

MP-IDSA *Commentary*

BRICS and Space: Engaging Divergent Powers

Ajey Lele

September 14, 2026

S*ummary*

The proposed BRICS Space Council could provide a platform for BRICS states to reconcile their differing positions on space security and sustainability.

At the 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi, India successfully gained unanimous consensus from all 11 member countries to adopt the BRICS New Delhi Declaration. This 140-paragraph Joint Declaration, under the theme ‘Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability’, includes important points on how the group views the importance of space technologies for growth. BRICS does not have a uniform space agenda, and member states have varying levels of expertise and capabilities in the space domain. It is therefore useful to contextualise their existing capabilities and space partnerships and examine the potential for deeper collaboration in the future at the policy, process, and project levels.

The Joint Declaration illustrates that BRICS member states have recognised their achievements in the field of Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation (RSSC) in using space technology for global challenges and socio-economic development. Member states have emphasised the need for greater international cooperation and efforts to reduce disparities in space capabilities amongst them. They have also highlighted the importance of space-debris mitigation and long-term sustainability. Space agencies of new member states have been requested to join the RSSC agreement.

On outer-space security, BRICS reaffirms that space systems and technologies should be used for peaceful purposes, and that they need to support efforts towards the long-term sustainability of outer-space activities. It is also important to prevent any possible arms race in outer space and any efforts to weaponise space. BRICS states oppose threats or the use of force against space objects. They also support negotiations on a legally binding multilateral instrument on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS), a UN framework established in 1981.

There is overall agreement on the importance of Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures (TCBMs), norms, rules, and principles in the space domain. The group also supports discussions through a UN Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on PAROS and favours building on existing efforts towards a legally binding instrument. In this context, it has recognised the 2014 updated draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects (PPWT), jointly submitted by China and Russia to the Conference on Disarmament, as an important contribution to these efforts.¹

Broadly, it could be argued that the assurances made at the New Delhi BRICS Summit are largely routine, reflecting commitments commonly reiterated in regional and global multilateral forums. Nevertheless, the meeting reaffirmed the continued

¹ [“BRICS New Delhi Declaration: Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability \(September 12, 2026\)”](#), *PM India*, 12 September 2026.

importance of the BRICS RSSC network. In 2021, the space agencies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa signed the Agreement on Cooperation on the BRICS RSSC. Over the years, the RSSC has demonstrated its utility and largely lived up to the objectives for which it was established, particularly in facilitating the sharing and use of Earth-observation data. This constellation comprises six satellites: Gaofen-6 and Ziyuan III 02, both developed by China; CBERS-4, jointly developed by Brazil and China; Kanopus-V type, developed by Russia; and Resourcesat-2 and 2A, both developed by India.²

ISRO's satellites in this constellation support various applications, including agricultural crop discrimination, water resources monitoring, and disaster management. ISRO launched these satellites in 2011 and 2016, respectively. They have already exceeded their designed operational lifetimes but, fortunately, remain functional. India needs to ensure replacement or supplementary systems are deployed well in advance to prevent gaps in data availability. During the recent summit, participants decided to expand the constellation by adding new members; however, little is known about adding new satellite systems.

The summit followed a strong preparatory phase to debate ideas on the space agenda. In July 2026, ISRO organised a meeting of BRICS Heads of Space Agencies in Bengaluru. Two key ideas were put forth: a proposed BRICS Space Council and a BRICS Space Economy. The final summit has formally backed the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the proposed BRICS Space Council, bringing its structural and operational framework closer to full activation.

During the July 2026 meeting, BRICS countries identified disaster management, earth observation, satellite-data sharing, capacity building, and knowledge exchange as key areas for future space cooperation. Some progress appears to have been made at the recent summit by strengthening the RSSC's structures. India has also highlighted its expanding New Space ecosystem, private-sector capabilities and space start-ups. Clearly, India is keen to leverage these capabilities to expand its presence in the growing space markets of BRICS countries. It also appears keen to move BRICS space cooperation from coordination to co-creation, through joint innovation and co-development, responsible and sustainable space operations and stronger international partnerships.³

² [“BRICS Countries Launch Joint Committee on Space Cooperation”](#), China National Space Administration, 26 May 2022.

³ [“Dr Jitendra Singh Pitches 'BRICS Space Economy'”](#), Press Information Bureau, Department of Space, Government of India, 24 June 2026.

From the outer space perspective, BRICS is an interesting but difficult grouping of states. Two major space powers in this grouping are Russia and China. Over the last few decades, India has also emerged as a very important space power. Within the BRICS grouping, Iran is also a spacefaring state with an evolving space programme developed against all odds. For India, particularly in the space domain, this forum is a complex diplomatic platform, especially with China as a central member. Four states in the world are ASAT (anti-satellite) powers, and three of them are in BRICS. Many global concerns focus on the covert counterspace programmes China and Russia are developing.

BRICS member states are also not united on joining regional or global space groupings. Two regional space groupings are worth mentioning. The regional space groupings led by China and Japan are the Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organisation (APSCO) and the Asia-Pacific Regional Space Agency Forum (APRSAF). APSCO includes China and Iran as member states, while Russia has signed the initial convention but has not yet ratified it. BRICS members in APRSAF include China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, South Africa and the UAE.⁴

Four BRICS members, namely India, UAE, Brazil and Saudi Arabia, have joined the US-led Artemis Accords, a framework for international cooperation in lunar exploration and future human missions to the Moon and Mars. In contrast, the two founding BRICS members, China and Russia, have not joined these Accords and are pursuing an alternative framework through the International Lunar Research Station (ILRS). The ILRS has also attracted participation from South Africa, Egypt and the UAE, highlighting the divergent alignments within BRICS on future lunar exploration.

BRICS member states lack unanimity on space governance, strategic space capabilities, or alignment with regional and global space initiatives. States like China, Russia and India have demonstrated ASAT capabilities, yet they are positioned differently within the emerging space-governance architecture and have divergent approaches. Against this fragmented landscape, India's effort to advance the idea of a BRICS Space Council is significant. Mechanisms like this matter because they give BRICS states a platform to reconcile their differing positions on space security and sustainability gradually. India needs to work to start a major debate under the BRICS umbrella on the need for effective legal and institutional frameworks for global space governance.

⁴ [“Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization \(APSCO\) IAF Members”](#), International Astronautical Federation.

About the Author



Group Captain (Dr.) Ajey Lele (Retd.) is Deputy Director General 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