



The Race for Leadership in the Global South

The Case of India's Africa Policy

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the rapidly developing India-Africa relations in recent years by addressing the diplomatic, economic and security dimensions of the relations. The emergence of a multipolar international order radically changed the way global powers and actors seeking to achieve global power status interact with Africa. The actors aiming to gain a strong position in the emerging new global order identified the African continent as a primary target both to develop their economies and to gain strategic advantages. Hence, a growing number of actors, mostly from the so-called Global South, comprising emerging economies, including China, India, the Gulf Arab states, and Türkiye, are making a concerted effort to gain influence on the continent through partnerships with African nations. Among these actors, India emerged as an important player in the continent in recent years, strengthening its strategic ties with African nations. New Delhi's Africa policy evolved significantly, reflecting its growing economic, strategic, and political interests in the continent. This study examines India's evolving relations with Africa at three interconnected levels (global, regional and bilateral), focusing on developments in politics, economics and defense over the last two decade. In this context, the study, which seeks to answer the question of how India's quest to lead the Global South relates to its relations with Africa, is guided by the arguments of neoclassical realist theory, while the process tracing method is used to understand the domestic and systemic dimensions of India's rapprochement with Africa.

Keywords: India, Africa, Global South, Global Order, Great Power Status

1 Introduction

India's relations with Africa are based on deep historical, cultural and economic ties that go back centuries. For much of the 20th century, when India and many African nations gained independence, New Delhi's relations with Africa were built on the foundations of anti-colonialism and South-South cooperation. However, with the liberaliza-

tion of its economy in the early 1990s, India's policy towards Africa underwent a paradigm shift. Since then, India's approach towards Africa has shifted from the ideological to the economic sphere. [2], [12] After the 2000s, ties between the two sides began to strengthen as both India and African countries realized the potential for mutually beneficial cooperation. In this context, India's energy needs have increased exponentially with its high economic growth rates, and the rapid increase in its dependence on imports to meet its domestic energy needs has made Africa, which has rich energy resources, a critically important target region for this country. [4]

In addition, Africa's growing importance in world energy markets, thanks to technological advances that made it possible to extract Africa's offshore oil reserves, and the growing instability in the Middle East, the most important energy import region for industrializing Asian economies, also contributed to Africa's rise to a strategic position for India. [1] On the other hand, developing African countries have strengthened their ties with India as an alternative actor, both to attract investment to grow their economies and to prevent the emergence of monopoly powers in the continent by attracting alternative powers against Western actors as well as Russia and China. Believing that it could not become a global power without the support of African countries, India worked hard to ensure that the African Union (AU) joined the grouping as a permanent member at the G20 summit it hosted in 2023. Indeed, the inclusion of the AU as a permanent member of the group with India's strong support, [8], [15] was an important step towards greater representation of Africa in global governance, while strengthening ties between the parties and encouraging new collaborations.

By bringing the AU into the G20, India sought to gain stronger support from Africa as part of the Global South and to reduce China's influence as it seeks to strengthen its ties with Africa. In fact, India's close relationship with African countries in the new era dates to the CII-EXIM Bank Conference on India-Africa Project Partnership launched in 2005. In this sense, the positive cooperation between the parties will lay the foundation for the future deepening of diplomatic and economic relations between India and African countries. India's growing presence on the international stage is linked not only to its rapid economic growth, but also to the Global South (emerging and developing countries) strategy that forms the axis of India's foreign policy.

The study employs the neoclassical realist approach, [33] complemented by process tracing methodology, as the theoretical basis for analyzing the political, economic and defense dimensions of India's policy towards Africa. Neoclassical realism is a cross-level method of analysis that focuses on how foreign policy is constructed, combining the system level with the unit level and focusing on the diplomatic behavior of specific countries. The main components of its theoretical framework are the independent variables of the system and the variables at the local level. According to the neoclassical realism perspective, the international system is in an uncertain state. System elements as independent variables shape but do not determine a country's foreign policy behavior. For system elements to have an impact on a country's foreign policy, they need to be transformed through domestic level variables. For India, system elements as independent variables refer to the systemic pressure caused by the distribution of power in the world in the context of competition between the US, Russia, China and the EU, which shapes the overall direction of India's strategic choices. India has overarching

needs for development and recognition as a great power. These needs determine the specific details of India's foreign policy strategy.

