

# GLOBAL BRIDGES

The EU and the Global South for an inclusive multilateralism  
Ideas from Europe, India, Brazil and South Africa

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# CONTENTS

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. EU, EMERGING POWERS AND MULTILATERALISM</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.1</b> EU Perspectives—‘Strategic Interdependence’: a Pragmatic Approach for the EU to reconnect with the Global South	7
<b>2.2</b> Brazil’s Role in Shaping the Reform of Multilateral Institutions: A Dual Approach	12
<b>2.3</b> India’s Views on Multilateral Reform	16
<b>2.4</b> South Africa’s Role in Strengthening and Rethinking the Multilateral System	21
<b>3. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>25</b>

# I. Introduction

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The very existence of multilateral institutions in their current shape and form is being called into question in today's fragmented, securitised world order. Ongoing wars, starting with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, have demonstrated that these institutions do not necessarily serve to prevent violations of basic rules and principles, such as territorial integrity and sovereignty. The need for reform is imperative to reflect power shifts in the Global South and vis-à-vis the traditional powers. The necessity to rethink the leading multilateral bodies, especially the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the Bretton Woods institutions, has long been on the global governance agenda. Given the current context, there is no turning back on these reforms.

So, what has changed in the push for multilateral reform? Mainly, emerging powers now have greater leverage and can voice their claims for representation and access to decision-making mechanisms more forcefully than before. They are increasingly able to assert their interests in global forums and pursue cooperation on specific issues with a broader range of actors.

In addition, minilateral institutions, which are mostly interest- and issue-based, are flourishing. The anti-Western rhetoric of some of the members of these new groupings, especially along the Sino-Russian axis, has become a source of tension for the European Union (EU). More importantly, Europe has realised that it needs to rebuild trust with its Southern partners, after failing to gain their support in condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its evasion of sanctions. In short, it needs to reinvest in the Global South and construct global bridges.

This report aims to analyse how these bridges can be built. We have brought together a group of scholars from the EU and leading emerging middle powers, namely Brazil, India and South Africa, to share their insights on this issue, against the backdrop of the upcoming Think-20 (T-20) Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The chapters in this report aim to give these scholars a platform to outline what they consider to be their country's or political entity's (in the case of the EU) core claims, specific initiatives and prospects for achieving effective multilateral reform.





The report draws five conclusions and policy recommendations from these contributions about:

- (i) the type of multilateralism that is desired;
- (ii) the existence and sort of multipolarity;
- (iii) the status of existing multilateral institutions and the goal to reform and/or replace them;
- (iv) the issue areas of interest in multilateral reform;
- (v) potential synergies between the EU and the Global South that can be harnessed in the pursuit of multilateral reform.

The report reveals greater consensus than anticipated on the need for profound multilateral reform while acknowledging the advantages and disadvantages of the growing number of parallel unilateral arrangements. The discrepancies that exist among European countries are also apparent in the Global South, which is more diverse than is often imagined. Even within institutions that only enjoy the presence of Southern partners—such as the BRICS\*—there are differing views between those seeking reform (including Brazil, India and South Africa) and those that have a revisionist agenda—mostly represented by China and Russia.

**THE EU IS SEEN AS A VALUABLE ADDITIONAL POLE THAT COULD BRING STABILITY TO AN ASPIRATIONAL ORDERLY MULTIPOLARITY IN THE FUTURE, YET THIS WILL REQUIRE A MORE OUTWARD-LOOKING APPROACH**

The EU must acknowledge these differences between countries and should not overemphasise the revisionist agenda, as this detracts from the goal of ensuring more equitable representation and access for the Global South to legitimate decision-making structures. The EU is seen as a valuable additional pole that could bring stability to an aspirational orderly multipolarity in the future, yet this will require a more outward-looking approach towards emerging powers and the broader Global South.

The Global Policy Center aims to comprehend the nuances between the countries of the rather plural South and provide the EU with policy recommendations. We hope that this report—a part of our Global Bridges initiative around the T-20—will spark debate and help build bridges between the EU and the Global South.

\* The current BRICS members are Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa. As of 2024, BRICS+ includes Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the UAE.



## **2. EU, Emerging Powers and Multilateralism**





## 2.1 EU PERSPECTIVES—‘STRATEGIC INTERDEPENDENCE’: A PRAGMATIC APPROACH FOR THE EU TO RECONNECT WITH THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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### INTRODUCTION

The main challenge for today's global order is the shift from rules-based multilateralism towards a more multipolar landscape, driven by power relations, influence and coercion. This multipolarity is gradually advancing into a bipolar reality, dominated by confrontations between the US and China.

This situation resembles a new ‘Cold War’, though this oversimplifies the complexities involved given the profound differences in trade and financial exchanges between the US and China today, compared with those of the US and the USSR. The decoupling of the two leading economies, which has already manifested itself in key strategic sectors such as trade, technology, energy and defence, is set to gain further momentum. If this trend continues, countries large and small will be forced to choose sides, resulting in a loss of a significant degree of their sovereignty, and major economic repercussions.

The evolving dynamics of bipolarity, Cold War tensions and economic decoupling are already affecting the EU. Although it cannot remain equidistant, the EU has a vested interest in preventing tensions between China and the US from escalating into full-scale conflict. To navigate these complex waters, the Union must develop a two-pronged strategy that reconnects with the

Global South without undermining its relations with the US and its allies. First, it needs to strengthen the transatlantic alliance and boost its military deterrence capabilities, which are crucial in addressing the Sino-Russian threat that stretches from Ukraine to the Balkans and beyond. Second, it must work with other emerging middle powers across the Global South to defuse this bipolar confrontation, which could harm global trade and significantly diminish its autonomy.

Striking this balance is a delicate task. Reinforcing the transatlantic relationship could exacerbate bipolar confrontation, while poorly managed efforts to reduce tensions with middle powers could weaken the transatlantic alliance and embolden China and Russia in their attempts to undermine the Western rules-based order. Equally, the EU must back the US and its Pacific allies in deterring China's ambitions for Taiwan, whilst also encouraging Beijing to engage constructively in global governance and urging the US to uphold the rules-based international system. At the same time, the EU should cooperate with middle powers and other countries to promote fairer multilateralism or, at the very least, set up a multipolar system grounded in respect, mutual recognition, and negotiated solutions, as opposed to

coercion and force. Up until now, the EU's response to rising global tensions has focused on reducing vulnerabilities in defence, energy, technology and health. However, this 'derisking' strategy, also known as 'strategic autonomy,' has proven problematic, as it is essentially reactive rather than proactive, alienates the most Atlanticist and pro-free-trade member states, and is viewed as protectionist by other countries. Rather than simply reducing interdependencies, the EU should strategically reassess them to manage and ultimately reverse decoupling and protectionist trends. A 'strategic interdependence' approach is a way to align the EU's security goals within a fragmenting global order, whilst enabling it to engage with middle powers in the Global South to forge pragmatic agreements for greater stability and prosperity.<sup>1</sup>

### CORE CLAIMS AND PROPOSED INITIATIVES

As Ursula von der Leyen stated in her 2019 inauguration speech as President of the European Commission, multilateralism is embedded in Europe's DNA.<sup>2</sup> The EU's commitment to multilateralism is both normative and pragmatic. On the one hand, European integration represents a unique, highly successful experiment in transforming a power-based regional order into a rules-based framework. The EU has consistently sought to promote this model abroad, though with limited success. On the other hand, the EU process of regional integration, primarily built on economic cooperation and trade liberalisation, has always required a liberal economic system underpinned by rules to ensure its prosperity. Therefore, despite past and ongoing challenges such as trade protectionism (especially in agriculture) and



**A 'STRATEGIC INTERDEPENDENCE' APPROACH IS A WAY TO ALIGN THE EU'S SECURITY GOALS WITHIN A FRAGMENTING GLOBAL ORDER, WHILST ENABLING IT TO ENGAGE WITH MIDDLE POWERS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH TO FORGE PRAGMATIC AGREEMENTS FOR GREATER STABILITY AND PROSPERITY**

restrictive immigration policies, which are particularly relevant to the Global South, the EU has largely supported an open, rules-based multilateral system both at home and abroad.

