

India and the Global South

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Abstract: Today, the term 'Global South' is increasingly being used by political leaders and in scholarly research on international relations, although it is not free of contentions and contradictions. The immense diversity in political systems, levels of economic development, and military capabilities makes it hard to develop a universally acceptable definition. The Global South has nuclear weapon powers and dynamic economies in it. There are many democracies, and so are illiberal democracies and outright autocracies. Then there are large countries and tiny nations. Making a distinct category of nations fit into the nomenclature of the Global South is thus a challenging exercise. It is significant to note that the Group of 77 still exists in more than 100 countries. Non-Aligned Movement is less relevant and practical, but it continues to exist, and annual summits occur. Now, Global South co-exists with NAM and the Group of 77.

Keywords: Bandung Conference, NAM, Group of 77, North-South Cooperation, Asian Relations Conference.

In the contemporary lexicon of international relations studies, the Global South has become one of the dominant concepts in general. India's emerging role in the Global South has caught the international community's attention. Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan, President Xi Jinping of China, Vladimir Putin of Russia and even Joe Biden, the President of the United States, have all been using the term 'Global South' in their speeches and statements from time to time.

Interestingly, there is no universally accepted geographical definition of Global South, nor can it be cartographically earmarked in a coherent and proximate geographical region. However, leaders of the major powers and their respective ministries of foreign affairs frequently use the term. For instance, India and China are located in the Northern Hemisphere of the globe, yet they are understood to have been part of the Global South.

More amusingly, China is the second largest economy in the world, and India is the fifth largest economy, and neither of these countries are part of

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the so-called Group of Seven, yet New Delhi and Beijing have willingly accepted to be part of the Global South. On the other hand, Singapore is a highly developed country, yet it is placed on the list of countries of the Global South.

The international community generally understands that poor, developing, and post-colonial countries are to be referred to as the 'Global South' in contrast with the advanced and highly industrialised economies of the Global North.

Such countries were characterised as the Third World during the bipolar politics of the Cold War years. The US-led Western liberal group of nations were known as the First World, and the group of Socialist countries led by the former Soviet Union were called the Second World. Alfred Sauvey coined the term 'Third World' in 1952. Three years later, when developing countries from Asia and Africa assembled at the Indonesian Bandung, the deliberations of the participating leaders began a process that led to the launch of a Non-Aligned Movement consisting of developing countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America. The first NAM summit took place in 1961.

After the Bandung Conference and before the first NAM summit, the oil-producing countries formed the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries in 1960, and most of them acquired vast amounts of wealth from oil revenues. It is also ironic that all these countries today are classified as developing countries and members of the Global South! The non-aligned countries themselves organised into the Group of 77 in the United Nations to fight for their economic rights in an international system that benefitted the advanced economies and impoverished the developing economies in 1964. For the first time, Carl Oglesby coined the term Global South in 1969, and the term assumed importance as the developing countries began to demand a New International Economic Order in the 1970s and held negotiations with the advanced industrial nations for establishing an equitable international economic system. This dialogue came to be known as the North-South Dialogue in the study of international relations. The North-South division of the globe became more well known when a report by an Independent Commission on Developmental Issues, chaired by the then German Chancellor, attempted to promote 'North-South' cooperation between the developed North and developing South, the term South to denote developing, post-colonial states received further acceptance among the international relations scholars.

Today, the term 'Global South' is increasingly being used by political leaders and in scholarly research on international relations, although it is not free of contentions and contradictions. The immense diversity in political systems, levels of economic development, and military capabilities makes it hard to develop a universally acceptable definition.

The Global South has nuclear weapon powers and dynamic economies in it. There are many democracies, and so are illiberal democracies and outright autocracies. Then there are large countries and tiny nations. Making a distinct category of nations fit into the nomenclature of the Global South is thus a challenging exercise. It is significant to note that the Group of 77 still exists in more than 100 countries. Non-Aligned Movement is less relevant and practical, but it continues to exist, and annual summits occur. Now, Global South co-exists with NAM and the Group of 77.

In any case, no member of the Global South has ever been a colonial or imperial power. Most have had a colonial history, and either they suffered from direct foreign rule or served as a sphere of influence of an imperial power. Most remain developing nations, some are the least developed, and some are fast emerging economies. Some are filthy rich, with billions of dollars of annual oil and gas revenues.

India's Enduring Role in the Global South

India considers itself a member of the Global South. It was put in the category of the Third World in the post-Second World War era. It played the role of a leader in the Non-Aligned Movement and the group of 77. It needs attention that when India was a poor developing country and achieved independence in 1947 after about 200 years of British colonialism, its leaders watched global developments even before Indian independence and through the nationalist movement to throw out the British rulers. It was in the DNA of Indian leaders to play a leadership role in international affairs. It needs reiteration that months before India became formally independent, Jawaharlal Nehru, who eventually became the first Prime Minister of free India, organised an Asian Relations Conference to unite the Asian countries and promote decolonisation in March 1947. Two years later, Prime Minister Nehru convened the second Asian Relations Conference to address the Dutch military action against the Indonesian freedom fighters.

