

Historical Thinking, Future Strategies

Democracy in a
New Geopolitical Era

History Hotspot September 2024

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“The Global South represents a collective identity of nations that share historical experiences of colonisation, underdevelopment and marginalisation in the international order.” Adams Bodomo

“The response of countries in the Global South to the Ukraine war has been faithful to the principles of the post-war international order. By insisting on diplomacy rather than war and dealing with both sides, they have brought neutrality back to the heart of geopolitics.” Faisal Devji

“In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the West pinned all its hopes on Moscow in the transition from dictatorship to democracy while considering its former colonial peripheries to be dangerously nationalist, potentially troublemaking and therefore threats to peace, stability and democracy.” Botakoz Kassymbekova

“Indians, and many others around the world, view the country as an example of a rare post-colonial country that has consistently remained a democracy, built its economy and educated its people, without a military coup or civil war.” Aparna Pande



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Photos: Claudia Höhne

Three events, just weeks apart, demonstrate how turbulent and unpredictable the world has become. In July 2024, two and a half years after the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first foreign trip after re-election took him to Moscow, and pictures of his warm embrace with Russian President Vladimir Putin went viral around the world. A month later, Modi visited Poland, and then Ukraine, a first for any prime minister of India. There he embraced Ukrainian President Zelenskyi, accompanied him to a memorial for Ukrainian children killed in the war, and emphasised that he could act as a "friend" and bring peace. During Modi's visit to Moscow, the NATO summit was simultaneously taking place in Washington, where member states were negotiating military support for Ukraine.

What do these parallel events in the summer of 2024 mean for India's role on the global political stage? Are we witnessing a possible "watershed" in the international order? Do we need to rethink historically evolved concepts, such as the Euro-Atlantic Western alliance, in light of these events? And what does India's foreign policy balancing act mean against the backdrop of the Non-Aligned Movement, which emerged as a consequence of the world order after World War II?

Balancing the Diplomatic Tightrope

The fact is that despite attempts by Western governments to isolate Russia internationally, India continues to maintain its long-standing ties with Moscow, which historically date back to its close strategic partnership with the Soviet Union. It was the Soviet Union that stood by India in its war against Pakistan. Today, Russia is India's most important defence partner. As a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1960s, India remains a skilful strategic player between the power blocs, and has avoided taking sides in the Russian war against Ukraine, never losing sight of its own interests.

However, it is also a fact that India has significantly deepened its relations with the West since the end of the Cold War. Over the past two decades, Western Europe has become an increasingly important part of India's foreign and economic policy. Are Modi's visits to Poland and Ukraine filling a strategic gap: the integration of Central Eastern Europe into India's European agenda?

Modi's two historic trips to Warsaw – the first by an Indian prime minister to Poland since 1979 – and Kyiv signalled India's long-term political, economic and security commitment to Central and Eastern Europe. It is a commitment that should also be seen in the context of the growing rapprochement between Russia and China. These diplomatic manoeuvres by India, which sees itself as the leading power of the Global South, illustrate the extent to which the global order has changed since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February, and the extent to which the geopolitical hegemony of the West has been shaken.

The West's Post-Cold War Reality Check

However, the causes of this upheaval in the traditional order are not only to be found in the new assertiveness of countries making up the so-called Global South. They are also directly linked to Western miscalculations and failures to recognise the geopolitical situation created by the collapse of the Soviet Union after 1991. For too long, the successor states of the former USSR were regarded as amorphous "post-Soviet" entities; the different historical experiences of war, occupation and oppression were recognised too late and too indiscriminately between Washington, Paris, and Berlin. Not to mention the admission that Russia's historically grown imperial self-image has remained the seed for Moscow's claim to spheres of interest and influence far beyond the end of the Soviet Union – and that Russia is prepared to assert this claim by force.

This doesn't apply only to the West's extremely hesitant recognition that Ukraine is indeed a country with its own national identity, history and culture, and has a right to territorial integrity and the realisation of its own political, social and economic goals. This nebulous Western perception of the so-called "post-Soviet space" also applies to the countries of Central Asia, which until a few years ago, were seen merely as a region where Russia and China were competing for influence and hegemony. Consciously or unconsciously, policy-makers in the West have thus adopted the geopolitical and strategic view of Moscow and Beijing, in which countries such as Kazakhstan, for example, are seen primarily as objects and not as political and social subjects. The remarkable path towards democratic and social achievements that many states of the former Soviet Union or the Warsaw Pact have taken since 1989/1991 has for too long remained largely unrecognised in the fog of the generic term "post-Soviet space".

