

The RIC Troika and the Emerging Multipolar World Order: Rebalancing Global Power from the North to the South

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Abstract

The loss of unipolarity and simultaneous emergence of plural loci of power have brought on the rising multipolar order that is becoming more indicative of the agency of the Global South. Within this transformation, the RIC Troika of Russia, India and China have shifted its structure into a consultative process to a strategic triangle of the twenty first century geopolitics. This paper will discuss the operation of the RIC Troika within the framework of a wider power rebalancing between the global North that is dominated by the West and the growing Global South with diplomatic coordination, institutional innovations and strategic outreach. The study has a theoretical base of power diffusion, polycentric governance and the solidarity between South -South, thus, applying a qualitative analytical approach is a mixture between geopolitical analysis, review of discourse and interpretation of policy. Another aspect that has been pointed out in the paper is the geo-economic restructuring of trade, energy, technological ambition and financial flows. The paper has put into consideration that though the RIC Troika is not expected to substitute the Western hegemony there is both material and ideational momentum that enhances the bargaining power of the Global South in the rising polycentric world. Tying together high-level diplomacy with the developmental desires of Global South, the RIC Troika is the key experiment in rehumanising of global power relations. The paper ends by concluding that the future of the emerging multipolar order will rely on how well the members of RIC are able to enjoy the alignment of their strategic ambitions to the interests of the rest of the increasing assertive Global South.

Keywords: Russia-India-China (RIC), Global South, Global North, Multipolarity, BRICS, Strategic Alliance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War the international system is facing a fundamental change. What was once a unipolar moment with the focus on the United States hegemony has resulted in a more and more multipolar structure with decentralized power in multiple regional and global participants (Muhyiddin, 2025). In this regard, the emergence of the Global South has become one of the characteristics of the modern international relations. The emergent economies, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, have commenced to not only transform the way economic power is distributed, but also alter the global governance institutions and norms (Dahiya & Kumar, 2023). Most of the modern age experienced the supremacy of the Global North, of which was spearheaded by the United States and its Western allies. After the creation of the Cold War the United

States seemed to live in a decade of unchallenged preeminence which had commonly been called the “*unipolar moment*” (Krauthammer, 1990). The first half of the twenty first century was a turning point in the international politics because the unquestioning status quo of the West started to be challenged by the increasing stance of Asia rising powers. One of the most significant responses to this shift was a Russia-India-China (RIC) grouping that was created. RIC was initially strategized by the Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov at the end of 1990s as an alternative strategic alliance to oppose the U.S. dominance and foster the emergence of the multipolar world (Lo, 2008).

Some researchers also believe that the presence of the RIC has played a crucial role in creating a multipolar balance, but others have suggested that such trilateralism has only been of little benefit due to the

varying interests of countries and the changing geopolitical positioning of the countries (ORF Online). It used to be a loose alliance, but over the years there has been an increase in weight, which has led to the emergence of BRICS and the strengthening of the institutional cooperation in the shape of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the G20 (Stuenkel, 2020). RIC is known to improve in geopolitics value in recent years by a significant amount. Western world sanctions and pressure against Russia, the conflict of forces between the U.S. and China and the financial development in India have shifted the center of attention to the region controlled by this block, which is more noticeable in the international arena. The question above therefore raises the question as to whether RIC can have a significant role in repositioning the global power between the North and the South. In order to answer this question, we trace the history of RIC, examine the mechanism of economic changes that result in its emergence, estimate the effect of the U.S. policies of trade and tariffs as well as discuss the issues that remain primary in determining its further evolution. Politically overshadowed by the larger entities of BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the RIC Troika, nevertheless, remains an intellectual and diplomatic core of determining the structure of the Eurasian and Global South multilateralism (Arapova and Lissovnikov, 2024).

This is the way the twenty-first century has shown the failure of the Northern leadership in the world governance. The protracted conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the crisis of 2008 and the needs of the COVID-19 pandemic tested the vulnerability of the structure of the Western-driven order. The very stability of unipolarity was discredited and created space where other constructions of power have emerged in which RIC has become one of the main contenders. Another point of observation was the trade policy of the Trump administration that showed that globalization is unstable when the leadership of the world is left to the West. By imposing tariffs on Chinese goods valued at hundreds of billions of dollars and dissolving the foundation of free trade, that it previously promoted, Washington was lessening the supply chains and ruining the principles of free trade (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2019; WTO, 2020). The activities were protectionism in a lot of the Global South and prompted the demand to gain independence and to improve cooperation between the South and the South. It is evident that the tariff crises capture the existence of more intensive underlying structural tensions entrenched in the status quo of the world order. As much as the initial effect of globalization boosted the Western states economies, the introduction of the Chinese and Indian state as potential competitors in the manufacture of items and technology made the north respond defensively. The RIC countries have in turn tried to ensure diversification of their approaches and the minimization of their dependence on the Western systems. China has spread

