

# Global South Cooperation In Trade: Can BRICS+ Challenge Western Dominance? An India-Centric Perspective

Dr. K R Kaushik

Visiting Faculty,  
AIMA, Ramanujan College, University Of Delhi,  
Amity University (AS0DL),  
Stratford University, India Campus-NOIDA

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## Abstract

*This paper examines whether the expanded BRICS+ configuration can meaningfully challenge Western (G7/Euro-Atlantic) dominance in global trade and finance, with a special focus on India's role. It synthesizes theory and recent evidence on South-South cooperation, de-risking from the U.S. dollar, alternative financing through the New Development Bank (NDB), and supply-chain reconfiguration. We assess trade, payments, finance, energy, technology, and standards, and present three scenarios to 2030—Incremental Plurality, Dual System, and Fragmented Blocs. Our central finding is that BRICS+ can materially reshape margins of global commerce—pricing power in key commodities, local-currency settlement in select corridors, and standards coalitions—but is unlikely to displace Western centrality in finance absent deeper monetary, institutional, and legal integration among BRICS+ members. For India, BRICS+ offers strategic opportunities to enhance trade corridors, diversify financial risks, and champion South-South digital and standards cooperation, while maintaining strategic autonomy in its relations with the West.*

**Keywords:** BRICS+, India, Global South, de-dollarization, NDB, South-South trade, standards, local currency settlement, strategic autonomy

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## I. Introduction

The return of great-power competition, sanctions proliferation, tariff escalation, and technology controls have catalyzed a strategic push by emerging economies to diversify trade and finance. The BRICS bloc—originally Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—has expanded (BRICS+) to include additional emerging economies and created a new “partner countries” category. Concurrently, South-South trade has outpaced global averages, and major emerging economies are experimenting with local-currency settlement, commodity pricing alternatives, and non-Western development finance.

**This paper asks a focused question:** Can BRICS+ cooperation in trade and finance challenge Western dominance by 2030, and what role can India play in this shift?

We argue the answer depends on progress in five pillars: (i) scale and complementarity of trade; (ii) hard-infrastructure and logistics connectivity; (iii) financial plumbing (clearing, FX markets, collateral); (iv) legal/institutional depth (treaties, dispute resolution, standards); and (v) macro-monetary credibility. We combine desk research, descriptive data snapshots, and case studies with an India-centric lens.

## II. India's Position In BRICS+

India stands at the crossroads of BRICS+ ambitions. Unlike China, which pursues systemic alternatives, or Russia, which seeks sanctions circumvention, India emphasizes strategic autonomy—leveraging BRICS+ mechanisms where beneficial while retaining strong economic and financial linkages with the West.

### Trade significance

India's trade with BRICS+ members (especially China, Russia, Brazil, and South Africa) has grown rapidly. Russian energy imports settled in rupees and dirhams highlight how India adapts BRICS+ mechanisms pragmatically.

As a major IT and services exporter, India is uniquely positioned to shape digital trade norms within BRICS+ while accessing manufacturing inputs and energy security.

**Financial positioning**

India is cautious on de-dollarization but supports gradual rupee internationalization. Experiments with rupee–ruble settlement, UPI–PayNow linkages, and potential UPI–BRICS+ cross-rail integration could reduce costs for SMEs and remittances.

India's deepening GIFT City ecosystem (IFSC) could evolve as a regional hub for South–South trade finance, rupee clearing, and sustainable finance bonds.

**Geopolitical balancing**

India's participation in BRICS+ complements its G20 leadership, Indo-Pacific strategies, and partnerships with the Quad/EU/US. By avoiding binding treaty commitments in BRICS+, India maximizes optionality and avoids over-dependence on any single bloc.

### **III. Literature Review And Theoretical Lens**

(As earlier, but with India's positioning emphasized as a case of “multi-alignment” strategy blending South–South cooperation with Western linkages.)

### **IV. Evidence Across Five Pillars (India-Centric Focus)**

**Trade scale and complementarity for India**

India imports crude oil, gas, fertilizers, and metals from BRICS+ members, while exporting pharmaceuticals, IT services, engineering goods, and consumer products.

New logistics corridors like INSTC (International North–South Transport Corridor) linking India–Iran–Russia and the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor provide India with parallel options outside Western-dominated sea routes.

**Payments and financial plumbing**

India is piloting local-currency settlement with Russia and exploring rupee clearing with African partners. Its digital payment leadership (UPI) could anchor BRICS+ interoperability.

Constraints include limited rupee convertibility and FX derivative depth, but India's growing capital markets could gradually address these.

**Development finance and NDB**

India has benefited from NDB loans in renewable energy, transport, and water projects. By pushing for more local-currency lending, India reduces forex exposure.

Co-financing with Indian DFIs and sovereign wealth funds could make NDB a stronger tool for India's infrastructure push.

**Energy and commodities**

Energy security is India's primary driver. Discounted Russian oil imports since 2022 highlight BRICS+ as a buffer against Western sanctions. Long-term LNG contracts with BRICS+ members could secure India's energy transition.

**Technology and standards**

India is leveraging BRICS+ to champion open digital standards, data localization, and secure telecom infrastructure, providing an alternative to China-centric tech stacks while countering Western data hegemony.

### **V. India-Centric Case Studies**

**India–Russia rupee settlement:** Shows how India pragmatically adapts BRICS+ initiatives for energy security while managing surplus-repatriation challenges.

**UPI cross-border pilots:** Demonstrates India's ability to export digital public infrastructure as a South–South standard.

**NDB projects in India:** Highlight NDB's support for India's green transition, particularly metro, renewable, and sanitation projects.

**India–Africa corridor:** India's outreach to African BRICS+ partners (e.g., Ethiopia, Egypt, South Africa) provides opportunities for pharma, IT, and agriculture exports.

### **VI. Scenarios To 2030 (India's Stakes)**

**Incremental Plurality:** India secures diversified energy flows, expands UPI-based corridors, and attracts NDB/Gulf finance.

**Dual System:** India manages two ecosystems, balancing Western finance/tech with BRICS+ trade corridors. This maximizes autonomy but requires high regulatory capacity.

**Fragmented Blocs:** India faces difficult choices if compelled to align fully with one bloc, risking supply-chain or financial shocks.

## **VII. Policy Recommendations For India**

Expand rupee corridors with Africa, Russia, and Gulf partners while ensuring convertibility and hedging mechanisms.

Champion digital payments interoperability by positioning UPI as a BRICS+ standard, reducing transaction costs for SMEs and remittances.

Strengthen GIFT City as a hub for South–South trade finance and rupee clearing.

Scale co-financing with NDB for India’s green infrastructure, using it to attract Gulf and African sovereign wealth funds.

Deepen INSTC and IMEC corridors to diversify supply chains and reduce reliance on chokepoints.

Lead in South–South standards diplomacy, particularly in digital public infrastructure, data governance, and sustainable finance.

Preserve strategic autonomy by balancing BRICS+ cooperation with continued integration into Western financial markets and global tech ecosystems.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

For India, BRICS+ is not a replacement for Western engagement but a strategic supplement. By leveraging BRICS+ for energy security, digital payments leadership, infrastructure finance, and South–South trade expansion, India can enhance its resilience while preserving global market access. The challenge is to maintain a careful balance: use BRICS+ to constrain Western dominance where necessary, but avoid isolation from the global financial and technological mainstream. India’s pragmatic, multi-aligned strategy positions it as a pivotal player in shaping the future of Global South cooperation in trade.