But how does the West now deal with the more complex geopolitical reality, its own failings, and global power shifts? How will Western democracies position themselves? What alliances will they forge? The US and the EU in particular face the challenge of dealing with an increasingly multipolar world order. The West as it has been defined since the Cold War is facing fundamental reorientation and rethinking. India's example shows that countries in the so-called Global South have their own interests and ideas of order, and they are trying to assert themselves against Western dominance and influence.

When did the Collapse of the Rules-Based Order begin?

India has often abstained in the UN when it comes to condemning Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Countries such as Senegal, South Africa and Brazil have offered to mediate in the war, emphasising their neutral position. Increasingly assertive, countries in the Global South see an opportunity to pit the superpowers of the US and China against each other and reshape the global order – something they say is long overdue. They no longer want to be spectators on the sidelines of the new world order. The Russian war against Ukraine, the Israel-Hamas war, and the tensions between China and the USA in the South China Sea are not just geopolitical conflicts, but also disputes about the future direction of the global balance of power.

In addition, authoritarian states are on the rise and aggressively establishing themselves as counter-powers to the Western-dominated liberal world order. For more than two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, democracies were on the rise around the world. Today, the quality and quantity of liberal democracies is in decline, as the results of the Democracy Index show it clearly. Autocracies

such as Russia and China are building their own centres of power and spheres of influence, often at the expense of their democratic neighbours.

The West must therefore rethink its alliances and forge new strategic partnerships to defend its values and interests in an increasingly multipolar world. It must act as a credible partner, willing to take seriously the concerns of the Global South and the independent states of the former Soviet Union, and to play an active, multilateral role in solving global challenges.

The West must also ask questions: When did the collapse of the rules-based order begin – not only from its perspective but also from that of other states? What have been the turning points since 1989, and what can we learn from them? How can democracies respond to the need to redefine their geopolitical strategies in light of their own values?

Historical Perspectives on Global Power Dynamics Post-1945

This fourth issue of History Hotspot addresses these questions and challenges. It contains selected articles on the former Soviet Union, India, African states, and the Non-Aligned Movement. The authors are participants in the Körber History Forum Retreat 2024, which focused on the promises made by democracies and autocracies after 1945 and how they have been kept. All discussions were based on the role and significance of historical experiences and narratives in the context of the exercise of power in domestic and foreign policy.

Historical thinking is the leitmotif of the Körber History Forum's programme, in order to open up relevant contexts for current global challenges and crises. In the coming years, it will increasingly be our task to analyse the narratives, policies, and discontents surrounding the global order from a historical perspective. It is essential to understand these changing dynamics, as well as categories and concepts such as "Global South", "Global North" and "neutrality", and to integrate them into European geopolitical thinking and strategies.

In times of uncertainty and a changing international order, we often overlook the fact that people around the world perceive conflicts and challenges differently and can also offer different solutions. Our central task at Körber-Stiftung and in the programme of the Körber History Forum remains to preserve this space for diverse perspectives and in-depth debates against the backdrop of often complex historical experiences.

Gabriele Woidelko & Florian Bigge

Hamburg, September 2024

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Democracy Beyond the Empire

How to Overcome
Imperialism

Collapse vs. Emergence: Decolonisation as a Chance and Choice for Democracy

Three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, former peripheries and satellite states have surpassed Russia in democratic progress. What factors led these nations, initially dismissed by the West as potential troublemakers, to embrace democracy?

By *Botakoz Kassymbekova*, Lecturer/Assistant Professor in Modern History, University of Basel

More than three decades after the collapse of the Communist bloc it has become clear that the former peripheries of the Russian/Soviet empire – republics such as Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Ukraine, and satellite states such as the Czech Republic, Mongolia, Poland and Slovakia – have been much more successful in democratisation than Russia. In fact, Russia is now one of the least democratic places in the former Soviet empire.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the West pinned all its hopes on Moscow in the transition from dictatorship to democracy while considering its former colonial peripheries to be dangerously nationalist, potentially troublemaking and therefore threats to peace, stability and democracy.

In his “Chicken Kyiv speech” in 1991, US President George Bush warned about “a suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred” and expressed scepticism about the prospect of Ukraine’s independence. The Western mainstream was dominated by concerns about whether and to what extent “dangerous ethno-nationalists” really wanted democracy.

From periphery to beacon: the progress of post-Soviet states

Today, it is the former Russian/Soviet imperial core that is the source of violence and danger to the world. Democracy indices show that most countries neighbouring the Russian federation, its former colonised peripheries, have made much more progress in securing individual freedom and choice. Some turned into robust democracies. This is one of the main lessons of the collapse of the Soviet empire for today.

