

MP-IDSA

Issue Brief

Strengthening the Nested Geometry of RIC-SCO-BRICS

Prashant Kumar Singh

June 24, 2026

Summary

India's commitments to strategic autonomy, systemic balancing and the Global South explain its robust engagement with the three non-Western groupings—RIC, SCO and BRICS. India's geopolitical position straddles both the Eurasian and Indo-Pacific regions, with abiding interests in both. Participation in processes of both regions ensures strategic balancing across contested geopolitical spaces.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, on the sidelines of the Saint Petersburg Economic Forum on 4 June 2026, offered a detailed appreciation of the complex nature of India–China relations, their leaders’ commitment to improving bilateral ties, the positive results they have produced, and Russia’s constructive ties with both.¹ Responding to the statement, China’s foreign ministry spokesperson remarked that “maintaining sound relations is not only in the respective interests of the three countries but also conducive to regional and global peace, security, stability and prosperity”. China was “ready to keep in communication with Russia and India on advancing cooperation among the three countries”.² These statements were seen as signs of willingness to revive the dormant Russia–India–China (RIC) cooperation framework.³

While the Government of India remains non-committal, there is a perceptible undercurrent in a section of Indian commentators in support of reviving RIC as well. The backdrop is the Trump administration’s unpredictability in international affairs; the international fallout from the US–Israel–Iran war; and the visible improvement in India–China ties. India’s BRICS Presidency this year provides an opportune context for serious consideration of this proposition and to strengthen the nested geometry of RIC–SCO–BRICS.⁴ India is an important member in the three non-Western groupings, and its commitments to strategic autonomy, systemic balancing and the Global South would explain its robust engagement with them.

Strategic Autonomy

India is committed to strategic autonomy, with which it pursues freedom of action to maximise relative national interests within systemic constraints by managing dependencies. Though not absolute, the freedom of decision-making is a foundational value of Indian foreign policy. Avoiding excessive dependencies through a multi-aligned foreign policy is one means of achieving it. India, as a geographically and demographically large civilisational state, with deep and diversified stakes in the global system and working in a complex security environment, does not have the luxury of disavowing strategic autonomy.⁵

¹ [“Delicate, Multi-faceted Relations between India and China: Russian Prez Putin Says External Interference ‘Not a Good Idea’”](#), ANI, 5 June 2026.

² [“Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lin Jian’s Regular Press Conference”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China (FMPRC), 8 June 2026.

³ Hao Nan, [“Don’t Count the Russia-India-China Triangle Out Just Yet”](#), *South China Morning Post*, 17 June 2026.

⁴ The SCO stands for Shanghai Cooperation Organisation while BRICS stands for the Brazil–Russia–India–China–South Africa grouping.

⁵ [“India’s Strategic Autonomy”](#), Shyam Saran interviewed by Pankaj Saran, *NatStrat*, 25 May 2026.

Strategic Balancing

India, with its commitment to a stable international order, is committed to systemic security rather than to narrowly defined security groupings. Its objective in participating in security-related groupings is to balance against strategic coercion, not to promote it from any quarter.⁶ Although there may be a gap between India’s moral-normative intent and the signals emerging from structural interpretations, India has been consistent in its approach. It believes that the existence of multiple groupings contributes to multi-polarity. Its worldview and national interests guide its participation, even though some may operate in ‘rival’ geo-strategic spaces, such as the SCO and Quad. Such a catholic approach not only aligns with strategic autonomy but also makes its value-based engagement more stable and predictable.

The Global South

The Global South is “an emotion” among the developing countries with a shared past of colonial exploitation.⁷ As India claims a greater role in world affairs, it is resolved to “decisively address” their historical injustice.⁸ It seeks to employ ‘common development with mutual support, trust and effort’ as its guiding principle.⁹

India underlines “a stable environment”, “transparent economic practices” and reduced dependencies as pre-conditions for sustainable development and economic security.¹⁰ It seeks international technological collaboration to build capacity in the Global South, especially in digital public infrastructure.¹¹ It avers that conflicts threaten “food, fertiliser and energy security” of the developing world.¹² It supports reformed multilateralism and effective use of existing groupings for a fair

⁶ [“Quad is Not Against Anyone: Jaishankar”](#), *The Statesman*, 1 October 2021; Nayanima Basu, [“Quad is Not ‘Asian NATO’, India Never Had ‘NATO Mentality’, Jaishankar Says”](#), *The Print*, 14 April 2021.

