

# China-India Brief

*A publication of the Centre on Asia and Globalisation*

*Special Issue*

## China and India in the Global South: Leadership, Influence, and Rivalry



Image Credit: Wikimedia Commons/ Government of India



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School of Public Policy



The *China-India Brief* is a monthly digest focusing on the relationship between Asia's two biggest powers. The Brief provides readers with a key summary of current news articles, reports, analyses, commentaries, and journal articles published in English on the China-India relationship. It features a Guest Column weighing in on key current issues in China-India relations.

**SPECIAL EDITION**

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## Guest Column

# From Ukraine to Iran: China, India and the Test for Global South Leadership

By Filippo Fasulo

As a consequence of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Global South, long a political label, became a geopolitical actor. Many states across Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America refused to let the war be framed solely as a clash between Russia and the West, or as part of a broader contest between democracies and autocracies. Instead, they insisted that food prices, energy insecurity, debt distress and unequal representation in global institutions were also central to the story. The rise of the Global South as an alternative, and, in many ways, more effective, framing was encouraged by Russia and China at the BRICS Summit, virtually held in Beijing in 2022. But it was embraced by many other countries not as an endorsement of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but as a way to advance their own demands for a rebalancing of the global order. China and India, in particular, sought to appeal to this wider constituency of developing countries through markedly different strategies. A second war, centred on Iran, is now testing which approach can hold under pressure.

## China: Resources, Transactions and Narrative

China's approach has been the more ambitious in scope and the more explicit in



*Image Credit: Wikimedia Commons/ President of Azerbaijan*

systemic intent. On Ukraine, Beijing paired diplomatic ambiguity with institutional activism. It abstained on the early **UN General Assembly votes**, later published its own **position paper on a political settlement**, and framed the conflict as evidence that Western security architecture and sanctions were destabilising the wider world. At the same time, China worked to turn "Global South" into a strategic category. Xi Jinping explicitly called on the Global South to "take the lead" in shaping a more just international order. In Africa, the **2024 FOCAC Beijing Action Plan** reaffirmed the fusion of development finance, political coordination and security cooperation, committing CNY 360 billion in support over three years. China also moved to multilateralise its diplomacy by co-launching, with Brazil and others, a "Friends for Peace" group on **Ukraine at the UN**.

For many countries in the Global South, China's offer is attractive precisely because it combines capital, infrastructure, industrial

policy, diplomatic status and an anti-hierarchical discourse. However, engagement with China is rarely just an act of ideological loyalty. It is typically transactional and selective. Governments value Chinese speed and scale, yet often remain wary of asymmetry, debt exposure and domestic political backlash. Many Global South states engage China seriously, but they do not necessarily want Beijing to define the Global South on their behalf. For example, many **new BRICS members** list “economic benefits” as the main reason for entering the groups.

### **India: Legitimacy and a Bridge to the Global North**

India's strategy has been different: less resource-heavy, but often more politically relatable. New Delhi's comparative advantage is not financial scale but a different political condition. India responded to the Ukraine shock not by offering a grand blueprint for a new world order nor through an implicit support to Russia as China did, but by presenting itself as the country best positioned to aggregate developing-country concerns without forcing them into any single orbit. Moreover, India is at the same time strengthening relations with the Global North, refusing to present Global South claims as anti-Western.

The **Voice of Global South Summit**, launched in January 2023 and joined by representatives from 125 countries, was the clearest expression of that method. India linked those consultations directly to its G20 presidency, where the **New Delhi**

economic anxieties of developing countries over Ukraine and secured one of New Delhi's most tangible diplomatic achievements: the African Union's admission as a permanent G20 member. India's development offer reflects the same tone: lines of credit, training, digital public infrastructure and renewable-energy coalitions rather than a civilisational or ideological project. Its **USD 32 billion global lines of credit portfolio**, including USD 12 billion across forty-two African countries, reflects a model of partnership that many partners find less politically burdensome than Chinese financing.

That helps explain why many countries in the Global South often view India as a useful balancer rather than a hegemonic candidate. India is more plural, less intrusive, but also easier to engage without strategic overdependence. But this same flexibility reveals India's limits. New Delhi cannot match China's financial firepower, supply-chain centrality or institutional density. Its influence is strongest where voice and representation matter most; it is weaker where partners need large-scale infrastructure or rapid industrial financing.

