

## INTRODUCTION

### The Global South: Together for a Shared Future

Mohanran Bhaskaran Pillai \*

**Abstract:** With its significant role in addressing the concerns, interests, and priorities affecting developing countries, India has taken a timely step by organising the Voice of Global South Summits virtually. These virtual summits served as a platform for developing countries to exchange ideas and solutions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasised the need for the 'Global South' countries to unite and speak in one voice, particularly regarding concerns related to food, health, and energy security and the challenges posed by conflicts on their development journey. The two virtual summits held during India's presidency of the G20 Group played a crucial role in shaping the agenda of the G20 deliberations. The third virtual summit, held on 17 August 2024, was a testament to the global significance of these summits, with 123 countries in attendance. This paper highlights the objectives of the Global South Summits, India's leadership aspirations, and the challenges India faces to be the leader of the Global South. It also delves into the ambiguous nature of the concept of the Global South. This paper was originally written as the theme note of the two-day national seminar, 'Global South: Together for a Shared Future', organised by the Institute for the Study of Developing Areas (ISDA) on 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

**Keywords:** Global South, Virtual Summit, G20, G77, Third World.

India's one-year presidency of the G20 was an unequivocal triumph for Indian diplomacy. India's adept negotiation of complex international trends and reaching a consensus stands as a testament to India's diplomatic prowess. This period of global recognition of Indian diplomacy saw the organisation of two virtual Summits of the Global South. The first summit, held from 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> January 2023, was an innovative initiative aimed at uniting countries of the Global South under the theme 'Unity of Voice, Unity of Purpose'. The Global South shared their visions and priorities on a common platform, inspired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision '*Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas Sabka Vishwas Aur Sabka Prayas*'. India's philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam* also backed it (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023). The Voice of Global South Summit was India's

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\*Formerly Professor & Head, Department of Politics & International Studies, Pondicherry University. Chairman, ISDA, Trivandrum. ORCID: 0000-0003-4785-9974

effort to provide a platform to discuss concerns, interests, and priorities affecting developing countries and exchange ideas and solutions. The summit was a significant milestone, with ten sessions spread over two days. On November 17, 2023, India hosted the second voice of the Global South Summit. Two summits in one year!

Further, it was announced that another summit would be convened later to discuss issues related to artificial intelligence and its impact on the Southern Hemisphere. The third virtual summit, held on 17 August 2024, was attended by 123 countries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said the countries of the 'Global South' need to unite and speak in one voice as they face concerns related to food, health, and energy security while grappling with challenges thrown by conflicts on their development journey. "Technology divide and technology-related new economic and social challenges are also emerging. Modi further stated, "The global governance and financial institutions created in the last century have been unable to meet the challenges of this century" (Narendra Modi, 2024).

This is a testament to India's initiative to foster solidarity among developing countries and indicates India's assertion of leadership in a large and influential group.

The first summit was a resounding success, marking a significant diplomatic achievement for India. The initial question of which countries to be invited was neatly resolved. For obvious reasons, China was not included in the list of invitees. This decision was made to provide a platform specifically for the Global South countries to voice their concerns and needs without the influence of major global powers. However, this exception of China required a touch of diplomacy, and therefore, none of the member states of the G20 were invited to participate in the first Global South Summit. Close partners like Indonesia, Brazil and South Africa were also excluded. However, India has been in close contact with them through the medium of the G20 troika. The January summit aimed to identify developing countries' main concerns and needs. The participation of 125 countries validates India's decision to convene the summit.

The most visible outcome of the summit was that India received the necessary inputs to shape the G20 agenda. The second summit followed the same pattern as the first. The leaders attended an opening and a closing session. Eight ministerial sessions were held. They were attended by Ministers of External Affairs (two sessions), Finance, Education, Environment, Energy, Health, and Commerce. The theme of the inaugural session was Together, for Growth for All, with Faith for All. The theme of the closing session was Global South: Together for One Future (Modi, 2023).