the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on expansive infrastructural and trade networks; Russia has re-defined its so-called pivot to Asia in its multilateral relationships with the continent, and India has extended its business relationships so that it does not depend overly on any of the political blocs. These initiatives are all manifestations of a general desire to create alternative economic networks and to have a more unified voice on the subject of debates about global governance.

Nonetheless, there are still internal stresses that remain in the RIC framework. The strategic alliances between China and Russia increase the unbalance in the troika because border disputes between India and China undermine bilateral relations between the two countries. The aspect is further affirmed by the fact that the long-standing economic and security relations have existed between India and United States and Europe, which are indicative of the complexities of the strategic orientation of India. All these changes are drawing towards what is being called by numerous researchers an “*emerging multipolarity*” (Stuenkel, 2024; Larionova and Shelepov, 2023). However, despite these tensions, the fact that dialogue amongst these three powers prevails, proves that there is an understanding that multipolarity is a requirement and that Global South needs more representation in the international decision-making systems.

1.1. The New Multipolarity and the Shaping Global Equilibrium

The politics of multipolarity is reappearing, which can be traced in the changes in the political-economic arena. After its 2023 expansion, BRICS now reflects the real representation of over 46 per cent of the global population and almost 36 per cent of the global GDP (PPP) (IMF, 2024 and BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration, 2023). By comparison, the G7 has been losing a significant portion of worldwide GDP at a rapid rate, a process Cox (2023) terms the historic re-shifting of world economic balances in favor of the South and East. The rise of a new technological and economic giant China, the resurgence of military and people, resource-based influence of Russia, and the rise of new geopolitical swing states, all reorganize the world hierarchies.

This transition has also been increased by the geopolitical consequences of the war in Ukraine. When the western sanctions turned Russia into an outcast of the *Euro-Atlantic system*, Moscow shifted closer to Beijing and increased energy and financial cooperation with India (Connolly, 2023 and Reuters, 2023). At the same time, the weaponisation of the U.S. dollar in terms of sanctions provoked the fresh vigor of the work of de-dollarisation in BRICS and RIC-related platforms (BIS, 2023; Korybko, 2023). These processes highlight the role in which geopolitical crises may trigger systemic restructuring.

1.2. The RIC Troika as a Strategic and Normative Actor

The RIC mechanism is a special trilateral axis under which three large civilisational states having different political orders, economic patterns, and the course of development coordinate on issues of world regulation, regional security, and South-South progress (Pant & Saha, 2024; Ye, 2023). RIC can be viewed as an informal core since Russia, India, and China discuss strategic positions and then transform them into multilateral forums whereas BRICS and SCO are institutionalised platforms (Stuenkel, 26). As a result, RIC is a little-researched but fundamental process of identifying the intellectual underpinnings of the modern multipolarity.

Even the attempts to establish alternative financial mechanisms are reflected by the positions of RIC, including: the expansion of BRICS (2023) to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Iran (BRICS, 2023); the empowerment of the SCO, which has become the largest regional organisation in the world (Weitz, 2023); the efforts to establish alternative financial mechanisms, including local-currency trade, BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement, and digital payment platforms (IMF, 2024; All these efforts, in turn, disrupt the western dominated structures, such as the World Bank, IMF, and the SWIFT network, by rolling out more geographically diverse, more politically inclusive, and economically pluralist options.

2. A Prelude on RIC Triad

The RIC (Russia Indo-China) format is one of the oldest and most significant projects in the Eurasian trilateralism of strategies. Born in deep global change, the Troika was an understanding constructed as a diplomatic suggestion to balance Western supremacy into a design that is presently explaining the setting of strategic rationality behind BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and the broadening framework of South-South collaboration. RIC concept was developed in the following of the realignment in the geopolitical order which took place after the end of the Cold War. As the Soviet Union disintegrated, Russia was keen on redeciding her role in the world, and India opened up its economy and China solidified her position as a manufacturing giant. In 1998, Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov presented an idea of the RIC as a direct counterattack on the unipolar hegemony of the United States. This was aimed at forming a trilateral axis that would contain the unilateral U.S interventions and multipolarity (Lo, 2008). The subsequent proposal slowly came into play with all three states reconsidering their foreign policy: Russia was sidelined by the NATO growth, India sought more than Russia by diversification, and China was emerging out of suzerainty after Tiananmen. A tripartite dialogue was therefore envisioned as a system of harmonising the interests and increasing the influence.