### **From War to War: Iran as the Real Test for the Global South Political Unity**

Ukraine helped generate a collective political consciousness of the Global South and allowed both China and India to audition for leadership. The escalation around Iran has been different: it is testing whether that consciousness can be translated into collective action, and whether leadership claims can survive proximity,

risk and intra-group obligation. That test became structurally unavoidable because of Iran's entry into BRICS, **effective from 2024**. The **2025 Rio de Janeiro Declaration** explicitly condemned the military strikes against Iran since June 13 2025, while still using softer formulas on Ukraine, and reaffirmed that "BRICS countries continue to play a pivotal role in voicing the concerns and priorities of the Global South." Under Brazil's chairmanship, the bloc managed to project a degree of collective coherence. The contrast with what followed is stark.

In early 2026, the coordinated US-Israeli strikes on Iranian leaders amounted to a direct military assault on a BRICS member. That should have been a defining test for India, which has chaired BRICS since December 2025. Instead, as the conflict spread across the region and drew in other BRICS-linked actors, New Delhi responded with striking caution. Despite direct appeals from Iranian President Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Araghchi urging Modi to **"activate BRICS"** and push for a collective condemnation, India has not convened a joint statement. The logic is clear enough: New Delhi is trying to preserve a delicate web of partnerships, and any forceful condemnation would put at risk ties it has spent years building. In particular, the UAE illustrates the dilemma sharply. It is **a cornerstone of India's economic architecture** and home to several million Indian workers. It is also a target of Iranian counter-strikes. But the price of that caution is paralysis — and a damaging blow to

the Global South's claim that it can act collectively, and speak for its members, when one of them comes under direct military attack.

China's posture has been sharper, but it has yet to produce any tangible results. Beijing has openly condemned the strikes as violations of sovereignty and international law, issued diplomatic protests, urged its nationals to evacuate affected areas, and aligned rhetorically with Russia and Brazil in criticising unilateral Western action. Yet China has not gone so far as to jeopardise the meeting with Trump scheduled for late March, prioritising bilateral dialogue over outright political condemnation. Paradoxically, it is now Trump himself who is calling for the meeting to be postponed. As the war involving Iran unfolds and risks escalating into a broader regional conflict, it is testing the ability of the Global South's would-be leaders to act not individually, but by convening a wider political response. The economic dimension makes that test all the more acute: disruption to regional trade routes, energy supplies, and remittance flows hits Global South economies hardest. The fact that **almost 140 countries co-sponsored** a UNSC resolution condemning Iranian counter-strikes, while remaining silent on the original US-Israeli assault, is a stark illustration of how economic vulnerability and dependence constrain the very countries that stand to lose most from prolonged instability, a dynamic that even China and Russia, by abstaining, chose not to challenge. China's main assets are its ability to weaponise its sector-specific

economic leverage over the United States and, potentially, to activate military cooperation with Iran. India, by contrast, has less to offer Washington in material terms, but it can still act diplomatically through a network of like-minded countries — including in the West — that are affected by the war, while also leveraging its role as BRICS' annual chair to advance a political blueprint that reflects the interests of the Global South.

