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The Making of a Global Bharat

Edited by

Harsh V Pant
and Sameer Patil



WILEY

THE MAKING OF A GLOBAL BHARAT

EDITED BY
HARSH V PANT
AND SAMEER PATIL

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Introduction

An ambitious and articulate Bharat is reimagining its global engagement at a time when cracks are appearing in the post-1945 world order. A host of challenges—such as the rise of multipolarity, the onset of deglobalisation, the advent of a technological revolution, the deepening polarisation between the East and the West, and the divide between the Global North and South—are upending the established order that was built on a foundation of hope and cooperation. Old ideas and institutions can no longer hold the weight of our problems, even as assumptions of the past need a radical rethink.

Amid this intense and transformative global change, India is redefining its foreign policy to navigate the complex geopolitical landscape. Indeed, in the past decade, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has implemented a new and pragmatic foreign policy vision that recognises these changed global realities. A closer look at India's global engagement during this period reveals several distinct defining traits of this vision. Firstly, in undertaking this engagement, New Delhi harnesses the

ancient wisdom of the *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (one earth, one family, one future) philosophy. It symbolises the interconnectedness of all living beings and promotes a sense of global unity and compassion. Inspired by this thought, India is anchoring itself as the voice of reason and dialogue, and rallying the international community to tackle challenges like climate change, pandemics, and economic inequality.

Secondly, India appreciates the significance of collaborative partnerships in achieving its foreign policy objectives. So, overcoming the hesitation of the past, New Delhi is now confidently embracing like-minded countries to secure trade deals, technological collaborations, and access to critical resources. For this, it has tapped into time-tested strategic partnerships and forged new ones through bilateral engagements and multilaterals.

Thirdly, this foreign policy vision appreciates that fulfilling India's national interest need not be antithetical to achieving global good. If executed properly, it can lead to a win-win for India and the world and promote shared prosperity. Therefore, initiatives like the International Solar Alliance or digital public infrastructure are not mere buzzwords. Rather, they are blueprints for a future where sustainable progress, digital inclusion, and equitable solutions pave the way for a better world. They also position India as a pivotal player in delivering public goods to the world.

Fourthly, there is an acknowledgement of the shift in power dynamics, recognising the rise of multiple influential players beyond the traditional West. More importantly, this foreign policy vision elevates the Global South's crucial voice in shaping the global agenda. The inclusion of the African Union in the G20 at the New Delhi Summit in September 2023 and advocacy of the idea of 'reformed multilateralism' at the United Nations (UN) are concrete expressions of this vision.

Finally, India now understands the critical role of geoeconomic heft in accomplishing the status of a 'leading power'. As such, New Delhi has strategically woven economic diplomacy into the fabric of the country's development goals, focusing on securing investments and generating employment. By actively pursuing new trade agreements and nurturing foreign investment inflows, India has brought about a transformative shift in its economic diplomacy.

A reimagined foreign policy, informed by this nuanced understanding, is paving the way for increased global influence, enhanced regional stability, and more sustainable development for India and the world. Through this 'India Way', New Delhi has deftly woven a tapestry of progress, not with the threads of geopolitical agendas, but with the vibrant colours of global cooperation and a focus on humankind's needs.

This issue of the GP-ORF Series, titled *The Making of a Global Bharat*, celebrates India's global engagements and explores the core elements of this new foreign policy vision shaped over the past 10 years. It includes curated essays by renowned scholars and domain experts who unpack the ideas and critical initiatives powering India's global resurgence.

The first four essays examine India's positioning in the shifting geopolitical landscape. Harsh V Pant and Yogesh Joshi decode India's reconceptualisation of strategic autonomy that eschews any major power dominance and asserts its strategic independence. Amrita Narlikar then deep-dives into ancient strategic thought to reveal a *Bharatiya* vision of global order that deftly fits elements of realism to advance India's and like-minded partners' interests. Velina Tchakarova's essay examines India's role in bridge-building within a deeply fragmented and polarised international landscape, highlighting the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for India's strategic positioning in global geopolitics. Finally, Leslie Vinjamuri assesses India's G20 presidency, which successfully prioritised the developmental needs of the Global South amidst the geopolitical gridlock.

The next set of essays examines specific regions and challenges where India has crafted unique responses. Rahul Roy-Chaudhury focuses on the Indian subcontinent through the lens of the reconfigured 'neighbourhood first' policy and examines New Delhi's efforts to achieve regional stability and cooperation. Max Abrahms and Kabir Taneja, meanwhile, look at the emerging contours of India's policy in West Asia, a region that has witnessed a fundamental transformation in recent years. Satoru Nagao and Pratinashree Basu look at the role of the Quad—an important minilateral that brings together Australia, India, Japan, and the US—in shaping the new regional order in the Indo-Pacific and the factors driving India's engagement with this important

grouping. Next, Cleo Paskal looks at India's handling of the delicate and multifaceted relationship with China while understanding the imperatives of the Modi government's firm response to Beijing's hostile behaviour.

India has also initiated some specific initiatives that seek to strengthen its international standing and global partnerships. Sinderpal Singh examines India's evolving economic partnerships by looking at its response to the securitisation of economic interdependence, its recently signed comprehensive economic partnership agreements, and its attempt to serve as a bridge between the Global South and the developed world. S. Paul Kapur analyses India's acquisition of significant defence capabilities by pursuing domestic defence industrialisation and security partnerships with like-minded countries. Sameer Patil then explores the idea of reformed multilateralism and India's efforts to keep the UN-led multilateral framework relevant to contemporary international politics. Elizabeth Sidiropoulos reviews India's efforts to strengthen ties with the Global South and raise its concerns in international forums. Erin Watson looks at India's thriving technology partnerships with like-minded partners and the broader benefits of these partnerships that enable the digital world and human development. The final essay by Justin Bassi narrates the Raisina Dialogue's critical role as a platform for a 'Global Bharat' and as a forum to generate innovative solutions for contemporary challenges.

Through incisive insights, these essays explore key aspects of India's new foreign policy in the context of an unpredictable international order.

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Harsh V Pant and Sameer Patil

Realigning Strategic Autonomy

Harsh V Pant and Yogesh Joshi

Strategic autonomy is the most employed and misunderstood dimension of Indian foreign policy. It is also its most politically divisive element. Indian governments of all ideological dispensations have used the concept to rationalise their foreign policy. At the same time, political oppositions have used the same terminology to attack the foreign policy choices of the establishment. The current scenario is no different. Political bickering notwithstanding, the Modi government's foreign policy, spearheaded by Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar, has redefined strategic autonomy. From the "choice of inaction," strategic autonomy has now transformed into the "choice of action" (1). This choice of action is most evident in India's ability to balance its various interests and partners, which may often appear at loggerheads (2). India's deft navigation of the Ukraine-Russia war and its successful leadership of the G20 demonstrated its diplomatic agility. More than any other state in international politics,

India appears to have gained the most and come unscathed from the current uncertainty in international politics.

In the Modi era, India's strategic autonomy derives from three distinct sources. Any choice of action is fundamentally shaped by the context in which such an action is warranted, the actor's capacity to perform an action and tolerate its consequences, and the actor's commitment to that course of action. The context of action is critical because it either narrows or expands the possible array of choices available to states. Extreme concentrations of power in the international system in one or a few great powers narrow a state's choices. Multipolarity, on the other hand, is associated with greater flexibility. Irrespective of the array of choices available, capacity is vital in making choices most aligned with one's interests and the ability to withstand pressure and possible fallouts of particular policy choices. The question states need to ask is not about autonomy per se, but autonomy of action for what? Therefore, practising strategic autonomy for a highly capable state may differ greatly from a state with little economic, military, or technological capacity. If context expands or shrinks the set of choices available and capacity allows one to pursue interest-aligned choices, commitment is central to sustained action over various issues. The element of commitment, however, is far more dependent upon internal factors such as energetic leadership, the legislative and executive power of the government, and the ideological moorings and cohesiveness of the ruling elites.

Context, Capacity, and Commitment

Three dimensions of strategic autonomy differentiate the Modi government's foreign policy from its predecessors. First, the international context and India's position are qualitatively different from what previous Indian governments have encountered. Both during the bipolar structure of the Cold War and the unipolarity of the post-Cold War era, the international context often militated against positive action to pursue India's interests. The best recourse in such circumstances was inaction. India's nuclear choices during the Cold War are perhaps the best example of this dynamic. Today's chaotic and highly competitive nature of great power interactions has created more space for other relevant actors. For example, the US-Russia and US-China competitions informed

India's stance on the Ukraine-Russia conflict. India believed that insofar as China remains the principal target of the US grand strategy, its interests in India as a strategic partner of choice in the Indo-Pacific will remain intact, irrespective of India's stance on the Ukraine war (3). This asymmetry in India's interests in Ukraine compared to US interests in India to counter China allowed New Delhi to pursue strategic neutrality over the war.

Second, India's rise has significantly increased its capacity for action and to tolerate the consequences of its foreign policy choices. Its economic and military rise provides it with more significant resources to pursue its interests and, simultaneously, allows it to absorb any likely repercussions from such actions. It also renders New Delhi highly important for all global actors. Today, India is not only a rising power but also a convening and leading power. The 2023 G20 Summit ably demonstrated all three facets of India's emergence as a global power. Even when context and capacity are primarily structural causes of India's robust pursuance of its strategic autonomy, the Modi government's commitment to action is indeed a novel phenomenon.

P. V. Narasimha Rao's opening of the economy, Atal Bihar Vajpayee's nuclear tests, and Manmohan Singh's Indo-US nuclear deal reflected a high level of commitment. Still, a commitment to sustained action over various foreign policy issues was absent in previous dispensations. All these decisions were the hallmarks of the previous dispensations and their highest achievements. On the other hand, the Modi government has shown clear commitment across foreign policy areas. The strength of these commitments principally flows from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's legislative power, but it is also a result of ideological fervour and personal energy (4).

In commandeering India's international relations, Modi sits only next to Jawaharlal Nehru. The differences between Modi and Nehru are apparent, given their distinct backgrounds. Of course, India's contemporary context and capacity provide Modi with significantly greater wiggle room. However, structurally, they possess two vital attributes for foreign policymaking: absolute command in the Indian parliament and significant popular support among the Indian public. Modi's self-confidence emanates from his ideological moorings in cultural nationalism rather than the liberal

internationalism of Nehru (5). This nationalistic foreign policy, which in its origins may be culturally indigenous, is also believed to be universally accommodating, aptly captured by the slogan of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam* (*one earth, one family, one future*). Modi has inverted the cultural frame of Nehru's foreign policy. However, this ideological commitment to Hindu (inter)nationalism has allowed the Indian foreign policy establishment to approach the world with a greater sense of purpose and confidence. Lastly, Modi's energetic pursuit of foreign policy in building personal bonds with global leaders is the most distinct characteristic of India's 'Modified' foreign policy. No other Indian prime minister has invested such significant time and effort to build the "right personal chemistry" with key global leaders (6).

The consequences of Modi's imprint are evident in three distinct domains. First is shedding the dogmas of the past. India's historical hesitations in engaging the world, primarily driven by a self-insulating version of strategic autonomy and fears of entanglements, have given way to greater engagement based on its interests and power. Second, strategic clarity is the primary purpose of India's foreign policy as a "direct instrument to accelerate national development and modernization" and is unabashedly embraced (7). The strategic purpose of foreign policy has been geared to accelerate India's rise. This "strategic clarity" accompanies an equally emphatic reorientation in India's "strategic communication". Modi has unequivocally asserted that India's foreign policy will remain on "India's side in an increasingly uncertain and fragmented world". Such cold-blooded pursuit of India's interests betrays an unseen realpolitik in Indian foreign policy (8).

The trio of context, capacity, and commitment is a highly useful matrix for understanding the 'Modified' version of India's strategic autonomy.

The Ukraine Crisis

The Russian invasion of Ukraine was perhaps the most serious test of India's strategic autonomy under the Modi government. The principal contradictions in India's foreign policy were primarily the balance of its interests between a historically significant strategic partner such as Russia and its emerging strategic partners in the West, primarily the US. India's foreign policy was not only able to resolve this principal

contradiction and come out of it unscathed, but also gain both material and prestige benefits.

India's response was shaped by its context, capacity, and commitment. India's commitment to its national interests underlined the necessity of continued strategic interaction with Russia, irrespective of Moscow's resort to violence. Material dependencies on Russian arms and hydrocarbons were necessary but not sufficient reasons for explaining New Delhi's reluctance to join Western condemnation and sanctions against Russia. In India's grand strategy, Moscow was always a critical node of Eurasia's overall balance of power. India's grand strategy required Russia to remain independent, to the extent it can, of China's influence. If national interests dictated India's reluctance to join the West's bandwagon, India's capacity and context insulated it from any significant blowback. New Delhi correctly identified that US interests in India vis-à-vis China outweigh Washington's disapproval of its neutral stand over Ukraine. This asymmetry of interests, borne out of the context of US-China rivalry, provided India with significant space to pursue its strategic autonomy. This strategic space was further bolstered by India's capacity to fill gaps in global supply chains significantly disrupted by the conflict. New Delhi compensated for global food insecurity by raising its food exports as well as exports of refined hydrocarbons.

The G20 Consensus

India's G20 presidency arrived in an international political context of growing polarisation between the East and the West and the accelerating divide between the North and South. The Ukraine crisis resulted in a complete breakdown of relations between Western countries and Russia. China's support for Russia entailed significant friction within the G20 framework. On the other hand, the growing economic divide between the Global North and the Global South had only exacerbated amid the Ukrainian crisis, deglobalisation, and international economic downturn. Indian foreign policy, therefore, faced the arduous task of creating consensus among the G20 members and refocusing global attention towards the needs of developing countries. However, India found itself uniquely placed to overcome these obstacles (9). The G20 presidency arrived at a stage when the three vectors of India's power—its status as a rising power, a convening power, and a leading power—were

getting consolidated. Climbing the international economic ladder as the world's third-largest economy attested to the two-decade process of India's rise. Its economic rise, clubbed with its developing needs and multi-aligned foreign policy with friends in both the West and Russia, gave India an unmatched convening power. Lastly, India's leadership in climate change, energy transition, digital economy, and technological transformation allowed it to become a leading power in setting the global agenda. Most interestingly, India's rise is perceived as a global good; therefore, states worldwide had a stake in the success of India's G20 presidency. India was able to convene highly antagonistic actors, negotiate compromises resulting in a consensus document, and lead the world in attending to the needs of the Global South. Getting the G20 nations to welcome the African Union as a member was perhaps the most significant contribution of New Delhi's presidency to the G20 process.

