

Understanding International Security Issues of Global South

Saurabh Sharma * & Om Ranjan **

Abstract: The debate over the Global South, which gained prominence in the 1970s, has seen a resurgence in the 21st century. The debate's focus has shifted in this century due to the emergence of developing economies, rising geopolitical tensions, and increased awareness of global inequities made worse by the pandemic, climate change, and unequal growth. Today, the Global South presents a complex landscape with multifaceted challenges and nuanced geopolitical realities. Therefore, effective international representation is imperative for addressing these security threats in an increasingly interconnected world. The paper discusses the critical aspects of insecurity in the Global South region. It also aims to highlight the growing influence of regional and international organisations and how international organisations play a crucial role in elevating the issues of the Global South. This paper also underlines India and China's significant and influential role in shaping the region's global governance format, demonstrating their substantial impact on the region's geopolitical landscape.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Insecurity, Peace, Stability, Regional Organization.

The term 'Global South' refers to a political concept highly relevant to the evolution of the international order (Haibin, 2023). It encapsulates the collective idea of achieving sustainable development, which countries aim to pursue from an economic perspective. The Global South states push for the evolution of the international order in a more just and rational direction, a change that is urgently needed in today's world (Haibin, 2023). The Global South region of today seeks to fully utilise its distinct strengths and roles in addressing climate change, resolving international conflicts, advancing the dialogue of civilisations, and promoting international development.

Since 2000, the international order and its nature have become increasingly evident (Amadi, 2020). It has been characterised by the Global

*Assistant Professor at Centre for International Politics, School of International Studies, Central University of Gujarat.

**Research Scholar in International Relations and Security Studies at Rashtriya Raksha University, Gandhinagar (Gujarat).

South and its increasing involvement in international affairs to create a more peaceful, stable external environment that supports sustainable development.

The nations of the Global South have stood up for a more fair, reasonable, equitable, and representative international system to form a cohesive worldwide political and economic force that actively participates in global governance to create an equitable, sustainable world. The Global South is beginning to emerge as the states move towards an era of global politics. Today, the Global South differs from the traditional East-West, North-South perspective, emphasising that global efforts can only solve problems (Haibin, 2023). It is more akin to creating a new transnational identity and worldview, pursuing the logic of global thinking and action. The international order is transformed in a more inclusive, pluralistic, and egalitarian way due to the growth of the Global South (Haibin, 2023).

The Global South, which replaced concepts like the *Non-Aligned Movement* (Munro, 2024) and the *Third World* (Tomlinson, 2003), has carried on the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, and anti-hegemonic movements of the past and has progressively grown into a significant international force in today's world politics (Haibin, 2023). As a result, the commonly used phrase 'Third World' in international relations has increasingly given way to a new phrase, the 'Global South.' Today, the idea of the Global South is seen through more than just the lens of underdevelopment (Oduro-Marfo, 2018). It also presents a future alternative to neoliberal globalisation (Lawrence, 2024). The term Global South is becoming increasingly common, which indicates growing discontent within the present global system, and the people/state that feels marginalised are eager to bring about or see such change. This growing influence of the Global South brings hope for a more just and equitable global order.

The Rising Importance of Global South

The rising importance of the Global South region marks a significant shift in the geopolitical and economic landscape of the 21st century. Traditionally marginalised in international affairs, countries in the Global South—encompassing Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania—are now emerging as pivotal players in global politics, economics, and culture. This ascendance is driven by increased political and economic growth and vast demographic spread, highlighting the region's evolving role on the world stage. Economic growth in the Global South has been a primary driver of its rising importance. Over the past few decades, countries such as China, India, and Brazil have experienced substantial economic expansion, contributing significantly to global GDP growth (Bishop, 2022). This economic dynamism is not just limited to these few nations but is spreading across various regions, including parts of Sub-Saharan Africa

and Southeast Asia. The integration of these economies into global trade networks has shifted the centre of economic gravity, making the Global South a crucial market for goods, services, and investment. The rise of regional trade agreements and economic blocs, such as the African Union (AU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), further underscores the Global South's increasing economic interdependence and collective bargaining power.

Politically, the Global South is asserting its influence through various international forums and multilateral organisations. Countries in this region have become more vocal and coordinated in their approach to global governance, advocating for reforms that reflect their interests and perspectives. Groups like the G20, AU, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), and now poised to be BRICS+ exemplify this trend; it is believed that these alliances have played a significant role in recent years in elevating the Global South to the forefront of global governance (Chade, 2024). The recent summits and the addition of new participants show how they navigate various forums and groups (Du Plessis et al., 2023). Several multilateral groupings of today reflect the realities of power and influence in this complex world order. The African Union's (AU) entry to the G20 bloc reflects such realities; it not only reflects the decentralisation of power holding but also re-iterates the idea of a "just and equitable global governance system" (Mabera, 2019, p.583). However, many still need to be convinced about the AU's capacity to present itself as a unified face because of the continuous internal disagreements on various political and economic issues (Birhan, 2024). These differences reflect regional conflicts and bilateral issues, which mirror the great power contestation at the macro level (Shekhawat, 2023, p. 35).