2 Global South

The term "Global South" broadly refers to the regions of Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania. [20] The term is closely related to a group of terms, including Third World and Periphery, referring to regions outside Europe and North America, mostly (though not all) low-income and often politically marginalized. The use of the term Global South emphasizes geopolitical power relations. From its inception to the present day, the term Global South has been used to describe postcolonial and developing country solidarity in world affairs. The term Global South was conceptualized in 1969 when American political activist Carl Oglesby coined it in *Commonweal* to refer to a set of countries that the Global North had "dominated" through political and economic exploitation. [31]

The idea of the South first emerged from the famous Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's essay "The Problem of the South" [17] in which he argued that Southern Italy had been colonized by capitalists from Northern Italy. Many political theorists contributed to this tradition in the early twentieth century, including J. A. Hobson, Vladimir Lenin and W. E. B. Du Bois. In his great work *Imperialism*, the British socialist Hobson defined what he called the "root of imperialism" as the relentless search of capitalist oligarchs for market profits no longer available in their own countries. Building on Hobson's thesis, Marxist theorists such as Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg also depicted imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism, creating a global class division between the countries that accumulated capital and those they exploited. [21]

In the 1950s and 1960s, Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch articulated the distinction between the "center" and the "periphery" of the world economy. Together with other critics of orthodox economics, Prebisch analyzed underdevelopment and campaigned for reform of the world trading system. This struggle put the terms "North" and "South" on the agenda of international politics. Thus, developing countries (mostly former colonies) began to articulate the idea of a Global South whose interests clashed with both capitalist and communist industrialized powers and transcended Cold War divisions. Moreover, the sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein's "world-system approach", [42] which alternates the concepts of "center" and "periphery" with the "modern/traditional" dichotomy, showed that this concept expresses an important reality rather than an intellectual adventure.

With the end of the Cold War, the terms "Global North" and "Global South" became widely used in academic fields such as international relations, political science and development studies. The North-South language offered an alternative to the concept of "globalization" and challenged the belief that cultures and societies were becoming increasingly homogenized. The idea of a strong Global North and a resisting Global South was strengthened by the Zapatista uprising in Mexico, [19] the "African Renaissance" [29] and the World Social Forum in Brazil [39]. Meanwhile, although industrial growth

in Asia and the emergence of the BRICS+ grouping in world politics [10] have complicated the North-South picture, other changes in the global economy, notably the enormous growth of finance capital based in New York, London, Frankfurt and Tokyo, have consolidated the economic advantage of the former imperial centers.

Consequently, the North-South terminology arose from the allegorical application of categories such as center-periphery to name patterns of wealth, privilege and development across broad regions. As a result, the term Global South functions as more than a metaphor for underdevelopment. It refers to the entire history of colonialism, neo-imperialism and different histories of economic and social change in which vast inequalities in living standards, life expectancy and access to resources have been maintained.

2.1 Global South in World Politics

In the 1970s, many developing countries, brought together by groups such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the the Group of 77 (G77), coalesced around a set of proposals known as the New International Economic Order (NIEO). The NIEO emerged from the economic declaration of the 1973 NAM summit in Algiers, which expressed disappointment that the decolonization wave of the 1960s had not brought more equitable distribution of wealth due to the unchanging structure of the global economy.

In recent years, the idea that the global political and economic order divides the world into two unequal groups gained new momentum. In December 2022, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution entitled “Towards a New International Economic Order” calling for the revival of the 1970s NIEO. The votes for and against the resolution almost exactly mirrored the Brandt Line dividing the Global North and South: The United States, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Israel, New Zealand, Australia, and Europe voted against the resolution, while the rest of the world voted in favor, with Türkiye abstaining. [13]

The rise of the Global South reflects renewed grievances against the global order and the need for the currently weak to come together to overhaul it. Speaking at the 2024 Munich Security Conference, Ghana’s President Nana Akufo-Addo said that “a situation in which the so-called Global South, which includes Africa, has always been at the wrong end of the stick in terms of benefiting from global assets” has created an inherent instability in the global order. [18] At the G77 and China Summit in September 2023, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel stated that “after all this time in which the North has organized the world according to its interests, it is now up to the South to change the rules of the game”. [14]