Conclusion

The Modi government has adroitly used contemporary international politics, its capacity as a rising, convening, and leading power, and its commitment to national interests in the context of its universal values to practice a distinctive version of strategic autonomy. In doing so, it has transformed some of the core beliefs of Indian foreign policy. Today, India's strategic autonomy is hardly synonymous with disengagement, isolation, and timidity. Rather, it symbolises how an aspirational India will use its rise to pursue its national interests by directly confronting global power equations and engaging multiple audiences.

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The Ancient Roots of Global Bharat

Amrita Narlikar

Transcending the vagaries of empires, invasions, dynasties, and governments, there is an idea of a 'global Bharat' that runs deep in Indian strategic thought. While its ancient and diverse traditions have long shaped the diplomacy and negotiation traditions of this civilisational state (1), recent years have seen an increasing commitment by Indian leaders to "own" its intellectual past (2). India's G20 presidency, built around the theme of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (one earth, one family, one future) is a powerful illustration of how the country is systematically reclaiming the global approach inherent in its traditions. This strategy of ownership and reclaim has domestic and international ramifications.

Even as the term finds greater usage and traction with global leaders and people on the ground, it is now important to ensure that this profound and far-reaching idea is not reduced to just another glib catchphrase. In this essay, I start by unpacking the full meaning of

the phrase, highlighting a key aspect that is often lost in current applications of the term. In the second section, I draw out its far-reaching implications for a *Bharatiya* vision of global order. In the third and final section, I explain why a global order based on this idea is not some “mere” utopian vision; rather, while taking a clear ethical stand, it can be reconciled with a robust realism that will advance the country’s interests as well as those of other like-minded partners.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: Recognising the Reach of this Concept

The phrase Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam comes from the following Sanskrit verse:

अयं निजः परो वेति गणना लघु चेतसाम् ।
उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ॥

This is mine, this is yours – only mean-minded people indulge in such calculations,

For the generous-minded, the entire earth is one family (3).

Mahopanishad, 6.71

Even as references to this verse find greater popularity within India and internationally, two points are worth emphasising.

First, most engage with the idea of “the entire earth is one family” on an understanding that this refers to all the *peoples* of this world. As per this interpretation, we should be looking beyond our national borders, and acting in the interests of our shared *humanity*. This well-intended interpretation, however, stifles the much more ambitious and inclusive nature of the concept. The fact is that Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam refers to not just *people* of the earth, but all the “*more than human*” beings as members of this global family. Those who have no vote and no voice matter just as much in this *Bharatiya* idea of a global family as those who do (4).

Second, that this one phrase has gained popularity in Indian diplomacy (and public discourse) should not lead cynics to assume

that its supporters have cherry-picked an exception in Indian thought. Multiple Sanskrit sources offer us a non-anthropocentric, trans-species, global perspective, similar to the one that Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam exemplifies. This is true not only of esoteric texts that a small number of religious scholars have the language skills to read, but also of the living traditions and stories that are passed on from grandparents to grandchildren even today.

For instance, the *Mahabharat*—India's famous epic that deals with some of the most fundamental questions about politics, negotiation, and war—contains within it a story of one of its heroes, Yudhishtir, who is clear that he would renounce paradise rather than abandon a stray dog who has faithfully accompanied him on his final journey. In the argumentation that he offers Indra—the king of the gods—especially striking is Yudhishtir's adamant refusal to accept a distinction between humans and animals. Instead, he effectively attributes personhood and rights to all beings. Several other stories in this epic offer similar lessons on the importance of treating one's fellow beings—human or not—with dignity and respect (5). Importantly, the *Mahabharat* is not alone in offering a holistic concept of the global; the *Ramayan* similarly emphasises the importance of trans-species cooperation, epitomised in the successful alliance Lord Ram establishes with the monkey-king Sugriva (6). Schoolchildren in India are similarly exposed to lines that remind them of an equality that extends across all species (e.g., **आत्मवत् सर्वभूतेषु, यः पश्यति स पण्डितः**, *He who looks upon all creatures as he looks upon himself, he is the truly wise one*).

The idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is thus a shorthand for a rich, non-anthropocentric globalism. Accept and embrace the philosophy of the unique universalism, inclusiveness, and pluralism that it stands for, and the Bharatiya vision of global order takes on a special relevance today.

Implications for Global Order and Governance

As policymakers turn much-needed attention to urgent issues, including climate change, Bharat offers a vision that is more original and timelier than dominant ones in the West.

Take, for example, the narrative about climate change mitigation. Schoolchildren have been taking to the streets in Europe (and beyond) with their 'Fridays for Future' demonstrations. These "school strikes for climate" have been inspired by Greta Thunberg's call: "You have stolen *my* dreams and *my* childhood...You are failing us. But the young *people* are starting to understand your betrayal. The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive you" (7). This is a narrative primarily about inter-generational justice, as one would expect if we apply Western tenets of liberalism. But if we draw on Bharat's approach, we get a much more inclusive, global narrative for climate action. Such a narrative requires not only inter-generational justice, but also trans-species justice. It attaches urgency to the cause of biodiversity preservation, but also to save the lives of individual animals within species. And such differences in narratives matter because they lead to potentially different policies and outcomes (8).

As part of its G20 presidency, India has already begun to shape the global narrative. For instance, the Delhi Declaration clearly highlights its respect for the environment: "It is with the philosophy of living in harmony with our surrounding ecosystem that we commit to concrete actions to address global challenges" (9). This commitment is explicit in the text via its attention to questions of sustainability and just energy transitions, circular economy, and the idea of LiFE (Lifestyle for the Environment)(10). Reflecting the impact that India's frame of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam has had, the preamble also accords importance to the "planet" in its own right (11). These developments are not to be scoffed at.

That said, and despite its many merits, the Delhi Declaration is primarily a "human-centric" one. For instance, point six states: "Through these actions today, we are building towards a system that better empowers countries to address global challenges, is *human-centric*, and brings prosperity and well-being to *humanity*." To apply the philosophy encapsulated in the phrase Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the next step will be to focus not only on "human-centric" development but also on *planet-centric* development. The Bhartiya vision of global order would require us to pay attention to not only *human suffering* (as the Delhi Declaration does) but also *more-than-human* suffering. And similarly, when speaking of 'one health', besides all the key issues that the Delhi

Declaration raises, Bharat would also push for a focus on protecting the health and welfare of other species (not least in the context of zoonotic jumping and pandemic prevention).

A global Bharat, as it advances such a vision of global order, would also lead the way in reforming global governance. That it is already walking its talk on making international institutions more inclusive is evident from the fact that the African Union acquired membership of the G20 during India's presidency. Apply the non-anthropocentric global vision to multilateralism, and India would be pushing for a global ban on trophy-hunting, joining countries like New Zealand in banning the live export of animals, and also toughening up its domestic laws such as PCA 1960 on prevention of cruelty to animals.

Bharat has powerful cultural traditions (that are inspired by Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, but also cross religious barriers to enter the cultural ethos) that could inspire a new form of global order, which enables not only a greater 'voice of the Global South', but also trans-species compassion and respect.

Ethics and Realpolitik

The Bharatiya global agenda that I have presented here has the potential to offer fresh, innovative ideas to deal with existential crises (including climate change, declining biodiversity, and pandemics), to reboot and re-energise the system of multilateral rules, to inject new levels of fairness—and a much more inclusive trans-species understanding of justice—in a way that has never been done before. But an immediate comeback on the argument that I have presented above will likely be: how will adopting this *value-based* globalism actually advance Indian *interests*?

As I have argued elsewhere, (12) Indian strategic thought shows us some interesting ways to overcome the values vs. interests dichotomy:

धर्म एव हतो हन्ति धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः।

When Dharm (duty/values) is destroyed, it also destroys; Dharm protects those who guard it.

Mahabharat, III.313.128

This is not a shallow understanding of values, but a deep one that suggests that both values and interests are reflexive, with one shaping the other. Attention to values is thus not a “soft” issue; rather, an effective use of ethics can be crucial for Realpolitik.

India’s expansive, non-anthropocentric globalism will be of natural advantage to the country and its people. It originates in Bharat. And it is an approach on which Bharat can offer thought leadership and action leadership. This will matter not only in terms of Bharat’s status and growing influence, but also in the selection of its trade and security partners. Just as democratic values and shared histories have offered countries from the Global South (13) and Global North to find commonalities with each other, Bharat’s planet-centric focus can offer another significant line of like-mindedness. This, in turn, would translate into closer ties with such partners—and also diversified supply chains from others—with important geoeconomic and security implications. Via closer cooperation with a critical mass of countries that come to share the same respect for life across species, a global Bharat would play a major role in building a more sustainable, secure, and kinder world.

Amrita Narlikar is a scholar of international relations, with research expertise in international negotiations, trade, multilateralism, and Indian strategic thought.

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India, a Bridge Between Antagonists

Velina Tchakarova

Over the past decade, experts in international relations have been forecasting the rise of an Asian-centric, multipolar century, characterised by a geopolitical shift from the Atlantic to the Pacific (1). The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the eruption of several critical military conflicts globally, has starkly highlighted the emergence of a new Cold War—termed Cold War 2.0 (2)—pitting the US against a Sino-Russian modus operandi, colloquially known as the ‘DragonBear’ (3). This confrontation is particularly pronounced in the context of the Indo-Pacific era, where India emerges as a pivotal bridge-builder amidst the complex rivalry between these two global power blocs of three systemic players. Within this framework, India’s role as a mediator or ‘bridge’ between these antagonistic forces assumes critical geopolitical significance. This essay aims to examine India’s role in bridge-building within a deeply fragmented and polarised international landscape, highlighting the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for India’s strategic positioning in global geopolitics.

Embracing India: The West's New Partner in a Global Dance

The current global geopolitical landscape is increasingly defined by a network of regional actors, or so-called middle powers (4), each possessing distinct, albeit limited, power projection capabilities. These actors are navigating a complex environment dominated by the systemic rivalry between the US and China. In this intricate geopolitical chessboard, India has emerged as a particularly potent and capable player, a development attributable to a multitude of factors, both endogenous and exogenous.

The strategic rivalry between the US and China has inadvertently created a conducive environment for India to assert itself as a significant geoeconomic player. India has witnessed a substantial influx of foreign investments and capital flows into important sectors (5) such as computer software and hardware, services, trading, chemicals, and the automobile industry, but also the prioritisation of key domains such as semiconductors, defence and aerospace, cyber technologies, biotechnology, nanotechnology, telecommunications, and critical infrastructure. India's strategic economic engagements have been multifaceted, including forging trade and technology pacts to assist the US (6) in reducing its reliance on China and entering bilateral defence agreements (7) to diminish India's dependence on Russian military hardware.

At the same time, Europe (8), currently embroiled in the most severe military crisis since the conclusion of the Second World War, exemplifies the global shift in power dynamics. The Russian military incursion into Ukraine has not only reshaped the European geopolitical landscape but also reverberated across the globe. Despite the West's comprehensive support for Ukraine—spanning the financial, economic, humanitarian, diplomatic, and military domains—the invasion has evolved into a war of attrition. This prolonged fight has precipitated profound spillover effects, severely impacting European economies, disrupting societal cohesion, and straining the military capacities of the region, which is striving to rejuvenate its industrial and geopolitical stature (9). In this context, India's stance on the war in Ukraine initially appeared as a diplomatic conundrum to many in the West, revealing a significant gap in their understanding of India's strategic interests and objectives.

However, the West's realisation of the necessity to engage with India, given the complexities of their bilateral relationships, marked a shift in the diplomatic approaches (10). Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement that "this is not a time for war" regarding Russia's decision to invade Ukraine resonates beyond its immediate context, reflecting his government's overarching geoeconomic strategy and geopolitical self-confidence (11). This strategy is not merely focused on guiding India out of the post-pandemic economic downturn but is ambitiously aimed at maximising economic growth and development in the most troubled post-pandemic period. India's economy, demonstrating resilience and robustness, grew substantially in 2021 and 2022. The nation's near-term economic outlook indicates a trajectory of continued rapid expansion through 2023-24, setting it apart as the only major economy to sidestep the threat of recession in the previous year (12). This economic ascendancy propelled India to become the world's fifth-largest economy in 2023, leapfrogging the UK and rising from the tenth position a decade earlier. Projections now place India on course to become the third-largest global economy within this decade.

In navigating these complex geopolitical waters, India has managed to strike a balance between embracing Western overtures and maintaining its own strategic agenda. It has deepened its relationships with the US and its Indo-Pacific allies, such as Japan and Australia (for instance, through the Quad (13)), and extended its diplomatic and economic ties to Europe and South Korea, engaging in various bilateral and multilateral cooperation formats. Nonetheless, India has not shied away from voicing criticism of Western policies, particularly in instances where global conflicts have necessitated a unified response, as evidenced in its stance on Western sanctions and narratives following the onset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Furthermore, India has been assertive in its quest to enhance its global stature and influence. This includes advocating for reforms within the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), urging to address the council's current dysfunctional state (14), characterised by a divide between the US/UK/French and China/Russia blocs (15). This stance not only reflects India's ambition to play a more pronounced role in global governance but also highlights the need for a reformed and more representative international order, aligned with the evolving geopolitical realities of the twenty-first century.

India's Geopolitical Ballet: Navigating the BRICS and SCO Arenas in the Shadow of China

As India strides towards becoming the world's third-largest economic power by 2025, its role as a natural long-term rival to China becomes increasingly pivotal. These dynamics position the Indo-Pacific region as the primary theatre for global power competition in the twenty-first century. The gradual 'bilateralisation' of international relations (16), entwined with the enduring security dilemma triangles between China, India, and Pakistan in South Asia, sets the stage for a significant transformation in global geopolitics. Moreover, the reshaping of global supply chains in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic adds another layer of complexity, catalysing a profound tectonic shift in international relations (17).

At the heart of these transformations are three critical layers of change, shaping the emergence of what is being termed the 'Indo-Pacific decade'. Firstly, India's proactive engagement within the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) bloc has been instrumental. India has not only played a significant role in shaping the agenda and direction of BRICS but has also supported its expansion, which may turn the BRICS Plus bloc (18) into a subsequent commodities powerhouse next to OPEC+. This includes extending membership to African and West Asian countries, a move that signifies India's recognition of the growing geopolitical importance of these regions and its intention to build more inclusive and representative regional coalitions.

Secondly, India's participation in and presidency of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) last year underscores its strategic pragmatism, especially in managing its complex relationship with China and its difficult relations with Pakistan. India's involvement in the SCO (19) is indicative of a geopolitical opportunism that is vital for ensuring it is not excluded from crucial discussions concerning the security and development of regions of mutual interest, such as Central and South Asia. This engagement demonstrates India's nuanced diplomacy, balancing its competitive stance with China while acknowledging the necessity of dialogue and cooperation on shared regional challenges.