In the 2000s, the RIC Troika has received a more institutionalized format of a diplomatic meeting instead of a loose consultative meeting. Trilateral meetings between foreign ministers that were held annually became an order of the day and the agenda was widened to include terrorism, energy security, climate talks, and global economic governance (MEA, 22). Also initiated by the group was co-ordinating of multilateral institution cases, especially the WTO Doha Round and the UN climate talks. It was the time when bilateral relationships were strengthened: Russia-China relations went into the full-scale strategic partnership, with the increase of defence relationships, as well as trans-boundary energy sources (Lukin, 2020). Although the relationships between Russia and India were rather strong, they were based upon the cooperation in defence-related areas, the negotiations in nuclear energy, and mutual Eurasian interests (Kornilov, 2021). Although the relations between India and China are becoming more and more competitive, the time of economic boom happened, the volume of trade between the countries grew rapidly, and the discussions between the countries in the border settlement framework under Special Representatives mechanism took place (Singh, 2020).

The combination of these two bilateral channels resulted in the trilateral cooperation better opportunity. India and China still saw each other as rivals although Russia played the role of a balancing force where dialogues are encouraged, security discussions are to be made and the RIC form should not break down due to bilateral tensions.

Among the most significant results of this further involvement was the intellectual preparation of BRICS (2006-2009). It is a well-known fact among scholars that the RIC was regarded as the center around which BRICS was built (Stuenkel, 2020). Including Brazil and, later, South Africa in the collaboration, the grouping retained the same imprint, namely RIC: the focus on multipolar diplomacy, the change of western-led institutions, and the normative claim of Global South priorities.

On the same note, RIC strategic triangle is further entrenched in the architecture of Eurasian security with the addition of India (and Pakistan) to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), even though initiated by China and Russia (Weitz, 2021).

The inaugural meeting of foreign ministers in the so-called RIC was held in 2002, and marked a small institutionalisation over the idea. The troika was not an immediate measure that was converted into a formal alliance but rather a strategic dialogue platform on the regional and global issues such as terrorism, multilateralism and development. As it was in 2006, the RIC grouping was availed as a platform to coordinate positions in the extended multilateral forums of the

United Nations and the WTO. The most important influence of RIC was in the form of a formation of larger groups. Additionally, Brazil became part of RIC in 2006 to become BRIC (then BRICS, as South Africa was added to it). The BRICS confirmed the systematisation of annual summits and the formation of new institutions like New Development Bank, as a gesture of defying the financial domination of the West (Stuenkel, 2020). At the same time, the RIC states were the core participants of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which was established by 2001 and included states of Central Asia and then India and Pakistan. These institutions made RIC have an outreach way beyond trilateralism, and a network of Global South cooperation.

The RIC troika path has cut across other regional constructs. The existence of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with the United States, Japan and Australia is an indication of the hedging strategy by India, as it balances its relationship with the RIC partners against the fear of China. Likewise, the Russian relationship with China became even more strategic with the western sanctions which ensued following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, throwing new twists to the troika which has left India caught in-between its partners.

2.1. Post-2014

The turning point in the development of the RIC was achieved when the crisis in Crimea happened in 2014 and relations between Russia and the West became worse. Western sanctions compelled Moscow to turn its back to the West and move towards Asia, expediting strategic and economic ties with China and, to a more highly evaluated extent with India (Kaczmarek, 2019). Russia enhanced energy politics with China including the Power of Siberia pipeline (Sukhankin, 2020) and tried to integrate India more deeply into the energy infrastructure initiatives such as International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

It was also in the era of increased diplomatic alignments in the RIC platform. The three states aligned Syria agenda, shared their anxieties on U.S. unilateral sanctions and spoke ill of U.S. interventions as disastrous (MEA, 2021). It also caused China and Russia to be more outspoken about the need to have a world order that was characterized by actual multilateralism (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, 2023).

India, in its turn, was trying to have a balanced diplomacy in the pursuit of more strategic cooperation with the U.S. without interrupting historical ties with Russia and competition with China. This position of delicacy further complicated the RIC, but did not diminish India in adhering to the barrier of a multipolar international system based on the roles of self-determination (Pant & Rej, 2022).