In his address to the UN General Assembly in September 2023, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva argued that “the richest 10% of the world’s population is responsible for almost half of the carbon emitted into the atmosphere”, but that “vulnerable populations in the Global South are most affected by the loss and damage caused by climate change”. [37] Referring to the conflict in Gaza, Colombian President Gustavo Petro said that Germany, France, the European Union, the United Kingdom and above all the United States, by supporting the raining of bombs on people, are

sending the message that what happened to Palestine can happen to you if you dare to make changes without their authorization. [21] Moreover, the leaders of the Global South are demonstrating a renewed willingness and ability to resist Western aspirations. From Latin America to Africa, Non-Alignment thus returned as a foreign policy doctrine, preventing the West from forging a global consensus around the war in Ukraine, among other issues.

2.2 Rise of the Global South

More importantly, although their efforts are still in their infancy, the BRICS grouping has begun to significantly reduce the US dominance of the global financial system by moving away from the US dollar and the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) payment system and establishing new international financial institutions such as the New Development Bank. The group, which was renamed BRICS+ after accepting new members, [5] begun to position itself as a potential counterweight to the G7 and other Western forums with its expanding membership. The increasing weight of the South in global politics is reflected in the Global South countries' turn to international institutions to hold the Global North accountable, as evidenced by the cases of genocide against Israel brought by South Africa and Nicaragua to the International Court of Justice in connection with the Israel's war on Gaza. [24] South Africa's stance, despite severe pressure from America and the West to desist, illustrates the new, stronger moral voice of the Global South.

The role of the Global South in world politics has evolved significantly over the past several decades. Countries in the Global South, such as China, India, Brazil, and South Africa, have emerged as significant players in the global economy. [11] Their rapid economic growth has shifted economic power dynamics, making them crucial markets for trade and investment. There has been an increase in economic and political cooperation among countries of the Global South. Organizations like BRICS+ and initiatives like the New Development Bank exemplify this trend, promoting development and economic collaboration independent of traditional Western-dominated institutions like the IMF and World Bank.

Countries of the Global South have been active in the United Nations and other multilateral organizations. They often advocate for reforms to make these institutions more representative and inclusive of developing countries' interests. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statements at the Voice of the South summit in January 2023, "We have the largest stake in the future of the South. As the eighty-year-old model of global governance gradually changes, we must seek to shape the emerging order," [25] showed that the South is approaching the end of Western dominance and preparing for what comes after. 88 per cent of the world population lives outside the West in what is now called the Global South. Many Global South countries across Latin America, Africa and Asia are no longer passive participants on the world stage, instead acting independently of the West in many ways. At the G20 Summit in September 2023, the AU won a permanent seat at the G20, [3] significantly strengthening the voice of a large part of the Global South.

3 Africa's Position in the Global South

Africa's position in the Global South is characterized by several economic, political, and social dimensions that reflect both its challenges and opportunities. Africa is rich in natural resources, including minerals, oil, and gas. The African continent is the second largest continent in terms of land area after Asia. Global powers view Africa as strategically important for several reasons. The most important of these are the extraction of natural resources, energy security, and new markets for trade and investment.

African continent is rich in natural resources ranging from arable land, water, oil, natural gas, minerals, forests and wildlife. The continent holds a huge proportion of the world's natural resources, both renewables and non-renewables. Africa is home to some 30 percent of the world's mineral reserves, eight per cent of the world's natural gas and 12 per cent of the world's oil reserves. [26] The continent has 40 percent of the world's gold and up to 90 percent of its chromium and platinum. [32] The largest reserves of cobalt, diamonds, platinum and uranium in the world are in Africa. It holds 65 per cent of the world's arable land and ten percent of the planet's internal renewable fresh water source. [36] Africa plays a vital role in the geopolitical landscape in terms of its geography, being a vast landmass stretching from the temperate zones in both the northern and southern hemispheres. It has access to seek after natural resources in the form of minerals, metals, and fossil fuels, and the potential to contribute to global food security.