Lastly, India's investment in developing multimodal transport, energy, and trade corridors, such as the International North-South Transport

Corridor (20) and the newly proposed India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (21), reflects its ambition to expand its geoeconomic portfolio, positioning itself as a contender to China's expansive infrastructure projects (such as the Middle Corridor and the Belt and Road Initiative (22)). These initiatives not only enhance India's connectivity and trade prospects but also highlight the critical role of Russia as a linchpin in the complicated security triangle among the three nations (China, India, and Russia). Furthermore, Russia's involvement is pivotal, not just for its geopolitical influence but also as a reliable provider of energy resources and critical commodities, an aspect increasingly important in the context of global energy security and shifting geoeconomic alliances.

These developments collectively underscore India's strategic foresight and diplomatic acumen in navigating the complex geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific region. By actively shaping the relationship with China via regional formats and partnerships, while investing in critical infrastructure and connectivity projects, India is not only bolstering its own geoeconomic and geopolitical stature but also contributing to a reshaping of the global order in the twenty-first century.

Champion of Change: India's Rise as the Voice of the Global South

As India charts its course in the global arena, it is increasingly recognised as a unique geopolitical and geoeconomic player that the three key systemic powers—the US, China, and Russia—cannot afford to overlook. India's involvement spans a broad spectrum of international issues, necessitating engagement within various regional platforms, often in competition with each other. Beyond its burgeoning role among the premier global players and its emerging leadership within the second-tier actors with the fastest-growing economies of the G20, India currently occupies another distinct and crucial position. It stands as an advocate for the Global South (23), a role it assumes with a commitment to representation and support, devoid of colonial, hegemonic, or ideological baggage.

India's aspiration to represent the interests and voices of seven billion people across Latin America, Africa, and Asia is a testament to its bridge-building function, aiming to foster dialogue and cooperation between the Western bloc and the 'DragonBear' modus vivendi. This initiative

is particularly significant in light of the credibility challenges faced by these blocs for various reasons. The recent G20 Summit in New Delhi (24) and the resultant joint declaration underscore India's ambitious geopolitical and geoeconomic goals for the future in engaging with those regions that may become a main arena of the competition between the US, China, and Russia. Against this backbone, India's ambitions are geared towards creating a unifying narrative that transcends divisive and fragmenting approaches, showcasing India's ability to mediate and align diverse global and regional interests.

Moreover, India's commitment to providing services and products to the least developed nations, many of which are heavily reliant on economic and financial aid by international organisations, is emblematic of its broader vision. This commitment aligns with India's domestic goal of uplifting millions of its own most impoverished population. In doing so, India positions itself as a unique model of development and diplomacy, one that neither the West, with its colonial past, nor the 'DragonBear', with their current hegemonic ambitions, can replicate. This distinctive approach, which eschews the pitfalls of past global powers, positions India not just as a mediator but as a leader in forging a more inclusive and equitable global order.

Future Horizons: Assessing India's Role as a Bridge between the Antagonists

India's strategic trajectory in the international arena, particularly amid the burgeoning competition in the context of the fourth industrial revolution, is marked by a keen interest in deepening cooperation with the US. This collaboration aims to diversify India's industrial, economic, and defence sectors, positioning it advantageously in the global power landscape. The US-China rivalry, while a source of global tension, has naturally created favourable conditions for India, catalysing its emergence as a significant geoeconomic beneficiary. India's strategic economic agreements, including trade and technology deals with the US and bilateral defence agreements, reflect a concerted effort to reduce dependency on China or Russia in some of these domains.

Concurrently, India maintains a pragmatic interest in Russia, particularly in the realms of key commodities, fertilisers, defence cooperation, and

diplomatic support, including Moscow's endorsement of New Delhi's bid for permanent membership in the UNSC (25). Russia's consistent backing of India's stance on Kashmir further cements this relationship. In its dealings with China, India is poised to navigate a rather controlled rivalry, maintaining open communication channels to mitigate potential escalatory effects from further border tensions. Currently, both India and China value a predictable and stable phase in their bilateral and regional relations, recognising the importance of such stability for boosting economic growth and improving trade partnerships in an increasingly volatile global environment.

India's diplomatic approach is characterised by a careful balancing act. It oscillates between aligning with the West (including the US, European Union, and Quad) and engaging with China and Russia, avoiding definitive alliances in favour of a more fluid stance of strategic autonomy (26). This strategy allows India to mediate and build bridges, fostering communication and partnerships across the spectrum of global powers. Unique among middle powers, India can prioritise its own interests first and foremost, a privilege afforded by its growing geoeconomic influence, rising geopolitical prominence underpinned by military strength, and a national self-confidence buoyed by a consistent political leadership. This trifecta—economic clout, geopolitical assertiveness, and domestic political stability—forms the cornerstone of India's success in navigating the complex landscape of international relations.

As the global order evolves into a new epoch, India's adept manoeuvring between major global antagonists not only enhances its own position but also contributes to reshaping the dynamics of global power play. India's journey in this era is not just about asserting its own interests; it is about redefining the art of balancing in a highly volatile and unpredictable world, making it a pivotal actor in the unfolding of twenty-first-century geopolitics.

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Assessing India's Stewardship of G20

Leslie Vinjamuri

At its inception, the G20 faced a comparatively benign geopolitical moment. Originally conceived as an agile and more inclusive format that brought together the leading international economies, it proved especially critical to securing an effective response to the 2008 financial crisis, something the G7 would have struggled to do on its own, and signalled the need for broader economic cooperation and a new economic reality that economic power was no longer tightly held by only a few economies (1). Instead, multiple significant economic powers had emerged and were now, in effect, the collective guardians of the international economy.

In 2009, China's share of global GDP was far less, at around 9 percent (2). China was perceived as a challenge rather than a more fundamental threat to US national security. The UK was on the cusp of the 'golden

era' of relations with China. Russia was still, then, a member of the G8. In domestic terms, American decision-makers continued to believe in the value of free trade in general, and to negotiate multilateral free trade deals. India's rise was significant, its partnership with the US strong and developing, but it had not entered a more conflictual relationship with China.

Fast forward to 2022 and the launch of India's G20 presidency. The geopolitical and geoeconomic context has transformed, but not for the better. First, relations between the major geopolitical powers have declined markedly to the point that they no longer work together to drive forward a cooperative agenda at the G20. Instead, it is necessary to work around tensions between these major powers. Relations between the US and Russia have worsened since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and took a drastic turn after its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The relationship between the US and China was first unsettled by a tariff war then began to decline rapidly during the pandemic, and especially after China's imposition of the National Security Law in Hong Kong in 2020. Intensified geopolitical competition in the realm of technology and national security means that even when relations between these two powers have stabilised, they have not fundamentally improved.

A second factor that fundamentally altered the context for G20 leadership was the new politics of anti-trade that has been embedded in the US Congress, especially, but also across virtually the whole of the foreign policy establishment in the US (3). The continued political and electoral significance of a group of voters who have suffered the negative impacts of neoliberalism, globalisation, and multilateral free trade deals has altered the US enthusiasm and ambition for being a champion of globalisation and reduced its interest in economic cooperation.

The combination of geopolitical tensions, geoeconomic competition, and anti-trade politics emanating from the original champion of international trade cooperation also created a context of stalled multilateralism, especially at the UN Security Council and the World Trade Organization, and increased the stakes for a successful G20.

The more immediate context of India's G20 presidency was even more inhospitable to international cooperation among the 20 leading economic powers. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, less than a year before India took over the leadership of the G20, the war- and sanctions-induced debt distress among developing countries, rising fuel and food prices, and the climate crisis fuelled a polycrisis. The October 2023 attacks by Hamas on Israel and Israel's retaliatory war against Hamas, with its grave humanitarian consequences for the Palestinians, created a crisis for the North and the South, inspiring heightened allegations of the West's hypocrisy and double standards. These two major wars served as the geopolitical bookends of India's G20, hailing an ever more fractured international climate for cooperative economic stewardship of the kind the G20 was designed to enable.

India and the G20

This context created a unique challenge but also a distinct opportunity for India's G20 leadership. The geopolitical deadlock among major powers, and the fracturing between the North and South, the US and China, and the West and the rest, provided both a vacuum and an opportunity for international leadership.

Three factors were particularly distinctive in India's G20 presidency: southern leadership, the nation-building dimension of the G20, and India's role as an emerging power closely allied with the US.

Southern Leadership and a Development Agenda at the G20

As grievances from developing countries escalated, India's leadership honed in on the series of Global South presidencies. It forged one of the most significant international instances of southern-based leadership in a multilateral framework that included both great powers and developing countries. India capitalised necessarily on the absence of cooperation among these great powers to present its leadership of the G20 as a mechanism for advancing a cooperative southern leadership that emphasised the continuity of southern leadership across four G20 presidencies—first Indonesia (2022), then India, Brazil (2024), and South Africa (2025).

India arrived on the global stage at a time when many countries across the developing world felt the absence of global leadership, and appeared to suffer the impacts of the West's anti-neoliberal and anti-global turn. Developing countries suffered a severe debt burden and rising food and fuel prices worsened by sanctions-induced inflation. The 2022 annual high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly saw Southern resistance in the face of a concerted attempt by the West to pressure Global South states to support sanctions against Russia and to embrace NATO's condemnation of Russia (4).

India skillfully leveraged its strong and developing partnership with the US, its relationship with Russia, and its southern partnerships to manage the complexity of a G20 that could easily have come to a standstill had the major powers chosen to get in the way of this southern momentum.

India championed an agenda that stressed development. As Samir Saran has said, southern leadership of the G20 has ensured a move away from a banker's G20 to one of a people's G20 (5). India's focus on inclusive growth anchored to the Sustainable Development Goals, expanding digital public infrastructure, green development, advancing gender equality, and reforming multilateral institutions reflected this commitment.

Nation-Building through a People-Centred G20

In attempting to characterise the meaning and significance of India's G20, India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said that the G20 was about "getting India ready for the world and getting the world ready for India". The first part of this equation—getting India ready for the world—was accomplished through a strategy that was designed to increase the visibility of India's G20 across the whole of the country. The Indian G20 took the form of a travelling road show with 200 meetings in 60 Indian cities in all 28 states (6). As India's citizens and international travellers arrived at airports across the countries, G20 banners and separate immigration lines were on display. The same was true in cities that hosted T20 events, with signage displayed throughout host cities. Cities raced to complete construction projects and prepare festivities before the arrival of G20 officials. This had

the effect of engaging a far broader segment of the population, and building national as well as local pride, but also embedding the G20 in the imagination of Indians. The G20 took on the feeling of a G20 that was a vibrant and inclusive city and peoples-based project rather than a formal closed-door meeting of elites. It anchored local goals to a global agenda and, in this way, helped build a sense of solidarity in India around India's international engagement, not merely the role of local host.

India's Role as an Emerging Power

The G20 itself also allowed India to get 'the world ready for India', in the words of Jaishankar. India chose, in this case, to anchor its G20 leadership in a narrative that stressed its role as a voice of the Global South. This ambition to connect its leadership to its predecessors in Indonesia, but also its successors in Brazil and South Africa, was also visible at the meetings of the T20 across India, which saw many panels comprising leading voices from these four states.

The significance of India's leadership of the G20 was reinforced by and reflected its status as a rising power. India's close ties with the US—with origins at least as far back as the signing of the US-India strategic partnership in 2005—reinforced and were in fact an essential part of this. India-US ties were based in part on a narrative of shared democracies and reinforced by the geopolitical reality of India's strategic location and a shared perception of the threat and challenge presented by China. Together, this underpinned and gave momentum to the deepening of military, economic, and technological ties which was visibly on display throughout the 12 months of India's G20 leadership. India's success in managing southern leadership of the G20 alongside a modern form of nonalignment (from the US and Russia at the UN), while deepening its partnership with the world's leading military power even during its G20 leadership was an exercise in geopolitical savvy.

In June 2023, just two months before the G20 Leaders' Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was given a state summit in Washington D.C. That summit further underscored the significance of the US-India trade relationship, but also especially its defence cooperation. The two great powers signed an Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology,

thereby demonstrating the forward-looking nature of this important security partnership (7). The fact that this occurred in the run up to the G20 meeting demonstrated the US's commitment to India's success, and demonstrated Washington's willingness to support New Delhi's presidency and to actively work towards ensuring a successful meeting in September.

On other dimensions, also, India's emerging power continued to unfold alongside its G20 presidency. In the September before it assumed leadership of the G20, India's economy surpassed that of the UK. A few months after its presidency began, in April 2023, India's population surpassed that of China (8), (9).

Achievements

Ultimately, the embrace of a Global South leadership nested within a multilateral framework that included the US, Europe, and China may endure as the most significant undertaking of the G20's leadership. The fact that the New Delhi G20 Leaders' Declaration was agreed and approved unanimously by all member states also translated into a narrative of India's success (10).

The discrete measures agreed were significant (11). Chief among these was the success in securing the African Union membership of the G20. The nature of that engagement was deferred for successive G20s to formalise. The sheer fact of achieving a communique at a tortuous moment for international relations demonstrated India's resolve and determination but also its diplomatic skill. The agreement to establish the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor presents a potentially consequential alternative to China's infrastructure offer, and the call for "better, bigger and more effective" multilateral development banks and a reformed membership on the UN Security Council served to keep the momentum around an agenda of reformed multilateralism, including especially the need for greater capital for lending (12).

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Redefining the Subcontinent through 'Neighbourhood First'

Rahul Roy-Chaudhury

India's revitalised and official 'neighbourhood first' policy was visibly demonstrated at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first swearing-in ceremony in May 2014, with leaders of the other South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) states in attendance. Modi's first foreign visit as prime minister was to Bhutan (June 2014), and his visit to Sri Lanka in March 2015 marked the first bilateral prime ministerial visit in 28 years. At Modi's second swearing-in ceremony in May 2019, leaders of the other six Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) countries attended for the first time, with Modi's first foreign visit in his second term being to the Maldives. Modi's first foreign visit after COVID-19 was to Bangladesh in March 2021. The first visit in 2024 of India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar was to Nepal. These events visibly demonstrate the Modi government's neighbourhood-first approach.