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## Guest Column

# The Global South Will Not Choose: China, India and the Politics of Influence

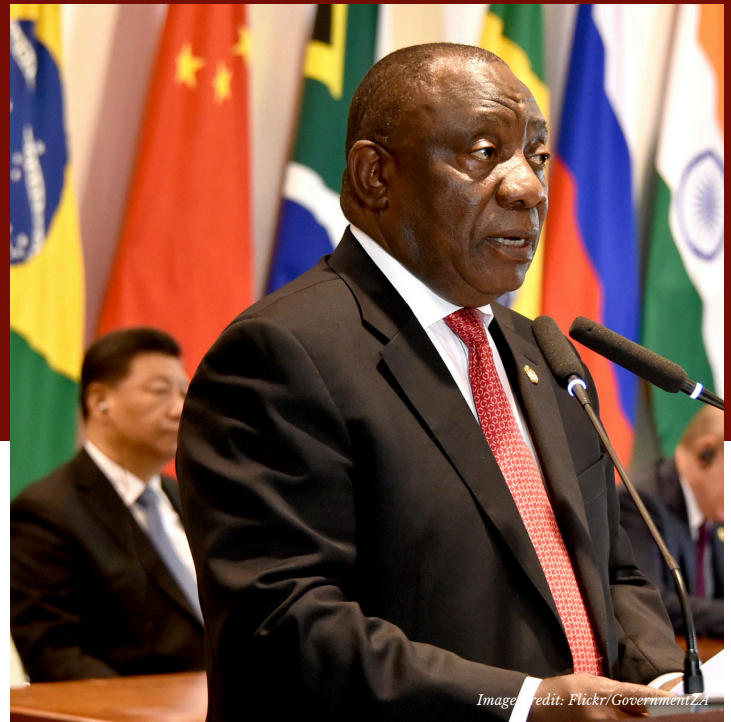
By Jing Gu

As great power competition deepens and the global economy fragments, both China and India have intensified their engagement with the Global South. This is often framed as a rivalry for leadership. But that framing is too simple. The central question is not who can “own” the Global South, but who can build influence that is credible, materially useful, and politically acceptable to states determined to preserve room for manoeuvre. Across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, governments are seeking strategic options rather than new patrons. In that setting, China and India compete through different combinations of delivery capacity, political acceptability, and strategic flexibility. The key question is not simply who leads, but who delivers, who listens, and who leaves states greater room for manoeuvre.

### Beyond a Leadership Contest

The Global South is too often treated as a passive arena in which others compete for position. In reality, it is an active political space, shaped by states that assess, negotiate, combine, and hedge. They do not simply receive influence; they filter it through their own strategic interests.

China and India are often discussed comparatively, but they are also embedded



in the same changing political field. Both speak the language of sovereignty, development, and South–South cooperation. Both seek greater standing across the Global South. Yet they do so through different histories, capacities, and repertoires of engagement. As **Tansen Sen** has argued, China–India studies are often weakened by the failure to combine comparison with connection. That insight is especially relevant here: China and India are not only comparable actors, but also **relationally embedded in the same contested landscape**.

### China’s Scale, Delivery and Structural Reach

China enters this contest with an overwhelming economic scale. Its trade with Africa reached \$348 billion in 2025, while trade with Belt and Road (BRI) partner countries exceeded **\$3 trillion**. In Southeast Asia alone, China–ASEAN trade approached **\$982.3 billion**. Institutions such as the **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank** (AIIB) and

the New Development Bank (NDB) reinforce this sense of scale and durability. Yet the significance of that scale lies not simply in volume. It points to China's position as a system-level actor: not merely a provider of projects or loans, but a partner able to shape markets, supply chains, infrastructure corridors, standards, financing arrangements, and development expectations across multiple regions at once. In this sense, engagement with China often offers access not only to capital, but also to wider ecosystems of trade, logistics, industrial capacity, and policy coordination.

That ecosystem logic remains one of China's distinctive advantages. China's influence often appears structurally embedded rather than episodic. It can connect ports to industrial zones, railways to export strategies, finance to state planning, and infrastructure to broader narratives of development and connectivity. Its appeal rests not only on the scale of its capital, but on its integrated capacity to deliver tangible infrastructure and reshape wider patterns of economic cooperation. For many governments, that makes China more than a source of funding. China's comparative strength, in other words, lies not only in financing individual projects, but in linking infrastructure, production, trade, and policy into broader development platforms.

None of this removes the tensions. Concerns over debt distress, uneven local spillovers, political suspicion, and strategic overreach remain significant. But even these concerns underline the scale of China's role. China matters not simply because it funds large projects, but because its involvement

development and cooperation are pursued.

### **India's Political Appeal and Bridge-Building Capacity**

India's position is different, but far from peripheral. If China's strength lies in scale and structural reach, India's lies more in political acceptability, diplomatic agility, and bridge-building capacity: its ability to act as a consultative, sovereignty-sensitive partner while linking Global South priorities to wider networks of power, technology, and finance.