However, the EU's normative approach to multilateralism has often been difficult to reconcile with the fact that foreign, security and defence policy competencies remain primarily in the hands of individual member states, which means that they engage in independent diplomacy driven by power politics. In the context of the United Nations (UN) system, the tension is evident in how some member states, such as France (and formerly the United Kingdom), have leveraged their global power to resist UNSC reform, though these changes have been endorsed by the Global South and



by Germany, one of the EU's most powerful members. While the EU is formally committed to "a reformed UNSC able to better deliver on its mandate",<sup>3</sup> as noted by the Council of the EU in June 2024, the diverging national interests of Germany, France and other EU member states on UN reform implies that Brussels is unlikely to act as a catalyst for change in this area.

A similar contradiction exists in the EU's development policies. While both the EU and its member states fully support the normative and policy frameworks of the UN's 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the reality is more complex. As recent negotiations around the UN Pact for the Future have shown, the Global South has lost trust in the West, primarily due to unfulfilled promises of financial support to address health, climate and structural debt crises. Moreover, the EU's development policies have taken a strategic turn and are increasingly viewed as tools to serve its geopolitical and economic interests rather than as a way to promote global public good and encourage a fairer, more inclusive multilateral system.<sup>4</sup> European governments are currently grappling with how to position themselves in a global landscape that is shifting towards bipolarity. Full decoupling is not a viable option for the EU, as its stability relies on interdependence within an open global order framework. However, the EU has already experienced the consequences of harmful dependencies, such as its reliance on Russian gas. Therefore, while it aims to reduce vulnerabilities in defence, green technologies and frontier technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), quantum computing, and the semiconductor industry, its goal is not to become self-sufficient. Instead, the EU aims to bolster its economic security by minimising exposure to external risks.

Like many countries, the EU now views the world through the lens of economic security, recognising that without a robust industrial base, it cannot project power or values on the global stage. The Letta and Draghi Reports highlight this shift: competitiveness is no longer merely an economic goal; it is now a geopolitical necessity to avoid irrelevance and subordination. The EU's 2023 Economic Security Strategy is built on three pillars: enhancing European competitiveness, protecting the economy from critical vulnerabilities that could be exploited by third parties, and forging partnerships that support these objectives.

This strategy departs from the concept of strategic autonomy, which has been criticised for dividing Europeans over security and economic issues. Instead, the idea of 'strategic interdependence' acknowledges the complexity of global relations and seeks balanced, interest-based partnerships. This opens a new avenue for strengthening multilateralism and fostering a multipolar order.

The EU has lost traction in the Global South. The 2008–2011 financial crises, the pandemic and the Ukraine war led the EU to concentrate on internal issues at the expense of its relationships with the Global South. While Europe slept, China made headway, forging strategic partnerships with Africa, Asia and Latin America through attractive influence strategies. Now, the EU's attempts to redirect attention and resources to compensate for that absence appear cautious and fragmented. This is patent in the modest funding and results of its Global Gateway Initiative that seeks to counterbalance China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in these regions.

The EU's shift to renew engagement with the Global South is far from altruistic. It is driven by security concerns, particularly after the outbreak of the 2022 Ukraine war and the difficulties it faces in countering Russian narrative. Initially, the EU sought external condemnation of Russia's violations of international law at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in an attempt to garner support for economic sanctions. However, two and a half years later, the EU is frustrated not only by the Global South's reluctance to follow suit on sanctions, but also by Brazil and South Africa's promotion of peace solutions for the Ukraine-Russia armed conflict, which it considers as a threat to European security.

The EU has two potential roadmaps to reconnect with the South. First, it can pursue a maximalist strategy aimed at reconstructing a fairer multilateral order focused on providing global public goods, though this approach is not without significant challenges. As the wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East have shown, the EU has not only lost the trust of the Global South but also much of its moral authority. Furthermore, EU rhetoric about global public goods has not been backed by sufficient financial commitments for development, debt relief and climate action. Certain EU policies are seen as protectionist, such as its resistance to new trade agreements (e.g., with Mercosur), the introduction of mechanisms like the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and deforestation laws, along with punitive migration policies, which further undermine its credibility.

Alternatively, a minimalist strategy would ensure that multipolarity acts as a stabilising force, enabling other states with varying degrees of power to take a seat at the global governance table. This pragmatic approach,

which could be termed 'multilateral realism', contrasts with a form of multipolarity that seeks similar aims yet is driven by coercive power struggles. The Group of 20 (G-20) is ideally positioned to take on this multilateral role as it includes all the Group of 7 (G-7) and original BRICS members, which should enable it to transcend the G-7's legitimacy concerns and create a valuable opportunity for pragmatic cooperation. Beyond this, the EU and emerging middle powers from the Global South can continue to explore regional and issue-focused minilateral agreements to safeguard economic ties from geopolitical tensions and enhance economic security for all partners.<sup>5</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

So far, the EU's answer to dealing with the vulnerabilities stemming from escalating world tension has centred on derisking and increasing its autonomy. This reactive approach to its security needs to be transformed into a proactive strategy. Today's bipolar confrontation represents an opportunity for the EU to adopt more realistic strategies based on pragmatism and negotiation with middle powers such as Brazil, India and South Africa. These countries are democracies, even though they diverge from the EU in their views on global order and sometimes align with China and Russia in challenging Western-dominated multilateral institutions. These democratic values should provide the foundations to foster dialogue and promote mutual understanding.

However, rebuilding a fully rules-based multilateral system that satisfies both the needs of the EU and the aspirations of the Global South may be beyond reach.



This means the EU and the Global South may have to settle for a second-best scenario, though this would still be an improvement on today's bipolarization of world order. If the EU and the Global South are capable of acknowledging the dangers and opportunities of the current international context, they may be able to find ways to bridge their differences and promote pragmatic trade-offs in crucial areas of global governance such as development finance, debt relief, climate adaptation, global health, trade and the energy transition.

These strategies might not fully address the Global South's needs or deliver the fairer, more inclusive multilateral order it has set its sights on. Yet they could help foster a multipolar world where competition does not necessarily lead to conflict and where asymmetries of power and resource imbalances can be redressed, at least to some extent.