But how could it happen that the former supposedly “dangerous” peripheries offer more hope for democracy, including Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (which, while not a democracy, scores higher than the Russian Federation), or Mongolia, landlocked between the Russian Federation and China? If countries like Estonia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Ukraine were still occupied by Moscow, they would not be as free as they are today – the basis of their development was their independence in 1991.

Given that the Soviet dictatorship was replicated in 15 republics and given that all Soviet republics went through similar economic collapse and social issues after 1991 (in fact, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Moldova

faced much greater economic challenges), why have they made more progress towards openness and freedom than the Russian Federation? Proximity to Europe and the intention to join the European Union are not the only factors influencing the democratisation of the formerly colonised and occupied, because in the case of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia, progress towards civil development has also exceeded that of the Russian Federation, which is geographically much closer

“It would be wrong and misleading to explain the difference simply with ‘wrong’ decisions of the regime or with ‘bad’ leaders.”

to the EU. What is it about Russian occupation/ colonialism and the Russian imperial centre that hampers the development of democracy?

The deeper factors at play

It would be wrong and misleading to explain the difference simply with “wrong” decisions of the regime or with “bad” leaders. Such a narrow focus cannot explain why the former colonial peripheries, sharing the same political and legal institutions and economic challenges as the former imperial centre, have been more successful in overcoming them.



Celebration after the Slovak National Council adopted the Declaration of Independence of the Slovak Nation on July 17, 1992. This event was part of a process which resulted in the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and creation of independent Slovakia and Czech Republic on January 1, 1993. Photo: IMAGO/CTK Photo



Photo: David Ausserhofer

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The problem lies much deeper than just the issue of the regime. Focusing only on freedom of the press, the rule of law, corruption or human rights will not allow to understand the historical developments of the last three decades either.

It is necessary to examine the two most fundamental differences between Russian Federation and the decolonised former Soviet republics that have influenced the latter’s democratisation: territorial size and narrative. They are interrelated and must be perceived as two sides of the same coin. The Russian Federation has not distanced itself from *size as a narrative* (imperial greatness) and the *narrative of size* (the need for a large territory as condition for global power projection). The republics that gained independence from Moscow in 1991 abandoned the Russian/Soviet narratives and created new national ones.



President Leonid Kravchuk leaves the polling station during voting for the Ukrainian Independence Referendum 1991. Photo: gettyimages.com / Georges DeKeerle

Imperial legacies and the quest for new national narratives

In this process of reinvention, the question of the legitimacy of the new narratives was fundamental and usually had to do with breaking with the old one and integrating society into the new ones. For some, democracy was often linked to the question of security against re-colonisation or overcoming the legacies of Russian/Soviet colonialism. In this process, society could emerge in the narrative as an important independent player. This happened for some republics sooner, for others later and for yet others not at all.

The decision to make the Russian Federation, but *de facto* Moscow, the Soviet Union's legal successor impeded de-Sovietisation and the search for a new narrative. Moscow's wars against Chechnya (in 1994–96 and 1999–2009) eliminated any chance of reorientation and turned its ideology towards the past.

It is consistent that *The Captive of the Caucasus*, written by Alexander Pushkin in the early 19th century, in which Russia colonised the Caucasus but imagined itself as its victim, has been again resurrected in the 1990s as the great Russian national *topoi*. A very successful updating of Pushkin's colonial story in popular films of the 1990s portrays the West and Ukraine as Russia's enemies. Its main message to the audience has been to cultivate the cult of sacrifice for "Russian greatness".

post-Soviet Moscow chose a kind of "Soviet legacy without communist ideology" with additional Tsarist features because this allowed it to re-imagine an empire. The claim to the right to determine world politics is another imperial legacy that Moscow established during the Soviet period.

Restoration of power: violence and centralisation in post-Soviet Russia

Crucially, this return to the story of greatness and the recreation of the dream of domination had to be based on external and internal violence. External expansion legitimised the story of a strong leader and the need for a centralised, patriarchal order.

"Russian colonialism, not just communism, is incompatible with democracy."

Instead of systemic change, the path taken was the restoration of an old story and an old system: ultra-centralised power, sustained by a story of enemies and martyrs willing to die for Russia's greatness. In 2015, Joseph Stalin was the most popular figure among Russia's population, unlike in Moscow's former colonies.

What the transformation after the collapse of the Soviet empire teaches us is that the communist system has not been the only source of Russian illiberalism, although it was instrumental in shaping its contours. Russian colonialism, not just communism, is incompatible with democracy.

While the collapse of the Soviet narrative was a precondition for political transformation in the non-Russian republics, the opposite happened in Russia. The collapse of the empire allowed many new stories to emerge. A democratic Russia, on the other hand, could never emerge because the empire never collapsed there. Fear and hatred of democracy stem from this fact.