⁷ [“‘Global South is An Emotion...’ EAM S Jaishankar’s Clear-cut Message at Raisina Dialogue 2026”](#), Video, *ANI News*, 6 March 2026.

⁸ [“India’s Statement Delivered by the External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar at the General Debate of the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 25 September 2022.

⁹ The principle is a faithful translation of *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas aur Sabka Prayas*, which Prime Minister Modi has expressed its approach for the Global South cooperation. See [“1st Voice of Global South Summit 2023”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 12–13 January 2023.

¹⁰ [“Remarks by EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar at High Level Meeting of Like-Minded Global South Countries, New York \(September 23, 2025\)”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 24 September 2025.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

international order.¹³ During India’s G-20 Presidency in 2023, India enshrined its vision through the Delhi Declaration¹⁴ and inclusion of the African Union.¹⁵

The Nested Geometry of RIC–SCO–BRICS

The three reference points explain why India should contribute to the nested geometry of RIC–SCO–BRICS. Nested geometry places shapes and objects inside one another, showing an interconnected relation. Though the RIC–SCO–BRICS may not be technically nested, a natural close connection does exist among them.

The three groupings emerged roughly during the same period in the post-Cold War era. The RIC emerged to manage the challenge of US unipolarity.¹⁶ It began as a foreign-minister-level dialogue, an informal meeting between the Russian, Indian and Chinese foreign ministers on the sidelines of the UNGA in New York in September 2002.¹⁷ The idea of BRICS is commonly traced to a 2001 Goldman Sachs report that proposed a BRIC grouping, comprising Brazil, Russia, India and China.¹⁸

However, institutionally this idea was first taken up at the first informal RIC Summit Meeting in July 2006, held on the sidelines of the G-8 St Petersburg Summit.¹⁹ The foreign ministers of the BRIC countries held an informal meeting to discuss it at the time.²⁰ Later, they approved the formation of BRIC in September 2006 on the sidelines of the UNGA,²¹ which later became BRICS with the inclusion of South Africa in 2010.²²

From 2002 to 2021, the three countries held 18 foreign minister-level RIC meetings.²³ They also held three informal Summit-level meetings—in 2006, 2018

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ [“Question No. 128 Impact of India’s G20 Presidency”](#), Rajya Sabha Starred Question No. 128, Answered on 14 December 2023.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ S. Kalyanaraman, [“Suchak Patel Asked: What is the Relevance of Russia-India-China \(RIC\) Trilateral post-Doklam and Galwan?”](#), Ask an Expert, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA).

¹⁷ [“Question No.663 RIC Group”](#), Lok Sabha, 4 February 2022.

¹⁸ [“With GS Research Report, ‘BRICS’ Are Born”](#), Goldman Sachs.

¹⁹ [“The History of BRICS”](#), BRICS Expert Council, Russia; “RIC Informal Summits”, Annexure B, available at [“Question No.663 RIC Group”](#), Lok Sabha, 4 February 2022. Also see Aleksei Zakharov, [“Why the Russia-India-China Trilateral is a Closed Chapter”](#), Observer Research Foundation, 27 August 2025. Russia was a member of the G-8 till it was removed after it annexed Crimea in 2014.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. [“History”](#), About BRICS, BRICS India 2026.

²² Ibid.

²³ [“Russia-India-China Foreign Ministers’ Meetings \(FMM\)”](#), Annexure A, available at [“Question No.663 RIC Group”](#), no. 17.

and 2019.²⁴ The RIC has been a consultative mechanism, unlike the BRICS and SCO, which engage in practical cooperation. The last ministerial meeting in 2021 professed to work for a fair, equitable and representative multipolar and “rebalanced” world.²⁵ It has deliberated on intra-BRICS and intra-SCO themes to strengthen those organisations, keeping regional interests in view.²⁶ After 2021, the grouping went dormant. Concerns about positioning *vis-à-vis* the war in Ukraine and deterioration in India–China relations from mid-2020 to late 2024 could probably explain this.