THE EU MUST WORK WITH OTHER EMERGING MIDDLE POWERS ACROSS THE GLOBAL SOUTH TO DEFUSE THIS BIPOLAR CONFRONTATION, WHICH COULD HARM GLOBAL TRADE AND SIGNIFICANTLY DIMINISH ITS AUTONOMY

- 1 Torreblanca, J.I., 'Onwards and outwards: Why the EU needs to move from strategic autonomy to strategic interdependence', ECFR, August 2023 (<https://ecfr.eu/article/onwards-and-outwards-why-the-eu-needs-to-move-from-strategic-autonomy-to-strategic-interdependence/>); Aydinbas, A. et al., 'Strategic interdependence: Europe's new approach in a world of middle powers', ECFR, October 2023.
- 2 'Speech by President-elect von der Leyen in the European Parliament Plenary on the occasion of the presentation of her College of Commissioners and their programme', European Commission, 27 November 2019 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH\\_19\\_6408](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_19_6408)).
- 3 'Council Conclusions on EU priorities at the United Nations during the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly, September 2024—September 2025', Council of the European Union, 11422/24, 24 June 2024 (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11422-2024-INIT/en/pdf>).
- 4 Dworkin, A., 'Multilateral development in flux: Strengthening European cooperation with the global south' Policy Brief, ECFR, November 2023 (<https://ecfr.eu/publication/multilateral-development-in-flux-strengthening-european-cooperation-with-the-global-south>).
- 5 The Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) and the EU strategic partnership programme on raw materials are both good examples of these dynamics. Sánchez-Cacicedo, A., 'Teaming up with rising power and minilateralism', in Everts, S. and Zorzi, B., *Ten Ideas for the New Team*, EUISS, Chaillot Paper 185, September 2024 (<https://www.eiss.europa.eu/content/10-ideas-new-team>). See also, Torreblanca, J.I., 'Critical material: The EU's and Chile's new relationship in the multipolar world', ECFR, December 2023 (<https://ecfr.eu/article/critical-material-the-eu-and-chiles-new-relationship-in-the-multipolar-world/>).



## 2.2 BRAZIL'S ROLE IN SHAPING THE REFORM OF MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS: A DUAL APPROACH

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### INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s, Brazil began to deploy a more ambitious and more outward-looking foreign policy. This shift reflected its burgeoning economic status and aspirations for a more prominent role on the global stage. Today, the country champions multilateralism as a strategic tool to advance both national interests and broader international objectives. Brazil's approach to multilateral institutions, such as the UN, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank, is often framed within a wider discussion of how emerging powers navigate an international order they did not historically lead or have any significant influence in shaping.

As a country that has gained international prominence after the establishment of the world's main multilateral bodies, Brazil has had to adopt strategies that reflect both its aspirations and the constraints it faces within an order dominated by traditional powers. Brazil's current G-20 Presidency underscores its commitment to reforming the international order to better reflect the interests and needs of Global South countries. This leading role aligns with Brazil's broader foreign policy objectives, which have traditionally centred on promoting more equitable global governance.

Brazil deploys a dual approach to promoting change in multilateral institutions. This centres on engagement and reforming the existing organizations from within, as well as creating parallel bodies. Brazil's role in groupings such as BRICS and its support for initiatives such as the New Development Bank (NDB) exemplify this strategy. At the same time, it is pushing for reforms in the IMF quota system and advocating changes in the UNSC. Thus, Brazil seeks to balance its engagement with existing structures while building alternative platforms in which emerging economies can exert greater influence. In short, Brazil is a reformist country and does not seek to replace existing international institutions. Instead, its main goal is to transform these bodies into more equitable, balanced organisations. This reflects the broader struggle of emerging powers in reshaping an international order that often sidelines their voices, while also recognising the value of multilateralism.

### CORE CLAIMS AND PROPOSED INITIATIVES

Brazil's stance in reforming multilateral institutions centres on creating a more equitable and representative international order. It advocates for the inclusion of Global South perspectives, particularly in decision-making processes. More specifically, Brazil highlights the need to reform two key multilateral organisations.



First, it aims to democratise decision-making in the UNSC whose current structure disproportionately favours the P-5 (Permanent Members). Reforming the UNSC constitutes Brazil's major and longest standing foreign policy objective. Virtually every administration has pushed for reform, through different tactics and rhetoric, but always with the same goal in mind. Brazil proposes the expansion of both permanent and non-permanent members to better represent today's global geopolitical realities. It highlights the need to include new members from the Global South, including its own bid for a permanent UNSC seat. The G-4 coalition (Brazil, India, Germany, and Japan) is key to accomplishing this goal.

Second, Brazil seeks to reform the Bretton Woods institutions (IMF and World Bank) to better reflect today's economic realities. Emerging markets and developing countries contribute significantly to global economic growth yet lack proportional voting power. Brazil calls for a more balanced quota system that reflects the real contributions and economic weight of emerging markets. It is no secret that emerging economies such as India, China and Brazil, are growing faster than most European countries. The distribution of quotas should then reflect this trend.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, Brazil advocates for the reform of programmes that have often been detrimental to developing countries, such as those involving conditionalities. Some argue that the creation of the original BRICS and the NDB was a direct response to the G-7 countries' inability to address developing countries' demands for reform of the Bretton Woods institutions quota system. This is why BRICS countries decided to establish parallel organisations where their voices could be heard.<sup>7</sup>

### BRAZIL'S STANCE IN REFORMING MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS CENTRES ON CREATING A MORE EQUITABLE AND REPRESENTATIVE INTERNATIONAL ORDER. IT ADVOCATES FOR THE INCLUSION OF GLOBAL SOUTH PERSPECTIVES, PARTICULARLY IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

Yet how can Brazil further its own demands and those of the Global South? The role of alternative institutions and groupings is key in this sense. Brazil's leadership in multilateral forums such as BRICS, IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) and the G-20 is crucial in driving the Global South's interests. Brazilian officials view the rise of the G-20 as a positive shift away from the more exclusive G-7, which primarily represents the interests of the world's wealthiest countries. Thanks to its smaller size and informal setup, the G-20 offers Brazil with an opportunity to engage directly with the world's leading and emerging economies, while asserting itself as a middle power capable of influencing global economic and political governance.

While the G-20's agenda has historically focused on economic and financial coordination, as emphasized by the US and European countries, Brazil believes its participation in this forum should have broader implications. Brazilian officials have consistently framed the country's involvement in the G-20 as a vehicle to advocate for deeper structural reforms within the international system, not solely as an opportunity to influence global economic governance. In line with this perspective, Brazil's current G-20 Presidency has identified three core goals: reforming global institutions, combating poverty, and addressing climate change and the energy transition.

Brazil has deployed three broad-based initiatives during its G-20 Presidency to articulate these goals. First, it has created the Global Alliance against Poverty and Hunger. This initiative seeks to bring together both financial and intellectual resources to implement proven public policies and social technologies that have successfully reduced hunger and poverty in various countries. Second, Brazil's G-20 Presidency has spearheaded two major climate change initiatives, namely the Global Climate Action Task Force and the Bioeconomy Initiative. The former aims to consolidate the outcomes of various climate-related G-20 working groups, deploying a cohesive, coordinated response to the climate crisis. The Bioeconomy Initiative reflects Brazil's innovative approach to rethinking economic production by focusing on sustainability and the bioeconomy.