India's Unique Economic Path

Manoeuvring Globalisation
and Democracy

India, a Democracy Not Bound to Globalisation

Navigating globalisation, protectionism, and realpolitik while maintaining democratic principles appears to be a complex challenge. India's unique approach demonstrates that democratic commitment is not inherently linked to globalisation.

By *Aparna Pande*, Research Fellow, India and South Asia, Hudson Institute, Washington DC

The answer to the question “Does democracy depend on globalisation?” can be found in another question: “Have the prospects of democracy around the world improved with globalisation?”. Despite the initial democratic expansion following globalisation in the early 21st century, experts have identified a recent trend of democratic backsliding. Nativism, ultra-nationalism and racism now challenge democracies internally, suggesting the link between democracy and globalisation may have been overstated.

India has benefited from globalisation but does not promote democracy abroad. Rather, Indians view their parliamentary democracy as indigenous despite it being a remnant of British colonial rule. Valuing it for its efficacy in governing their diverse country, Indians do not attempt to impose democracy upon others.

Balancing realpolitik and economic reforms

The foreign policy of India, a country with a 5,000 year-old civilisation, is based on realpolitik, not similarity of values or systems. During the Cold War, the country embraced democracy without capitalism, something rare for an ally of the West. India has historically traded globally but has been inward-looking and wary of global trade in the post-colonial era. It links economic growth to social development more than to wealth generation, which validates protectionism and indigenisation.

India wants to reap the benefits of globalisation and free trade, but it has been slow and gradual in opening its economy. It has initiated major economic reforms, beginning in 1990–91. But opening the economy to foreign investment, reducing tariffs and removing import restrictions has been piecemeal.

“Indians view their parliamentary democracy as indigenous despite it being a remnant of British colonial rule.”

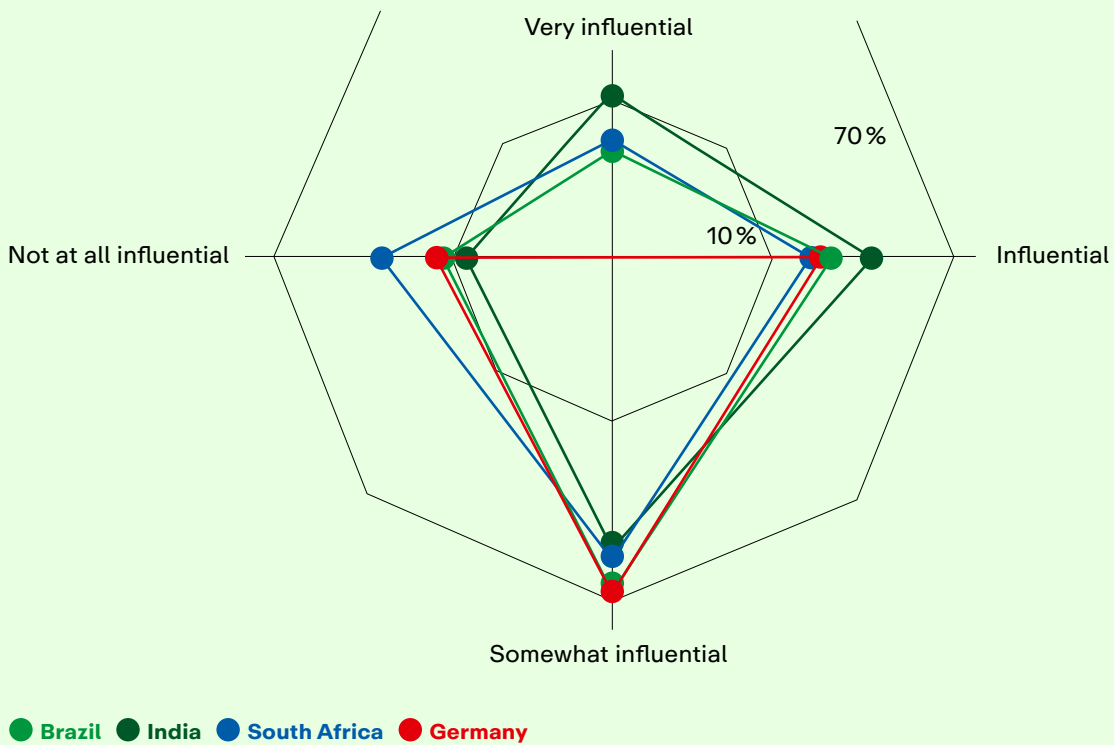
India's share of global trade has risen as it has signed free trade agreements with several Asian countries. GDP growth stood at 3–3.5 per cent per year during most of the Cold War, but for two decades after the 1990–91 economic reforms it hovered around 7 per cent or higher. The economic boom lifted millions out of poverty: GDP has grown from \$270 billion in 1991 to \$3.4 trillion today. India now has the world's fastest-growing emerging economy and between 2008–2014, its GDP growth rate was closer to 8 per cent.



Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, speaks at the 69th United Nations General Assembly General Debate in the UN building in New York City on September 27, 2014. Photo: Alamy Stock Photo/ UPI/ John Angelillo

India, the confident

How do you rate your government's influence on global rulemaking?



The survey was commissioned by Körber-Stiftung and conducted by Verian Germany among experts in Brazil, Germany, India and South Africa on attitudes to foreign policy between 16 October and 29 November 2023 for the *Emerging Middle Powers Report 2024*. Ganter et al. 2024.

India's paradox: protectionism amidst global integration

Even though India has benefitted from integration with the global economy, it has become more protectionist over the last decade than it was even in the 1990s and early 2000s. The reforms of 1990–91 were never followed by a second generation of factor market reforms relating to land, labour and capital. Between 2014 and 2021, import duties rose from 13.5 per cent to over 18 per cent.

“India’s policies attract charges of hypocrisy or schizophrenia.”

India’s policies attract charges of hypocrisy or schizophrenia. The country seeks foreign investment but wants control over that money; it seeks state-of-the-art technology and to be a part of global supply chains but it would like transfer of that technology to build India’s industrial base.

Even as India benefits from a globalised world, its leaders continue to debate the value of globalisation and argue that it needs to re-examine the trade deals it has signed. In the words of Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar, India seeks to “engage America, manage China, cultivate Europe, reassure Russia, bring Japan into play, draw neighbours in, extend the neighbourhood, and expand traditional constituencies of support.” There is no mention of globalisation or democracy in this global agenda.

Seeking recognition and influence on the global stage

India’s citizens and leaders seem to think that their country deserves to be an important and powerful actor on the global stage, a claim that comes from a belief in its civilisational legacy and geostrategic location. For them, the most critical aspect of its civilisational greatness is that it is recognised by others. India expects its position in the international geo-economic order to reflect this vision.

India’s participation in existing global geopolitical and geo-economic institutions – like the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – at the same time as it helps found other groupings – like the BRICS – reflects its dichotomous policy. India wants to remain part of the existing post-Second World War order while seeking to change it from within to make it reflect a new reality.

Shaping the future of globalisation and democracy

The challenge faced by India is that, instead of growing its economic might to ensure a seat at the



Photo: David Ausserhofer

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global high table, it expects an invitation simply based on its right to be there. Rules-based global trade does not align with such a supposition.

The path that India – the world’s most populous democracy and state – chooses will impact the future of democracy and globalisation. Indians, and many others around the world, view the country as an example of a rare post-colonial country that has consistently remained a democracy, built its economy and educated its people, without a military coup or civil war. But that example only shows that a commitment to democracy is not necessarily bound to the idea of globalisation.

The Global South's Historical Legacy

Transforming the
International Order

The Euro-American West should not underestimate the Global South

During the Cold-War, the Non-Aligned Movement sought independence from the superpower rivalry. The Global South continues this legacy by enhancing cooperation among developing countries and seeking greater global representation. How will this impact the international order?

By *Adams Bodomo*, Professor of African Studies, University of Vienna

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) emerged after the Second World War as a response to the bipolar world order dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. Comprising primarily newly independent nations from Africa, Asia, and Latin America as well as some Eastern European countries like Yugoslavia, it aimed to solidify independence, to promote global peace and security, and to pursue development.

The movement's first meeting was held in the Yugoslav capital, Belgrade, in 1961. Leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia were its Founding Fathers. The NAM served as an alternative platform to the polarised Cold War order and for non-alliance with either superpower. It played a crucial role in bridging the East-West divide by promoting dialogue.

The rise and decline of the Non-Aligned Movement

The NAM made notable contributions to international diplomacy and development in its heyday. One of its key achievements was in mediating conflicts and promoting peace. Member states played pivotal roles in resolving conflicts in Southern

Africa, Southeast Asia, and West Asia. The NAM also served as a platform for collective action on



First meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Belgrade, 1961. Photo: IMAGO / Pond5 Images

issues of global importance, including decolonisation, disarmament and economic justice.

But, despite its early success, the NAM faced numerous challenges that contributed to the decline in its influence over time. The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union fundamentally altered the geopolitical landscape. With the demise of bipolarity, many member states realigned their foreign policy towards closer ties with either the United States or other emerging powers.