BRICS has grown significantly in terms of membership.²⁷ It is envisaged as a body for “managing global instability through practical cooperation”.²⁸ It has been taking up issues related to the development of the Global South. It has been invested in offering models for reforms in global governance. BRICS countries command the heft required to push their agenda. They “account for more than 40 per cent of global oil production, around 35 per cent of world GDP in purchasing power parity terms, and a substantial share of global grain and fertiliser exports”.²⁹ It set up the New Development Bank (NDB) in 2015. It is debating de-dollarisation and alternative payment mechanisms. Although geopolitical pressures are bringing its internal political coherence under question, it has maintained its course.³⁰

The Shanghai-5 process that began in 1996 for “confidence-building in the military sphere and the mutual reduction of armed forces in the border area” among China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and later joined by Uzbekistan, culminated in the SCO in 2001.³¹ Its main goals are to promote “multilateral interaction to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region” and to jointly “address new challenges and threats”, with the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) as the main security body.³² However, its agenda has evolved to include trade and the economy as well, with the SCO Interbank Consortium emerging

²⁴ “RIC Informal Summits”, Annexure B, no. 19.

²⁵ [“Joint Communiqué of the 18th Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation, the Republic of India and the Peoples Republic of China”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 26 November 2021.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Five countries joined it as full members in 2024 and one more in 2025. Ten countries joined it as partner countries in 2025. [“History”](#), no. 20.

²⁸ Rajeesh Kumar, [“India’s BRICS Test: Can New Delhi Hold a Fractured Bloc Together?”](#), Commentary, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), 29 May 2026.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Its ten member states and two observer states represent the broader Eurasian landmass whereas 15 dialogue partners are from various other regions. [“About Shanghai Cooperation Organisation”](#), The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

³² Ibid.

in 2005 and the SCO Business Council in 2006.³³ A demand to establish a SCO Development Bank has persisted since 2010. At the 2025 SCO Summit, the member states resolved to consult on matters related to this issue.³⁴

There is significant overlap among the three organisations in their membership, operating geographies and agendas. The three RIC countries are among the four founding members of BRICS. The two RIC countries, Russia and China, are the prime movers of the SCO, whereas the third, India, though a late entrant, is an important member. The RIC represents the broader Eurasian region, while the SCO clearly operates within the same region to address security issues.

BRICS, with its much wider membership, is largely dependent on the economic size and wider cooperation of China, India and Russia to play a meaningful role in providing an alternative geo-economic fulcrum to the world. Brazil, a non-Eurasian country and the world's tenth-largest economy, also has an important role to play. Of these four, the quality of political and security relations among Russia, China and India is crucial to the success of BRICS. At the same time, the overall security-strategic dynamics of the Eurasian region affect the quality of relations between the two.

The three groupings together address the three reference points: strategic autonomy, strategic balancing and the Global South. Although the global power configuration has undergone significant changes since the RIC's formation, multi-polarity remains the ideal. The last iteration of the RIC reaffirmed support for a “rebalanced” world. India and China lead the campaign for the Global South. Russia, which identifies as a non-Western power that inherits the Soviet tradition of socialism, adheres to the idea of multi-polarity, demands reforms in global governance, and considers itself a natural ally.³⁵ On questions of global governance reforms, alternative financial architectures, and respect for non-intervention and sovereignty, their views converge substantially. Mini-lateral coordination among them is even more relevant amid destabilising political and economic unilateralism from certain quarters of the world. Their strategic coordination is required to strengthen the nested geometry of the RIC–SCO–BRICS.

³³ [“Non-Governmental Mechanisms”](#), The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

³⁴ [“Tianjin Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation”](#), President of Russia, 1 September 2025.