Africa's collective voice in global forums, such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, is growing. Initiatives like the New Partnership for Africa's Development aim to enhance Africa's role in global governance and development. Africa has a young and rapidly growing population, which presents new market opportunities, especially for trade and investment. In addition, regional organizations that aim to promote political and economic cooperation, such as the AU and various regional economic communities, both assist in governance on the continent and enable the continent's countries to act as an effective bloc in global politics.

3.1 Global Competition for Africa

There are many actors investing in infrastructure and development projects across Africa. The most important of these are China, the US, Russia, the UK, France, Germany, India and Türkiye. Of these, China is a major economic partner that has invested heavily in infrastructure and development projects across Africa. But while this partnership brings much-needed investment, it also raises concerns about debt sustainability and economic dependency. On the other hand, while historical ties with Western countries continue to influence Africa's economic and political sphere, aid and development support from Western countries increasingly emphasizes trade and investment rather than aid. Other emerging economies, such as India, Brazil and Türkiye, are also increasing their engagement with Africa, where they see great potential. These partnerships present new opportunities for trade, investment and diplomatic relations for both these emerging actors and Africa, as well as opportunities for African nations to diversify their engagement with extra continental powers.

Africa's position in the Global South is multifaceted, reflecting a blend of significant potential and persistent challenges. The continent's rich natural resources, youthful population, and growing regional cooperation offer substantial opportunities for development. Africa also provides the prime space for the geopolitical race to win economic influence, including through access to critical minerals, despite Africa's efforts to control its own development agenda. Geopolitical rivals such as China, Russia and India on the one hand, and the US and the EU on the other, have stepped up their competitive initiatives by engaging with individual African countries and various continental and regional organizations. [40] Therefore, Africa stands out as a critical continent to be won, as it has the capacity to influence the equations in the future global power struggle.

4 India's Quest to Lead the Global South through Africa

India has been increasingly positioning itself as the leader of the Global South. To this end, it actively engaged with countries in Africa, Latin America and other regions through various diplomatic channels. [41] In this context, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi intensified his close contacts with countries in these regions to strengthen bilateral relations and thus pave the way for India's quest for Great Power status. [7]

India has extended lines of credit and grants to many developing countries. It involved in numerous infrastructure projects, capacity-building programs, and humanitarian assistance, often through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program. New Delhi has been a vocal advocate of South-South cooperation, which emphasizes mutual support and knowledge sharing among developing countries. This is evident through its participation in forums like the India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) and the BRICS group. India has been active in various multilateral platforms, pushing for the interests of the Global South. This includes its role in the G77, NAM, and its efforts to reform global institutions like the United Nations to better reflect the interests of developing countries. New Delhi has pursued trade agreements and economic partnerships that benefit developing countries, advocating for fairer terms in global trade practices. These efforts reflect India's ambition to be a leading voice for the Global South, promoting a more balanced and equitable global order.

India's Africa policy over the last two decades has evolved significantly, reflecting India's growing economic, strategic, and political interests in the continent. [9] Africa is an important source of energy for India, particularly oil and gas. Indian companies like ONGC Videsh invested in oil and gas fields in countries such as Sudan, Mozambique, and Nigeria. India has provided development assistance to African countries through grants, concessional lines of credit, and capacity-building initiatives. This includes projects in areas such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. India increased its diplomatic presence in Africa, opening new embassies and high commissions. High-level visits by Indian leaders to African countries and reciprocal visits have strengthened diplomatic ties.

India and African countries cooperate in various multilateral forums, such as the United Nations, the AU, and the IAFS. The IAFS, held in 2008, 2011, and 2015, has been a key platform for discussing and advancing India-Africa relations. India has been

one of the largest contributors to United Nations peacekeeping missions in Africa. Indian peacekeepers have served in countries like Congo, South Sudan, and Somalia. India has provided scholarships and training programs for African students and professionals. The ITEC program has been a key instrument in this regard. India has promoted cultural exchanges with African countries, emphasizing shared historical ties and cultural affinities. This includes initiatives like the Pan-African e-Network project, which aims to connect educational and medical institutions in Africa with their counterparts in India [6].