Finally, Brazil has launched the Call to Action on Global Governance Reform. This initiative aims to advance the reform of five central international institutions: the UNGA, the UNSC, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the WTO, and the international financial architecture (IMF and World Bank). These initiatives demonstrate Brazil's commitment to engaging both traditional and emerging powers in reforming the existing organisations without dismantling them entirely. Brazil's proposals at the G-20 (Bioeconomy Initiative and Global Climate Action Task Force) received full support from the European countries represented at the forum.

In this context, BRICS has become a cornerstone of Brazil's foreign policy. Brazil's interest in BRICS is twofold. First, it seeks to gain economic and political advantages from bilateral negotiations with other members. In fact, its relationship with India

and China has become much more robust due to the BRICS framework. Second, it enables Brazil to advocate for collective demands related to institutional reform by collaborating closely with countries like India, China, and South Africa, which strengthens its negotiating position. In fact, Brazil's stance in international forums such as the G-20 and the UN is often discussed and coordinated in advance within the BRICS framework.

**ITS G-20 PRESIDENCY INITIATIVES, INCLUDING THE GLOBAL ALLIANCE AGAINST POVERTY AND HUNGER, THE GLOBAL CLIMATE ACTION TASK FORCE AND THE CALL TO ACTION ON GLOBAL GOVERNANCE REFORM, UNDERSCORE ITS COMMITMENT TO TACKLING GLOBAL CHALLENGES IN COLLABORATION WITH WESTERN POWERS AND EMERGING GLOBAL SOUTH COUNTRIES.**

However, while BRICS offers Brazil significant opportunities, it also presents challenges. One key issue is the diversity of the bloc itself, particularly after its recent expansion. Brazil's democratic political system and market economy differ sharply from those of China and Russia, whose authoritarian political systems and state-led economies sometimes lead to divergent views on international issues. The recent BRICS expansion has also brought added complications, with Brazil initially opposing the inclusion of many new members. Essentially, Brazil is concerned that the future of BRICS will be affected by two competing visions. On the one hand, countries like Russia and China may attempt to transform BRICS into an anti-Western platform, while others, such as Brazil and India, are striving to keep BRICS close to its origins as a platform for reforming the global order and amplifying the voice of the



Global South. Nonetheless, BRICS remains central to Brazil's strategy to engage with global institutions and advance the interests of its Southern partners.

Western partners often perceive Brazil's position in BRICS as a direct affront to the liberal global order. This perception is misguided and overlooks the nuanced role Brazil can play in the global arena. As we have argued, Brazil is more of a reformist state than a revolutionary one seeking to overhaul or subvert the existing global order. Brazil's engagement with BRICS should not be viewed through the lens of confrontation. Instead, it should be understood as a way to enhance the representation of emerging economies in international institutions. The fight for equality is a universal value.

In this context, the Brazil-EU view of multilateralism can serve as a buffer against the confrontation generated by the ongoing rivalry between China and the US. As tensions escalate between these two global powers, played out in the shape of trade disputes, geopolitical manoeuvring and ideological clashes, Brazil's strategic partnership with the EU provides a stabilising influence in today's world order. The Brazil-EU partnership can help reform multilateral institutions enabling them to move towards a more balanced world order, especially in terms of UNSC reform and climate diplomacy. It is essential for all European countries to support the Group of 4 (G-4) platform in this regard, not just those directly benefiting from it, such as Germany. The EU, as a world leader in climate policy, and Brazil, as an advocate for Global South perspectives in climate negotiations, can together push for reforms in global climate governance to reconcile the development needs of emerging economies with environmental commitments.

## CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

Brazil's evolving foreign policy reflects its aspirations to reshape global governance, prioritising multilateralism and equitable representation for the Global South. Brazil seeks to amplify the voices of emerging economies and advocate for meaningful reform by strategically engaging with traditional institutions, such as the UN and the IMF, as well as promoting alternative platforms such as BRICS and the G-20.

Its G-20 Presidency initiatives, including the Global Alliance against Poverty and Hunger, the Global Climate Action Task Force and the Call to Action on Global Governance Reform, underscore its commitment to tackling global challenges in collaboration with Western powers and emerging Global South countries.

Looking ahead, Brazil's leading role in these international forums makes it a crucial player in promoting a more balanced, inclusive global order. Strengthening partnerships, particularly with the EU, paves the way to advance shared goals such as UNSC reform and climate diplomacy. Yet, Brazil must navigate the complexities of diverse alliances within BRICS and geopolitical tensions between major powers. Ultimately, Brazil's dual approach, centring on reforming existing institutions and establishing new frameworks, seeks to ensure the Global South's interests are adequately addressed in global governance.

6 Brazil currently has a quota share of 2.3%, China 6.2%, and the United Kingdom 4.3%. However, economic estimates suggest that Brazil should have 2.9%, China 12.1%, and the United Kingdom 2.9%. Virmani, A., 'Global Economic Governance: IMF Quota Reform,' *Macroeconomics and Finance in Emerging Market Economies*, Vol. 5, No. 02, 2012, pp. 260–280.

7 Abdenur, A. & Folly, M. (2015), 'The New Development Bank and the Institutionalization of the BRICS,' *Revolutions: Global Trends & Regional Issues*, Vol 3, No. 1, 2015, pp. 66–92.

## 2.3 INDIA'S VIEWS ON MULTILATERAL REFORM

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### INTRODUCTION

As a rising power, India seeks to play a pivotal role in global governance, yet it finds itself constrained by the existing global multilateral system. This world order, in its view, does not address its concerns or aspirations, and limits its effective participation in global affairs. As a founding member of the global multilateral system in the post-1945 world, India earned its spurs as a champion of multilateralism, actively participating in the creation of global institutions from the UN to the Bretton Woods system and the WTO.

The global order has changed, and so has India's place in it. The country now accounts for one-sixth of humanity. It is a significant economic and military power, and a

civilisational state with unique soft power skills. In addition, India prefers to stay out of the growing polarisation of global politics, preferring instead to chart its own path based on its interests, history and culture. Today, India advocates for 'reformed multilateralism', i.e., more flexible multilateral institutions that prioritise cooperation over rigid alignment.

"We are living in the era of multilateralism", Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared as he concluded India's presidency of the G-20 in September 2023. "The world is interconnected as well as interdependent. This reality compels us to recognise that absolute agreement on all matters cannot be a prerequisite for collaboration".





## CORE CLAIMS AND PROPOSED INITIATIVES

Geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts are redefining multilateralism, as we explain below. Thus, any changes in the multilateral order mean altering the existing global power structures. India sees this new reality as both a challenge and an opportunity.

The relative decline of the US as the world's sole superpower, the rise of China and the growing economic and technological rivalry between the two are shaping this new reality. This is creating almost mutually exclusive spheres of influence which are conditioning the economic and geopolitical choices made by the Global South. India aims to be a 'safe haven' for these countries, articulating their concerns and demands, without tying them into debt traps or political commitments, Chinese-style. For example, India helped to bring the African Union (AU) into the G-20 during its Presidency of the organisation in 2023 in an aim to increase the representation of African countries in a key multilateral institution.

Geoeconomic fragmentation has eroded free trade. In fact, geopolitics is affecting the economic and trade choices countries are making, leading to a version of de-globalisation. Industrial policies, tariff walls, 'de-coupling', 'de-risking', and 'plus one strategies' are building protectionism into multilateralism. India has a twofold approach to these challenges. First, it aims to revitalise the WTO, prompting it to prevent China from blurring the lines between 'free' and 'fair' trade. Second, it is building its own resilient supply chains and domestic capacities in certain industries, such as semiconductors and electronics, through onshoring and near-shoring.