India, a Prominent Member of the Global South, Stands in Solidarity

Since the 1990s, India's profile has changed rapidly. About six months before the collapse of the Soviet Union, India liberalised its economic policies, drawing the attention of traders and investors from around the globe. After Soviet disintegration and the end of the Cold War, the bipolar strategic order in the world broke down. The United States found itself enviable as a leader in unipolar world order. Simultaneously, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 lost their appeal and relevance. Some countries of NAM and Group of 77 turned into emerging economies with fast economic growth rates, while several remained least developed; others struggled to navigate an uncertain global political economy. By the closing of the 20th Century, India had detonated nuclear explosives and declared itself as a nuclear weapon power. Under American sanctions and

European, Japanese and Australian criticisms, it appeared that the US-led liberal international order would not tolerate a nuclear India. However, the Indian economy continued to grow despite Western sanctions and the Asian financial crisis. As a result, India came to be perceived as a resilient democracy with a dynamic economy, and the US and its allies slowly accepted the de facto nuclear weapon capability of India.

On the Eve of the 21st Century

India's standing on the global stage turned more positive with US President Bill Clinton's path-breaking visit to India in March 2000. The release of a Vision Statement and signing several agreements by President Clinton and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee opened a new avenue for the Indo-US relationship, culminating in a durable and resilient strategic partnership. Questions arose about whether India would abandon its non-alignment policy as a foreign policy tool, join the US-led global order or maintain its neutral stand on global affairs. India did neither of the above. Non-Aligned Movement lost its relevance with the collapse of the bipolar international order, but some of the principles of non-alignment remained valid. Other leaders of the NAM also changed course. Yugoslavia disintegrated; Indonesia became focused on ASEAN and Asia-Pacific affairs; Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel, received massive assistance from the US, and Ghana became inactive. However, NAM still needs to be dismantled, even as some of its principles continue to be important for developing countries. The uneven economic growth in the developing world weakened the resolve of the Group of 77, and the North-South Dialogue stayed on the ground.

The role of the emerging economies among the developing countries in the meantime is considerably augmented by the complex outcome of the globalisation process. The Group of Seven industrialised nations slowly lost its lustre even as the global political economy made it imperative for the advanced economies to seek the cooperation of the emerging economies to address the economic crisis. From this emerged the Group of 20 when the global recession of 2007-2008 threatened the global economy, including that of the developed North. India and other emerging economies became a prominent member of the G20.

Global South issues have remained on the back burner for all these years. Globalisation did not bring much of a relief to the Global South. The digital transformations in various parts of the world did not reach the common masses in large parts of the Global South. While national debts skyrocketed in the Global South, foreign investments were meagre, and the economic growth story was lamentable. The Ukraine crisis worsened matters for the Global South, mainly due to the food, fuel and fertiliser crises that erupted with the war in Ukraine becoming increasingly serious.

Global South Under Spotlight

When the global coronavirus pandemic destabilised people's political, economic, and social lives worldwide, the worst sufferers were the inhabitants of the Global South. The Western powers championed vaccine nationalism, and China was struggling with a virus that originated in Wuhan, affected the world, tarnished Chinese soft power, and disrupted the supply chains running through China. India not only deftly handled the issue at home but also assisted about 150 countries, most of them in the Global South, by supplying innumerable doses of the vaccines (Narendra Modi, 2024).

It was a tough time for India since COVID-19 was spreading fast. Amidst this health pandemic, it had to confront the Chinese forces along the Galwan Valley. It was the worst border clash between India and China in about four decades. However, India was mindful of the pain and suffering due to COVID-19 in the Global South, leaving no stone unturned to provide health security to millions of citizens of the Global South.

Amid the pandemic, Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Russia, too, was affected severely by the Coronavirus. However, it felt provoked to attack Ukraine on its perceived ground that Ukraine was seeking membership in NATO, despite its repeated warnings. If that materialised, it would constitute a serious national security threat. The United States and its NATO allies retaliated against what they called a violation of the national sovereignty of Ukraine, which could, unless stopped, further enhance Russian appetite for further aggression and territorial acquisition by force.

As the war continued unabated and affected the global political economy, the worst victims, besides the Ukrainian citizens and the military personnel on both sides, were the people of the Global South. There were enormous shortages of food supply, inadequate fertilisers in the international market, and a very volatile energy market. The international community looked to India for help, and India came to the rescue to the extent possible without negatively affecting the domestic grain supply.