2.2. Post- 2022: RIC as Strategic Insights

Another major change of directions of the RIC took place in February 2022 when Russia attacked Ukraine. The Western sanctions redefined the world energy trade, money flow, and political alliances. The RIC Troika which was not necessarily coordinated increasingly took a prime role in the control of Eurasian reactions to global instability.

2.2.1. Russia

With the West isolating Russia, Russia intensified trade relations, energy relations and financial relationships with China and to a lesser degree India. As of 2023, China-Russia trade had reached USD 240 billion per the discounted Russian oil and the increased settlements in the yuan, as well (Reuters, 2023). India also significantly expanded the Russian crude imports vividly illustrating the timeless reasoning of strategic autonomy regardless of the pressure by the West (IEA, 2023).

The pressure by Russia to resist western isolation, diversify economic relations and have a role in international structures of governance affects Russia interest in RIC. Through RIC, Moscow is able to establish itself as the centre of Eurasian power in spite of being asymmetrically dependent on China (Kashin, 2022).

2.2.2. China

The Beijing considered the war a validation of its old theory that U.S actions which permeated alliances were disruptive to world order. It hastened other financial constructs, advanced the yuan in the cross-border trade, and boosted BRICS membership all topics that are in line with its long-term agenda of remaking global orders (BIS, 2023).

China considers the RIC as a wider plan of establishing Sino-centric Eurasian space. It focuses on institutional innovation e.g. BRICS, SCO-BRI as a complementary move and enhances systems that water down the mighty Western dominance (Zhang, 2023).

Russia and India are the next most important impediments to the efforts of China to establish a Sinocentric order in the Asian nation besides the United States. The interaction between Beijing and these two great powers has gone in significantly different directions: Russia is a former superpower that has found itself that was unable to adapt to its post-Soviet situation, whereas India is an up-and-coming player that has shifted its position between being a geopolitical marginality and the projected great power at the center of the world by the middle of the century. These opposing trade off strategies can also be most clearly seen with bilateral consideration though when looking at the China-Russia-India strategic triangle there are more aspects to the alignment, competition, and role-

negotiation. The Chinese academic speech is particularly sensitive to the trilateral arrangement as well as the bilateral relationships, specifically the developing Russia-India relationship under which Beijing considers the key point of the Asian politics of power (Rozman, 2025).

2.2.3. India

India has embraced an identity of “*principled neutrality*” where it does not comply with actions that have been imposed by the West even as it continually emphasizes on dialogue and sovereignty in the United Nations (Saran, 2023). New Delhi continued to strengthen the relationships with the West via the Quad and be heavily involved in the processes of RIC, SCO and BRICS.

To India, RIC is a platform that maintains independence in a polarized world. It assists New Delhi in balancing china, maintaining relations with Russia, and influencing the discourse of the Global South enough to avoid letting China gain a monopoly on leadership in the emerging institutions (Mohan, 2023).

On the whole, the geopolitical environment after 2022 made the applicability of the RIC framework rather than lower. The Troika was an important venue of crisis management, energy policy and less dollar-centered financial order negotiation. The development of RIC has been a factor directly linked to: BRICS growth (Johannesburg 2023), the SCO expansion, De-dollarization movement and other types of diplomacies that attach greater importance to sovereignty and non-interference. These dynamics have gone to the point of making the Troika an experiment in a conceptual way to a monumental pillar of multipolarity. Stuenkel (2020) believes that in the absence of the RIC nucleus, BRICS would not have a strategic coherence. As Acharya (2023) also points out, the emerging institutions that are constructed around the RIC denude a “*multiplex world*” in which non-Western actors create new institutions and norms instead of attempting to reform the existing ones.

3. The Russia-India-China Nexus: North to South

Global North and Global South have been applicable in reference to the world politics, where they do not literally imply the existence of the countries in the mentioned hemispheres. Instead, they outline the inequalities within the global system in the terms of wealth, power and influence. Key international institutions such as World Trade Organization (WTO), World Bank, and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have traditionally been controlled by the Global North which consists of mainly North America, Western Europe, and Japan and other rich and industrial democracies. This divide has begun to blur in the last 30 years, largely due to problems stemming out of colonialism, economic reliance and the imbalance in the average income in the Global South, which is generally

considered to be Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Brandt Commission, 1980). As an illustration, China and India are now some of the biggest economies globally whereas some Latin American nations such as Brazil and Mexico have also emerged to be the largest economies in the world (World Bank, 2023). Nevertheless, there are still tremendous disparities in such aspects as technology, finance, and political decision-making. The example is the voting quota system of the IMF which has to provide a greater role to the United States and Europe, even though Global South countries have repeatedly demanded its change (Woods, 2021).

