One summit amongst many

For India, the upcoming BRICS summit is just a sideshow — the most populous country on earth has larger ambitions

Ahead of the upcoming BRICS summit in Sandton, South Africa from 22 to 24 August, India's Minister of External Affairs, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, announced that his country is currently not considering plans for a 'BRICS currency' – instead, the focus for India is much more on strengthening its own currency. New Delhi is also critical of an expansion of the BRICS, although it has signalled a willingness to compromise on this point. The negative or reserved position towards the two most important points of the upcoming summit makes it clear that Narendra Modi's trip will produce nice pictures, but will make only a small contribution to India's foreign policy agenda. For the most populous country on earth, the summit is just a sideshow, because India has larger ambitions — making the BRICS summit just one of many.

India's geopolitics – bigger than BRICS

For India, the concept of non-alignment began in the early 1960s with a policy of non-participation in conflicts in the bipolar world. The country was thus able to retain a certain degree of independence at the international level. This position is still present in Indian foreign policy today, although it is increasingly giving way to geostrategic and geoeconomic concepts that focus on a certain turning to the West, a possible regional conflict with China and India's growing global importance. For India, in this context, the BRICS is merely a vehicle for articulating alternative forms of global governance or development models when necessary. India's bid for a seat on the UN Security Council, supported by Brazil, South Africa and Russia, is a case in point. Its participation in non-Western multilateral forums – such as the BRICS – must therefore be seen consistently as a response to under-representation in the Bretton Woods institutions and the UN system, and not at all as a political determination.

The cooling in Indo-

New Delhi may still have resilient ties with

Russian relations and the conflict with China are enabling – indeed, necessitating – a cautious turn toward the West.

Moscow – since the Russian war of aggression, for example, the country has become India's largest oil supplier – but India's slow disengagement from Russia is inevitable. As a result, Russia will become increasingly less important in India's range of partners. This is based on a number of insights, above all that Russia could increasingly slip into a direct and dependent relationship with China meaning India's ambitions cannot be presented in the context of an Indo-Russian partnership. The 2020 border dispute between China and India has led India to view China as an existential challenge to national security. For India, this marks its own '*Zeitenwende*' and represents the core of Indian security policy.

At the same time, the cooling in Indo-Russian relations and the conflict with China are enabling – indeed, necessitating – a cautious turn toward the West. This turn, especially towards the US, is becoming increasingly evident, demonstrated all the more by the very large red carpet welcome in Washington. Strategic convergences between India and the United States have reached an all-time high. The two have a clear and common adversary in China and are increasingly caught in a geopolitical Nash equilibrium: both countries know that the other can help them win their respective contests against Beijing. For the United States, India is a key force that not only shares a long, disputed land border with China, but has the potential, and to some extent the potency, to challenge China regionally. For India, on the other hand, the United States is a source of high technology for, among others, the military sector; it provides investments that the country urgently needs; and it is an extraterritorial balancing actor in the Indo-Pacific. All this is taking place as part of the Quad Security Dialogue, to which India is committed.

The European Union is also an important partner for India. Its partnerships in the areas of green energy production, digital public infrastructure, resilient value chains, artificial intelligence, and research and development projects in the field of high-performance computing and quantum computing speak for themselves. India's efforts to leverage its growing domestic economy and middle class to secure its rise as a global economic powerhouse and become a global manufacturing hub cannot work without foreign investment, market access and better integration. This is where a possible free trade agreement between India and the EU could build important bridges. In addition, the growing military cooperation between India and France, as well as Germany's

willingness to deliver submarines to India, are of central importance for New Delhi. They mark a significant expansion of the bilateral relations up to this point.

From being influenced to becoming an influencer

India's ambitions will become most evident in the course of the upcoming G20 summit in September. Prime Minister Modi and the Indian government are positioning themselves as the mouthpiece of the Global South and are impressively placing Indian ambitions at the centre of the upcoming summit. During his Independence Day address on 15 August, Modi described it as follows: 'And so this India is unstoppable, this India is tireless, this India does not gasp and this India does not give up.' It is repeatedly emphasised that India carries on trade and maintains good relations with almost all countries. The world today, according to the official motto of India's G20 summit, is one that is bringing people together like never before through a complex web of connections in trade, technology, migration and the internet. But it should also be a world that comes together in pursuit of equitable and balanced growth for all people in the world. India has raised the 'voice of the Global South' to bring these issues to the fore. Recent experiences in the pandemic, as well as in energy and food security, have highlighted the fragility of global systems. In this context, India has clearly described its own role as one of leadership in the world – the Prime Minister's unstoppable India.

For India, the BRICS summit is just one of many.

The most populous country on earth is increasingly claiming its place in the reshaping global order. India's self-image is not only that of the voice of the South, with global visibility in Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean, as an upcoming economic superpower ('10 trillion dollar economy'), but also as a central player in a multipolar world and with a clear claim to be adequately represented in all global institutions – from the UN Security Council to non-Western alliances like the BRICS. It does not act non-aligned but multi-vectored, based on clear goals: the preservation of the rules-based order from which it has benefitted and continues to benefit for so long; adequate representation in their institutions; the avoidance of conflict between great powers; and the domestic growth imperative and enforcement of national interests.

More and more, India is in a strategic convergence with the West and in conflict with China. Like Germany and many others, India is economically dependent on China and faces similar challenges. In 'The Indian Way', the aforementioned Minister of External Affairs of India increasingly describes his country as an influencer and no longer as influenced. India will assert this influence in all international forums – even if the respective framework is sometimes insufficient for this. Conversely, this does not mean that the BRICS is past its prime as a forum. India will continue to use this framework to initiate and advance its own issues and agenda in a non-Western setting. Still, for India, BRICS is not the only venue in which it plays a role. In addition to the BRICS, India, for example, will also chair the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2023; this dual presidency has been used for active Indian interest-oriented politics. And therefore, the BRICS summit is just one of many.

In Germany and the rest of Europe, India's ambitions should be recognised, respected and supported. In order to maintain rules-based multilateralism, we need India as a strategic partner. At the moment, the signs are quite encouraging in this regard.



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