The Global South: rising influence and new multilateral dynamics

Today, the Global South represents a collective identity of nations that share historical experiences of colonisation, underdevelopment and marginalisation in the international order. It promotes the idea of South-South cooperation based on solidarity, mutual benefit and shared development goals. Central to this is the exchange of resources, knowledge and expertise among Global South countries.

These countries are increasingly strengthening their ties, leveraging their comparative advantages to tackle shared challenges and pursue mutual interests. They do so through channels that include the BRICS+ grouping – comprising Argentina, Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates – and China’s Belt and Road Initiative. These foster new forms of multilateralism and economic integration that operate outside traditional Western-dominated frameworks.

“The NAM served as an alternative platform to the polarised Cold War order and for non-alliance with either superpower.”

Hope rests on the G20

In ten years, which institutions or groups will tackle challenges most effectively?

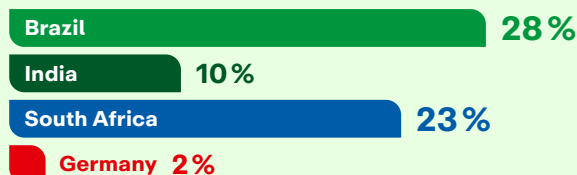
G20



United Nations



BRICS+



G7



answer ‘don’t know’ and ‘no answer’ ranged from 1 to 5 per cent for all issues

The survey was commissioned by Körber-Stiftung and conducted by Verian Germany among experts in Brazil, Germany, India and South Africa on attitudes to foreign policy between 16 October and 29 November 2023 for the *Emerging Middle Powers Report 2024*. Ganter et al. 2024.



BRICS Assembly year 2023: South African Minister of Electricity Kgosientsho Ramokgopa speaks to the press. Photo: Alamy Stock Photo/UPI

Countries like Brazil, China, India and South Africa have seen rapid economic growth, in the process lifting millions out of poverty and gaining significant geopolitical influence. They have become key players in global trade, investment and finance, challenging Western dominance. This signifies a major realignment of economic power from the Euro-American West towards the Global South.

In diplomacy, the Global South is pushing for greater representation and voice in global governance structures. There are growing calls for reforming institutions like the United Nations Security Council to reflect better current geopolitical realities, with many Global South countries advocating for expanded roles and voting rights. Additionally, regional organisations such as the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations are taking on more responsibility for things like peacekeeping and conflict resolution.

From NAM to Global South: shared goals, different eras

The NAM and the Global South are inextricably linked, with the latter being the ideological and symbolic successor to the former. The two groups can be compared regarding historical context, composition and membership, and broader objectives and focus areas.

Historically, the NAM originated during the Cold War as a response to the bipolar world order dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union, whereas the Global South emerged in the post-colonial era as newly independent countries

sought to assert their identity and interests on the global stage. Although there is an overlap of membership, the Global South is a broader term referring to countries primarily located in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania. It encompasses diverse nations with varying levels of economic development, political systems and cultural identities.

There is an overlap in objectives too. The NAM aimed to assert independence, to promote global peace, to oppose imperialism and colonialism, and to advance the interests of developing countries on the world stage, with geopolitical and ideological issues as its primary focus areas. The Global South generally aims to address common developmental challenges, to promote economic growth and social justice, and to enhance cooperation among countries facing similar issues. It focuses on issues such as poverty eradication as a goal, sustainable development and human rights.

“The NAM and the Global South are inextricably linked, with the latter being the ideological and symbolic successor to the former.”

In sum, while the NAM and the Global South share the goal of promoting the interests of developing countries and asserting their independence, they differ in their scope, focus and historical context.



Photo: David Ausserhofer

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Lessons for strategic thinking and policy formulation

The rise of the Global South has significant, multi-faceted strategic implications for the global order. This is a disruptive and transformative period in global governance, characterised by a redistribution of power and influence, greater diversity in global leadership and the potential for more equitable and inclusive global governance.

We live no longer in a unipolar or bipolar world but in a multipolar one with multiple players that have diverse interests and varying degrees of influence. It is high time to assess the past and to engage in dialogues based on equal partnerships, good faith, and co-management of our world's multiple crises.

Challenging the status quo and shaping the new world order

From the NAM to the emergence of the assertive Global South, the global order has been challenged. The Global South significantly influences the changing dynamics of the global order. Through economic resurgence, South-South cooperation, diplomatic assertiveness and cultural influence, its countries are challenging traditional power structures and reshaping international relations.

As we navigate this complex landscape, embracing the diversity and dynamism of the Global South will be essential for building a more just, prosperous and peaceful world order. Unless genuine, deep reforms of existing governance systems are undertaken and the voices of the Global South are heeded, parallel and competing governance will inevitably emerge, putting the world on a collision course. To avoid this, the Euro-American West must constructively engage the Global South in terms of strategic thinking and policy formulations, rather than creating a fortress for itself.

