

CPPR ISSUE BRIEF

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON

The 18th BRICS Summit: India's Priorities and the Future of the Global South

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1. The Changing Nature and Purpose of BRICS

Unlike the UN, BRICS operates without a formal charter or secretariat, giving members flexibility without binding obligations. It evolved from a pressure group challenging the IMF and World Bank into a parallel institution-builder, anchored by the New Development Bank (NDB) and Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA). Since 2022, it has taken on a sharper geopolitical and anti-Western tone, rebranding itself as a vehicle for Global South unity and a multipolar world order.

2. Expansion and Internal Coherence

The enlargement to ten members has strengthened BRICS's claim to represent the Global South but has also deepened internal contradictions. Divergent positions among Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, alongside the continuing India-China rivalry, highlight the difficulty of maintaining cohesion as membership diversifies. BRICS's success should be judged by its ability to deliver tangible outcomes, not by member count or declarations.

3. India's Strategic Autonomy and Global Positioning

India is navigating a careful balance between Global South solidarity and continued engagement with the West. This includes pursuing UN Security Council reform with support from China and Russia, defending South Africa's G20 membership, and maintaining trade and technology ties with Western economies through simultaneous participation in BRICS, the G20, and the Quad.

4. India-China Relations within the BRICS Framework

Relations remain in a fragile post-Galwan recovery phase, illustrated by a recent 400-member Chinese business delegation to India. Despite a persistent trust deficit and unresolved border issues, BRICS was seen as a platform for confidence-building, with a proposed joint communique at the Summit's conclusion floated as a tangible signal of cooperation.

5. Emerging Economic and Technological Priorities

Discussions highlighted de-dollarisation through the CRA and local-currency settlements, India's UPI

as a potential model for BRICS-wide digital payments, and the widening AI capability gap with China's WAICO initiative. Critical mineral supply chains, counter-terrorism cooperation, and the climate-water-AI nexus were flagged as urgent cross-cutting concerns.

6. Recommendations

Strengthen institutional depth over numerical expansion: BRICS should prioritise building strategic rapport and coordinated action among members over further enlargement, ensuring the grouping translates political weight into measurable outcomes.

Pursue UNSC reform through sustained China-Russia engagement: India should continue diplomatic outreach to secure Chinese and Russian backing for permanent Security Council membership, using BRICS as a confidence-building platform alongside bilateral channels.

Advance a joint India-China communique: A joint statement at the Summit's conclusion would demonstrate that cooperation on trade and economic growth remains possible despite bilateral differences, even as diplomatic efforts continue separately to resolve the border dispute.

Invest in AI capability and shape global governance norms: India should scale up domestic AI investment to narrow the gap with China while actively promoting "AI for All" and Responsible AI frameworks as alternatives to exclusive blocs like WAICO.

Expand local-currency and digital payment mechanisms: Rather than pursuing a common BRICS currency, which remains conceptual, members should prioritise immediate, practical steps such as local-currency trade settlement and cross-border adoption of payments systems like India's UPI.

7. Conclusion

BRICS stands at an inflection point between becoming a credible institutional voice for the Global South and drifting into a politicised bloc. While expansion has strengthened its representative weight, it has also deepened internal contradictions among members. Ultimately, BRICS's success should be measured not by membership size or the ambition of its declarations, but by its ability to avoid excessive politicisation and convert dialogue into tangible, durable outcomes for the Global South.

8. Further Resources: CPPR's Research and Engagement on BRICS

- **India's BRICS Presidency, South Asia and Future of Regional Cooperation**
 - <https://www.cppr.in/reports-and-papers/india-brics-presidency-2026-south-asia>
- **BRICS in the Evolving Global Order: Geopolitical Challenges and Adopting New Strategies in the Trump Era | FNF Policy Paper**
 - <https://www.cppr.in/reports-and-papers/brics-in-the-evolving-global-order>
- **Is BRICS Creating a New World Order? | D Dhanuraj, Chairman, Centre for Public Policy Research**
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-qAJjF_c8

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