4.1 Important Developments Affecting Relations

India's Africa policy over the last two decades has been characterized by deepening economic ties, strategic and political cooperation, cultural exchanges, and development assistance. In recent years, two significant developments affected India's political relations with Africa. The first of these developments was India hosting the Voice of Global South Summit in January 2023, presenting itself as a reliable leader for Africa, which it views as the heart of the developing world. [35], [38] The second development was the major role India played in the inclusion of the AU in the G20 during the summit it hosted. The country utilized its G20 presidency with great success to position itself as a leader of the Global South. In this sense, India's presidency was marked by the critical role it played in the inclusion of the AU as a permanent member of the G20, [34] a platform traditionally comprising the world's most powerful countries. By supporting the inclusion of the AU into the group, New Delhi made a significant contribution to the process that will pave the way for Africa, a continent that has been marginalized in international relations until now, to become an effective actor in shaping global governance from now on. New Delhi's intensive efforts during the AU's G20 membership process were appreciated by African leaders and helped accelerate political relations between the parties. [16]

During this period, while political relations gained momentum, economic relations between the parties continued to grow stronger. Economic relations between India and Africa have traditionally been based on trade and investment. Africa is a huge market waiting to be explored for Indian businesses in terms of manufactured goods such as textiles, pharmaceuticals, automobiles and light machinery. In addition, the continent, which is rich in energy resources, has the potential to provide solutions to India's ever-increasing energy needs. For these reasons, India which rapidly developed its economic relations with Africa in recent years and became one of the continent's most important economic partners. Therefore, while the trade volume between the parties increased to \$103 billion in 2023, [27] the influence of Indian investors in Africa also increased significantly. Moreover, India became one of the top five countries investing in the African continent with a total investment worth \$73.9 billion between 1996 and 2022. [28]

Moreover, despite its own development challenges and resource constraints, India is also trying to take its relations with the continent to a special level by making significant contributions to Africa's development through technical consultancy and military cooperation within the framework of credit lines (about \$12 billion), grants (about \$1.3

billion), higher education scholarships and capacity building in specialized technical fields. [23] India, which aims to bring the Global South together under its leadership as part of its goal of achieving great power status, also began to strengthen its defense ties with African countries in recent years. In this context, the principles of 'Security and Growth for All in the Region' and 'The World is One Family' (Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam) became two fundamental principles that played a critical role in shaping India's defence ties with Africa. [22] In addition to signing MoUs with African countries on the Indian Ocean Rim, the organization of defense fairs in Lucknow in 2020 and Gandhinagar in 2022, and the holding of the India-Africa Defense Dialogue at the level of defense ministers [30] highlight the increasing importance of the defense sector in relations between the parties. Finally, defense and security, which emerged as an important pillar of India-Africa relations, gained a more important dimension with the 10-day Africa-India Field Training Exercise held in Pune, India in March 2023, enabling New Delhi to take firm steps towards strengthening its position in the Global South.

5 Conclusion

African countries, which have gone through critical processes in the political, economic and defense fields, significantly increased their political influence on world affairs thanks to their increasing populations, developing economic structures and strengthened state structures. Accordingly, the efforts of many actors trying to be influential in the continent within the framework of economic interests and global power competition to get closer to African nations placed the continent at the center of competition in world politics. India, which has been seeking leadership in the developing world called the Global South in recent years, also developed a number of mechanisms to join this competition and develop close relations with the continent. In this context, the New Delhi administration focused on deepening and diversifying its multidimensional engagement in Africa.

New Delhi's relations with Africa, bound by a common history that goes back centuries, were further strengthened by the critical developments that took place in last decades. In political terms, India's hosting of the Voice of the Global South Summit in January 2023 and its major role in the inclusion of the AU in the G20 summit it hosted in June 2023 became the most important recent developments that enabled New Delhi to position itself as a reliable leader for the Global South and Africa. Indeed, its anti-colonial stance and efforts to be the voice of developing countries through the NAM and other international platforms over the last seven decades demonstrated that New Delhi is a consistent actor in its policies towards Africa which is an important component of the Global South. In addition, increasing economic contacts with the continent enabled the country to become Africa's third largest trade partner, while increasing cooperation in the field of defense strengthened its presence on the continent.

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