Russia-India-China (RIC) triptych has been characterised by an ebb and flow trend in the last decade given the dynamism of the world politics. The RIC was mostly a venue of symbolic talk between 2014 and 2019. The three states held minister levels conference and even opened up at international summits with the G20 Summit, in 2019 in Osaka, signifying their mutual focus on multipolarity progression, although the troika was not more strategically converged (The Diplomat, 2025). This precarious status was broken in 2020 and 2021. The June 2020 confrontation in the Galwan Valley put the relations between India and China in a dire situation that put potential cooperation between the two countries in stalemate. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic shifted the priorities of all countries towards national problems. Though simultaneous involvement of a virtual RIC meeting took place in November 2021, it became more of continuity than a coordinating aspect (Business Standard, 2025).

Between 2022 and 2023, selective cooperation was once again utilized in different geopolitical circumstances. The event of the Russian invasion of Ukraine with the following sanctions imposed by the West forced Moscow to intensify its relationship with India and China. India also increased its purchases of the discounted Russian oil and fertilizers and this was a huge leap in terms of trade between India and Russia. At the same time China and Russia strengthened their alliances, and agreements in the sphere of energy, logistics, digital economy and supply-chain strength were achieved with the support of the state visit to Moscow by President Xi Jinping in 2023. Through the Vostok 2022 military exercises, India and China attended in solidarity with Russia, which marked the first time these three countries had such proximity, but India only participated to the minimal in a way that its relationships with Western nations would not be poor. A diplomatic thaw could be observed in 2024. Narendra Modi, the Indian Prime Minister, and Chinese President Xi Jinping had their first official meet in Kazan during the BRICS Summit despite duration of four years, and they agreed that they would stabilize border tensions. This meeting established the new impetus of the reemergence of the RIC dialogue (Wall Street Journal, 2024).

By the year 2025 discourse concerning the reemergence of the RIC was intensified. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov fundamental to relaunching the troika in May 2025 by saying that better India-China relations would open up the possibility of trilateral dialogue again (Times of India, 2025a). China was pleased to respond positively as it termed the resuscitation of the troika as healthy to the stability of the region (Times of India, 2025b). India however, was found to be cautious as they observed that such meetings would have to occur at a convenient time and in a convenient form (NDTV, 2025). As of August 2025, the troika has not been holding a formal trilateral summit since, although Russia was persistent and China continued to support it, its reappearance appeared to be at any rate. Analysts noted how the RIC was seen as a balancing force to NATO and Western sanctions by Moscow, a Beijing voice to consolidate its Eurasian position, and India was approaching the revival with a defense between long-time partnership with Russia and its competition with China and an increasing relationship with the West (Economic Times, 2025).

With Russia, India and China increasingly getting involved on the RIC front an emergent stage of Asian geopolitics is emerging. Although their strategies have remained in conflict, the overall motivation to resist the external forces especially the Western nations has brought back the trilateral mechanism to life. By so doing, the RIC Troika can enhance the strategic sovereignty of Asia and help redefine how global power is disposed globally further than the Western hegemony (Manhas, 2025).

3.1. Energy Realignment

Among the most vivid geo-economical changes, which were conditioned by the RIC-troika, is manifested in the energy field. With Russia being among the largest oil and gas consumers in the world, the energy imports and exports of the state demanded by Europe have been redirected by a significant percentage toward the Asian markets, especially China and India, after the implementation of the Western sanctions (IEA, 2023). Imports of discounted Russian crude in India increased significantly in 2022, thus, enhancing its own energy security and weakening the efforts of the West to cut off Moscow. The intensifying interdependence is highlighted by the fact that China has been investing in pipelines in Russia as is the case with the Power of Siberia project. The resultant triangular flow of resources is Russian hydrocarbons powering the Chinese industry and India gain cheap imports.

3.2. Supply Chains and Technology

In addition to the energy, RIC is transforming the world supply chains. The ordeal of China in the electronics and green technologies, the resources endowments carried by Russia and the Indian digital services form considerable complementarities.

According to it, though, there is the issue of technology transfer, India wants to be independent of Chinese platforms, and Russia experiences limitations of receiving the Western high-tech supplies. Still, the development of RIC-based supply-chain resilience infrastructures to cut susceptibility to the U.S.-led embargo, especially in semiconductors, rare earths, and pharmaceuticals, is becoming a matter of discussion (OECD, 2023).