Challenge vs. Restoration: The Global South's Influence on the International Order

The war in Ukraine has revealed that many countries in the Global South view Western powers, rather than Russia or China, as the revisionist forces challenging the international order. However, this isn't rooted in Cold War nostalgia or anti-Western sentiment.

By *Faisal Devji*, Professor of Indian History, St Antony's College, University of Oxford

It is not surprising that the war in Ukraine has revealed so-called revisionist powers like Russia and China challenging the international order led by the United States. What did come as a surprise was that much of the rest of the world – at least outside North America, Western Europe, and some parts of East Asia – seemed to go along with them. Since then, the Global South's allegiances have been the subject of intense scrutiny.

But it would be a mistake to see these countries as being motivated by pro-Russian sentiments dating back to the Cold War, or by anti-Western feelings linked to memories of colonial rule. Instead, we should consider the possibility that for many if not most of them it is the Western powers that are the revisionist ones. And that it is the Global South that is more firmly invested in shoring up the post-war international order represented by the UN.

Shifts in post-Cold War international relations

Given their historically non-dominant if not subordinate role in the international order, these countries recognise that it has always been a structure of compromise. The UN was set up precisely to bring together the Cold War's great rivals and their respective allies in order to

enable diplomacy and global governance even under conditions of distrust and hostility.

It was only with the end of the Cold War, and the apparent retreat of the nuclear threat, that this order started to crumble as the great powers chose to ignore or operate outside its remit. None more than the United States, which in wars from Bosnia and Kosovo to Afghanistan and Iraq chose to act pre-emptively and outside the UN. Beyond military action, it also relies on unilateral and third-party sanctions to cripple others' economies and expel its enemies from the global financial system.

Reaffirming neutrality: The Global South's strategic approach to Ukraine

Many countries in the Global South still believe that any international order that does not include enemies within it is doomed. They see Russia as a regional power whose relatively modest military abilities and economic clout prevent it from posing any kind of global threat to the international order. While difficult to defeat, as seen in Ukraine, Russia can only threaten its immediate neighbours. And this is a situation that can and should be addressed diplomatically within the UN.

But, no matter how diminished Russia is, its status as a regional power is also seen as guaranteeing the international order's entirely liberal feature of pluralism. Indian policymakers, for example, think that their country's rise to great-power status is only possible in a world without the hegemony of a single superpower like the United States.

The response of countries in the Global South to the Ukraine war has been faithful to the principles of the post-war international order. By insisting on diplomacy rather than war and dealing with both sides, they have brought neutrality back to the heart of geopolitics.

“The UN was set up precisely to bring together the Cold War's great rivals and their respective allies.”

Understanding conflicts through the lens of neutrality

Hitherto a central tenet in any understanding of international politics, neutrality was steadily marginalised following the Cold War and discarded entirely during the War on Terror. Its role is to limit the spread of conflict and allow for mediation by third parties. Neutrality is proclaimed literally in the Ukraine war, it also appears in the widespread calls for a ceasefire in Gaza. Rather than seeing



British barrister and King's Counsel Philippe Sands before the International Court of Justice on 19 February 2024. Photo: © ICJ-CIJ



Photo: David Ausserhofer

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these conflicts as being distinct and even opposed, both are understood in the Global South as Western proxy wars.

We should consider the possibility that it is countries in the Global South that now represent political maturity in the international order they seek to preserve. They have brought neutrality back to geopolitics while reinvigorating international law.

This is most evident in the charges brought against Israel and Hamas at the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court, in which international law is very unusually being treated as if it pertained to a domestic jurisdiction. Traditionally, international law has been voluntary, with one's good behaviour guaranteeing that of one's enemies. Only states defeated in wars are subjected to tribunals. But this is exactly what both courts are being urged to do with regard to the Gaza war.