Ties with the neighbourhood have been prioritised by Indian leaders since independence, primarily for reasons of stability and security. A peaceful neighbourhood would serve as a buffer against regional and global instability and volatility. This required India to exercise a leadership role in terms of its dominance in size and population in the subcontinent. India's prime ministers implemented this in different ways. Jawaharlal Nehru signed treaties of friendship with Bhutan (1949) and Nepal (1950); Indira Gandhi's assertive and realist approach helped create Bangladesh; and Inder Kumar Gujral sought India to be a "responsible big brother" (1). "The concept of 'neighbourhood first' came into the lexicon" around 2008 (2), (3). In effect, it is a "continuation of foreign policy...not something specific to governments" (4).

Rhetoric

Nonetheless, the Modi government's neighbourhood-first policy is distinct in terms of optics (visibility and activity) and substance (implementation and impact). It also emphasises geoeconomics, along with defence and security.

The policy focuses on managing relations with eight countries in India's immediate neighbourhood, comprising the other seven SAARC member states (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) and Myanmar (5). Seychelles and Mauritius increasingly feature in the neighbourhood-first policy but are not part of India's immediate neighbourhood. Ties with Sri Lanka and the Maldives have also been augmented (since March 2015) by India's policy of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) in the Indian Ocean (along with other maritime neighbours) (6).

The neighbourhood-first policy is officially stated to be "one of the fundamental pillars of India's diplomacy" (7). Its rationale is that the neighbourhood is "as much a domestic security and economic imperative, as it is strategic in foreign policy requirement". This is accentuated by "complex civilizational bonds of history, culture, language and geography" (8).

It was also clear that India's prosperity and growth were linked to that of its neighbours; India could not develop unless its neighbours developed,

and India's development could help neighbourhood development. Yet, with India's fast-growing economy projected to become the third largest in the world by the end of the decade, despite economic and security challenges in the neighbourhood, this view is under challenge. In this context, Jaishankar prioritised the requirement of a "benign neighbourhood" for India's current stage of economic growth (9).

Notably, the cabinet secretary had issued a letter to all government ministries and departments informing them that neighbourhood-first was "the central pillar" of India's foreign policy to ensure a coordinated approach to partner countries that was "consultative, non-reciprocal and outcome oriented". A secretary-level inter-ministerial coordination group has been set up as a high-level mechanism to mainstream India's neighbourhood-first policy, including on all issues related to strengthening border infrastructure (10).

The objective of the policy is to create mutually beneficial and people-oriented partnerships with a focus on the three C's: connectivity (including infrastructure projects such as cross-border roads, railways, inland waterways and ports), commerce (trade and investment linkages), and cultural commonalities (including enhancing people-to-people contacts and capacity-building).

Bilateral Implementation

There has been visible and substantive implementation of the policy in terms of project delivery in the subcontinent, primarily on a bilateral basis to accentuate India's relative strengths. The single exception is Pakistan. An early outreach by Modi towards the Nawaz Sharif government in May 2014 failed (with attacks against the Pathankot air base in January 2016 and an army brigade headquarters near Uri in September 2016 following), resulting in an end to the normalisation of relations until an abrogation of Pakistan's policy of cross-border terrorism (11).

India committed over US\$3 billion to Afghanistan's developmental efforts (12). Since the Taliban regime took control in August 2021, it has reopened its diplomatic mission in Kabul with a focus on delivering humanitarian assistance to the people. India's largest developmental

partner, Bangladesh, has been extended concessional credits of nearly US\$10 billion for over 40 projects, including high-impact community development projects. In November 2023, three India-assisted infrastructural projects were inaugurated, bolstering railway, power, and port connectivity in the Bay of Bengal region. India is Nepal's largest trading partner and foreign investor, has provided key power generation infrastructure and facilities, and facilitates transit for most of Nepal's third-country trade. India provided financial support of US\$3.9 billion during Sri Lanka's worst financial crisis in 2022. The largest ongoing infrastructure project in the Maldives is the India-funded Greater Male Connectivity Project. India's lines of credit (LOCs) to its neighbours increased from US\$3.3 billion in 2014 to US\$14.7 billion in 2020; indeed, 50 percent of India's global soft lending goes to its neighbours (13).

India is also the first responder to many humanitarian disasters in the neighbourhood, including the tsunami in Sri Lanka, the water crisis in Maldives, and earthquakes in Nepal and Afghanistan. It also provided Indian-manufactured vaccines to the neighbouring countries during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Modi government's neighbourhood-first policy also prioritises defence and security cooperation. Joint military exercises are conducted with the Maldives, Myanmar, and Nepal; coordinated patrolling with Bangladesh; and arms and equipment are provided to Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles. Defence LoCs have been extended to Sri Lanka (US\$150 million), Bangladesh (US\$500 million), Mauritius (US\$100 million), the Maldives (US\$50 million), and Seychelles US\$100 million).

Subregional Implementation

Given the Pakistani security establishment's intransigence and the resultant suspension of SAARC summits for a decade, the Modi government has focused on subregional cooperation through key minilaterals to augment and implement its neighbourhood-first policy (minus Pakistan).

Fourteen priority sectors have been identified for cooperation in the Bay of Bengal through BIMSTEC, involving Bangladesh, Bhutan, India,

Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. The Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal initiative (known as BBIN) also provides a subregional architecture of connectivity in areas such as water resources management, power, and transportation.

In the security domain, the quadrilateral Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) brings together in separate meetings the national security advisors (NSAs) and deputy NSAs of India, the Maldives, Mauritius, and Sri Lanka, with Bangladesh and Seychelles as observers. The 6th NSA-level meeting of the CSC was held in December 2023, with a focus on maritime safety and security, countering terrorism and radicalisation, cybersecurity, and the protection of critical infrastructure and technology. Maritime domain awareness (MDA) in the Indian Ocean has also been enhanced through the Indian initiative of linking radar systems with its maritime neighbours. Both CSC and MDA efforts have synergy with SAGAR.

Challenges

Yet, the success for the neighbourhood-first policy has been mixed as India's neighbours do not have anything like a reciprocal 'India-first' policy, and even those who rhetorically stated it in the past do not follow it currently. Until recently, the Maldives had an official 'India first' policy. But, having recently been elected on an 'India out' campaign, Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu has demanded the withdrawal by 15 March 2024 of India's 80 Indian armed forces personnel deployed in the country to operate India-sponsored radars and surveillance aircraft, including for humanitarian missions.

The neighbourhood's relations with India are at times strained due to negative perceptions of India's subcontinental dominance in terms of size, population, and now economic and military strength, and the impact of India's domestic political interface in relation to the neighbourhood's domestic politics. Even though India remains a key factor in the domestic politics of the neighbourhood, its attempts to seek a 'non-partisan' role is challenged by the polarisation of politics in other subcontinental countries (14). This is exacerbated by the 'rejuvenated' 'China factor' in the neighbourhood's diplomacy (15). Other than Bhutan, all of India's neighbours have joined China's controversial Belt and Road Initiative for energy and infrastructure upgrades. China being Sri Lanka's largest

supplier of arms since the 1950s and Bangladesh being the second-largest market for China's arms in the subcontinent after Pakistan are deeply sensitive issues for India (16), exacerbated by India's tense relations with China since the Galwan clash of June 2020.

The absence of a comprehensive document articulating the Modi government's official neighbourhood-first policy is bewildering. The most wide-ranging public account remains the 25 July 2023 report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs on 'India's Neighbourhood First' Policy (17). This lacuna needs to be urgently rectified for greater visibility and impact.

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Beyond Oil: India's Diversifying Play in West Asia

Max Abrahms and Kabir Taneja

Over the past decade, under the stewardship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has actively pursued the development of stronger relations with West Asia, including in both the Persian Gulf and the Levant. This has perplexed many observers, both domestic and foreign, given the geopolitical and ideological tensions among many of the countries with each other. From the post-Second World War era on non-alignment to the current ideations of strategic autonomy and multipolarity, India has sought mutually beneficial pragmatic partnerships with countries throughout the region.

For example, within the first week of 2024, Gujarat welcomed the president of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, for an investors summit (1). A few days later, India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar flew to Iran to gain a better window into

the emerging crisis in the Red Sea stemming from growing Houthi threats on international shipping partners (2).

The bridge-building between New Delhi and capitals in the Gulf has been a hallmark of India's shift from transactional bilateral relationships over energy security and migrant workers to a set of more substantial, enduring strategic relations befitting a global power. To this end, a direct leadership-to-leadership outreach was initiated to showcase both intent and opportunity. Modi's visit to the UAE in August 2015 was the first such high-level visit by an Indian prime minister to the emirates in 34 years (3). In February 2019, New Delhi hosted Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) for a state visit. This was more than a simple decision, as MBS was thick in the middle of the murder investigation of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and, at the time, banished from most Western capitals (4).

India is understandably keen to expand financial ties through investment and trade with Gulf partners, which would benefit from geopolitical calm. The challenges are severe and obvious, but can hopefully be ameliorated with time and diplomacy. Despite the current tensions since Hamas launched Operation Al Aqsa Flood on 7 October 2023, regional achievements have not been absent in the last few years. New Delhi recognises the potential benefits of the Abraham Accords, which "normalised" diplomatic and political relations between several Arab states (particularly the UAE) and Israel in 2021. A month after the accords, an important new "minilateral" comprised of India, Israel, the US, and UAE was officially formed, known as the I2U2, to deepen cooperation between the four countries in terms of supply chains, clean energy, food security, technology, and military cooperation (5). The first I2U2 leader-level summit was held in July 2022 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, where vaccines and related medical issues became a major area of collaboration (6).

India hosted the highly successful G20 summit in September 2023, which resulted in a memorandum of understanding signed between India, Saudi Arabia, UAE, the European Union, France, Italy, Germany, and the US to develop an India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor. While some saw this as a potential counter to China's Belt and Road Initiative, the purpose is not to contain China but to mitigate risk from

geopolitical chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz or now even the Suez Canal and the Red Sea.

The geoeconomics push has also come with a more sustained development of defence cooperation. Military-to-military ties involving India are improving. Over the past two years, all three arms of the Indian armed forces—the army, navy, and air force—have conducted joint exercises and exchanges with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt, among other regional countries, in bilateral and multilateral formats. Since 2019, India has mobilised Operation Sankalp, deploying its warships in and around the Gulf of Oman and Strait of Hormuz amidst tensions between the US and Iran. Since then, over 40 Indian warships have participated in this endeavour, escorting more than 62 million tons of cargo onboard Indian-registered merchant ships (7). Operation Sankalp furthers India's anti-piracy activities in the Arabian Sea, which have been ongoing since 2008.

Notably, India has pursued outreach in the region even among countries that have strained relations, including Israel, Iran, and the Arab states. Bilateral ties with Israel on defence matters are strengthening. In 2023, the country's arms sales reached US\$12.5 billion (8), and India has regularly been the country's largest export market for military hardware. Moreover, India and Israel have also become co-producers of important military platforms. In January 2024, the Indian Navy launched the Drishti-10 Medium Altitude Long Endurance drone. The Drishti is developed in India, with the original platform based on the Israeli Hermes-900 UAV by Elbit Systems (9).

Growing military relations with Israel have not precluded cooperation with Iran over unrelated geopolitical issues. For example, India and Iran have continued their robust exchanges with respect to Afghanistan since the fall of Kabul and the return of the Taliban in 2021. Beyond Afghanistan, Indian investments in Chabahar Port continue to trickle in, and its commitment to the International North-South Transport Corridor remains strong. Modi met Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in 2023 (10). This bilateral relationship has been checked due to Iran's regional unpopularity and US sanctions against it.

Despite the vicissitudes in the region since the October 2023 Hamas terrorist massacre, India is committed to improving relations based on shared interests. This approach is a quintessential example of how nation-states can conduct pragmatic, realist relations notwithstanding ideological divergences. Although India maintains its tradition of 'non-alignment', stronger ties with the US create many opportunities in the region while delimiting others. The net effect is positive for both New Delhi and the region.

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India's Quad Diplomacy: A Vision for Regional Cooperation

Satoru Nagao and Pratinashree Basu

In 2024, India will host the leaders' summit of the Quad, a diplomatic partnership with the US, Japan, and Australia. Initially met with scepticism and concerns from various quarters, including China, the Quad has gradually gained traction as a platform for like-minded countries to collaborate on issues of mutual concern. It serves as a forum for strategic dialogue, coordination, and cooperation to maintain a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific. As neither an economic bloc nor a formal security grouping, the Quad remains a unique platform that, despite having faced highs and lows and near obsolescence, has managed to not only find scope for staying together but also increasingly expand its mandate. It has pledged to cooperate as "a force for good, committed to bringing tangible benefits" (1) across the Indo-Pacific.

India has played a significant role in shaping the Quad agenda since its reinvigoration in 2017. New Delhi, previously often identified as the

“weak link” (2) in the grouping, has graduated to become a cornerstone during the Quad’s current phase. If the Indo-Pacific has served as a crucial geography for India’s diplomatic outreach, the Quad has served as a vital platform to demonstrate India’s capacity and credibility as a reliable partner country. As the Indo-Pacific region develops and garners more and more attention, significance, and complexity, now is the best time to rethink and re-evaluate the purpose of the grouping, particularly India’s place and role in it. There are two key questions to address: First, what is the Quad and what factors have contributed to its emergence as a significant player in shaping the Indo-Pacific’s new regional order since 2017? Second, what are the primary motivations and strategic interests driving India’s active engagement with the Quad, and how do they align with the broader regional and global dynamics in the Indo-Pacific?

The Genesis of the Quad: Revival and Relevance

The late Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was the pioneer of the Quad. In his ‘Confluence of Two Seas’ speech at the Indian Parliament in 2007, he said: “By Japan and India coming together in this way, this ‘broader Asia’ will evolve into an immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the United States of America and Australia. Open and transparent, this network will allow people, goods, capital, and knowledge to flow freely” (3). This was the first explanation of how the Quad could protect the “free and open Indo-Pacific.”

In 2012, just before he was sworn in as prime minister for a second term, Abe published a short article, ‘Asia’s Democratic Security Diamond,’ detailing the security background of the cooperation among the four Quad countries (4). As the article showed, there were three reasons to introduce the Quad concept: regional cohesion, a counter-China strategy amid the country’s rising advances and unilateral actions, and the importance of India.

The 2017 iteration of the Quad shook off the ambiguity of its initial years due to the events that took place between 2012 and 2020, with Abe returning to office as prime minister in 2012 and several instances of Chinese aggression towards the Quad countries (5). Since 2017, all four countries have stepped up their bilateral and minilateral

engagement through diplomatic and security platforms (6), with the first ministerial meeting taking place in 2019. The COVID-19 and post-pandemic years have been the most active for the grouping, with the launch of the Quad Vaccine Partnership and the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness. As Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi underscored during his opening remarks at the 2023 Quad Leaders' Summit, "Through our shared efforts, we are giving practical dimensions to our vision of a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific" (7).