While India cannot match China's financial scale or state-backed delivery capacity, it maintains a distinct profile through development cooperation, technical training, digital partnerships, and diplomatic activism. According to the **Indian Ministry of External Affairs**, India has extended over 300 Lines of Credit worth \$32 billion to sixty-eight countries, supporting around 600 projects. Through the **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme**, India has trained thousands of officials from developing countries. The Voice of Global South Summit in 2023 brought together 125 countries and aimed to position India as a political amplifier of developing-country concerns.

India's influence should not be underestimated because it operates on a smaller material scale. For many states, it appears less imposing and therefore less threatening. It offers partnership with less structural dependence, while its ties with major powers enhance its appeal by

allowing it to act as a bridge rather than a bloc actor. This does not automatically translate into leadership. Leadership rests on continuity, institutional reach, and delivery at scale.

That appeal rests in part on adaptability. Yet India's global role remains constrained by a persistent gap between willingness, ambition, and material capability. Its partnerships can be slowed by uneven implementation and disbursal, while its digital model may also invite scrutiny over privacy, exclusion, and governance standards as it travels. India's appeal is evident, but it will endure only if diplomatic visibility is matched by more consistent delivery.

### **Why the Global South Will Not Choose**

Framing China and India's engagement with the Global South as a zero-sum rivalry is misleading. Both are trying to shape a more pluralistic order in which the terms of influence are less Western-dominated, but they do so from different strategic positions. China seeks to convert economic leverage into enduring political influence without appearing overly assertive. India aims to translate its diplomatic visibility into broader strategic relevance without overstating its material capacity. The relationship is competitive, uneven, issue-dependent, and sometimes selectively cooperative.

In practice, many governments do not feel compelled to choose between the two.

They seek Chinese infrastructure, finance, and market access where useful, and Indian training, digital tools, or diplomatic support where these provide advantages. Their operative logic is not alignment, but diversification. The Global South is not a passive arena but an active domain of agency: states are combining, bargaining, balancing, and hedging across multiple relationships in pursuit of their own strategic interests.

The real story is not a binary contest for ownership of the Global South. Rather, it is a fluid struggle over credibility, capacity, and strategic manoeuvre. China will remain the more consequential economic actor across much of the Global South, because of its larger and more institutionalised delivery capabilities. India's influence, however, may continue to expand if it can convert diplomatic visibility into sustained developmental relationships and scale the elements that travel best: digital public infrastructure, technical training, affordable governance tools, and a style of partnership that resonates with states wary of both Western conditionality and Chinese dominance. The decisive question is not which country "wins," but whether either can exercise influence without narrowing the strategic choices of partner states.

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Development at China Agricultural University. Her work examines China and the Global South, development finance, and the changing politics of international development. She is the author of **China and the Global South in a Contested World Order**.

## Guest Column

# India's Increasing and Challenging Engagement with the Global South

By Raj Verma

In the early twenty-first century, particularly under the Modi governments (2014–2019 and 2019–2022), India placed less emphasis on the Global South as it focused on building stronger relationships with major and emerging powers. However, during Modi's second term, following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and India's preparation to assume the G20 presidency in November 2022, New Delhi stated that it will enhance its engagement with the Global South.

## Why India needs the Global South

Under the Modi government, New Delhi sees the Global South as important for several reasons. First, it views cooperation with the Global South countries as a way to counterbalance US dominance and promote a more equitable, multipolar world order. Second, India seeks to reshape the Western-led liberal system, which it considers biased and limiting to its ambitions of becoming a leading power. Third, New Delhi supports the creation of a more stable, predictable, and diversified global economic framework, including reforms to international financial institutions. Finally, India aims to boost its international status and secure broader recognition as a leading power.



## Modi government's three-pronged Global South strategy

Since 2022, the Modi government has followed a three-pronged strategy to deepen India's engagement and influence in the Global South. First, India has sought to position itself as the voice of the Global South. On November 30, 2022, Modi wrote an article in **The Hindu** outlining India's vision for the G20. In it, he noted that India's G20 priorities would be shaped not only through consultation with fellow G20 members but also with countries of the Global South, whose perspectives are often overlooked. He further argued that India's development journey could serve as a model for these nations, emphasising its status as the world's fastest-growing major economy and highlighting its bottom-up, rather than top-down, approach to governance and development.

