge, but as a founding Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) member, it should relish the challenge, as it brings increased importance, influence, clout and ability to steer the discourse around rules-based order. Sure, this is a different milieu to that of the Bandung Conference, and global order has transitioned from non-alignment to multi-polarity, but the rules of the game remain unchanged. Whether it is non-alignment, poly-centrality or multi-polarity-being a staunch votary and lobbying for equitable, democratic, inclusive and representative global governance is universally acceptable, cherished and adored. What was a maxim then is axiomatic even now.

Global pivot toward ‘South’ of the Brandt Line.

Ultimately, it was India’s leitmotifs of multilateralism, multi-polarity, ‘middle path’ and abjuring alliances on global discord that won the day at the ‘Bharat Mandapam’. What marked the zenith of the India’s G-20 presidency was the inclusion of the African Union as a permanent member. The Indian presidency yielded major deliverables and outcomes, with larger ramifications for the emerging global order. The creation of a new Working Group on Empowerment of Women, Global Digital Public Infrastructure Repository for bridging the technological divide, established Start-up 20 Engagement Group-recognizing start-ups and MSMEs as engines of global growth, among others. Laudably, the Indian presidency worked on harmonizing development with the environment, asserting that “no country should have to choose between fighting poverty and fighting for our planet.”

The New Delhi Leaders’ Declaration is wide-ranging and highly ambitious, when assessed on the trinity yardstick of consensus, additionality and implementability. Whether it is the emphasis on equitable climate finance, reform of Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), managing global debt vulnerabilities, food security, gender equality and innovative approach towards Artificial Intelligence and crypto assets.

Conclusion.

To conclude, the Indian presidency resuscitated and strengthened the G-20 itself as a forum-one of the only remaining forums that include the Western bloc, the Russia-China combine, and the 'non-aligned' members. It ushered the G-20 as a more representative, inclusive, and egalitarian model of global governance vis-à-vis the shibboleths of post-World War II order. The winds of global governance are increasingly blowing towards 'South' of the Brandt Line, in tandem with 'Vaisudhava Kutumbakam' resonating globally.

New Delhi dished out a stellar diplomatic performance to forge the seemingly elusive consensus on the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration. While in the long run, India must therefore have its priorities sorted out, its strategy fine-tuned, nuanced and aligned with the rubric for an emerging world order. In order to seek alternatives to the status quo i.e. the Bretton Woods and the post-Second World War Order, it will aid, albeit indirectly, the rise of China and strengthening of Yuan, as a natural concomitant of Beijing's economic size. If the China-centric world order is antithetical to New Delhi's idea of multi-polarity, then the West can be 'de haut en bas'.

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About



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