As India began to champion the cause of the Global South, other interested powers did not want to lag behind in trying to woo the Global South politically. Significantly, the majority of Global South countries, like the Indian position, did not want to take sides on the issue of the Ukraine War, and their political support for the United Nations is considered essential. Significantly, there appears to be some Cold War that has started in Eurasia between the Trans-Atlantic powers and Russia. Russia has the support of China, which is engaged in Cold Confrontation with the United States mainly over the issue of the Taiwan Strait and sovereignty issue in the South China Sea. In a complex scenario like the above, where there are no two distinct groups of nations involved in a Cold War, non-alignment of the

earlier eras cannot be applicable as an option. However, India's strategy is to maintain strategic autonomy, and many countries in the Global South would also like to adopt this foreign policy strategy.

India's Current Status in the Global Order

Unlike in the earlier decades, especially during the Cold War, India's influence in the developing world was due to its diplomatic skills. Thus, its relative economic and military weaknesses did not hinder India from playing a prominent role. India's profile today is markedly distinct, and it is in a much better position to be the voice of the Global South. India today is not only a nuclear weapon power but also the third-largest economy in the world regarding Purchasing power Parity. In dollar terms, India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the fifth largest in the world. India is known as an IT power with considerable achievements in promoting digital transformations. Its poverty alleviation of 250 million (Narendra Modi, 2024) people in a decade is appreciated all over. India's record promoting Gender Justice is partly reflected in its 14 million women representatives in rural governance institutions.

India has not only been trying to contribute towards developmental activities in the Global South but also has become the voice of the Global South in international forums. India-led projects are running in over 50 countries under the ITEC programme. India offers 14,000 scholarships to students from 160 countries who want to study in about 200 Indian educational institutions, offering about 800 different types of courses (V.Muraleedharan, 2024). India has been giving duty-free treatment to imports from least developed countries since 2008. When natural disasters strike a country from the Global South, India is often one of the first responders. Under South-South cooperation initiatives, India administers 42 projects in 36 countries and under the Sustainable Development Goals recommended by the United Nations, India runs 300 projects in 78 countries (S. Jaishankar, 2024). In addition, India has 22 projects in 13 Island countries to protect them from natural disasters under the “Coalition on Disaster Resilient Infrastructure” (S. Jaishankar, 2024).

More significantly, India has begun to act like the voice of the Global South, and it demonstrated its leadership during the presidency of the G20 in 2023. Before the G20 summit in Delhi, the government of India convened twice a summit with the Global South countries to ascertain the views of those countries and place them before the G20 leaders. During those summits, India offered its achievements in the digital sector to willing nations so that they could also generate a unique identity for their populace like the Aadhar Card (Narendra Modi's Address at the World Governments Summit in Dubai, February 14, 2024); they can use it in the health sector the way India developed the COWIN; they could make government welfare scheme easily accessible to the masses and also could directly transfer the

money to the recipients of the government monetary assistance (Narendra Modi's Address at the World Governments Summit in Dubai, February 14, 2024).

When India proposed during the G20 summit to include the African Union in the membership, all the G20 leaders promptly accepted it—an event that sprang a pleasant surprise to the international community. India now suggests that globalisation needs to change to make it Global South sensitive. Keeping in mind the more extensive interests of the Global South, India aspires to play a role in the efforts towards reforming the United Nations and the Bretton Woods Institutions and make them more democratic and more realistic in the light of the contemporary requirements and amend their functioning framed decades ago after the Second World War.

India's efforts to promote the Global South's interests are ethical and pragmatic. All that is now admitted is that nations are part of a complex interdependence network in the globalised world. Underdevelopment and backwardness in one part of the world will negatively impact the other parts of the world. This understanding has encouraged the G7 countries to look towards the G20 countries to seek solutions to the current problems faced by the international political economy. Interestingly, the US, Japan, China, Russia, and the major European powers have begun charting their policies towards the Global South.

The real challenge for India will be navigating through a scenario where several major powers would try to get involved in the issues related to the Global South. For instance, China has the money and power to spread its influence through its Belt and Road Initiative in the Global South, and it may try to counter India's projects. There are already examples of this in recent times. If the US and China continue their Cold confrontation and seek to establish two parallel orders, the Global South will find it hard to take sides. Even here, India has to use its skilful diplomacy to assist the countries of the Global South.

Moreover, the Global South is excessively debt-ridden. India has limited financial resources to help in this regard. However, the Chinese BRI scheme is often reported as a debt trap.

On the other hand, India's projects are essentially skill developments that can strengthen the country. This fact must be disseminated so that countries can make the right decisions. Western countries give grants but always make it conditional with strings attached. India needs to engage the Global South with more moral considerations. After all, India has grown from being a vulnerable post-colonial state to a nation on the rise and has begun to play a global role. In addition to all the challenges mentioned above, it must be emphasised that the Global South is not a single entity. It is amorphous and consists of a range of diverse sets of countries with

varying degrees of capabilities and aspirations. Thus, India has to craft its strategies accordingly and not seek to develop one grand strategy that can fit all countries in the Global South.

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