In January 2023, Modi government hosted a virtual "**Voice of the Global South Summit**," inviting participation from more

than 120 countries. The meeting was held under the theme “Unity of Voice, Unity of Purpose,” reflecting India’s guiding philosophy of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” (“the world is one family”). Its central objective was to underscore India’s continuing role as a leading champion of the Global South. Follow-up editions of the summit were later organised—one in New Delhi in **November 2023** and another in **April 2024** in a virtual format—where India reaffirmed its strong commitment to representing and advocating for the interests of Global South countries.

Second, India has sought to position itself as a leading champion of the Global South’s interests. The government of Narendra Modi has used major international institutions and forums, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), G7, G20, Non-Aligned Movement, Group of 77, United Nations General Assembly, United Nations Security Council, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change processes, the Commonwealth of Nations, BRICS, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association, to reinforce its claim of leadership within the Global South. Advocating for the priorities of developing countries and highlighting the challenges they face has become a consistent theme of India’s engagement across these global platforms.

Third, India has emphasised the provision of public goods to the Global South. In recent years, especially since 2022, India has expanded its role in delivering development-oriented support, including supplying COVID-19 vaccines, promoting solar energy, strengthening technological

cooperation, and sharing its development experience and best practices. It has implemented numerous projects across **seventy-eight countries, including 208 projects in Africa**. These efforts are designed through a consultative process and are intended to be transparent, demand-driven, empowerment-focused, and environmentally sustainable.

Since India is recognised as a first responder in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, it has also committed to sharing its **expertise and capacity-building programs** with partner countries and international organisations. Prime Minister Modi has further highlighted **India’s readiness to extend public goods** through the Global South Science and Technology Initiative, aimed at supporting research and skill development. He has underscored India’s willingness to share knowledge in advanced sectors such as nuclear energy and space technology, where the country has achieved notable progress. In addition, India has offered to **provide transformative digital public infrastructure**—already deployed domestically in areas like universal identification, healthcare, education, e-governance, logistics, commerce, industry, and electronic payments—to benefit countries across the Global South.

### **Sino-Indian rivalry for leadership of the Global South**

Both China and India are striving to position themselves as leaders of the Global South in order to advance their national interests. However, India faces a significant disadvantage in this competition. First,

China secured a head start. While the government of Narendra Modi has intensified its engagement more recently, China under Xi Jinping has consistently prioritised and invested in the Global South over a longer period. Second, New Delhi does not possess the same level of financial and economic resources that Beijing can mobilise for investments and funding across the Global South. Beijing has pursued a comprehensive strategy that combines diplomatic outreach, economic initiatives, cultural diplomacy, and soft power to broaden its influence throughout the region.

China has established a range of alternative or parallel institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the New Development Bank, and various overseas development funds, including the China-Latin America and Caribbean Industrial Investment and Cooperation Fund, the Silk Road Fund, and the China-Africa Development Fund. These initiatives are aimed at providing loans and investments to developing countries, thereby increasing China's influence in the Global South. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China has built a global network of institutional influence, leveraging high-profile infrastructure and investment projects. Additionally, China has worked to win the support of the Global South by founding Confucius Institutes, promoting cultural exchanges, and offering scholarships to students from these countries, all of which serve to strengthen its soft power.

New Delhi is well aware of China's advantages and has set out to counter them

by establishing normative legitimacy as the preferred partner of countries in the Global South, especially in Africa. **Indian media** has repeatedly referred to China's activities in Africa as extractive and exploitative. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, India's Minister of External Affairs, has also repeatedly targeted China's BRI and China's engagement with the Global South. At the 2025 Japan-India-Africa Business Forum, **Jaishankar stated** "Unlike extractive models of engagement, India believes in capacity-building, skill development and technology transfer, ensuring that African countries not only benefit from investments but also develop self-sustaining growth ecosystems."

### **India's challenges for leadership of the Global South**

New Delhi should recognise that its efforts to claim leadership of the Global South could be constrained by several factors.