### **Ambiguity in the definition of the Global South**

It is a habit of international relations experts to divide the world into

specific groups or factions. Since the late 1960s, the label Global South has been in circulation. The term 'Global South' was first coined by the left-wing American writer and political activist Carl Oglesby in 1969. In later decades, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the term gained greater acceptance. It was only after the collapse of the Soviet Union that the term gained more traction among academics and activists. The terms 'periphery', 'developing', 'underdeveloped', or 'Third World', derived from the 'centre-periphery' model, gradually disappeared. In the twenty-first century, especially in the last ten years, the rise of this concept has been astonishing. The term Global South is now used to refer to specific unique structures and processes of socio-economic inequality resulting primarily from global capitalism. As Marlea Clark points out, the Global South is not strictly geographical but a political economy categorisation. According to Nour Dados and Raewyn Connell, the notion of the "Global South" also "marks a shift from a focus on development or cultural difference toward an emphasis on geopolitical relations of power." For them, the term "Global South" encapsulates "an entire history of colonialism, neo-imperialism, and differential economic and social change through which large inequalities in living standard, life expectancy, and access to resources are maintained" (Kaveh Yazdani & Constanza Castro, 2023, p. 7).

Under the influence of postcolonial theory, the Global South terminology is used to question Eurocentric epistemologies. For them, the term Global South encompasses a whole history of colonialism, neo-imperialism, and different economic and social changes that perpetuate huge inequalities in living standards, life expectancy, and access to resources.

For scholars such as Anibal Quijano and Raewyn Connell, the term 'Global South' visualises historical and global processes and dynamic forms of knowledge that originate in non-Western geographical and historical contexts. This visualisation helps us understand the complex dynamics of global power relations. It enriches our understanding of the diverse knowledge systems outside the Western world, leaving us feeling enlightened and informed.

The "Global South" concept has become a political slogan in academia and international activism that "draws attention to global struggles and solidarities" among different populations who share experiences of inequality. Anne Garland Mahler argues that the 'Global South' is a political consciousness fundamental to theorising contemporary hegemony and resistance. Like the East or the Third World, the concept of the Global South—due to its ambiguity, varying definitions, and homogenising tendencies—has its problems and shortcomings. There is no static historical relationship that turns its back on ever-changing geopolitical processes. Some consider it a static and ahistorical concept that turns its back on ever-changing geopolitical processes. Others see it as some version

of the now politically exhausted Third World liberation narrative. However, some critics of the term observe that it is a concept captured by "Northern-dominated institutions and the global financial sector". They say it promotes "neoliberalism with Southern characteristics" (Kaveh Yazdani & Constanza Castro, 2023, p. 8). Although the concept does not have a universally accepted meaning, the Global South distinguishes parts of Asia and Oceania, Africa, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands from Europe and North America.

While the term 'Global South' was initially used to group less developed countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, it has evolved to include any socio-economic or industrial laggard place, including East Europe and substantial parts of the former Soviet Union. This evolution in the term's meaning underscores its dynamic nature and the need for a comprehensive understanding of its current usage (Wion, 2023).

Indeed, the term undoubtedly helps to understand, analyse, and encompass different non-Western geographical and historical contexts and global socio-economic processes under a single terminological umbrella.

### **Old Wine in a New Bottle?**

The Group of 77 (G77) was a more neutral and acceptable term for countries on the development path, as all developing countries were bundled together and referred to as the Third World. It stood for North-South and South-South cooperation. In his famous 1980 report 'North-South: A Program for Survival', former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt coined the concept of the 'Brandt Line'. The 'Brandt line' bisects the globe at about 30 degrees north latitude. The developed countries of North America, Europe, Japan, Australia and New Zealand were placed in the north. The remaining southern part of the hemisphere was defined as the region facing development challenges. Here, we need to travel back to history a bit. The virtual summit revives memories of the historic Afro-Asian conference held in 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia (Ranjan, 2023).

India was its chief architect of the Bandung Conference. For the first time, the former colonial territories of Asia and Africa came together in Bandung. It ignited the spirit of Third World solidarity and paved the way for the Nonaligned Movement (NAM) creation. Later, in 1964, the Group of 77 (G-77) came into existence with the signing of the Joint Declaration at the first session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva. The G-77 became the largest intergovernmental organisation of developing countries at the time. The G77 was created to foster the economic interests of developing countries and improve their ability to negotiate international economic issues within the UN system. In 1974, the UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) was established. Its responsibility was coordinating cooperation with postcolonial countries and developed countries or multilateral agencies in

collaboration with the G-77. China was not a member of either NAM or G77. However, China has worked as a G77 partner. The South Commission was established in 1987. Dr. Manmohan Singh, later the Finance Minister and Prime Minister of India, was its Secretary General. The extensive report on South-South and North-South cooperation prepared by the commission was published by Oxford University in 1990.