These coalitions work towards addressing global challenges such as climate change, sustainable development, and equitable energy transition. Demographically, the Global South is home to most of the world's population, with a significant proportion of young people (Sarkar & Pandey, 2023). This demographic dividend presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, it provides a large, dynamic workforce that can drive economic growth and innovation. On the other hand, it underlines the need for a substantial investment in infrastructure and technology development to harness this potential fully. This demographic demand is reshaping the aspects of international security, emphasising the growing importance of the Global South in shaping global narratives. Strategic initiatives and partnerships are also elevating the role of the Global South in international affairs. Investments in infrastructure and technology through South-South cooperation have fostered stronger energy ties and exchanges within the region. Initiatives such as India's International Solar Alliance (ISA) and One Sun One World One Grid (OSOW) have created new opportunities to engage globally, which

enhances collaboration and partnership in renewable and green energy transition across Asia, Africa, and beyond (Suri, 2023). These developments are transforming the economies of participating countries and redefining the future of the global energy ecosystem.

Polarisation and the significant power contestation have been two shades of the international order. The world has been forced to recognise the altered reality of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing humanitarian and economic crises. The conflict in Ukraine has reflected the growing divisions between the West and the Rest. As we come across the first half of 2024, it is becoming clear that the changing global order is inevitable, and the existing system has to be completely redesigned to handle the change effectively. Therefore, to bring about that set of changes, the states from the Global South served as essential aspects in reforming the world order. However, despite these lofty hopes, the Global South's efforts to come together as a collective approach still need to be solved in disagreements and never-ending power battles, making any collective approach to global governance useless.

Dynamics of Insecurity in Global South

The dynamics of insecurity in the Global South are complex and multifaceted, shaped by a blend of historical legacies, socio-political instability, economic disparities, and emerging global challenges. This region often grapples with a unique set of security issues distinct from those the Global North faces. The Global South faces three principal vulnerabilities. First, it is confronted with climate insecurity, whereby the developing world is at the forefront of climate change adaptation and mitigation, even though climate change is a worldwide issue (Suri, 2023). Second, it has energy insecurity since its needs for human growth depend on an available and reasonably priced energy source (World Economic Forum, 2023). Third, these states carry risks of growth instability due to the depletion of the traditional development engines and the growing scarcity of capital for economic expansion (Sharma, 2023). The main issue is that most nations need help accomplishing these three goals with a single geopolitical and development plan. Giving up on the climate imperative might lead to energy security; unrestrained coal use, particularly, could lead to economic security and prosperity. Therefore, it is remarkable that many emerging nations have voluntarily decided to reduce the amount of coal-based electricity they roll out.

Accelerating climate security and development is possible but at the expense of energy security. One illustration of this conundrum is the dramatic drop in solar panel prices. Many nations in the global South can implement a grid-scale solar power rollout. However, they would need to rely on imported panels to transition the energy infrastructure, bringing another kind of energy instability (Ukoba et al., 2024). Therefore, emerging

nations will continue to experience intermittent energy supplies because of the available range of issues. Moving away from coal to "cleaner" fossil fuels like natural gas faces another political problem: the long-standing conflicts across Russia and West Asia. This is where China's choice comes as an alternative. The critical minerals are necessary for a large-scale energy shift, and China presently has their highest processing capacity (Purdy & Castillo, 2022).

Additionally, China's cost advantage in solar panels and even battery production—which it has gained through subsidies—cannot be ignored (Bradsher, 2024). Therefore, many nations seeking energy security will be uncomfortable with green development, significantly if it exposes them to Beijing's aggression. Such reliance will not help them with their energy insecurity issue. Thus, as many Latin American and Southeast Asian nations produce vital minerals, or as India hopes to become, a manufacturer of electric cars and solar panels, the Global South aims to benefit from the global green transition while also making sure that the post-transition world offers them more economic security than the one it replaces (Birol & Kant, 2022). They will not be willing to participate in the process unless these three requirements of the rising world are addressed, like the transition.

Additionally, they will try to modify the multilateral order to suit their needs. The Global South needs more room due to current efforts to advance the green transition. Essentially, they increase the cost of emerging economic transition and decarbonisation (Goldthau et al., 2020).

This is the context in which countries of the Global South are rejecting Western-led structures as instruments of their domestic energy and economic transitions. They aim to establish and spearhead their alliances that facilitate them with technological exchange, secure vital natural resources, and other prerequisites for swifter growth (Hogan & Patrick, 2023). In this decade, the current international system will be irreparably damaged if the three insecurities of the Global South are not openly addressed.