The COVID-19 pandemic starkly exposed

the inadequacies of multilateralism. The developed world cornered vaccine supplies, whilst developing countries were denied access to them in tragic ways. The UN and the World Health Organization (WHO) both failed to objectively evaluate the pandemic and to equitably distribute vaccines. In addition to shutting out many countries, they also failed to prevent the major powers from using vaccine deliveries for their own gain. By contrast, India began to supply its own vaccines in 2021, and, by 2023, it had sent them to almost 100 countries.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, India and South Africa led a multilateral initiative at the WTO to seek a waiver on Trade-Related Aspects of International Property Rights (TRIPS) restrictions for vaccines, only to see it blocked by Global North countries and Big Pharma.

India also sees the existing multilateral system as inadequate in preventing or resolving armed conflict, and even incapable of implementing the rules-based international order. The UN Security Council is paralysed, given that today's conflicts involve powers that wield the right to veto which simply disregard the international rules-based order to protect their geopolitical interests. Between January 2022 and April 2024, the UNSC's permanent members used their right to veto 18 times.<sup>9</sup>

The UN is at the heart of the multilateral system, yet, in the last decade, it has increasingly been 'missing in action', incapable of leading global responses to ongoing crises. The two major wars that are being fought at present are a good example of this. As the Indian foreign minister S. Jaishankar recently put it, the organisation is a 'bystander'. According to Jaishankar, "The UN is in a way like an old company,

not entirely keeping up with the market”, adding the comment that “when it doesn’t step up on key issues, countries figure out their own ways of doing it”.<sup>10</sup>

The Russia-Ukraine war created disproportionate pressure on food, fuel and fertilisers in the Global South, which was dealt with at national level. In 2022, India responded by exporting wheat to Southern countries in need. During the lockdowns in 2020, India maintained food supply chains with Gulf states. In 2019, in his address to the UN’s Alliance on Multilateralism, the Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar stated that “The Kindleberger trap on the shortage of global goods is far more serious than the Thucydides Trap. The challenges are global but we still respond largely nationally”.<sup>11</sup> The danger of the Kindleberger trap is growing, with neither the world’s major powers or the global system capable of stepping up when necessary.

Against this backdrop, the old superpower seems to be ‘checking out’, yet no other country appears to be ready to ‘check in’ and fill the void. For example, in 2021, India received a vaccine request from Paraguay. Why? Because China had made non-support of Taiwan a condition for giving out vaccines. Similarly, the US decision to bar Russia from the SWIFT mechanism prompted many countries to contemplate setting up alternative payment systems, an idea that is currently being explored by BRICS members.

In 2016, the UN was incapable of enforcing the ruling made under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) condemning China’s arbitrary island building in the South China Sea. Yet, what goes unmentioned is that in 2014, India obeyed the Permanent Court of Arbitration’s order to award Bangladesh its claim in the

Bay of Bengal. Logically, India points to double standards, showing that the current multilateralism crisis has turned into a tussle between traditional powers who want to maintain the status quo and emerging powers who want the system to embrace a multipolar world.

India made its case for ‘reformed multilateralism’ during its non-permanent term in the UNSC in 2021-22,<sup>12</sup> as well as during its presidency of the G-20. This included a concerted effort to increase the representation of emerging powers and countries in the Global South in international institutions such as the UNSC. India is already a member of the G-4, together with Brazil, Japan and Germany, yet advocates a broader base for this transformation process. In this regard, India achieved a degree of success with the inclusion of the AU as the 21<sup>st</sup> member of the G-20.

### INDIA BELIEVES THE RULES-BASED INTERNATIONAL ORDER NEEDS TO BE STRENGTHENED TO PREVENT IT FROM BEING OVERRUN BY EITHER EXTREME NATIONALISM OR MERCANTILISM

Voting structures in international organisations also need reform. This mainly includes changes in the veto system of the UNSC which makes it impossible for the Global South to be heard in international crises where their interests may be at stake. Similarly, the voting patterns in the IMF and the World Bank are skewed towards developed economies, leaving the Global South without a voice, especially when negotiating economic packages from multilateral development banks. The NK Singh-Lawrence Summers report published in July 2023 on Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) reform constituted a step



forward in this regard. However, implementing its recommendations would require strong political leadership which may be too tall an order at present.<sup>13</sup>

India has also been working effectively outside UN spaces. The Quadrilateral Security Initiative (QUAD) is a group with strong geopolitical convergences that is building the rules for a global technological future. BRICS is gathering popularity, particularly among the Global South, but also among middle powers who are looking for a more 'multi-aligned' world. IMEC (the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor) is building upon regional demand for secure supply chains to address economic, trade and connectivity needs. While these plurilateral groupings may not have the 'legitimacy' of the UN, they bring the promise of greater effectiveness.

At the 2015 COP in Paris, India proposed a new international treaty-based organisation to harness the immense potential of solar energy. Today, the International Solar Alliance (ISA), which has over 120 members, is the first international organisation to be headquartered in India. The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) was created as the world aimed to address the challenges of extreme weather and its impact on countries. India is also leading an international initiative on digital public infrastructure (DPI) within the G-20 framework, to provide digital goods and platforms to Global South countries, as well as helping to create the Global Biofuels Alliance which is now helmed by Brazil. In the past decade, as India has expanded its overseas development footprint, the EU has become its primary development partner, particularly in the areas of climate change and global governance.



## CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

India believes the rules-based international order needs to be strengthened to prevent it from being overrun by either extreme nationalism or mercantilism. India has deployed several initiatives to counter what it sees as a growing loss of confidence in the multilateral system via three distinct approaches: a concerted push for 'reformed multilateralism'; the exploration of non-UN spaces through minilateral and plurilateral groups, and the establishment of India-led multilateral institutions to address specific areas of interest.

As the world wrestles with an ever more fractured international order, countries with significant agency are adopting more creative strategies. While these initiatives could be more effective, they also reflect the crisis facing multilateralism. India's efforts to build a collective voice has found resonance in the Global South, though this is very different in shape and feel from the older G-77 and Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) organisations. However, unlike China, India does not seek to lead the Global South.

"It is a collective. We don't expect to be the leader. We are seen as a trusted member, an articulate member," said the Indian Foreign Minister during the Kautilya Conclave in October 2024 when questioned as to whether a rising India could walk away from the South. "On the contrary, I see value".

**INDIA HAS DEPLOYED SEVERAL INITIATIVES TO COUNTER WHAT IT SEES AS A GROWING LOSS OF CONFIDENCE IN THE MULTILATERAL SYSTEM VIA THREE DISTINCT APPROACHES: A CONCERTED PUSH FOR 'REFORMED MULTILATERALISM'; THE EXPLORATION OF NON-UN SPACES THROUGH MINILATERAL AND PLURILATERAL GROUPS, AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INDIA-LED MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS TO ADDRESS SPECIFIC AREAS OF INTEREST**

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## 2.4 SOUTH AFRICA'S ROLE IN STRENGTHENING AND RETHINKING THE MULTILATERAL SYSTEM

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### INTRODUCTION

Since transitioning to democracy in 1994, South Africa has consistently championed the importance of joint action to move towards a fairer, more peaceful and more representative world.