3.3. Financial Alternatives and Dedollarization

The other important sphere is the financial one. RIC states are also discussing the use of alternative to the U.S dollar in cross border trade. China and Russia have increased the settlements in and of yuan and rubles and India has instituted rupee-trade systems with certain partners. The deliberation on a new currency in BRICS highlights the pace of dedollarization although there are still practical challenges (O'Neill, 2023).

3.4. Patterns of Trade and South-South Connectivity

The central element is the troika that improves the South-South connectivity. The Belt and Road Initiative of China overlap Japan yet with the Eurasian Economic U.N. Corridor of Russia and the International NorthSouth Transport Corridor of India, the two countries form intersecting infrastructure systems. Competition is also present; however, all these initiatives lead to the decrease of the dependence on routes and institutions controlled by Northern.

4. Theories of Rebalancing Power in International Relations

Analyzing the strategic role of RIC (Russia Indian China) troika and its contribution to changing the global order, it is critical to base this research on solid theoretical backgrounds. To determine the role of the RIC group, it is more useful to discuss numerous theories about power distribution in the world.

Most of the traditional International Relations (IR) literature tends to explain world order as polar, in the sense of unipolar, bipolar or multipolar with material power among states being distributed. In the modern world, however, this paradigm might not be as good as representing the intricacy of international relations. Some have suggested that it is time to abandon the concept of “multipolarity” in favor of “multiplexity”, as not only is the concentration of power a problem, but also the capacity to interact between an extremely large number of actors (Acharya, Estevadeordal, and Goodman, 2023).

The analysis has to have a lens of the Global South to comprehend RIC as a force that rebalances the South towards the North. The reason behind traditional IR theories historic marginalism of non-western views is contrasted with a post-colonial and dependency dependent approach anticipates structural unequal

relationship, past exploitation, and continuing heritage of colonial regimes. In his more general argument on Global IR, Acharya assumes that non-Western agency is not only responsive to the dominance of the Western one, but it does produce its own norms and institutions (Acharya, 2023). The fact that he describes a “*global multiplex*” and not multipolarity gives emphasis to a decolonialist movement in world politics: that formerly colonized or peripheral nations are now determining global governance in their own way (Acharya, 2017; see also Acharya, 2023).

Dependency theory also adds a structural criticism: as such Global South states become strategically positioned; many of them still exist in asymmetrical relationships in the economy. With this interpretation of RIC, it is possible to enjoy a lot that Russia, India and China collaborate in order to maintain counterbalance of western-centric institutions like IMF, World Bank and SWIFT. They are not just collaborating in a strategic way since it is a normative collaboration toward an agenda of sovereignty, non-intervention, and development-led multilateralism (Pant and Saha, 2024).

4.1. Realist Lens

According to the materialist viewpoint offered by the realist scholars, the world politics is primarily influenced by material power or military power, natural resources, and economic magnitude. In this sense, the fast emergence of China, the developing economy of India, and energy resources of Russia has re-balanced the world order (Mearsheimer, 2014). However, realists warn that long-term collaboration would be rather dangerous since states tend to follow different national interests.

The RIC trioka is a rational strategic formation that is seen under a realist prism in the twin aspects of classical realism and structural realism. According to realism, anarchic international system prevails where state security, relative gains and power are the focal point of states. Cooperation does not exist due to the same identities or norms but is only possible due to the fact that temporarily it coincides with interests. In the case of Russia, to be defeated by Western sanctions and geopolitical isolation since the conflict in Ukraine, increased coordination with the economical machine of China and the developing market of India is an indispensable element of the strategic survival. In the case of China, closer relations with Russia and India will support its quest to neutralize U.S. dominance within the continent of Asia and the international system at large. India on the other hand, will use the RIC platform to maintain strategic autonomy and at the same time enhance security relations with the United States under the Quad. Therefore, RIC embodies realism in action: a dynamic, strife-based set-up that exists due to the need, not loyalty, and where collaboration continues in spite of

incompatibilities due to the cost of falling outweighing the rewards of staying aligned (Sharma and Das, 2025).

4.2. The Liberal Approach of Institutionalism

Liberals underline the importance of the international institutions, suggesting that they make the level of cooperation easier and offer some means of the global impact. In the case of RIC, its true strength is the support and the creation of new institutions which are BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). These avenues enable countries of the Global South to make more difference in the global decision making (Keohane, 2005).