It is an irony in history, a perversion of history, or a mandate that Manmohan Singh, who played a crucial role in preparing the South Commission report, became the spearhead of neoliberal reforms in India. In the post-Cold War era, the non-relevance of the nonaligned movement and the G77's inactivity were disappointing for developing countries. There is a need for an appropriate and innovative path era in the neoliberal context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The opportunity to host the G20 summit prompted India to formulate a new platform. India has stepped forward to help the Global South deal more effectively with the current geopolitical and economic challenges. While defining the Global South, External Affairs Minister S. Jayashankar observed, "Those who are actually in the Global South know they are in the Global South"! The Indian Foreign Minister has injected some ambiguity into the definition of the Global South.

### **Leadership to India or China?**

More than 125 countries are in the fold. There is nothing but the colonial experience that connects the countries of the Global South, which differ in population, economic growth, infrastructure, scientific and technological base, availability of raw materials and skilled human resources. Many of them have now achieved economic growth faster than the developed countries of the Northern Hemisphere. The Second World War ended with the victory of liberal internationalism and the liberation of colonies. However, the end of colonialism did not bring equal participation to the third-world countries in the global governing systems of liberal internationalism, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Agreement. The nonaligned movement has constantly demanded that global governance institutions be reformed to ensure the participation of third-world countries. It is a sad discrimination that India, which is fast becoming the number one in terms of population, does not have permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council. Despite liberal internationalism giving way to neo-liberalism, reforms in global governance institutions are looking the other way. China and India are making great efforts to articulate the needs of developing countries by demanding reforms in the international economic and financial systems. However, both countries follow different approaches to addressing and articulating developing countries' demands and concerns (Schroeder, 2022). Recent events such as

the International Monetary Fund/World Bank annual meetings, the Belt and Road Forum meeting in Beijing, and Israel's war with Hamas have revealed differences in the responses of the two countries. One of the tangible outcomes of this year's IMF/World Bank meetings in Marrakesh was an agreement to increase equal-proportional IMF quotas without changing members' relative voting shares. India has announced support for the US proposal as a temporary solution, pending talks on changing the proportional voting system. In contrast, China has called for increasing and realigning quotas to reflect the growing share of developing countries in the global economy. India has adopted a pragmatic approach.

India's policy is to accept the possible changes and not cling to measures out of reach due to geopolitical tensions between significant countries. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has signed deals worth nearly one trillion US dollars in 150 countries. One hundred thirty countries, including heads of state from Russia, Hungary, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Argentina, Kenya and Zambia, sent representatives to the recent forum meeting. Amid criticism of inefficiencies in project implementations and substantial debt burdens, China has sought to assert that the BRI will continue in smaller, greener forms, focusing on digital infrastructure rather than large-scale physical projects. The interest shown by many developing countries suggests that participation in the BRI will remain an important consideration in their dealings with China. India has consistently criticised China for promoting projects that fail to meet international standards and transparency. India opposes the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, one of the BRI flagship projects, because it passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The most glaring difference between China and India is their approach to developments in the West (Tran, 2023).

Shortly after the Hamas attack on Israel, Prime Minister Modi expressed shock at the terrorist attacks, saying, "We stand in solidarity with Israel at this difficult time." The Indian government later reiterated its longstanding support for an independent Palestinian state and its stand against terrorism propelled by Hamas. India's position is similar to that of the West. China, by contrast, has refrained from condemning Hamas. However, he called on all parties for a ceasefire. China suggested to end the war and return to the negotiating table. Israel "acts beyond the bounds of self-defence, mass punishing Gaza civilians." China's criticism continued. Many developing countries, including Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, and leading countries in the African Union, share the view of the Israel/Gaza situation with China. Israel's denial of fundamental rights to the Palestinian people is blamed for the root cause of the current conflicts. China calls for negotiations to resolve the disputes.

### **Challenges Ahead**

Recent events have revealed considerable differences in policy and

attitudes between the countries of the Global South. The Global South is diverse. Therefore, unity of voice and purpose takes work. A typical agenda for economic growth and development is challenging. The possibility of different coalition combinations arises depending on circumstances and national interests. Countries are contextualised with China and India based on their specific objectives.

For example, countries wishing to expand their trade and investment opportunities will continue approaching China because China's economic base is much larger than India's. Countries with solid anti-colonial leanings will likely associate more closely with China.

On the other hand, India's pragmatic approach is more attractive to those who want to negotiate with developed countries and make current international economic and financial institutions and practices favourable to their economic growth and development. The support received for India's G20 presidency is a testament to that. What prevails among countries in the Global South is not the simplicity of straightforward alignment but the intricacies of multi-alignments complexities.

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