Support for multilateralism and reforming the global governance system are long-standing tenets of South Africa's foreign policy. The words 'multilateral' and 'multilateralism' appear 26 times in the 2023 *Framework Document on South Africa's National Interest*. An example from the text reads as follows:

"[It] is in South Africa's National Interest to continue to display a people-centred, progressive and developmental focus in its foreign policy, particularly as this has been expressed in the post-liberation canon of promoting Pan-Africanism, South-South solidarity, North-South cooperation and multilateral cooperation".<sup>14</sup>

South Africa simultaneously pursues a non-aligned foreign policy, asserting its sovereignty while navigating between the West, China and Russia.

South Africa's core claims for strengthening multilateralism centre on promoting a rules-based international order, reforming global governance structures, and ensuring that institutions reflect 21<sup>st</sup> century realities.

Pretoria argues that the post-World War II multilateral system disproportionately benefits powerful Western countries, marginalising the Global South. Many developing countries share South Africa's frustration with the lack of meaningful representation they have in decision-making processes within international organisations, especially the UNSC. There is growing recognition among developing countries on the need for collective action to challenge Western powers' dominance of the global governance system.

This chapter briefly examines South Africa's advocacy and initiatives for reform of the UNSC, the Bretton Woods institutions and global economic governance, as well as providing insights into several of the multilateral organisations in which the country participates, such as BRICS, the AU and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).<sup>15</sup>

## CORE CLAIMS AND PROPOSED INITIATIVES

In September 2024, the South African President Cyril Ramaphosa reiterated these themes in his address at the UN General Assembly, highlighting how the structure of the UNSC has remained largely unchanged since 1945. He also stated that the UN Security Council must be reformed as a matter of urgency, to allow the voices of all countries to be heard and considered.<sup>16</sup>

South Africa strongly advocates UNSC reform, demanding two permanent seats for Africa with the right to veto, in addition to its current three non-permanent rotational seats.<sup>17</sup> This reflects the Ezulwini Consensus, a common African position adopted in 2005. The states have not been named, but Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa are among the top contenders to occupy the new proposed seats. Pretoria has traditionally been reluctant to put itself forward for a UNSC seat but has now done so. It has also supported permanent seats for Brazil and India, as well as more inclusive and transparent decision-making processes.

Pretoria's position on UN reform has recently been given a boost. In early September, the US announced support for two permanent seats for Africa on an expanded Council, albeit without veto powers, provoking discontent in the continent. In September 2024, the UN Pact for the Future recognised the urgent need for a UNSC that is "more representative, inclusive, transparent, efficient, effective, democratic and accountable".<sup>18</sup> At the summit, the UN resolved to tackle the under-representation of Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, aligning with renewed momentum for UNSC reform. However, this declaration does not mean changes are

imminent, and Pretoria continues to reject any new permanent seats on the Council that lack veto powers.

South Africa has also consistently advocated for reforms in the IMF and the World Bank, arguing that their policies reinforce global inequalities. Pretoria encourages the redistribution of voting power within these institutions through increased quota and voting shares, to amplify African voices in reshaping global economic governance. The country has long pushed for an extra seat for Africa on the Executive Board of the IMF, which was finally agreed upon at the Spring meetings in 2024. As a result of accepting the 2010 quota amendments, South Africa's voting power share increased by 0.77%.<sup>19</sup>

South Africa is also vocal on international tax reform, as well as debt relief and restructuring. It was a firm supporter of the historical UNGA vote in November 2023, accepting the Convention on International Tax Cooperation championed by the African Group. Furthermore, South Africa has advocated for a reformed multilateral system that places a greater emphasis on development issues, such as poverty, inequality, unemployment and climate change that require holistic collective solutions.

South Africa considers the EU as a key partner in its transition to clean energy, despite differences on key conflicts. While Pretoria has refused to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it remains extremely critical of Israel. Both the EU and South Africa quietly accuse the other of double standards.



On climate finance, South Africa has stated that quality matters as much as quantity. For example, more concessional financing is as important, if not more so, than the actual amount of financing provided. South Africa is also aligned with its BRICS partners who are cooperating to diversify trade in local currencies to reduce the unilateral power wielded by the US in the global financial system through the dollar.

South Africa also aims to promote greater cooperation within the Global South, particularly through minilateral groupings like BRICS. Pretoria's voice may be diluted, however, by the new BRICS members, Egypt and Ethiopia, as there are now more African leaders to listen to. Nevertheless, South Africa pushed for their inclusion, echoing its aim to reshape the global economic order by working closely with other emerging powers. By way of example, South Africa, through BRICS, has pushed for the establishment of alternative financial institutions, such as the NDB, which offers more favourable terms for Global South countries.

As an emerging middle power, South Africa has frequently campaigned for the Global South, using its diplomatic leverage to advocate for reforms that benefit developing countries. It is an active member in South-South Cooperation mechanisms such as the NAM and the G-77 Plus China, still finding relevance in these large groupings. Pretoria was pivotal in pushing for the AU to become a G-20 member, which was achieved under India's G-20 Presidency in 2023. In September 2024, President Ramaphosa spoke at the UN, stating "South Africa's G-20 Presidency provides us with an opportunity to advocate for and mobilise support for the developing economies of Africa and the Global South ... By strengthening and reforming multilateral

mechanisms and institutions, by deepening international economic cooperation, we can indeed realise a better world".<sup>20</sup>

### SUPPORT FOR MULTILATERALISM AND REFORMING THE GLOBAL GOVERNANCE SYSTEM ARE LONG-STANDING TENETS OF SOUTH AFRICA'S FOREIGN POLICY

South Africa also champions the strengthening of regional and subregional organisations, such as the AU and the SADC, as key stakeholders that are better suited to tackling the unique challenges faced by their respective regions. Indeed, South Africa's soft power comes from its cooperation with other African countries and its active participation in regional bodies. Pretoria's leadership in promoting African unity and continental integration through instruments such as the AU's Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, is viewed as a major step towards building a stronger, more cohesive and globally assertive Africa.

South Africa's key role in mediation, conflict resolution and peacekeeping missions across the African continent, with around 1,140 active troops in UN missions and a further 2,900 in SADC missions,<sup>21</sup> also aims to create a more favourable environment for multilateralism and development. Furthermore, South Africa is advancing a broader agenda that is widely shared by its Global South peers based on prioritising peace, development and regional cooperation.



## CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

South Africa aims to reshape the multilateral system to better address the needs of developing countries. This goal underpins its role in advocating for reforms in international organisations, promoting South-South cooperation and spearheading regional initiatives.

### SOUTH AFRICA STRONGLY ADVOCATES UNSC REFORM, DEMANDING TWO PERMANENT SEATS FOR AFRICA WITH THE RIGHT TO VETO

South Africa's prospects for advancing its multilateral agenda will depend on factors such as the evolving geopolitical landscape, the success of regional integration initiatives and the ability of the Global South to remain united on the international stage. However, geopolitical and geo-economic tensions between Western powers and Russia and China, both key BRICS members, could hinder South Africa's efforts to advance multilateral goals. The slow pace of reform in the UNSC and Bretton Woods institutions suggests that meaningful change will require sustained, long-term diplomatic

efforts. On the upside, South Africa's G-20 presidency in 2025 could be an important stepping stone from which to drive its global governance reform agenda.