A significant development has been the aligning of shared concerns surrounding China's assertive actions across the region (8) and the intent to find an agenda for cooperation that can act as a bulwark. Therefore, in addition to the function-based cooperative framework that is geared towards addressing pressing challenges faced by the region across sectors geostrategically, the Quad has also developed as an effective counter-China strategy militarily, economically, and politically.

The Quad and India: Aligning Interests and Ambitions

Through its phase of revival and current activity, India has been a constant and consistent partner, particularly as the country's foreign policy outreach converged significantly with the evolving mandate of the Quad, even as it deepened bilateral ties with each of the three other countries. Notably, India has been able to do so not only through strengthening defence and security partnerships but also by participating and contributing to agendas like climate change, health, infrastructure, maritime security, and technology. New Delhi played a leading role in the 2021 vaccine partnership and also hosted the Quad counterterrorism tabletop exercise in 2019. India participates in several military exercises (such as 'Malabar', 'Vajra Prahar', 'Cope India', 'Yudh Abhyas', 'JIMEX', 'AUSINDEX', and 'Tiger Triumph') and has various levels of security engagements with the different Quad members. For instance, with the US, it has signed the General Security of Military Information Agreement, the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (9). It also has other developmental and trilateral and plurilateral initiatives, such as the Australia-India-Japan supply chain resilience initiative.

All these participatory mechanisms and cooperation frameworks are in tandem with India's foreign policy initiatives and goals—including the 'Act East' policy, 'Security and Growth for All in the Region' (or SAGAR) concept, and 'Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative' for maritime security—and its objective of engaging as a net security provider (10) in the Indo-Pacific. The Quad, in turn, allows India a medium for balancing against China's assertions and advances while the absence of a 'security' objective for the grouping also creates scope for engaging with countries across the Indo-Pacific without securitising such efforts (11).

While India's engagement with the Quad is driven by a combination of strategic, security, economic, and geopolitical factors, it is substantially influenced by its core foreign policy strategy of balancing while preserving diplomatic manoeuvrability and multi-alignment (12). The country's foreign policy is guided by diversifying its strategic partnerships. By engaging with the Quad, India aligns with a group of countries that share a commitment to democratic values, the rule of law, and a rules-based international order. This diversification of partnerships enhances New Delhi's diplomatic leverage and strengthens its position on the global stage. While India's engagement in the Quad is nuanced and pragmatic, it underscores the country's evolving role as a key player in shaping the future of the Indo-Pacific region.

Going Forward: Adapting for Success

The Quad holds significant importance for India in the context of its foreign policy and strategic outlook. First, the grouping provides India a platform to bolster its strategic partnerships with like-minded democracies. As a growing global power, New Delhi recognises the importance of collaborating with nations across key issues of global concern and key opportunities that can be leveraged and strengthened. In this regard, the Quad aligns perfectly with India's foreign policy objective of deepening ties with partners in an increasingly complex global landscape. Second, the Quad allows India to enhance and deepen its security and defence cooperation with some of the world's most advanced military powers. India's participation in the Quad bolsters its defence capabilities and provides a forum for exchanging strategic insights and intelligence sharing. This collaboration is vital for addressing

regional security concerns, including those related to maritime security and counterterrorism, and ensuring the free and open navigation of critical sea lanes.

Third, the Quad serves as a mechanism for India to actively engage in shaping the regional order in the Indo-Pacific. With its extensive coastline and growing maritime interests, India has a keen interest in maintaining a stable and rules-based order in the region free from both military and political influence. The Quad's commitment to principles such as freedom of navigation, adherence to international law, and infrastructure development align with India's vision for the Indo-Pacific. Many of these objectives focus on non-traditional issues, which ensures a degree of de-politicisation and more common ground for constructive action. India's participation in the Quad allows it to promote these shared objectives. Finally, the Quad opens doors for India to tap into a network of economic opportunities and regional growth. With the member countries representing a significant portion of the global economy, the Quad fosters economic connectivity, trade, and investment. India, as a rapidly expanding economy, benefits from this economic engagement, which aligns with its ambitions for regional economic integration and development. At the same time, it can position itself suitably to deliver and respond to the challenges that the region faces. The Quad thus holds immense significance for India, serving as a platform for strengthening strategic partnerships, enhancing security cooperation, shaping the regional order, and fostering economic growth. It reflects India's commitment to maintaining regional stability and advancing its role as a responsible and influential player in the Indo-Pacific.

Sustaining the momentum of strong cooperation among members is essential for the Quad to become the leading security framework in this region while also delivering developmental benefits. What is and will continue to be vital going forward is to build on existing convergences and not allow issues external to the group's immediate mandate to jeopardise its work.

To create cohesion, the Quad should prepare a consensus that indicates what regional order it wants to create in the Indo-Pacific and publish this as a charter. All Quad members are aware of their potential to

lead the Indo-Pacific into the future. To realise this potential, the four countries need to manage their Quad agendas and roles with careful consideration. As India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar observed at the 2nd India-Japan Forum in 2023, the "Quad is the ability for countries in alliances to keep their alliances, but to look beyond alliances. And it is this, I would say, leap of strategic imagination which actually the leaders and the governments of Quad have shown" (13). Now is the time to do so.

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Manoeuvring the China Conundrum

Cleo Paskal

India is an enormous problem for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Through India's simple existence—let alone its success in improving the lives of its citizens—it undermines key justifications for the legitimacy and actions of the CCP, including:

- It takes a dictatorship to run a country of over a billion people;
- People of faith (such as Uyghurs, independent Christians, and Falun Gong) are inherently a danger to rulers and must be 'controlled';
- A heavily state-controlled economy is the best way to deliver growth to the majority of the population;
- Rule *by* law instead of rule *of* law is a better system.

Meanwhile, India, right next door, is a pluralistic democracy that, despite myriad challenges, is delivering increasing literacy, life expectancy, and economic opportunities to a population that is larger than that of China.

India is also—as seen with its well-received G20 initiatives (1) and unanimous leaders’ declaration (2)—a global power that can deftly bridge a range of nations and craft actual win-win projects (unlike China’s win-win projects, which often seem to mean China wins twice) such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (3).

China’s Concept of Comprehensive National Power

As such, it has been apparent since at least 1962 that China has been keen to ‘knock India down a peg’. The methods used by Beijing have been varied, complex, and often opaque. To understand its approach, it helps to look at the CCP’s concept of Comprehensive National Power.

The China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, a Ministry of State Security-linked think tank, described Comprehensive National Power as the “total of the powers or strengths of a country in economics, military affairs, science and technology, education, resources, and influence” (4). Functionally, it is even more broad than that, and it drives policy (5).

The CCP considers Comprehensive National Power an objective metric, and the pursuit of Comprehensive National Power can justify just about anything (6). Given that Comprehensive National Power is relative, that can be achieved either through outcompeting others, or by knocking others down.

One way China works to increase its own Comprehensive National Power while decreasing that of others is through ‘unrestricted warfare’. A 1999 book by the same name (7), written by two People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force Colonels, details a ‘no rules apply’ approach to targeting an enemy. This does not mean ‘actual’ fighting is neglected; rather, it is one of a very wide range of weapons in the toolkit that China employs, guided by the perception of efficacy rather than morality or law.

What Does this Mean for India?

Given that China views India as a near existential threat, it has waged unrestricted warfare against India in an exceptionally broad manner, intending to dramatically lower India's relative Comprehensive National Power (8). That has meant trying to weaken India economically and socially, working to prevent it from becoming a viable location to redirect supply chains away from China, isolating New Delhi from potential strategic partners, damaging India's international reputation, and more.

This has involved, as a small example:

- Chinese-linked hacks of the Indian electrical grid (9);
- Strategic investments in Indian tech start-ups (10);
- Blocking attempts at the United Nations to sanction those India considers terrorists (11);
- Actively courting India's neighbours—in one case, possibly even interfering in an election (12)—with the overt goal of gaining strategic advantage (13);
- Spying extensively on India, including from the sea (14) and air (15);
- Potentially using “cognitive warfare” to affect India's internal politics (16);
- Waging proxy war against India using, among others, Indian Maoists (17), the Maldives (18), and “iron brother” Pakistan (19).

And then there is the border, where China seems unwilling to reach an agreement and where it has launched overt warfare, as seen most recently in Galwan in June 2020.

It was after that attack, in which the PLA killed 20 Indian soldiers, that India's deft counters to China's unrestricted warfare started to become noticeable. India's counters have been appropriately broad, to the point of being properly considered a strategy of Comprehensive National Defence.

Comprehensive National Defence

The Indian defence and strategic community had been thinking about these issues for a long time; in 2013, Lt. Gen. PK Singh, Maj. Gen. Y.K. Gera and Captain Sandeep Dewan edited a book called *Comprehensive National Power: A Model for India* (20).

The first major move came within weeks of Galwan, when India banned 59 Chinese apps, including TikTok and WeChat, as they posed a “threat to sovereignty and integrity of India” (21). Concerns over the apps included that they could be used for harvesting metadata to refine AI systems with military applications, be used to gather information for blackmail and commercial advantage, and being delivery systems for influence operations (22). India accurately identified the apps as unrestricted warfare weapons and banned them. Apart from being a defensive move, it was estimated to have knocked off up to US\$6 billion off the valuation of TikTok’s parent company, ByteDance (23), striking an effective economic blow against China.

Also in 2020, after Galwan, India restricted foreign direct investment from China and others to curb “opportunistic takeovers/acquisitions of Indian companies due to the current COVID-19 pandemic” (24). Since then, it has expanded its economic defence and has investigated Chinese companies operating in India for money laundering, in one case seizing more than US\$700 from Xiaomi, a smartphone manufacturer (25). It has also rejected major proposed Chinese investments (including in an electric vehicle plant (26)).

This level of Comprehensive National Defence to counter China’s Comprehensive National Power attack has been some of the most innovative and effective globally; when the US administration tried to follow India’s example and ban TikTok and WeChat, it failed.

China is still attacking where and how it can and is doing damage, but India has another layer to its defences that it may take China a while to counter—the Chinese strategic community consistently underestimates India. For example, the aforementioned book, *Unrestricted Warfare*, makes extensive reference to both Chinese and Western strategic texts but makes no mention of Indian strategic texts, such as the classic *Arthashastra*.

It is also possible that Galwan displayed a misunderstanding of the psychology of the Indian soldier. The PLA may have thought that by killing the commanding officer first, Indian soldiers would scatter. Instead, they were more motivated to regroup and counterattack, which they did to great effect.

That said, the CCP is likely learning from its mistakes—as much as its Han nationalism filter will allow—and so another of India's arrows in its defence quiver is becoming more important.

Comprehensive Multinational Defence

India has been innovating something that scares China even more—developing Comprehensive *Multinational* Defence. China prefers to be able to take on countries bilaterally, or via compromised multilateral organisations. When countries work together in tight cooperation outside of China's sphere of influence, it weakens Beijing's control (and so its relative Comprehensive National Power).

This is why India's growth of networks of strong bilateral ties, such as with Japan, its focused targeted partnerships like the Quad, and more broad engagements such as the G20 are a real problem for China. As is the potential future of increased, deeper defence, shown in new moves such as the announcement of the sale of BrahMos missiles to the Philippines in 2021 (27) and the first-ever India-Saudi Arabia military drills in early 2024 (28).

So, China is using unrestricted warfare to try to break these ties. According to the Pentagon's 2022 *China Military Power Report*, China “employed a wide range of diplomatic tools” to “subvert” the Quad (29). It is also spreading anti-India narratives, including in state media (30), with the goal of making India seem like a less desirable partner, and is allegedly backing Indian media promoting pro-China lines (31). A key goal is to try to isolate India, including by presenting India as an undesirable partner.

India Shows the Way, But the War Continues

India is being attacked because it is successful. For India to continue that success, it would help for India to not just focus on its comprehensive

defence against unrestricted warfare, but to bring its unrestricted warfare analyses and defence into its Comprehensive Multinational Defense strategies.

For example, China's role in fueling wars in places like Gaza should be investigated for links to things like how that could affect the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, which is a direct challenge to China's Belt and Road Initiative. While rarely discussed in Washington, this is a common conversation in New Delhi.

Sharing India's strategic understanding of these complex China attacks is not only helpful for partners but will also help others to identify the means and motivations of the reputational attacks on India designed to drive wedges into partnerships that threaten China. This could mean, for example, setting up a China Unrestricted Warfare studies centre in India where those from the Quad countries, African partners, Indian Ocean nations, and the like can compare experiences and refine best practices. For example, what Sri Lanka has been through is relevant for those wanting to weaken China's grip on the Solomon Islands.

In a mindset distorted by a Comprehensive National Power prism, any partnership or development that does not involve China is a potential threat to China that must be attacked. That means, for a country like India, it is not enough to try to build a better future, it also needs to block the malign influence that will attack that future. India has been pioneering this 'block and build' approach.

The war is on. It is not the sort of war the West is used to. But India has been on the receiving end of China's attacks for decades, and it knows its neighbour well. The lunges and parries are ongoing and are likely to intensify. As the home of the Arthashastra, it is not surprising that India is innovating ways of fighting back.

New Delhi's counters are worth a broader understanding, both to learn from and to support, and, in the case of countries including the US, to make sure one is not being manipulated into taking positions that actually support China's goals.

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A New Paradigm in Economic Partnerships

Sinderpal Singh

This essay examines three key aspects of India's economic partnerships as part of a new paradigm in India's foreign policy. The first relates to the global securitisation of economic interdependence and how the Indian state has responded to this phenomenon. Second, the essay looks at the issue of free trade agreements (FTAs) and how the Indian state has sought to negotiate and conclude economic agreements that are more comprehensive, rather than just narrowly looking at FTAs. The third aspect relates to India fashioning its economic partnerships in relation to its global position vis-à-vis the Global South and the developed world.

The spectacular growth stories of several economies in Asia, specifically of countries in East Asia (known as the 'Tiger economies'), occurred between the 1960s and 1990s (1). China's remarkable economic growth in the post-reform era, between the 1980s and early 2000s,

also occurred in broadly the same period. A key characteristic driving this growth was the steady and growing internationalisation of these economies within the context of a US-led interdependent global economy. This interdependence in the economic sphere also seemed to be largely insulated from the security competition between states and even appeared to mitigate conflictual tendencies arising from competition in the security realm between states (2). However, since the early 2000s, this post-war economic-security nexus has, slowly but steadily, unravelled, reflecting a deeper systemic shift in global geopolitics, with the US and China increasingly positioned as systemic competitors in both the security and economic domains.