The way forward: an inclusive post-war international order

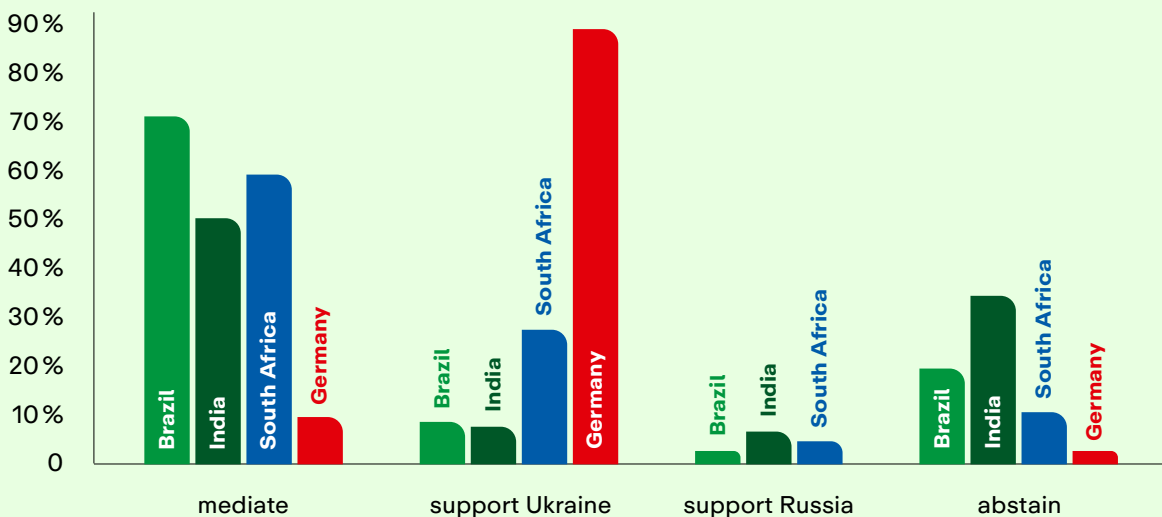
Whether the Global South's efforts to rebuild the international order by way of neutrality and law will succeed is an open question. They may well end up destroying this order altogether by insisting on its universality. For in order to succeed a great deal more is required, including making the UN Security Council more representative regionally and perhaps empowering the UN General Assembly more.

The two ongoing wars that are transforming global politics offer not just risks but also opportunities, with the remaking of the post-war international order the chief one. Such a project has to be inclusive, and for this the Global South is already prepared. But, in the view of these countries, the chief problem that this faces is the desire to renew and extend US-led Western hegemony by military and financial means.

“Whether the Global South's efforts to rebuild the international order by way of neutrality and law will succeed is an open question.”

Divided on Ukraine

On the Russia-Ukraine war, your country should ... ?



answer 'don't know' and 'no answer' ranged from 0 to 3 per cent for all issues

The survey was commissioned by Körber-Stiftung and conducted by Verian Germany among experts in Brazil, Germany, India and South Africa on attitudes to foreign policy between 16 October and 29 November 2023 for the *Emerging Middle Powers Report 2024*. Ganter et al. 2024.



Körber History Forum *Retreat* 2024

Historical Thinking, Future Strategies: Democracy in a New Geopolitical Era

Speakers include:

Anne Applebaum
Hal Brands
Beatrice de Graaf
Faisal Devji
Ramachandra Guha
Botakoz Kassymbekova
Jörn Leonhard
Jan-Werner Müller
Olivette Otele
Aparna Pande
Mary Elise Sarotte
Karl Schlögel
Quinn Slobodian
Timothy Snyder
Adam Tooze

Autocratic powers are establishing themselves as a counterweight to the Western world order and weaponizing old geopolitical ideas. Global instability emerges, as autocrats are emboldened by Russia's aggressions and by the cautious response of European democracies. There's an emphasis on the need for democracies to rediscover and adapt their geopolitical strategies in the evolving era. But can they adapt quickly and effectively enough?

This and other questions were at the centre of discussions at the Körber History Forum *Retreat* 2024. The conference took place on 27–28 May at Lübbenau Castle in the Spree Forest. For two days, the *Retreat* provided a space for debates with selected experts on our present historical and geopolitical challenges.



More information:
[koerber-stiftung.de/en/projects/
koerber-history-forum/](https://koerber-stiftung.de/en/projects/koerber-history-forum/)

Körper-Stiftung

Social development needs dialogue and understanding. Through our operational projects, in our networks and in conjunction with partners, we take on current social challenges in the areas of activities comprising “Knowledge for Tomorrow”, “International Dialogue”, “Vibrant Civil Society”, and “Cultural Impulses for Hamburg”.

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Conflicts arise in situations that are fraught with misunderstandings and lack debate. Moreover, such conflicts are often grounded in the past. This is why we champion international dialogue and foster a more profound understanding of history. We address political decisionmakers, civil society representatives and emerging leaders from the younger generations. Our geographic focus is on Europe, its eastern neighbours, the Middle East and Asia, especially China. We strengthen discussions about history at the local level in a manner that stretches beyond national borders and encourage people to share their experiences so that history is not forgotten. Our foreign and security policy formats provide safe spaces for confidential talks built on trust. However, we also employ formats that involve the public, such as publications, competitions and networks, to spur debate about common European values and inspire the greater development of international cooperation.

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