Role of the International Organizations vis-a-vis India and China

International organisations play a critical role in the Global South amid competition and state hegemony dynamics by acting as neutral arbiters, fostering cooperation, and promoting inclusive development. These organisations, such as the African Union (AU) and ASEAN, provide platforms for dialogue and collaboration that transcend national interests and geopolitical rivalries. In a region where significant powers often vie for influence, international organisations help balance these competing interests by advocating for policies prioritising the collective good over individual state agendas. The Global South nations are seen as leading the charge to create a more responsive and representative global order in these

altering times; they tend to set both the agenda and direction. Nevertheless, despite these lofty goals, the Global South states efforts to come together still need to be improved by disagreements and never-ending power battles, making any such approach to global governance dead (Shekhawat, 2023, p. 35). Regional organisations like the AU and ASEAN are vital in fostering regional integration and cooperation. The AU, for example, promotes unity and development across Africa, working to mitigate the influence of external powers and encouraging member states to collaborate on common issues such as security and political stability. ASEAN, similarly, enhances economic and political ties among Southeast Asian nations, helping them navigate external pressures and maintain regional autonomy. By championing sovereignty, equality, and development principles, international organisations support the Global South in navigating the complexities of state hegemony and competition. They counterbalance powerful states' influence, ensuring that the voices of smaller and less powerful nations are heard and their needs addressed in the global arena.

India and China are significantly shaping international organisations' roles across the region. Both nations have been leveraging their growing economic power and diplomatic influence to drive agendas that reflect the priorities and interests of the Global South. Through active participation and leadership in various international and regional organisations, they advocate for policies that promote development, economic cooperation, and political stability. China has enhanced infrastructure and connectivity across the Global South through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Escriche & Burguete, 2023). This extensive project aims to improve trade routes and economic links between Asia, Africa, and Latin America, fostering greater economic integration and development. Additionally, China's involvement in international organisations like the BRICS grouping promotes a multipolar world order, giving a stronger voice to emerging economies and advocating for reforms in global governance structures.

Conversely, India is pivotal in organisations such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the G77, which are critical Global South platforms (Braveboy, 2014). India's focus on capacity building, sustainable development, and south-south cooperation aligns with the broader goals of these organisations. Moreover, as discussed, India's leadership in the International Solar Alliance (ISA) underscores its commitment to addressing climate change and promoting renewable energy, which are vital issues for many countries in the Global South (Jha, 2023).

Both India and China use their influence to push for a more equitable international system, challenging the dominance of traditional Western powers. Their efforts in shaping international organisations involve

advocating for reforms that give developing countries greater representation and decision-making power. Through their active engagement, India and China contribute to redefining the global order, ensuring that the needs and perspectives of the Global South are more effectively addressed on the international stage. Also, it has been seen that China's increasing revisionism has threatened a collective approach to governance in recent years. There is an attempt to rewrite the story of global governance through the adoption of Chinese values and characters, for instance, the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Civilizational Initiative (GCI), and the Global Security Initiative (GSI) (Schuman et al., 2023). Various analysts explain a sense of frustration inside the Chinese policy circle about the existing Western format of global governance mechanisms. For the longest time, China has used various international groupings to 'amplify its vision and ideas' and remould global governance (Chhabra et al., 2020), but with the current change in the situation, China seems to leverage certain groups to further its narratives and ideas.

Conclusion

The global south philosophies and regional interests are too diverse to be grouped. It is not easy to talk of the global South as a single political body or a distinct group of countries, both politically and culturally. Current global security politics point to the possibility of a more divided global South, where the differences between the rich and the poor will widen more. The security landscape in the Global South is characterised by a diverse array of challenges that require comprehensive and coordinated approaches. Addressing these issues involves strengthening local capacities and governance structures and fostering regional and international collaboration to create sustainable security solutions. Even players in the Global North acknowledge the significance of the Global South as an idea. However, they also need to understand that actions taken in the name of the Global South might not represent the goals and aspirations of all participating nations. Further, such actions make the development process more complex on both sides. Therefore, the future will become more competitive and hamper regional resource security.

Leaders in the Global North face the constant danger of losing sight of the geopolitical and geo-economic factors that shape global activities by discounting the core grievances of the Global South. This ultimately creates a hostile North-South dynamic. Therefore, leaders in the Global South should passionately express their desire to reorient the global order away from Western domination.

References

Amadi, L. (2020). Globalisation and the changing liberal international order: A review of the literature. *Research in Globalization*, 2, 100015.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resglo.2020.100015>

Birhan, A. T. (2024). The African Union and Conflict Resolution: Challenges and Prospects. *Social Science and Humanities Journal (SSHJ)*, 8(03), 34576-34585.