India embarked on its historic economic liberalisation exercise in the early 1990s, towards the end of the epoch of economic interdependence and connectivity driving economic growth. It also embarked on reorientating its foreign policy, driven, to some extent at least, by its new economic imperatives. India's 'Look East' policy and the various economic partnerships forged for the first time since independence were key examples of the country's new approach to the outside world, and broadly fit the mantra of economic liberalisation and connectivity as conduits for economic growth. However, the changing nature of the systemic geopolitical competition between the US and China began to transform the nature of the security-economics nexus within two decades of India's economic liberalisation experiment. The increasing global support for trade protectionism, especially within the US, embodied by the rapid rise of Donald Trump within the US political system, signalled the end of the earlier security-economics relationship (3). Trade deficits were now a source of vulnerability and dependence, and economic connectivity was increasingly viewed as a source of vulnerability rather than an enabler of economic growth. The zero-sum logic prevalent in many security relationships had increasingly pervaded the economic sphere. For India, a key relationship was with China, especially with Beijing being New Delhi's top trading partner from about 2013 and a formidable security challenge along the shared border and in India's immediate neighbourhood (South Asia). However, by 2019, there were growing reservations about India's increasing trade deficit with China and how it could potentially be a source of vulnerability for India within its broader security relationship with China. India's growing number of FTAs and associated economic agreements were

perceived, within India, to have benefitted other countries more than India, relatively speaking. This culminated in India's decision not to be part of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in late 2019, despite being involved in discussions on the partnership from an early stage. Concerns over an even larger trade deficit with China due to joining the RCEP largely drove the Indian decision, demonstrating a shift in Indian perceptions of the link between economics and security. Greater economic connectivity and trade deficits were now a source of vulnerability for the Indian state, instead of mitigating the conflictual aspects of its security relationship with countries such as China. In this new rendition, India's economic and security partnerships were increasingly viewed as reinforcing each other rather than being insulated, much less mitigating each other.

The second aspect of India's approach to economic partnerships, and related to the first aspect, is crafting economic partnerships that are more comprehensive than just FTAs. This shows India increasingly employs a more comprehensive and integrated approach towards its foreign economic and security policies with other states. India has embarked on building economic partnerships with its security partners, building economic and security ties in tandem with each other. The two key examples of this phenomenon are the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement and the India-United Arab Emirates (UAE) Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, both of which entered into force in 2022 (4). The India-Australia security relationship has grown significantly in recent years, both bilaterally and multilaterally, via mechanisms such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and the annual Malabar Exercises. The India-UAE security relationship has also been on a strong upward trajectory, with both countries looking to cooperate on maritime security matters and joint defence production (5). India and the UAE are also part of the new India-Middle East Economic Corridor, announced at the 2023 G20 summit. These examples suggest two trends in India's new approach to economic partnerships. Firstly, economic partnerships reinforce relationships with states in other domains, such as security cooperation, technology transfers and cybersecurity, and connect India much better within evolving global supply and production chains. Secondly, economic partnerships with other countries also help to serve India's domestic requirements and thus include labour mobility pacts and mutual recognition agreements

relating to professional accreditations and access to the services industries for Indian companies in these countries. India now approaches economic partnerships comprehensively, to help it build deeper and stronger relationships with countries with converging security interests while positioning itself favourably within evolving global supply and production chains.

The third aspect of India's new approach to economic partnerships is its attempt to serve as a bridge between the Global South and the developed world. India has been keen to aid developing countries in their economic development plans, sometimes in conjunction with developed countries like Japan. This affords developing countries, specifically in Africa, alternatives to China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative and the financing conditions that come with it. India has also sought to speak on behalf of the Global South on the need for wider representation for developing countries within global economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and even the G20 (6). India's success at enabling the African Union's membership to the G20 speaks to this aspect of its approach towards economic engagement as part of its role as a leading voice of the Global South. In this endeavour, India faces an acute challenge. China has also sought to speak on behalf of developing countries and has represented global economic institutions as serving the narrow interests of the US and its Western allies at the expense of the Global South. It has thus increasingly sought to build alternative groupings and coalitions with developing countries, pitting these against global economic institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the G20. China's drive to expand the membership of the BRICS is an example of this strategy. India, however, has sought to challenge this strategy by tempering its criticism of the current global economic order on behalf of the Global South while also trying to make existing economic institutions more representative rather than build competing institutions or groupings (7).

India, in this instance, seeks to serve as a bridge between the Global South and the developed economies, stressing the developing world's right to both economic security and autonomy while also working on areas where the developed and developing countries have mutual economic interests. Indian leaders have been wary of China's attempts

to employ concerns about economic disparity in the global economic system in conjunction with the divergence between developing countries and the US and its allies on certain key strategic issues, such as the war on Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas conflict. In this instance, India has been keen to stress the right of individual countries of the Global South to take public positions on key global issues even if they are at variance with the US and its Western allies. However, it has also been keen to stress that this does not need to lead to the building of alternative economic and political institutions and coalitions, challenging the existing economic and political order led and dominated by the US and its allies.

The Indian state has, in the last few years, embarked on constructing new economic partnerships based on three key strategies. The first has been to revise earlier perceptions of the relationship between economic and security ties in its foreign policy. Economic relations are now viewed through the prism of broader security relationships between India and other states, and thus, increasingly stronger economic relations follow from deepening strategic ties with various states. Conversely, increased economic de-risking has accompanied deteriorating security ties with certain states, such as China. The second strategy, related to the first, is to construct comprehensive economic agreements that go beyond trade and look at a wide range of bilateral areas of cooperation, such as technology transfer, labour mobility, and joint defence production, allowing these agreements to link economic and security ties between India and these states. Lastly, India wants to be a leading voice of the Global South by projecting itself as a bridge between it and the developed world. More specifically, India has pushed back against attempts by China to lead the Global South, specifically China's attempts to build alternative economic and security institutions and processes it wishes to lead.

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India's Multitiered Approach to Defence Self-Reliance

S. Paul Kapur

India's 'global Bharat' seeks to promote a new, globalist vision emphasising collaboration, interconnectedness, community, and global unity. Before it can achieve this, however, India will have to grapple with more traditional strategic problems. For, normative aspirations aside, old-style conflict and competition have not disappeared from the world stage. Indeed, they remain dominant features of international politics.

India recognises this defensive imperative and has undertaken a new, multitiered approach tailored to its emerging needs. This will include not just a continuation of its longstanding reliance on imports of foreign weapons and materiel. India also will shift its focus to the domestic production of weapons systems, close defence cooperation with like-minded strategic partners, and the export of Indian-made weapons and materiel. India hopes that this combination of approaches will enable it to provide for its

own defence, expand its defence industrial base, and bolster the defence capabilities of friendly states.

Arms Imports: Essential but Insufficient

India has traditionally relied on international arms purchases to provide it with critical military capabilities, ranging from fighter aircraft to submarines to air defence systems. Indeed, between 2018 and 2022, India was the world's largest importer of major arms, accounting for 11 percent of global arms purchases (1). India wishes to be more than simply a weapons importer, however. Continued adherence to an import model will leave India dependent on supplier states, and potentially vulnerable should they prove unable or unwilling to continue providing it with weapons and materiel. Instead, India seeks to develop the ability to produce weapons domestically, grow its defence industrial base, and increase its strategic independence. This has become especially important since the Ukraine war has made Russia, long India's main defence supplier, a less reliable source of arms (2).

This effort to increase domestic defence production can be understood as part of the country's larger 'Make in India' campaign launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government in 2014. In the defence sector, the campaign promotes the indigenous production of weapons systems and materiel. Associated measures include streamlining licensing processes; facilitating foreign direct investment; creating defence industrial corridors in northern and southern India; offering domestic manufacturers a variety of financial and tax incentives; and partnering with micro, small and medium enterprises, and academia, to advance research and development. The initiative also bans the import of many defence items, which now must be domestically produced except in case of an urgent military requirement (3).

Examples of weapons systems domestically manufactured under 'Make in India' include the Arjun main battle tank, the Tejas light combat aircraft, the Akash surface-to-air missile, and submarines and surface combatants (4). This move toward domestic production helped to drive an 11 percent decrease in arms imports between 2013-2017 and 2018-2022 (5). In 2022, domestic manufacture accounted for 68 percent of Indian arms acquisitions (6).

Defence Partnerships: Working Together to Promote Self-Reliance

India has begun its shift toward domestic arms production through a series of unilateral policy decisions. However, India will be unable to realise its full domestic production potential on its own. To produce world-class weapons systems, it needs access to foreign technology. That technological access, in turn, will require a close strategic partnership between India and supplier states.

India has traditionally resisted such close partnerships, preferring to maintain its 'strategic autonomy'. Recently, however, India has shown an increased willingness to work closely with others. This is particularly true of the US, which has become India's most important strategic partner. Modi has described US-India relations as a "defining partnership of this century," and the US, for its part, considers India a "linchpin" of its Indo-Pacific strategy (7).

The reason for this partnership is straightforward: India and the US need each other to offset rising Chinese power in the Indo-Pacific region. The result of this convergence of interests has been closer security cooperation than either country could have anticipated just a few years ago. This cooperation can be seen at several levels, including joint military exercises, the signing of so-called foundational agreements facilitating logistical cooperation, the sharing of geospatial data, and arms imports. The growth of the bilateral arms trade, which has increased from nearly zero in 2005 to well over US\$20 billion today, is representative of the trajectory of US-India security cooperation. Indian purchases include a range of sophisticated platforms and systems, including attack helicopters, mobile artillery, and maritime patrol and transport aircraft (8).

India does not, however, wish simply to import high-end armaments from the US. Instead, India seeks to co-develop and produce weapons systems domestically with the US. This will require the US to transfer sensitive technologies to India. The US has sometimes hesitated to do so, and both countries are working to overcome this problem. For example, the US has designated India as a major defence partner, afforded India tier 1 strategic trade authorisation, and launched an

initiative on critical and emerging technologies with India. Such efforts have borne fruit, as evidenced by the recent agreement to co-produce General Electric jet engines in India for the indigenous Tejas fighter plane (9). The jet-engine deal embodies India's new approach to self-reliance and its defence partnership with the US, combining external technology with indigenous engineering and production.

Arms Exports: India as a Global Defence Production Hub

India's indigenous manufacturing capability affects not only its ability to supply its own military with critical defence systems, but increased domestic production can also enable it to export arms globally. This phenomenon is captured in the Indian government's slogan: 'Make in India, Make for World,' and its desire for the country to emerge as a global 'defence production hub'. Indian arms exports have been growing rapidly, and were at their highest level ever between 2022-2023, reaching about US\$2 billion, an increase of ten times over defence exports from 2016-2017 (10). The Indian government hopes to expand this capability even further, reaching US\$5 billion by 2025 (11).

To this end, India seeks to export arms both within the Indo-Pacific region and further afield. This is part of an effort to establish a global presence in the so-called 'value market' for slightly less capable, but more affordable, weapons systems. Regional customers have included countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, and Mauritius. Their purchases have included the Brahmos cruise missile, high-speed patrol boats, and small arms and munitions, and could expand to include air defence capabilities, anti-submarine munitions, coastal radars, and tactical aircraft. These exports can increase India's influence in the Indo-Pacific and enable its customers to bolster their defensive capabilities, helping to insulate them against rising Chinese power (12).

India is also exporting domestically-made armaments beyond its own region. For example, it has sold counter-battery radars, rocket launchers, and anti-tank missiles to Armenia. India is also interested in developing its relationship with Egypt, increasing interoperability between the two militaries. The countries are reportedly exploring a deal involving the sale of India's Tejas fighter planes, along with technology transfer enabling the Egyptians to manufacture the aircraft domestically (13).

If India's efforts are successful, its defence exports could begin competing with those of Russia and China, potentially eroding their share of the value market. But India will need to clear several hurdles before this occurs. Despite their upward trajectory, Indian exports still lag relative to those of other countries. India was among the top 25 arms-exporting countries in 2017-2021, but fell out of that group for 2018-2022, and it ranked fourth of 12 arms exporters in the Indo-Pacific, while being first in imports. Some of the reasons for this include stiff international competition, as well as problems such as delayed delivery and accidents involving Indian-made systems, which may have discouraged potential customers. India's biggest export success, the Brahmos cruise missile, resulted from collaboration with Russia and is not entirely indigenous in origin. Indian arms exports are thus headed in a positive direction and will be an important component of Make in India. But India has ground to cover before it becomes a global defence manufacturing hub (14).

A Crucial Constant: The Importance of US-India Ties

One constant characterising these multiple approaches to India's defence needs is the importance of the US-India strategic relationship. India needs to acquire US arms and technology and co-develop weapons systems with the country to become self-reliant and secure. The US needs India to succeed in these efforts so an independent and strong India can help offset rising Chinese power and ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific region. These goals will be unattainable if US-India relations founder. Careful management of the relationship and avoidance of needless disagreements are therefore essential. Whatever their differences, the two countries agree on a fundamental strategic fact—the emergence of a strong, independent India is in their mutual interest. It will promote a free and open Indo-Pacific, and the fundamentally liberal vision that underlies 'Global Bharat'. India and the US should do everything they can to make it a reality.

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The views in this article are personal, and do not represent those of the US Defense Department.

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India's Agenda for Reformed Multilateralism in Reimagining Global Cooperation

Sameer Patil

A perfect storm of transnational threats, accelerating technology, the COVID-19 pandemic, and fractured supply chains, compounded by retreating globalisation and a simmering climate crisis, have thrown the current global order into flux. Geopolitical dynamics between the P-5 members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have frayed the consensus that underlined the spirit of international collaboration. Their disagreements have effectively impaired the ability of the UN to address pressing global challenges and strengthen international peace and security. This has eroded its trust and legitimacy, creating a crisis of credibility for multilateralism.

Speaking at the UN General Assembly in September 2020, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi reflected on this crisis of multilateralism. He noted that while India's respect for the world body is "unparalleled,"

it has also been waiting for reforms of the UN system for a long time (1). India's vision for reformed multilateralism rests on two pillars emphasised by Modi: revitalising multilateral institutions and, crucially, doing so within a defined timeframe. By responding to the international community's needs, reformed multilateralism proposes to recast contemporary multilateralism. This essay deep dives into India's initiatives to keep the UN-led multilateral framework relevant to contemporary international politics.