³⁵ Mikhail Komin, [“Deconstructing Russia’s Anti-colonial Posturing in the Global South”](#), European Council on Foreign Relations, 27 November 2024; Aleksei Zakharov and Rajoli Siddharth Jayaprakash (eds), [“Russia’s Engagement with the Global South: From Concept to Practice”](#), Special Report, No. 306, Observer Research Foundation, May 2026.

India's Stakes in Reviving the RIC

India has vital geopolitical and geo-economic interests in regional security and stability. The region is a hotbed of terrorism, separatism and extremism that has a bearing on India's national security. Pakistan's collusion with such forces adds another layer of complexity to the regional situation for India, as it commands a strategic location in the wider Eurasian region and harbours active hostility towards India. Furthermore, the region is important for energy security and for transport corridors, such as the TAPI and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). However, progress on these initiatives remains elusive and subpar.

Scaling down the tempo of participation in the RIC or SCO due to concerns about either China or Pakistan should not be normalised, particularly with a view to accommodating the West. Pakistan is an irritant in India's other engagements as well, including its relations with the US and West Asian countries. Therefore, prudence demands that the Pakistan factor serve as the impetus for deeper engagement. India-China dynamics are even more complex. India cannot feasibly disengage from China, either economically or geo-politically. Their relations always need deft management and continuous dialogue.

Given their geographical and economic size and the scale of their capabilities, a natural Eurasian triangle involving Russia, India and China exists that needs to be leveraged. India sits on a commanding height in the broader Eurasian landmass. Having uninterrupted strategic communication with its two most important peers in the region, Russia and China, is only rational. Considering the importance of the broader region, sustained triangular strategic communication is by itself a strategic gain. It gives a positive signal to international and domestic constituencies while helping to build confidence among them.

Furthermore, this triangle should not be allowed to be skewed by any one party to the detriment of others in the region, nor should any one angle of the triangle be allowed to dominate the others. China may not be uncomfortable with a 'managed G-2' with the US in future, whereas Russia sticks to multi-polarity. Therefore, the latter would have the motivation to keep India invested in the regional scenario.

India will also share the same consideration. This is not to suggest that India needs the RIC for its Central Asian outreach. Still, it does have a role to play in ensuring strategic coordination and communication among the region's leading countries, which will make India's presence more of a net positive. Thus, there is impeccable logic in reviving the RIC, which should, in turn, make the SCO and BRICS processes even more meaningful. Trilateral National Security Advisor and secretary-level

meetings should be considered. It should, in fact, be considered for upgradation to regular summit-level meetings.

Conclusion

Strategic autonomy is not about ad hoc transactionalism. It is about anchoring one's foreign policy on stable, durable pillars that must be safeguarded from external pressures. Multi-alignment is such a central pillar in India's foreign policy. India's geopolitical position straddles both the Eurasian and Indo-Pacific regions, with abiding interests in both. Sustained and mutually beneficial engagement must be pursued without let or hindrance from any external quarter. Sizable economic and technological stakes drive India's engagement in the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, Eurasian processes are important for resource and physical security, as well as for reforming the global order. Participation in processes of both regions also ensures strategic balancing across contested geopolitical spaces. That India remains invested and active on both fronts is the crux of India's strategic autonomy.

India's BRICS presidency, recent signals about the RIC, and the improvement of India-China relations come at a time when the US is sending ambiguous signals about its commitment to the Indo-Pacific and the Quad. It is thus an opportune time to take steps to transcend 'emotional' partnerships, framing traps and simplistic binaries. Fluctuations in India's relations with either power in either quarter should not be permitted to sway fundamental calculations. The essence lies in conviction and consistency.

About the Author



Dr. Prashant Kumar Singh is Research Fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses is a non-partisan, autonomous body dedicated to objective research and policy relevant studies on all aspects of defence and security. Its mission is to promote national and international security through the generation and dissemination of knowledge on defence and security-related issues.

Disclaimer: Views expressed in Manohar Parrikar IDSA's publications and on its website are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Manohar Parrikar IDSA or the Government of India.

© Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA) 2026