At regional level, the success of Agenda 2063 will partly depend on South Africa's ability to garner support for regional integration and development initiatives. In this regard, success in the AU could broaden Africa's influence. Globally, achievements will hinge on whether South Africa can navigate the complex dynamics of global power and build alliances with actors that share its aspirations for a fairer world order.

In essence, South Africa aspires to be a constructive, pro-active force in reshaping global governance institutions for the benefit of all, through its steadfast and consistent support for multilateralism.

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- 15 The SADC has 16 members spread across Sub-Saharan Africa from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Tanzania (included) southwards.
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- 17 van Nieuwkerk, A., 'UN security council: African countries face hurdles and dangers in getting permanent seats', *The Conversation*, 23 September 2024 (<https://theconversation.com/un-security-council-african-countries-face-hurdles-and-dangers-in-getting-permanent-seats-239642>).
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- 19 'Acceptances of the Proposed Amendment of the Articles of Agreement on Reform of the Executive Board and Consents to 2010 Quota Increase' *International Monetary Fund*, 24 April, 2017 (<https://www.imf.org/external/hp/sec/misc/consents.htm>).
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# 3. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

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The conclusions set out here, which are based on the contributions made by our partners from the EU, Brazil, India and South Africa on how to reform the multilateral system, are linked to specific policy recommendations on how multilateral reform could be more successful in moving forward. They centre on the key issues raised by our contributors.



## CONCLUSION 1 - ON THE TYPE OF MULTILATERALISM WE ARE LOOKING FOR

Multilateralism, especially if it is rules-based, is a welcome trait of today's world order. In this report, our contributors have put forward different views on its origins and future evolution. As foreseeable, Brazil, India and South Africa all agree that today's multilateralism continues to be rooted in the power dynamics of a select club, i.e., the winners of World War II. These contributors also agree that the resulting multilateral setup is not one in which emerging middle powers played any kind of historical role or had any significant influence in shaping.

In terms of expectations going forward, the aim is to achieve a more equitable, fairer international order that factors in representative multilateralism. More importantly, there is an overall feeling that the current decaying setup is far too fragmented, to the point of becoming unsustainable in its current shape or form. Interestingly, all contributing countries are liberal democracies. In the case of South Africa as of the mid-1990s, and earlier for the remainder. This provides them with an alleged legitimacy to advocate for broader multilateralism and a more balanced world order.

While these perspectives hold for all three emerging middle powers, as well as for the EU, the former have lost trust in the West for failing to comply with its commitments. This disillusionment stands in sharp contrast to China's extensive global development projects which is mirrored by other emerging economies with increasingly long tentacles, such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Russia. In the meantime, the EU has failed to provide financial support for basic access to health, climate change and structural debt.

In addition, as noted by our European contributor, the current EU shift towards renewed engagement with the Global South is seen with suspicion, against the backdrop of the ongoing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East. Europe has publicly acknowledged the need to become much more geo-strategic, security-driven and less altruistic. Conversely, the EU has not always found support from the Global South when enforcing economic sanctions against Russia and securing public condemnation of the Ukraine invasion.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Multilateralism is closely linked to the nature of world order. Today's fragmented, securitised world adds an extra layer of complexity to ensuring representative and fair multilateralism.

Going forward, multilateralism still stands a chance if the actual power shifts in the Global South and vis-à-vis the traditional powers are transformed into more equitable representation in the multilateral arena. Historical multilateral institutions as well as emerging organisations must reflect this new reality of today's world order. Given the current context, there is no turning back on these reforms.

## CONCLUSION 2 - ON WHETHER MULTIPOLARITY IS A GIVEN AND THE SORT WE WANT

Multipolarity is a recurring theme that has been raised by all contributors. Today's fluid multipolarity is potentially conducive to 'reformed multilateralism', in the eyes of India. According to our European contributor, however, this may not lead to a more equitable system whereas 'multilateral realism' would enable multipolarity to act as a stabilising force, once states with differing degrees of power acquire a seat at the global governance table. Yet there is a risk of it being driven by coercive power struggles, against the backdrop of today's fragmented, highly polarised world order, which could end up transforming the envisaged multipolarity into a China-US bipolar setup. In contrast, our contributors from emerging middle powers have all framed multipolarity as an entry point towards finally gaining much-sought equality in global governance.

The ongoing confrontation between China and the US is perceived as a threat to balanced multipolarity by all contributors. Russia is seen as an additional pole by some, while the US is often grouped into the broader category of the 'West'. Both our South African and Brazilian contributors have highlighted the risk of a Sino-Russian axis, particularly in the context of 'new' parallel institutions, as is the case of the newly expanded BRICS (as of January 2024). India also remains wary of China's excessive influence in the grouping, opting to engage to a certain extent but leaving the door open to a wider range of parallel minilateral arrangements. However, BRICS, together with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), are increasingly seen in Europe and the broader West as anti-Western and pro-Sino-Russian arrangements.

All contributors have advocated for autonomy as the best path to navigate the troubled multilateral waters, be it in the form of 'strategic autonomy' geared towards 'strategic interdependence' in the case of the EU, historical 'non-alignment' for South Africa, re-adapted 'pluri- and multi-alignment' in the case of India, and 'active non-alignment' for Brazil. The new bottom line is the need to be openly pragmatic, geo-strategic and to foster collective resilience when establishing new partnerships of convenience. There are seemingly diminishing returns on investing in what are seen as ineffective and obsolete institutions, such as the UNSC, the G-77, the IMF and the WTO. Interestingly, South Africa still finds relevance in the historical South-South operating mechanisms such as the NAM and the G-77 Plus China arrangements.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATION

There is much to gain from multipolarity despite its innate disorder, particularly as a mechanism to prevent a bipolar setup. Multipolarity can be a stabilising force once both emerging and old poles find their place at the global governance table.

Thus, it is imperative to acknowledge the plurality of the Global South beyond the emerging middle powers, given that smaller countries aiming to be heard will seek to align with existing and emerging poles. These 'swing states' must be duly acknowledged and factored into any discussions on multipolarity if we are to move forward.

### CONCLUSION 3 - ON WHETHER TO REFORM AND/OR REPLACE EXISTING MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS

As noted by our South African contributor, collective action is key to challenging Western dominance in existing multilateral institutions. As the recent UN Pact for the Future has shown, there is broad-ranging support for comprehensive reform of leading organisations such as the UNSC. This is even more relevant in today's agitated security situation and the Security Council's ineffectiveness in controlling it. The legitimacy of the UN, in general, and the UNSC, in particular, have been seriously undermined and only large-scale damage control efforts will be able to restore their credibility.

Strong claims for reform are to be expected from G-4 countries, which includes Brazil and India. Gaining a permanent seat at the UNSC has been a long-standing foreign policy objective for these two countries, together with South Africa. In fact, Pretoria is pushing for two permanent seats with veto power within the UNSC under the Ezulwini Consensus, with Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa being the strongest contenders to occupy them. The EU is not oblivious to the clear need for UNSC reform, but it is sceptical about the extent to which Brussels can bring about change due to internal discrepancies, despite the fact that Germany is a G-4 member.