Birol, F., & Kant, A. (2022). India's clean energy transition is rapidly underway, benefiting the entire world. <https://www.iea.org/commentaries/india-s-clean-energy-transition-is-rapidly-underway-benefiting-the-entire-world>

Bishop, M. (2022). The BRICS countries: Where next and what impact on the global economy. *Economics Observatory*.

Bradsher, K. (2024). How China Came to Dominate the World in Solar Energy. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/07/business/china-solar-energy-exports.html>

Braveboy-Wagner, J. A. (2014). The NAM and the G77: the unexpected persistence of tricontinental multilateralism. *UACES, Sept*, pp. 1-3.

Chhabra, T., Doshi, R., Hass, R., & Kimball, E. (2020). Global China: Global governance and norms. *Report, Brookings*, October. www.brookings.edu/research/global-china-global-governance-and-norms.

Chade, J. (2024, February). BRICS: Towards a new era of global governance. *Geneva Policy Outlook*. <https://www.genevapolicyoutlook.ch/brics-towards-a-new-era-of-global-governance/>

Du Plessis, C., Miridzhanian, A., & Acharya, B. (2023). BRICS welcomes new members in push to reshuffle world order. *Reuters, August 24*.

Escrache, I.A. & Burguete, V. (2023, November). Introduction: China's Presence in the Global South. <https://www.cidob.org/en/publication/introduction-chinas-presence-global-south>

Goldthau, A., Eicke, L., & Weko, S. (2020). The global energy transition and the global South. *The geopolitics of the global energy transition*, 319-339. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-39066-2_14

Haibin, N. (2023). The Global South is an Important Driving Force in the Evolution of the International Order. *Contemporary World*. <https://interpret.csis.org/translations/the-global-south-is-an-important-driving-force-in-the-evolution-of-the-international-order/#:~:text=The%20Global%20South%20has%20the,evolution%20of%20the%20international%20order>.

Hogan, E. & Patrick, S. (2024, May). A Closer Look at the Global South. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/05/global-south-colonialism-imperialism?lang=en>

Jha, V. (2023). International Solar Alliance: Bridging the Gap. *Tracks to Transition: India's Global Climate Strategy*, p. 37. <https://csep.org/reports/>

international-solar-alliance-bridging-the-gap/

Lawrence, G. (2024). It's the Economy, Stupid! Neoliberal Nonsense and the Myths of the Free Market. In *Societal Deception: Global Social Issues in Post-Truth Times* (pp. 51–98). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Mabera, F. (2019, December). Africa and the G20: A relational view of African agency in global governance. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 26(4), 583–599. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2019.1702091>

Munro, A. (2024, June). Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) | Definition, Mission, & Facts. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Non-Aligned-Movement>

Oduro-Marfo, S. (2018, August). Global South: What does it mean, and why use the term? <https://onlineacademiccommunity.uvic.ca/globalsouthpolitics/2018/08/08/global-south-what-does-it-mean-and-why-use-the-term/>

Purdy, C., & Castillo, R. (2022, August). China's Role in Supplying Critical Minerals for the Global Energy Transition. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-role-in-supplying-critical-minerals-for-the-global-energy-transition-what-could-the-future-hold/>

Sarkar, D. & Pandey, A. (2023, August). Youth-led just transition: A mandate or a mirage for the Global South? <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/youth-led-just-transition-a-mandate-or-a-mirage-for-the-global-south>

Schuman, M., Fulton, J., & Gering, T. (2023). How Beijing's newest global initiatives seek to remake the world order. *Atlantic Council*, June 21. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/how-beijings-newest-global-initiatives-seek-to-remake-the-world-order/>

Sharma, M.S. (2023, December). The Global South's Three Insecurities. Annual Trends Report- Rise of Global South: New Consensus Wanted. https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/2023-12/Annual%20Trends%20Report%202023-ISPI-ORF-PCNS_final.pdf

Shekhawat, S. (2023, December). Regional Organisations in the Global South-Straddling Between Competition or Cooperation. Annual Trends Report- Rise of Global South: New Consensus Wanted. https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/2023-12/Annual%20Trends%20Report%202023-ISPI-ORF-PCNS_final.pdf

Suri, S. (2023). It's time for climate justice-A Global South perspective on the fight against the climate crisis. *Observer Research Foundation*. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/a-global-south-perspective-on-the-fight-against-the-climate-crisis>

Tomlinson, B. R. (2003). What was the third world? *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38(2), 307–321.

Ukoba, K., Yoro, K. O., Eterigho-Ikelegbe, O., Ibegbulam, C., & Jen, T. C. (2024). Adaptation of solar power in the Global South: Prospects, challenges and opportunities. *Heliyon*.

World Economic Forum. (2023, November). How we can create a global energy transition inclusive of the Global South. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/11/energy-transition-global-south-cop28/>