Crisis of Multilateralism

The UN system was shaped in the aftermath of the Second World War, reflecting the then-existing power balance. Nowhere was this more evident than in the structuring of the UNSC, which bestowed a permanent membership to the five great powers of the day—three from Europe—with an exclusive power of the right to veto. In effect, this reflected the 'victors take the spoils' approach, making them more equal than others. More than seven decades later, this arrangement not only appears to be anachronistic but also a perpetuation of the colonisation project, whereby the European colonies bore the burden of the two World Wars while the privileges of peace benefited the colonisers and their allies, placing them in exalted positions of power (2).

Devoid of representation from South America, Africa, or small island states, and with limited representation from Asia, the UNSC has ceased to be a representative body and fails to reflect contemporary power balances. For instance, nearly 70 percent of the UNSC agenda concerns Africa (3). Yet, the Council has no permanent African representation. As India's foreign minister S. Jaishankar mentioned at the 77th session of the UN General Assembly, this arrangement is also "perceived as deeply unfair, denying entire continents and regions a voice in a forum that deliberates their future" (4).

Moreover, the UNSC has also ceased to be effective, as multiple instances have shown over the last few decades. From crises in Crimea to Libya and West Asia to Sub-Saharan Africa, the UNSC has failed to get its act together and take a unified position on defending the UN Charter (5), (6). The collapse of the international sanctions regime to punish acts that destabilise international peace and the consequent

proliferation of unilateral sanctions is further proof of the UNSC's inability to serve its basic function (7).

This paralysis of the UN system extends to other multilateral institutions, too, particularly in the domain of finance and trade, where international financial institutions and global trading arrangements have failed to provide succour to the developing world in the face of challenges like the global debt crisis and disruptions to global trade. For instance, the US has blocked the appointment of new members to the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Appellate Body, impairing the dispute settlement system and denting the organisation's enforcement power. Furthermore, the WTO has also been unable to frame substantive rules for digital trade, underlining the need for alternative trading mechanisms.

These dynamics have compelled several like-minded countries to collaborate in establishing issue-based minilateral frameworks, such as the Quad and AUKUS (Australia, the UK, and the US). Despite their limited scope, these minilaterals have spearheaded successful transnational cooperation on critical issues like critical technologies, vaccine access, the digital economy, and climate change (8).

Push for Reformed Multilateralism

India's call for reformed multilateralism seeks to address both the shifting power dynamics in the world and the emergence of new global challenges, focusing on the needs of the Global South. India energetically pursued the reformed multilateralism agenda during its second presidency of the UNSC in December 2022 and the presidency of the G20 in 2023.

On 14 December 2022, it organised an open debate, 'New Orientation for Reformed Multilateralism'. Chairing the debate, Jaishankar sought to drive home the urgency of reforms by arguing that it cannot be "business as usual in the multilateral domain" (9). Despite this, he noted that the UN is failing to undertake meaningful reforms. He specifically underscored the need for UNSC reforms, and mentioned that since the formation of the Open-Ended Working Group three decades ago, the needle has not moved on this issue. This underlines that reforms must be undertaken within a specific time frame, as any delay risks further delegitimising the UN system.

Reforms of the UNSC

The UNSC's restructuring represents a key element of India's reformed multilateralism agenda. The proposed reforms aim to expand the Council, making it more representative, legitimate, and relevant for tackling complex global problems (10). This expansion will boost transparency, accountability, and objectivity in global governance and decision-making. The imperative for such reforms has only intensified over the years.

In the last few years, in addition to staking its own claim for a permanent UNSC membership, India has also vigorously pursued this idea by making it an integral part of conversations on multilateral reforms. India has also taken the Global South on board in this endeavour. It has deepened its engagement with other contenders for the UNSC permanent membership through the G4 (consisting of India, Brazil, Japan, and Germany). The group has proposed, among other things, "expansion of seats in both categories of membership, equitable regional representation, more transparent and inclusive working methods and an enhanced relationship with other UN bodies, including the General Assembly" (11).

Besides this, India has also stressed the need to formalise the Inter-Governmental Negotiations process by introducing record-keeping that will enable attributing specific positions to the respective member-states rather than a mere summary. Through this process, the negotiators can pinpoint common ground and explore pathways to build additional consensus (12). Additionally, India has actively engaged with the L69 Group of Developing Countries from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and the Pacific (Small Island Developing States). Specifically, acknowledging the historical injustice faced by African nations, this grouping underscores the need for the UNSC's full and equitable representation, as defined by the Common African Position (13).

This advocacy is yielding a change in the perception of the P-5. While earlier, there was reluctance on their part to acknowledge the need for reform, they are now highlighting the need to restructure the UNSC. In September 2023, for instance, US President Joe Biden noted that the US has followed up on its support to expand the UNSC and consulted several member-states on this issue (14). Likewise, France and China

too have supported the idea of expanding the Council, with France declaring support to the idea of including new permanent members (15), (16). Whether the P-5's rhetoric on UNSC reforms translates into action hinges on the shifting sands of geopolitical dynamics. Regardless, their statements have validated the rationale for reformed multilateralism.

A G20 Consensus

India also utilised its recently concluded G20 presidency to evolve a unanimous view of the world's leading industrial powers on this issue. The G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration acknowledged the paradigmatic shifts in the international environment and the need for reinvigorating multilateralism (17). The declaration specifically focused on reforms of the international financial institutions and management of the global debt vulnerabilities in low- and middle-income countries. The inclusion of the African Union as the newest member of the G20 at the New Delhi Summit powerfully demonstrated the repositioning of the Global South from the periphery to the core to shape the agenda of international cooperation.

However, even before the G20 Summit took place, India had set the ball rolling on reformed multilateralism by making it a key focus area of the Think20 (T20) engagement group. The T20 had a dedicated task force on the theme, "Towards Reformed Multilateralism: Transforming Global Institutions and Frameworks," that tackled four inter-locked workstreams: (a) Policy coordination between multilateral groupings; (b) Towards a more equitable, transparent & effective WTO; (c) A G20 proposal for UN reform for a multipolar world; and (d) Global Digital Governance and Institutional Frameworks (18). This schema reflected a holistic thrust to reform the existing multilateral framework to serve our purpose best. Indeed, the task force's statement set out the ambitious vision of creating a roadmap for 'Multilateralism 2.0', while highlighting the continuing relevance of the UN Charter (19).

The Way Forward

India has undeniably emerged as a champion of reformed multilateralism, leading the charge to address critical challenges while upholding a rules-based order built on shared progress, sustainability,

and inclusivity. These efforts have been instrumental in pushing the envelope on structural reforms and advancing the conversation on this topic.

Despite the headwinds of global polarisation, India remains steadfast in its pursuit of a revitalised multilateral system, one that transcends East-West and North-South divides. The upcoming Summit of the Future in September 2024 offers a valuable opportunity for the UN to fortify its core mandate against the mounting threats to global peace and security (20). As Modi has stated, “the path to achieve sustainable peace and prosperity” is through multilateralism (21).

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India as the Voice of the Global South

Elizabeth Sidiropoulos

Since independence, India has been an important advocate of the developing world. It was a founding and leading member of the Non-Aligned Movement and the preceding Bandung Conference. At independence, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru laid the foundations for India's South-South Cooperation policy. "The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity," he said in 1947 (1). This stated commitment in India's foreign policy has continued even as it has emerged as an important power in the Global South.

In his book *The India Way*, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar reiterated that India "has a powerful constituency in the global South that it must cultivate even as it rises" (2). He argued that India spoke for a larger developing world constituency regarding equity and fairness.

India had to be a “just and fair power, consolidating its position as a standard bearer of the global South”. This positioning reflects India’s historical political philosophy of South-South cooperation, and a clear national interest as its power grows.

Development Partnerships and Foreign Policy

India is currently the world’s fifth-largest economy and its most populous. The proportion of India’s population living in extreme poverty dropped from 18.7 percent in 2015 to 12 percent in 2021, according to World Bank data (3). India’s digital public infrastructure (DPI) model has helped it achieve 80 percent financial inclusion in just six years, which the Bank of International Settlements estimated would have ordinarily taken 47 years (4). India is also the largest manufacturer of generic pharmaceuticals in the world.

Today, India’s foreign policy is described by strategic autonomy or multi-alignment. Its foreign policy positions—seen most notably in its response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine—are driven by its national interest and pragmatism. It is a member of the Quad (alongside the US, Australia, and Japan) and of the BRICS. It is not anti-West, a characteristic of both the Russian and Chinese narratives, nor does it automatically align with the West, unless it is in its interest to do so. India still regards itself as part of the Global South, seeing these countries that make it up as important partners, especially in driving multilateral reform in a multipolar world.

In recent years, India’s political and economic rise has pitted it against China, its neighbour and rival. China also considers itself a leader of the Global South. The Belt and Road Initiative has brought much-needed infrastructure projects to developing countries, although not without some criticism of the financing mechanisms. China is now the largest trading partner of many countries in the Global South. However, China is also increasingly seen as a hegemonic power as it competes for the superpower mantle with the US.

India and China each have unique selling points that are relevant to developing countries’ developmental priorities. To date, China has had deeper pockets, and its largely statist approach to its relationships is

contrasted with India's more mixed approach, which includes the private sector and civil society as actors in their own right.

Supporting developing countries' priorities resonates strongly as Southern solidarity, but in an increasingly contested multipolar system, it helps to acquire influence and friends and allies.

Equally, the agency of many countries in the Global South has also increased. In Africa, momentum has built in recent years around key demands for reform of the global multilateral system, not least regarding finance. There are also continental programmes such as for infrastructure, industrialisation, and regional value chains that provide frameworks around which external actors can engage with the continent. African countries do not wish to choose between development partners. All partners can play an important role in helping meet Africa's needs. In that regard, the developing world aims to optimise relations with both countries.

Instruments and Platforms for South-South Cooperation

India's development partnership instruments have evolved over the decades, as have their scale and reach. However, they can be broadly categorised into capacity building, the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme, bilateral grant-in-aid, lines of credit, and support for multilateral funds.

It has sought to advance South-South cooperation, both bilaterally and through new informal groupings or platforms. Furthermore, while India's focus was largely on its immediate neighbourhood in the early days, its development cooperation now stretches across the developing world.

India has also established platforms through which to consolidate diplomatic and economic relations with countries in the Global South. The most notable of these was the India-Africa Forum Summit, which was held for the first time in 2008 in New Delhi. There have been three summits since then, with the fourth one planned for 2024. The Summits provide an opportunity for Africa and India to assess progress in commitments made and to take stock of the relationship more broadly.

Another platform that sought to strengthen links and partnerships with Global South countries was the India Pacific Islands Forum, the first meeting of which was held in 2014.

The India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Forum is another platform through which South-South cooperation has been advanced, particularly through the IBSA Trust Fund, which is administered by the UN Office for South-South Cooperation and provides financing for small projects in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. In 2018, IBSA adopted the declaration on South-South cooperation, which reaffirmed the principles of such cooperation and noted that solidarity and the spirit of sharing were the primary drivers, underpinned by interdependencies, not 'new dependencies'. The declaration also reiterated its commitment to global governance reform, where "people-centric social policies" should be the "driving mechanism for restructuring the international financial architecture and reforming international organisations" (5). Presciently, in the current context of rising debt among developing countries, the declaration also emphasised that responsible financing was an essential component of development cooperation and underlined that the long-term interests of partner countries should not be negatively affected in this regard.

India also played a leading role in developing the BRICS Bank, now the New Development Bank, when it chaired the BRICS in 2012. The proposal, which came to fruition in 2014, provided for an alternative development financing institution, apart from the World Bank, for developing countries.

Another international innovative initiative by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018, was the launch of the International Solar Alliance together with France, intended to help members generate solar energy and reduce dependence on fossil fuels. India allocated US\$1 billion in lines of credit for solar projects in Africa (6). This initiative highlighted India's approach of engaging across the North and the South to address developmental challenges.

India has also advocated for access to cheaper drugs for developing countries, specifically in the context of the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property

Rights (better known as the TRIPS Agreement). The case for more widely accessible and cheaper antiretroviral (ARV) medication was taken up in the WTO together with South Africa more than 20 years ago. More recently, again with South Africa, India submitted a request for a temporary waiver of intellectual property rights at the WTO to manufacture vaccines to counter the COVID-19 pandemic. These initiatives were all critical for developing countries' ability to manage their health challenges in a more cost-effective way. While the ARV battle was successful, the waiver was not. But the issue of drugs as global public goods will continue to be important for India.

Global South Summitry

In 2023, India elevated its Global South engagement by initiating a Voices of the Global South Summit (VOGSS), linked to its G20 presidency. The first summit was held in January 2023 to discuss key Global South concerns that India could integrate into the G20 discussions. More than 120 countries participated (either virtually or in person). China was not invited, nor were other developing G20 members. This platform allowed India to project its Global South credentials and not be overshadowed by other rivals (most notably China).

The second summit was held in November. This meeting updated the countries on G20 outcomes from the summit in September and reiterated the imperative of not losing momentum on the decisions made, which were crucial for developing countries (7). Another summit is planned, with a focus on artificial intelligence and its impact on the Global South.

A G20 for the Global South

The VOGSS was an expression of India's declaration when it assumed the G20 presidency that it would bring development back to the centre of the grouping's agenda. India's G20 presidency is discussed elsewhere in this volume. However, it is important to highlight three items in particular that are critical to the Global South's development and inclusion. The first is that of digital inclusion for development. A central theme of the Indian presidency was its own DPI system, which could enable developing countries to leapfrog developmentally. The possible

developmental impact of a DPI was encapsulated in an estimate by the United National Development Programme in 2022 that DPI could add as much as 1.4 percent growth to lower- and middle-income countries by 2030, which would accelerate financial inclusion (8). Well before its G20 presidency, India had considered its DPI as an innovative model that could be adapted and used in developing countries. Eight countries have signed memoranda of understanding with India for DPI infrastructure at no cost and with open-source access (9). More are expected to follow.

The second item is scaling up the financing of multilateral development banks. India pushed for reform of the World Bank and other multilateral development banks (MDBs) in 2023.

The annual World Bank meetings in Marrakesh in October reflected this imperative. The heads of the MDBs said that they would explore ways to expand their lending capacity to yield “additional lending headroom” of between US\$300 billion and US\$400 billion over the next decade (10).

The third item was debt. In early 2023, India and the International Monetary Fund launched the Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable, aimed at addressing some of the debt restructuring bottlenecks, including the comparability of debt treatment, which have plagued many developing countries since the pandemic.

India’s G20 presidency will also be remembered for inviting the African Union to become a permanent member, thus rectifying Africa’s underrepresentation in the body.