4.3. Constructivist Approach of Perspectives

Constructivists emphasize ideas, identity and norms. According to them, the Global South is not a group of nations with a similar economic system but a shared identity that exists on the basis of a post-colonial past. In this perspective, RIC is relevant in that it contributes to the principle of a multipolar world and solidifies cooperation in the South-South partnership (Acharya, 2018). Collectively, this can prove that although material resources and institutions are instrumental in this process, discursive power of RIC, i.e., its ability to signify the Global South and develop new discourses is also decisive.

4.4. The Strategic Triangulation Theory and Trilateral Diplomacy

Strategic triangulation is a useful concept of analysis of the specific structure of RIC. Triangulation is also a case in IR theory in which a third party is being a balancer or mediator among two other powers, or in which three states are being triangularly coordinated. This model can be especially applied to the perception of how RIC can possibly operate within itself (the three states) and outside of it (in connection with other power centres).

This is one of the aspects that Frank O'Donnell focuses on by studying the multi-alignment management of India: India has been interacting with Russia as well as China not only bilaterally but also in trilateral FORums such as RIC, BRICS, and the SCO to give its strategic freedom (O'Donnell, 2021). He claims that the multi-alignment management in India is based on informal organization instead of formal institutions, applying the forum-shopping to score its interests in various multilateral arenas (O'Donnell, 2021).

Geopolitical tensions and opportunities are to be emphasized with such triangulation. A “*strategic triangle*” is not a new concept; Russia, India and China have long been expected to be put into place as counter-hegemonic bloc (Primakov doctrine). Nonetheless, internal differences (strategic analysts; see IDSA, 2004) have typically been pointed out by skeptics. According to the opponents of RIC, the lack of coherence of the

latter is due to the strategic differences and mistrust (Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2004).

Recent geopolitical changes, especially the 2022 war in Ukraine and the further rapid decoupling of the economy, rekindled the interest in this triangle by making it not only a symbolic formation, but also a useful tool in the collective order-building. Triangulation theory therefore explains why RIC can also be a broker: in coordinating the strategic interests of its members, institutional innovation, and (not least) a common front on Global South forums.

4.5. Multipolarity and Polycentric Governance

This concept of the polycentric governance can be used to conceptualize the RIC troika of Russia, India, and China in the world politics. The term was coined by Vincent and Elinor Ostrom to define a system that is marked by more than one centre of authority that may overlap and does not have one power center (Ostrom, 2010). In international or world politics, this means that the world will cease being dominated by a few or just one superpower and the influence will be shared among a number of countries. An example of this model is RIC as every member has unique advantages: Russia has unlimited reserves of energy, a powerful army, a permanent seat on the UNSC, and the opportunity to vote; India has a young fast-growing population, a developing digital economy, and leadership in South-southern cooperation its 2023 G20 presidency serves as evidence of this role; China has unparalleled economic sizes, manufacturing superiority and huge international projects like the Belt and Road Initiative. These states do not work as a bloc together. Instead, they act as twin centres of power generating a more complex and multipolar world that spreads power among a number of instrumental actors, as opposed to it being concentrated in the West.

5. RIC's Role in Shaping the Emerging Multipolar Order

Russia-India-China (RIC) Troika is gaining an increasingly increasingly significant impact on the structural change of the world system. They are, individually, important members; but, as a team, they can, and indeed, will, change the paradigm of Western institutional domination in the world. This part analyzes and assesses the functional role of the RIC in terms of geopolitical, economic, technological and institutional space and how it is redefining the lines of a post-western multipolar order.

In the creation of BRICS in 2006 and its consolidation in 2009, previous RIC consultations were very much relied on. Some researchers observed that the BRICS had the prosperity of the RICs in their principal ideas that were multipolarity and sovereign equality, as

well as reforming liberal institutions that serve the West (Stuenkel, 2020; Acharya, 2023). Since only Russia, China and India are the members that are shared by both BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), they offer ideological legitimacy and institutional anchor to the organisation. This collective work of the RIC was particularly noticeable at the BRICS Johannesburg Summit of 2023, introduced the most significant growth in the existence of the organization. The addition of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the UAE effective, 2024 was a display of ability to bring accordable support to the inclusion of the Global South in the Troika (BRICS Johannesburg Declaration, 2023). China was pushing expansion to increase the weight of the group and financial influence of the group under Western sanctions, Russia considered it one of the Lantians, and India was also pushing a gradual expansion to avoid making BRICS a China-centric entity (Pant & Rej, 2022). The ultimate expansion list was rather similar to the "*RIC balancing logic*" as it favoured those countries that would strengthen energy security, diversification of trade as well as geographical reach in Asia, Africa as well as West Asia.

