



**INDIA CAN UNITE THE GLOBAL  
SOUTH WITH THE DEVELOPED  
WORLD**

BY AKHIL RAMESH AND CLEO  
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COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, and the resulting economic and political crises have led the resurgence of the “Global South”—developing countries seeking leverage through unity on the global stage. Increasingly, they’ve found themselves caught in the crossfire of larger nations, such as the United States and China. James Marape, prime minister of Papua New Guinea (PNG), in his address at the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation in May 2023, called for India Prime Minister Narendra Modi to offer a third voice in the face of the Global North. Hailing Modi as the leader of the Global South, Marape went on to suggest that the Pacific Island countries would rally behind his voice at global forums. This came as US President Joe Biden had to cancel his scheduled participation at the meeting to attend more pressing (at the time) concerns over the debt ceiling crisis. While Secretary of State Antony Blinken made the trip and signed a crucial defense agreement with PNG, he did not receive the same warmth and welcome as the Indian prime minister. Modi and Marape shared solidarity and, as the PNG leader [called](#) it, “shared history of being colonized by colonial masters.”

India is not the only state capitalizing on the shared experiences of colonial rule or Western imperialism and the resulting solidarity to strengthen ties with nations of the Global South. China has consistently reminded former colonies in the Global South of the brutality of the Western world and sought to gain goodwill among leaders and civil society. While the wounds evoked may be the same, the remedy offered is markedly different. The stark contrast between the Indian approach to the Global South and the Chinese approach can be seen in how they talk about the Western world. New Delhi does not remind nations of their past as a motivation for revenge but rather to spur cooperation with the West on more equal terms. Beijing (much like Moscow) calls for deliberate mechanisms and groupings in opposition to the West.

For example, since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent sanctions on its economy, Moscow has sought the creation, expansion, or hardening of groupings to stand against the Western world. The BRICS grouping, initially a talk shop, has expanded to address a plethora of issues impacting the larger Global South. Russia and China are trying to shape it into a platform for nations with disputes with the Western world to exacerbate the cleavage. In early 2023, [16](#) nations applied to become part of the BRICS. In the last major meeting of the group in Johannesburg, South Africa in August, six nations were added. Moscow and Beijing continue to use the group to test alternative mechanisms for the SWIFT banking network and other instruments to sanctions-proof themselves. The creation of development banks such as the NDB has given the group more access to the developing world and tapped into the grievances surrounding the debts offered by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

New Delhi continues to engage with a range of groups to capitalize on the benefits they offer while advocating for its own interests, and having useful sideline meetings with others that, like India, may be looking for options. Its outreach to the Global South has largely been bilateral and it hasn’t used these platforms for broad anti-West coalition building. Rather it has tried to build multilateral inclusivity that can lead to stronger bilateral ties.

Take India's successful advocacy to include the African Union (AU) in the G20 group. Modi had consistently [called](#) for including the AU in the group. At the G20 meeting in September, the African Union—represented by Azali Assoumani, president of Comoros—was made a permanent member. This makes the G20 more inclusive and broader in scope, and dovetails with India's own outreach to African countries. As one small example, Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar visited Tanzania earlier in the summer to inaugurate a university and discuss increased cooperation on a variety of sectors.

Part of this has strategic implications. India's conception of the Indo-Pacific region is not the same as that of the United States. While the US conceptualization roughly parallels the operational area of the US Indo-Pacific Command—from just west of the Maldives to the coast of the Americas—India includes the whole Indian Ocean, [including](#) the eastern shore of Africa.

Also, over the last six months, India has increasingly shown willingness to be involved in the Pacific part of the Indo-Pacific, beyond ASEAN and including the Pacific Islands. There was a port call in Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea and India opened a new embassy in Dilli, Timor-Leste. There is eagerness in the Pacific Islands to see what follows the 12-point plan for engagement that Modi announced in his May visit to PNG. India's engagement with the Pacific Islands has traditionally been on nonconventional security issues such as public health and capacity-building, exactly the [sort of engagement](#) many Pacific Islands have said they want.

Furthermore, in an unusual turn of events, the former heads of the three branches of the Indian military [visited](#) Taiwan for a closed-door meeting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Taiwan. By engaging with the full Indo-Pacific, from east African nations to Pacific Islands, and including sensitive points such as Taiwan, India is more than testing the waters as an expanding security provider—especially in human security, which is much in demand across the region.

India does not have the same [colonial](#) legacy as the West's previous "point country" in the Pacific Islands, Australia, nor has it been as disconnected from the African continent as has the United States. The last US president to visit the continent was Barack Obama in 2015, and that was not a state visit but a visit to his ancestral village in Kenya. Over the same decade, China has made inroads into nations small and big. Beijing's BRI project runs along the length and breadth of the continent. To counter China's predatory lending, New Delhi has advocated for expanding lending to poorer nations, including at the recently concluded G20. President Biden has [supported](#) India's recommendation and called for increased funding for the World Bank. From the Pacific Islands to east Africa, India can knit the region together in a way that the West can't, and China doesn't want to. The G20 showcased the potential for India and the United States (and likeminded countries) to work together to develop solutions for the people of Global South, aiding in economic stability and ultimately for upholding a rules-based international order.

With Xi and Putin not attending the G20, Modi and Biden stole the spotlight and shone it on a potential future that many wanted to see. That said, press releases are one thing. It will be outcomes that matter.

*PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.*