The reform of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), especially the Bretton Woods organisations, has surfaced as another cross-cutting claim. The 2010 IMF and World Bank amendments that materialised in the 14<sup>th</sup> General Review of Quotas and Board Reform in 2016 are seen as insufficient in the eyes of all three

emerging middle powers. The obvious mismatch between emerging economies' voting quota shares and the growing rates and sizes of their economies, which is particularly relevant in the cases of Brazil and India, is generating increasing tension.

The creation of parallel institutions outside the UN space is seen as the best way to move forward, together with internal reform of historical multilateral organisations. The G-20 is seen as a particularly effective option in this sense as it brings together all the G-7 and original BRICS members. Additionally, the presidencies of India in 2023, Brazil in 2024, and South Africa in 2025 highlight the inclusive representation it brings across. The EU is also a G-20 member, together with France, Germany and Italy, while Spain and the Netherlands are observer countries.

In the case of BRICS, there is a general realisation that this grouping has enabled South-South co-operation. The establishment of the BRICS NDB is also seen in a positive light. Yet our Indian contributors made no mention of BRICS, which is telling in itself, while the organisation's recent expansion has proved difficult for Brazil and South Africa to digest. South Africa sees a diluted role for itself with the inclusion of the two new African members, Egypt and Ethiopia. It has also identified the risk of a limited BRICS mandate due to geopolitical and geo-economic tensions between Western powers and Russia and China.



Brazil's view is that BRICS expansion has reinforced the inherent competition in the organisation between:

- (i) the China-Russia axis, with a strong anti-Western dimension; and
- (ii) India and Brazil which see it as a channel to amplify the voices of the Global South.

Saudi Arabia's hesitation in joining due to the Sino-Russian, anti-West position further illustrates these competing views among current and future BRICS members.

For the EU, the advent of the BRICS forum was initially perceived as a wake-up call but not as a threat, as both China and Russia were still part of the system. This perception has changed following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

The proliferation of minilateral arrangements beyond the G-20 and BRICS has become widespread among emerging powers. India's participation in this area is particularly significant given the broad spectrum of regional and sector-based groupings to which it belongs, ranging from the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the QUAD to the IBSA Dialogue Forum, the ISA, the CDRI, IMEC and the US-led Minerals Security Partnership (MSP). Brazil, in turn, has led the Global Biofuel Alliance and is also a member of IBSA and the ISA. South Africa has been particularly active on the regional front, evidenced by its pro-active engagement with the AU and SADC. The participation of the EU in the G-20, IMEC, the MSP and the IORA (as a Dialogue Partner) showcase its intent to engage in partnerships with both Western and emerging powers.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

A critical mass of countries including Southern and Northern powers support comprehensive reform, not replacement, of leading international organisations, alongside the creation of new institutions. This dispels the myth that effective reform of multilateral institutions implies dismantling existing structures. This is only the aim of revisionist powers. The mounting Sino-Russian anti-Western rhetoric within BRICS, for example, is not representative of the position of Brazil, India or the broader Global South.

Overemphasising a revisionist agenda takes the focus away from more profound reforms and the establishment of parallel institutions. Securing more equal representation and access to new decision-making structures could open up channels of collaboration among the different powers. The blossoming of minilateral arrangements illustrates this.

## CONCLUSION 4 - ON ISSUE AREAS OF INTEREST IN MULTILATERAL REFORM

There are issue areas of interest linked to multilateral reform. The need to reform existing mechanisms to provide more effective debt relief and debt restructuring has been raised repeatedly by the report's contributors. South Africa has been particularly active in advocating for international tax reform, as illustrated by the historical UNGA vote of November 2023, accepting the Convention on International Tax Cooperation which was promoted by the African Group.

The issue of de-dollarisation is increasingly prominent on the emerging power agenda. Our South African contributor specifically mentioned how Pretoria is cooperating with its BRICS partners to diversify trade in local currencies to combat the dominance of the US dollar in the global financial system. The outcome of the recent BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, illustrates the extent to which this has become an issue of concern for BRICS or, at least, for its more revisionist members, i.e., Russia and China.

Climate action and particularly climate finance is another core issue of concern that has been brought up in this report. Brazil has been particularly active in championing global climate action and the green transition, as a historical leading advocate for Global South perspectives in global climate change negotiations. In addition, it is now also looking into bioeconomy issues and is focusing on the topics of poverty and

hunger, as its ongoing G-20 initiatives show. Meanwhile, India is keen to build parallel bridges across the Global South and Western countries in a broad spectrum of issue areas based on shared interests.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Debt relief and debt restructuring are still two cornerstones of the G-20 mandate. This underscores their importance and the need to persist in creating more effective mechanisms to tackle them. Support for global public goods beyond geo-economics, i.e., climate action, health, digital and financial inclusion, alongside food security, must be carefully considered by Western powers with a view to regaining much needed global legitimacy and moral authority in today's world order.

## CONCLUSION 5 - ON THE SYNERGIES BETWEEN THE EU AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH IN MULTILATERAL REFORM

The role of the EU as a stabilising influence in multilateral reform to counter the ongoing rivalry between China and the US was mentioned by all three emerging middle powers. As tensions escalate between the two global powers, played out in the shape of trade disputes, geopolitical manoeuvring and ideological clashes, Brazil and India see their strategic partnership with the EU as a haven of stability in today's world order.

There is a caveat, however. As noted by our EU contributor, Europe's development policies are increasingly perceived as serving its geopolitical and economic interests rather than adequately financing global public goods and promoting a more inclusive multilateral system. In addition, certain EU policies are being seen as a smoke screen for protectionism, such as the resistance to new trade agreements (e.g., with Mercosur), the introduction of the CBAM and deforestation laws, along with restrictive migration policies. This poses a challenge for the EU if it aims to build a relationship of trust and actively re-engage with countries in the Global South. Notwithstanding, India sees the EU as a primary development partner in the overall realm of global governance.

All three emerging middle powers agreed that the EU as a whole and European countries individually constitute solid partners when it comes to joint actions on climate change. By way of example, the EU has set up Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs) with emerging economies, including South Africa. These alliances aim to combine public and private funds to move forward on climate transition. Finally, working together on multilateral reform constitutes a critical opportunity for

the EU, Brazil, South Africa and India to cooperate in strengthening the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law that they all share. As regions and countries with a vested interest in a fair, inclusive, and rules-based international order, these partners are uniquely positioned to demonstrate how multipolarity can be harnessed to benefit global stability and prosperity.

At a time when the EU's moral authority is under scrutiny, collaboration with democratic powers in the Global South can help reinforce these shared values, advancing a model of multilateralism rooted not in coercion but in collective responsibility and respect. Together, they can champion pragmatic multilateralism, making inroads toward global governance systems that reflect the diverse aspirations of both developed and emerging economies.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATION

The EU needs to make itself more relevant to the world at large. It also needs to be clearer on what kind of engagement it wants with multilateralism and the Global South. The EU Global Gateway is a welcome step forward, though insufficient on its own. Instead, a clearer focus, consolidated public and private investments and a better articulated collective approach towards emerging powers are required. External actors are keen for the EU to become an additional pole that guarantees a more orderly multipolarity, making it imperative for the EU to adopt a more outward-looking stance and to deliver on pragmatic multilateralism.