First, the rise of "**non-alignment 2.0**"—where many countries are prioritising strategic autonomy to maximise their geo-economic, geopolitical, and geo-strategic interests. This implies that states in the Global South may be reluctant to accept leadership from major powers such as India or China.

Second, many developing countries rely simultaneously on Western nations and non-Western powers like China and Russia for economic growth, development, and responses to global economic challenges. Given India's relatively limited material

resources, it may struggle to meet these countries' economic and developmental expectations or to assume a leadership role.

Third, India faces **lingering resentment in some parts of the Global South**, partly because its positions in international forums, especially the WTO, have at times conflicted with the interests of other developing nations.

Finally, India's leadership ambitions may also encounter resistance from neighbouring Global South countries. Some of these states remain cautious about India's regional dominance and have expressed concerns over what they perceive as interference in their domestic affairs and policies that they believe encroach on their sovereignty and national interests.

Dr Raj Verma is a Visiting Fellow at the Sigur Center for Asian Studies, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University. Dr Verma has an MPhil and PhD in International Relations from London School of Economics and Political Science. He is the author of four books/edited volumes, editor/co-editor of eight special issues/sections and the author of almost 50 peer reviewed articles published in journals. Dr Verma's research is focused on India's and China's foreign and security policy, India's and China's political economy, Sino-Indian-US-Russia-Pakistan relations, Asian security

issues, Global South and the emerging world order and International Relations theory. He has worked in think-tanks in the UK, India, and China, and also worked as an economist and consultant with a focus on emerging markets in Asia, especially India and China. He has received fellowships from universities and research institutes in India, China, the UK, Taiwan, Philippines and other countries. He has been regularly interviewed by media in India, China, the UK and Europe, and has been invited by universities and think-tanks in India, China, Taiwan, the Philippines and the UK to deliver lectures.

## News Reports

### Bilateral Relations

**Chinese FM welcomes new Indian ambassador, 'reflecting China's goodwill in advancing bilateral ties'**

**Global Times, March 20**

China welcomed the appointment of India's new ambassador Vikram Doraiswami, calling envoys key to bilateral ties.

**India approves limited easing of Chinese investment curbs after years of friction**

**Reuters, March 10**

India approved easing curbs on Chinese investments in select sectors, signalling a reset after years of friction. The move opens electronics, capital goods and solar to FDI from neighbouring countries.

**India, China Should See Each Other As 'Partners, Not Rivals': Chinese FM Wang Yi Pushes Closer Ties**

**Times of India, March 8**

China's foreign minister called for India and China to act as partners, not rivals, and to treat their ties as an opportunity. He cited recent Modi–Xi engagements as giving fresh momentum to relations.

### China and India in the Region

**India-China push to resume Lipulekh trade reignites Nepal's concerns**

**Kathmandu Post, March 22**

India and China are set to resume border trade via the Lipulekh Pass after a six-year pause, officials say. Preparations for the June–September trading season are underway, though the move has raised concerns in Nepal.

**Ships stranded at Hormuz, energy crunch at home: How India's U.S.-Israel tilt is testing ties with Iran**

**CNBC, March 16**

Two Indian LPG vessels transited Hormuz, though authorities stressed there is no wider deal with Tehran. With energy costs rising, India continues a balancing act, even as its alignment with the US and Israel becomes clearer.

**China to continue to make active efforts to facilitate reconciliation and ease tensions between Afghanistan, Pakistan: FM**

**Global Times, March 16**

China said it will work to ease tensions and support reconciliation between the two sides, urging calm and restraint. It called for face-to-face talks, an early ceasefire, and dialogue to resolve disputes.

**India arrests another suspect in Bangladesh uprising leader's killing**

**CNA, March 15**

A Bangladeshi man has been arrested in India for aiding two suspects accused of killing student leader Sharif Osman Hadi to cross the border.

## Trade and Economy

**Iran war impact to show on India GDP, inflation in risk to 'Goldilocks' economy**

**Hindustan Times, March 18**

India projected 7.2% growth in FY27 with inflation below 4%, but the Iran war threatens to disrupt that outlook.

