

# India Could Cordially Compete with China Through BRICS+

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*Instead of stoking a strategic-security dilemma between the two Asian Great Powers that would only work out to the US' ultimate benefit, India would do best to cordially compete with China through the BRICS+ format in order to incorporate an implicit rules-based structure to their rivalry and have a chance at reaping the advantages that Russia's "balancing act" could provide in maintaining stability between them.*

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi announced on Wednesday that China would ["explore modalities for BRICS-plus"](#), to hold outreach dialogues with other major developing countries" because "we hope to establish extensive partnerships and widen our circle of friends to turn it into the most impactful platform for South-South cooperation."

[BRICS+](#) is considered a "dirty word" by most Indians, especially their ultra-jingoistic Hindutva ruling class, because it's understood as a euphemism for institutionalizing China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) global vision of New Silk Road connectivity that New Delhi has been vehemently opposed to since its inception. That's unfortunate from the perspective of the emerging [Multipolar World Order](#) because it strongly suggests that India is predestined to become the US' [premier 21<sup>st</sup>-century partner](#) in "containing China", with destabilizing consequences for the two Asian Great Powers involved. This scenario is disadvantageous to Russia's stated vision of a [Greater Eurasian Partnership](#) in the supercontinent because it challenges Moscow's efforts to integrate the Eurasian Union, SCO, and OBOR, thereby presenting a large-scale strategic threat to its long-term interests.

## Russia's "Balancing" Role

Russia is uniquely positioned to [function](#) as the supreme "balancing" force in Eurasia for the entirety of this century, provided of course that can skillfully leverage its multi-vectored diplomacy to that end, and [especially in Asia](#) when it comes to preserving stability between its Chinese and Indian partners. It's therefore of the highest importance that Russia convinces India that it has more to gain by joining BRICS+ in its own way than to avoid the initiative entirely, since India's participation in this initiative is integral to Russia successfully pulling off its envisioned 21<sup>st</sup>-century "balancing" act in promoting multipolarity across Eurasia. This doesn't just entail the two Asian Great Powers in question, but also has a lot to do with [Russia's fast-moving rapprochement with Pakistan](#) and the need for Moscow to dispel India's American-encouraged suspicions about its [intent](#).

Another driving factor is the interest that Russia has in becoming the go-to "balancing"

party for all of China's Silk Road partners and adversaries, which in this context includes rival South Asian states Pakistan and India, respectively. Russia understands that the best way for it to attain a higher strategic value to China in its own partnership with the country, and therefore correct whatever real or perceived "lopsided" relations it may have with Beijing, is take on a greater degree of importance along the Silk Roads in becoming an indispensable force to its success and stability. Bearing this in mind, it's most prudent for Russia's diplomats to speak to their Indian counterparts in a "language that they know" so as to most effectively convince them of the self-interested benefits that they stand to gain by joining BRICS+, which can be summarized as participating in an implicit rules-based platform for competing with China and from where they can draw upon Russia's "balancing" influence to their advantage.

To elaborate a bit more in depth, India should conceptualize BRICS+ as a vehicle for expanding its multidimensional partnership with Russia across the entire geographic space of "[Greater South Asia](#)", with New Delhi inviting Moscow to participate in a wide array of joint projects so as to mitigate whatever unpleasant competitive perceptions Beijing may have of them. In addition, Russia could do the same with Indian involvement in its own territory in order to justify "internally balancing" foreign direct investment in strategic locations such as the Chinese-bordering Far East without fear of offending China. If the Russian-Indian bilateral relationship migrates to BRICS+ and accepts this new branding, then it would open up a previously untapped and wide array of mutually advantageous possibilities for each of them such as the proposals that will be discussed below.

### **Reconceptualizing The Chinese-Indian Competition In SAARC And BIMSTEC**

India's most immediate geopolitical concern is naturally its own neighborhood as institutionalized through the largely overlapping South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), both of which New Delhi believes Beijing is trying to "poach" away from its hoped-for hegemonic influence by using the allure of the New Silk Roads. The [Chinese-Indian New Cold War](#) has seen these two BRICS "frenemies" compete with one another all across these regional integration organizations in varying intensities and to different extents, but their rivalry could be managed if they each conducted it through the shared platform of BRICS+. While it might be impossible to dispel the "zero-sum" mentality guiding Indian decision makers at the moment, reconceptualizing their SAARC and BIMSTEC competitions with China as being part of BRICS+ could allow both parties to "save face" anytime they experience a subjective "loss" to the other since the end result would still nevertheless be a "BRICS victory".