Conclusion

Cementing India’s toes with the South is part of a strategy that is rooted in the country’s ideational commitment to solidarity, but also a very pragmatic recognition of the importance of allies and partners in an increasingly multipolar world where the contestation for power and the rules of the international system will be primary features of international relations in years to come. Former Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran summed it up as follows: “[India] should not hesitate in promoting and participating in a countervailing coalition to constrain

any aspiring hegemon even while it expands its own economic and military capabilities” (11).

The Global South itself is increasingly diverse. As India orients itself towards its national interests, these will not always coincide with those of other Global South states. Nevertheless, there are convergences of interests among Global South members as the global issues that require attention, the rewriting of certain rules and reforming of global institutions, which make India’s advocacy crucial, giving added heft to the growing Southern agency. At the same time, bilateral/minilateral and regional cooperation will continue to be important as it aims to tackle specific national and regional development challenges. The two approaches—global reform and bilateral/regional cooperation—complement each other and amplify the developmental impact.

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Towards a Global Stack: The Future of India's Global Technology Partnerships

Erin Watson

Much is often said about India's thriving technology partnerships with like-minded partners. As the world and the Indo-Pacific region continue to undergo drastic geopolitical and economic change, India has positioned itself as a trusted technology partner of Western liberal democracies and as an advocate for the Global South alike (1). Cooperation in defence, clean energy, space, cyber, and critical technologies are all examples of India's partnerships with countries like the US, Canada, Japan, and Australia (2). While driven by geostrategic imperatives in the Indo-Pacific region where US-China competition continues to thrive, the benefits of these partnerships flow to countries globally, enabling the digital world and human development.

What is said less often, is the potential of India's existing technology in achieving its foreign policy objectives. While technology increasingly emerges as the backbone of many of India's global partnerships (3),

there remains huge potential to leverage India's existing technology, specifically, its digital public infrastructure (DPI). India's DPI, otherwise known as the India Stack, is world leading. It is the largest set of government-backed application programming interfaces globally, it is home to the largest biometric identity system, and it has brought India's population into the financial system at an unmatched rate (4).

While India Stack is a success story in and of itself, there is enormous potential for adopting India's DPIs among its global partners. India has already demonstrated a willingness to partner with developing countries to provide no-cost DPIs to digitise their populations. In 2023, India signed agreements with Armenia, Sierra Leone, Suriname, Antigua, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Papua New Guinea, and Mauritius (5). It has also taken elements of India Stack, particularly its unified payments interface (UPI), to other countries with large diasporas and high levels of remittances, such as Singapore and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (6). These exports are illustrative of two cases where India can use the Stack to achieve its foreign policy objectives, and where it is currently still underutilised.

Firstly, there is enormous demand for digital infrastructure in the developing world (where India has already demonstrated its willingness to use substantial geopolitical capital to bring the African Union into the G20, giving the collective region a seat at the table in perpetuity (7)). This is critical for job creation, education, access to finance, and delivery of essential services like hospitals (8). However, so too is the need for transparency, accountability, and participatory governance frameworks (9). India Stack can do all of this. Importantly for India and its partners, this is a substantial geostrategic advantage as an alternative to China's Digital Silk Road (10). As India has established itself as the chief advocate for the developing world in recent years (11), these partnerships also position it to work with partners to bring the Stack to countries in the Indo-Pacific (and especially the Pacific), Latin America, and African regions.

Secondly, in the developed world, where there is a significant Indian diaspora, there is an opportunity to advance India's economic agenda and ambitions. India is now the fifth largest economy in the world, with a nominal gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$3.7 trillion. With such an

enormous economy, it is no surprise that many countries in the West have turned to India in an attempt to diversify their economies away from China. Against this backdrop, it is sometimes easy to forget that in the 1960s, India's poverty rate was around 63 percent (12). Today, the poverty rate sits around 11 percent. The remarkable turnaround in India's economy, especially since the 1990s when the GDP was US\$320 billion, means India has a new strategic advantage to pursue its interests. India's domestic political agenda of the last decade has much to answer for this, especially Digital India, along with economic liberalisation processes that started in the late 1980s (13). In this new Indian economic era, the Singapore and UAE cases are interesting for the flow of money through remittances via UPI. What remains underexplored among partners is the opportunity to export UPI for the flow of money for goods and services between India and the rest of the world. Startups, businesses, tourists, and students with global access to UPI can unlock the Indian economic opportunity in a way not seen before, where historically moving money in and out of India has been slow, bureaucratic, and expensive.

India knows its DPIs are at a global competitive advantage. In the first case of developing countries, India has also made big advances. During India's presidency of the G20, the country achieved huge strides in bringing DPIs to the Global South. India framed its intentions as the accelerator of the Sustainable Development Goals (14) through a repository of DPIs and a social impact fund to low- and middle-income countries. In the second case, however, it seems that DPIs remain limited to a conversation about UPI and unlocking the Indian economic opportunity. This is important, but there is much more that can be done when DPIs range from digital identification to payments and data storage.

Developed countries with patchwork systems pieced together over a much longer timeframe than India struggle to retrofit systems like digital identification. Australia is an example of this, where digital identification has been a political challenge for successive governments (15). Over-policing, a lack of transparency, and data breaches are all concerns from the electorate over digital ID adoption. Indeed, major data breaches for Australian corporates in recent years are just one reason people are cautious of digital ID. This is where and why India

can and should make a case for its DPI data-matching capability to overcome this.

While the bilateral relationship between Australia and India is at an all-time high, India should be promoting solutions to Australia's challenges. There is a similar pattern among other partners of India, including the US, where analysts have also noted the need for a similar stack of DPIs (16). However, this is a rare conversation about India and its potential as a technology partner in the foreign policy arena.

The veracity with which India's global partners are pursuing new and emerging technology cooperation is historic. While there is much attention and focus on these developments, especially with countries like the US, Australia, and Japan, there is much to be gained from India exporting its DPIs to achieve its foreign policy and economic agenda. The conversation about why and how this should happen, however, is lacking. This is especially true for the adoption of DPIs in developed countries. Developing countries might perceive much more to gain from this existing infrastructure, but developed countries also have the opportunity for complementary systems that can overcome existing challenges around data and transparency. With India's (re)emergence as a global power, it is time to go beyond just an India Stack, to a Global Stack.

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The Raisina Dialogue as a Global Platform

Justin Bassi

Eight years ago, India was a country with a giant population and giant potential. Today, it influences global affairs and helps set economic and political priorities. The potential has been realised.

Over the same period, the Raisina Dialogue was established and has grown from a largely Indian event to rivalling the Shangri La Dialogue as the premier international strategic and foreign affairs conference. Neither India nor Raisina's rise in global influence was guaranteed.

Historically, Australia has favoured forming alliances. India has not. But not all cooperation is done through alliances—there is also alignment. And outside the traditional US and UK relationships (and the relationship with Japan, which is close to a formal alliance), India now sits in the top tier of Australian partners.

Less than a decade ago, the friendliness between Australia and India was not matched by alignment on strategic issues. As 2015 ended, it was unclear whether the national interests of both countries would converge in the way we now know they have. The Modi government was still in its infancy and was domestically oriented, while its international attention was largely dominated by its immediate neighbourhood. The Quad grouping had been consigned to history.

Australia, the US, the other Five Eyes countries, and most liberal democracies openly prioritised the health of their economic relationships with China over strategic and security matters. The relationship struggled to move past cricket, curry, and the Commonwealth despite strategic commonalities emerging.

As Peter Varghese, former Australian Ambassador to India and Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, put it in his India Economic Strategy in 2018, “Timing has always been a challenge in Australia’s relationship with India. In the past, substance often lagged enthusiasm” (1).

So, while it seems so obvious in 2024, the speed at which India became vital to countries around the world surprised many. Even those who were adamant about India’s potential struggled to see it being realised. The speed arose from a convergence of two major trends: the world realised India’s significance and India gained the confidence to shift from being an Indian Ocean leader to a global one.

India’s middle class has grown, sending more young Indians abroad to study, including in Australia, the US, and Canada, while overall Indian migration has also risen, contributing to a more internationalist perspective. India is now providing Australia with its largest migrant group (having overtaken the Chinese community), with strong links to India, bolstering the dynamism of the relationship.

Looking back, the inaugural Raisina Dialogue, held in March 2016, was a key part of India’s opening up to the globe. It was one of the first signs that India wanted not only to have national security but also to project international influence, signalling it was ready to speak to—and shape—the world. The inaugural keynote address was delivered by Harry Harris, then Commander of US Pacific Command, who said, “*Chalein*

saath saath, or Forward together we go" (2). That was a rallying call not just for the US and India, but for all democracies who could see the need for India to play a leading role in the Indo-Pacific.

Harris went on to say: "We are ready for you. We need you. Let's be ambitious together."

Timing is everything. As India was ready to take itself global, the democratic world was ready to see India beyond counterterrorism and Pakistan. India emerged economically and technologically as a vital contributor to balancing Beijing.

Key moments came in 2016 as Australia and India made their own, though intertwined, strategic shifts. For Australia's part, 2016 saw a step up from middling middle power to influential regional power, starting with the collapse of the hitherto separation of economics and security, with long-term values such as sovereignty prioritised over short-term financial interests. It meant China's adverse impact on Australian and regional security outweighed economic temptations and resulted in new laws being passed to counter foreign interference and prohibit Chinese technology in sensitive sectors. For India's part, its focus shifted from internal affairs to external engagement, with a growing appreciation that its economic and technological potential was global and that its national security required international influence.

India's deliberate strategy to become a technology leader started around the same period, as it took advantage of globalisation trends to provide a platform for global technology companies to "follow the sun" and have continuous 24/7 operations in Europe, the US, and India. This took strategic investments in people, skills, and education.

Eight years on, the expansion and success of the Raisina Dialogue has reflected India's growing impact worldwide. Global leaders, foreign ministers, and defence personnel automatically include it in their annual calendars, just as India is front and centre for nations canvassing views on security topics from counterterrorism to maritime security and the impact of technology on society. India is positioning itself as the third strategic and economic powerhouse, based on perceptions of its geopolitical centrality as the fulcrum between Europe and the US.

The initial test for both Raisina and India was to maintain growth, openness, and engagement with the world, ensuring the new approach was not a one-off. Then, in 2017, after seemingly being dead for almost 10 years, the Quad was regenerated. It was a slow start, with meetings at the senior officials' level to test the political will, led in India by then Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar. In a move that shocked many, the Quad was elevated to the foreign ministers' level in 2019, this time with Jaishankar as external affairs minister. The world was taking notice; then Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne provided the keynote address at the 2019 Raisina Dialogue.

Raisina and India had proved that strategic engagement was more than a passing phase. This left Beijing doubly worried. Not only was the Quad a collective constraint on Beijing's power, but it also reflected a more confident India with the ability to push back on China's malign behaviour while offering the Global South an alternative to Beijing's money.

India is now playing a more significant role in Southeast Asia and the Pacific as a consequence of commitments, both bilaterally and multilaterally, to work to enhance strategic stability and security.

By 2023, Raisina and India were truly global—Raisina as a leading international summit and India as the leader of the Global South, providing the connection between developing and developed nations, a role that China wanted for itself but could only achieve through oppression and suppression.

For the first time, the Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting was held in India, and Raisina hosted the principals for a public panel. Again, India's growing role as an international player was inseparable from Raisina's blossoming stature.

Raisina was taken internationally and established as a regular feature in Australia with Raisina @ Sydney held in February 2023. This dialogue showcased India's role across all issues, with a focus not only on foreign affairs but also on economics, energy, and defence.

Whether we are responding to global events like the COVID-19 pandemic, working together on climate and energy security policies, identifying ways to enhance our economic security, protecting ourselves from

the national security implications of cyber and critical technology, or countering interference in our democratic institutions and sovereignty, the Australia-India relationship is now more important than ever, for ourselves and the region. At Raisina @ Sydney, Australia's Energy Minister Chris Bowen said: "When it comes to the response to the climate crisis and the massive energy transformation, I see India and Australia as key partners" (3).

Raisina in Australia will continue to be a forum to tackle all these challenges and discuss how we can substantively respond as part of the next chapter in this increasingly entwined and aligned relationship.

As Raisina was taking India global, India was simultaneously showcasing its international influence as G20 chair in 2023, through which it demonstrated its global convening power and ability to bridge the gap between developed and developing nations. Also in 2023, India landed a spacecraft on the moon—the first country to do so on the moon's south pole.

This is not to say we have entered a new multipolar era; there remain only two major powers for now—the US and China. But India is on the rise, with deepening international relationships and a formidable technology sector at a time when tech has never been more central to strategic power and influence. The next phase, from 2024, will be just as crucial because increased power brings increased responsibility. India will constantly need to demonstrate that it can use its growing power appropriately and in a way that enhances regional stability. It faces higher expectations.

With increased power and higher expectations, there must also be a greater willingness to disagree with friends on specific issues while not disrupting collaboration on strategic matters. This applies to matters ranging from thematic topics like climate policy to bilateral differences such as India's rift with Canada over the killing of a Sikh separatist leader to divergences on the Russia-Ukraine war. The challenges and opportunities of India's rise mean that countries like Australia and the US—members of both the Quad (with India) and the Five Eyes (with Canada)—must walk a fine line between expectations and patience.

And this, again, is where Raisina comes into play, as a dialogue for open and frank debate involving both Indian and global leaders discussing all areas of common interest and those of concern.

Indeed, India's readiness to host a Quad meeting and then shortly thereafter host or attend a meeting of the BRICS grouping with Russia and China is confusing to some international observers.

In fact, India actively participates in the Quad and sees it as a trusted mechanism for regional stability. By staying in the BRICS, on the other hand, it can monitor countries with which it has less trust while seeking to limit any potential unfavourable outcomes from those meetings. The fact is, the alignment simply is not there, particularly with China.

India shows that engagement with all is possible, but not all engagement is equal. Consider it this way: there is no equivalent of Raisina—a forum for free, open debate—in China.

The Australia-India relationship shows that differences can be managed through dialogue, that hesitations of history can be overcome if there is sufficient trust between the two political systems, and that practical cooperation can deliver real benefits to our nations and our region.

And while many around the world continue to seek answers to legitimate questions about India's future role in the world, history cannot be dismissed—a point Jaishankar made at the 2023 Raisina @ Sydney Dialogue, when he said: "Despite decades of adversity and limited resources, India stuck to that path when actually other democracies questioned the viability" (4).

So, too, should countries like Australia, the US, and Japan, which make up the Quad partners, stick with India, and grasp how significant its potential as the next tech superpower will be for strategic balance and deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. As they do so, they should continue to proudly promote democratic values and know that an engaged, involved India—with a globally prominent Raisina, including in Australia—is better for a region that aspires to be more open, more prosperous, and more secure.

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