**Trade deficit with China tops \$100bn**

**Times of India, March 17**

India's trade gap with China has surged past \$100bn, even as exports have shown improvement in recent months.

**US launches probe into trading partners including the EU, China and India**

**BBC, March 12**

The US has opened Section 301 investigations into manufacturing policies in 16 trading partners, including China, India and the EU, over alleged unfair practices.

**US won't let India become rival like China, Trump official says**

**South China Morning Post, March 6**

The US will not offer India the same economic concessions it once gave China, Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau said. The remarks signal caution in ongoing trade talks.

## Energy and Environment

**India steps up regional energy diplomacy, supplies Bangladesh with diesel**

**South China Morning Post, March 20**

India's diesel supply to Bangladesh amid the Iran war underscores its "first responder" role in the region.

**India asks China for urea as war-induced gas crunch bites**

**Bloomberg, March 12**

India has asked China to ease curbs on urea exports as the West Asia war disrupts fuel supplies and threatens fertiliser production.

**US grants waiver to allow India to buy Russian oil amid Iran war**

**Guardian, March 6**

Washington has temporarily eased sanctions to let India buy Russian oil stuck at sea, seeking to prevent further price spikes. The waiver lasts 30 days.

**Canada, India Strike \$1.9 Billion Uranium Supply Agreement as They Firm Ties**

**Wall Street Journal, March 2**

Canada is strengthening ties with India through agreements on energy and critical minerals, as it looks to diversify alliances during strains with Washington.

## Analyses

### **Four signals from China's Two Sessions**

New Indian Express, March 16

*By Xu Feihong, Chinese Ambassador to India*

China's Two Sessions signal a shift toward slower, higher-quality growth, AI-led industrial upgrading, and calibrated openness—alongside renewed emphasis on stabilising ties with India. Yet these ambitions underscore continuity more than change, with structural constraints and strategic competition still shaping outcomes.

### **BRICS Meets Reality in the Middle East War**

Foreign Policy, March 16

*By C. Raja Mohan, Columnist at Foreign Policy, a distinguished professor at O.P. Jindal Global University's Motwani Jadeja Institute for American Studies*

BRICS' silence on the Gulf war underscores a structural reality: a loose coalition of rivals cannot translate shared rhetoric into collective action. As with past solidarity projects, national interests ultimately override ambitions for a cohesive multipolar bloc.

### **Boosting China-India ties should be pillar of Hong Kong's five-year plan**

South China Morning Post, March 14

*By Brian Wong, Assistant Professor in philosophy at the University of Hong Kong, and a Rhodes Scholar and adviser on strategy for the Oxford Global Society*

Hong Kong can serve as a pragmatic bridge in managing China–India ties, leveraging its legal, financial, and diaspora linkages to sustain engagement amid strategic rivalry. But structural mistrust between Beijing and New Delhi will ultimately limit how far such facilitation can go.

### **China's Expanding Nuclear Capabilities: Implications for India's Response**

Observer Research Foundation, March 2

*By Kartik Bommakanti, Senior Fellow, Defence and National Security, Strategic Studies Programme, ORF*

Beijing's growing and modernising arsenal is reshaping the regional balance, forcing India to prioritise deterrence against China while managing spillover risks with Pakistan. A minimalist approach centred on sensors, missile defence, and sea-based forces may prove the most viable path.

## Books and Journals

### **US–China Strategic Competition in the Indo-Pacific and India’s Strategic Recalibration of Its Policy Choices**

**India Quarterly, March 2026**

*By Swaran Singh is a Professor of Diplomacy and Disarmament at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi*

Donald Trump’s 2025 inauguration marks a turning point in the retreat from rule-based globalism, signalling a shift toward neo-mercantilist bilateralism in which ‘Make America Great Again’ prioritises transactional bargaining over multilateral norms. In this context, strategic competition between the United States and China further weakens rule-based multilateralism, as both challenge long-standing international arrangements underpinning post-Second World War stability, alongside a renewed US retreat from global responsibilities. Consequently, India faces growing asymmetry with China and increased US unpredictability, including a potential withdrawal from the Indo-Pacific where India has significant stakes. As distinctions between partner and

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competitor blur in India’s engagement with both Beijing and Washington, this article assesses the sustainability of India’s strategic autonomy. It argues that amid competing frameworks such as the US-led AUKUS and China-led RCEP, India must advance an inclusive, non-militarised Quad while broadening engagement with other stakeholders to avoid excessive dependence on either power in the Indo-Pacific.