### **Advancing The "Asia-Africa Growth Corridor"**

Opening up SAARC and BIMSTEC to BRICS+ could also allow India to call upon its Russian partner to more deeply involve itself in these regions through Indian-led joint projects that function as part of its "Asia-Africa Growth Corridor" (AAGC), which is being hyped up by the country's media and their Western partners as New Delhi's "response" to OBOR. While that appears to be a gross over-exaggeration of its future potential for self-serving domestic political purposes, it shouldn't be overlooked that the idea itself does indeed have a certain degree of promise inherent to it, especially if it manages to develop "soft infrastructure" in the Greater Indian/African Ocean Region in parallel with the "hard infrastructure" that China is constructing through OBOR. An exciting detail about the AAGC is that it expects to rely on

Japanese capital for most of its projects, though this is a double-edged sword of sorts because it invites China and others to frame the initiative as a unipolar-backed obstacle for obstructing the Silk Roads.

So long as the AAGC remains a mostly Indo-Japanese undertaking, then it will continue to be viewed with suspicion and inevitably contribute to the New Cold War between China and India. The entire paradigm could suddenly shift, however, if Russia was invited to participate in the AAGC and openly announced its support for endeavor, as Moscow's multipolar credentials would lend a large degree of trustworthiness and credibility to its associated projects and could go a long way towards easing China's suspicions. Moreover, just as China is expected to use BRICS+ to promote OBOR, so too could India do the same with the AAGC, possibly even double-branding its investments in Russia's Far East as being under the banner of both BRICS+ and the AAGC. Not only that, but Moscow might finally have found its gateway for returning to the "Global South" in a tangible trade-worthy sense by carving out its own niche in the AAGC in cooperation with its Indo-Japanese partners, which would also strengthen its [ongoing rapprochement](#) with Tokyo too.

### **Bringing Shadow Partners Into BRICS+**

As can be surmised from the above, India's formal involvement in BRICS+ would allow it to indirectly incorporate shadow partners like Japan into the platform via their participation in the AAGC, thus enabling it to boost its competitive potential vis-à-vis China without openly drawing its consternation. Since the aforementioned section described Tokyo's role in this structure, it won't be redundantly reiterated in this part, with the focus instead shifting to how Iran and Israel could fit into this framework. Both entities are located in the Mideast and are accordingly included in India's "Link West" policy of West Asian ("Mideast") engagement, and each of them has their own special relationship with Russia. Iran is an important party to the Astana peace process while many Israelis share civic, linguistic, and/or ethnic ties with Russia. In consideration of this, Russia could help India make more pronounced and rapid inroads with each of them, possibly in exchange for New Delhi opening up the door to Moscow in the "Global South" regions of ASEAN and Africa via the AAGC.

Russia and India already cooperate with Iran through the North-South Transport Corridor (NSTC) that's expected to one day facilitate South Asian and EU trade via Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia, but the inclusion of this project into BRICS+ as a signature undertaking of the AAGC could draw Tehran even closer into the multipolar institutional fold. Furthermore, since Russian businessmen could theoretically use the NSTC to trade with Pakistan just as much as with India, it's to Moscow's interests to convey to New Delhi that its nationals have no "zero-sum" intentions in doing so and are merely chasing their own "win-win" economic solutions, and this could best be achieved by integrating the NSTC into BRICS+. As for Israel, a [joint report](#) recently authored by some of Russia and India's most prominent think tanks calls for them to commence trilateral relations with the Mideast entity that's already one of Moscow's [closest regional allies](#). By utilizing the two-way patronage network that exists between Russia and Israel, Moscow could help New Delhi make lightning-fast progress in diversifying its partnership with Tel Aviv.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

This policy proposal is intended to advance Russia's grand strategic interests as they relate to its tacit desire to "balance" Eurasian affairs across the current century, taking into

account the nuances of Moscow’s multidimensional relations with its partners in New Delhi and Beijing in order to craft the most realistic suggestions for how Russia could become the arbiter of the Chinese-Indian New Cold War. There is no state besides Russia that’s capable of managing the growing competition between these two Asian Great Powers, and it is absolutely imperative for Moscow to craft mechanisms for controlling their rivalry so as to guarantee the stability of the emerging Multipolar World Order. The best way to do this is by **convincing India to join the BRICS+ platform after opening its eyes to the benefits that it stands to attain by doing so, speaking to its decision makers in a “zero-sum” language that they understand but recognizing that the end result would be to the “win-win” benefit of all Eurasian parties regardless**, though so long as Russia successfully sustains the “balance” between them.

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