# Capsule Review

## Xie Chao, "All Roads Lead to South": India and China in Global South Narratives and Practices

Strategic Analysis, October 2024

*Reviewed by Vansh Verma, student at the International Affairs programme at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy*



Xie Chao presents an astute analysis of the China-India relationship within the Global South, highlighting the role of identity, leadership, and diplomacy in shaping the bloc's capacity to counter Western coalitions. Representing the majority of the world's population and its most rapidly emerging economies, the Global South has proved to be a potent force of change in international politics. Yet it faces internal complexities between China and India that prevent it from achieving its full potential.

The author traces both the consistencies and the divergences in their political conduct. On Russia-Ukraine, both nations abstained from UN resolutions condemning Moscow and resisted Western-imposed sanctions, though with distinct postures: China through overt strategic alignment with Russia, India through calibrated ambiguity.

On Israel-Palestine, the West's selective application of international norms galvanised broader Global South solidarity, yet India's initial tilt toward Israel exposed its divergence from the bloc's prevailing consensus, complicating its self-styled role as the South's advocate.

Compounding these tensions, the bilateral relationship between India and China remains corroded by border disputes and diplomatic mistrust, rendering their collaboration within BRICS, SCO, and the G20 more competitive than cooperative.

Overall, Xie presents a realistic account of how China-India dynamics define their relationship with each other and with the broader world, covering multiple theatres of interaction with care and nuance. However, Xie pays insufficient attention to America's deepening isolationism and its growing antagonism toward both nations. This is not a peripheral development but a cause to fundamentally recalibrate relations between Beijing and New Delhi. Coupled with this, both nations should capitalise on their shared consensus over environmental and energy issues, areas far more conducive to convergence, allowing them to collaborate and consolidate the Global South bloc more effectively.

## Selected Literature for Capsule Review

**US–China Strategic Competition in the Indo-Pacific and India’s Strategic Recalibration of Its Policy Choices**

**India Quarterly, March 2026**

*By Swaran Singh*

**India’s Nuclear Dynamics with China and Pakistan in the Maritime Domain**

**Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs, July 2025**

*By Shang-Su Wu and Rajesh Basrur*

**Role conflict and ‘regionness’: the effects of the belt and road initiative on South Asia**

**Contemporary South Asia, November 2025**

*By David Mitchell*

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### Capsule Review — Submissions

China-India Brief invites concise review essays from LKYSPP students assessing recent and significant contributions to the literature.

- Selected submission will appear in the next issue.
- Contributors are invited to choose from the journals listed above.
- Submission guidelines are available on our website.

**Deadline: 20 April 2026**

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# Our team



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## THE CENTRE ON ASIA AND GLOBALISATION

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## OTHER CAG PUBLICATIONS

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- *Indira Gandhi and the Years that Transformed India* by Srinath Raghavan (Yale University Press, 2025)
- *Partnership or Polarization? Southeast Asian Security between India and China* edited by Evan Laksmana and Byron Chong (Contemporary Southeast Asia, 2023)
- *Asian Conceptions of International Order: What Asia Wants* edited by Kanti Bajpai and Evan Laksmana (International Affairs, 2023)
- *How Realist Is India's National Security Policy?* edited by Kanti Bajpai (Routledge, 2023)
- *Deterring Conflict and Preserving Peace in Asia* edited by Drew Thompson and Byron Chong (Centre on Asia and Globalisation, 2022)
- *What Can the United States Learn from China about Infrastructure?* by Selina Ho in *The China Questions 2* (Harvard University Press, 2022)
- *India Versus China: Why they are Not Friends* by Kanti Bajpai (Juggernaut Books, 2021)
- *Winning the Fight Taiwan Cannot Afford to Lose* by Drew Thompson (Strategic Forum, 2021)



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Feedback or comment?

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