Despite the fact that China and Russia have been the most significant partners in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), its power was greatly enhanced after India became its full-fledged member in 2017. The organization has become the major venue in the Eurasian security governance with India, China, and Russia comprising the three out of the largest economies in the SCO. The RIC Troika of the SCO is in charge of coordinating counter-terrorism frameworks via the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), forming connecting routes between Central Asia and South Asia and East Asia (Weitz, 2021), and uses the SCO platform as a means to deny any western interventionism and accentuates the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention (MFA China, 2023). The recent occurrences when the SCO has opened its doors to Iran in 2023 and became increasingly active in its interactions with other participants of the Gulf and ASEAN only add to the already existing evidence concerning the impact of the RIC in the region. India is evolving into the third-largest importer of oil in the whole world, and the energy decision will influence the geopolitical landscape. This has seen India purchase volumes of discounted Russian crude, record high during 2022-2023: up to approximately 1.6million barrels daily to be bought in mid-2023 (IEA, 2023). This would enhance both the energy security of India and the weakening of the Western regimes of sanctions as well as the bargaining capacity of India with the suppliers in the Gulf region and its involvement in the Far-Eastern credit of Russia in energy initiatives, such as the Sakhalin-1 project, which helps to highlight its resolve to become a long-term Eurasian footprint in energy (Kornilov, 2021).



Figure 1: Russia-India-China

Source: Sharma and Das, 2025. <https://samvadaworld.com/featured/realism-at-play-how-india-china-and-russia-are-reshaping-global-power/>

One of the most promising connectivity provision initiatives that collaborate with the Regional Integration Corridor (RIC) is the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) that connects India, Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia. As part of its projected full-scale operation, the corridor is estimated to cut down freight transit in between India and Russia by up to forty per cent, and lower the related costs by up to thirty per cent (UNESCAP, 2022). The RIC framework of cooperation also overlaps with a number of other macro projects, in particular, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China, the Chabahar Central Asia connectivity strategy of India, and the vision of the Greater Eurasian Partnership of Russia.

Although India is not supporting the BRI because of sovereignty issues in Kashmir, all three states are feeling a tangible interest in reducing overreliance on Western shipping canals and dollar-denominated maritime chains (Pant & Ghosh, 2021).

6. Challenges and Constraints within the Troika

The RIC has been faced with a difficulty of realization of its latent potential into practice despite the high level of structural overlaps in the organization. A major impediment is rooted in the fact that the underlying glimpses on the vision of what multipolarity ought to represent and how the international order ought to be repaired are different. Russia especially Putin has led an overtly multipolar model where Russia would be placed in one pole by dominating a Eurasian bloc. This vision focuses on the politics of the great-power concerts, hegemonic and basing areas and opposition to liberal multilateral bodies (Krickovic and Pellicciari, 2021).

- India-China Rivalry: Trust has been lost due to border tension such as the Galwan clashes of

2020. The India-China relationship has been the potentially most important impediment to RIC integration.

- Imbalance of Power: The fact that China takes control of the economy is an aspect that is not pleasing to Russia and India who are also fearful of becoming overly dependent on Beijing.
- Sanctions: The new challenge faced by Russia that consists of sanctions by the Western world continues to limit the extent of its participation in the world financial systems, making it hard to pursue the importance of close cooperation.
- Divergent Economic Models and Trade Patterns: Beyond geopolitical tensions, the RIC has struggled to achieve meaningful economic integration. While bilateral trade relationships exist particularly between Russia and China, and China and India the trilateral has failed to establish formal trade arrangements comparable to MERCOSUR, the African Union, or ASEAN (Sawal & Anjum, 2023).

Overall, these constraints imply that even with such symbolic and strategic reasons that define the relevance of the RIC, it remains a rather loose advisory institution instead of a group bonded closely.

7. The Indian's Strategy

The rejuvenation of the RIC Troika is closer to the Indian perspective of long-term Indian quest of strategic independence with a balanced multipolar world order. India pays secondary attention to the RIC not as a counter-alliance but as a forum enabling major powers of the Eurasian region to negotiate interests, decrease the number of misinterpretations and increase the spheres of working relationships. In between the emergence of

China and the strategic realignment of Russia, India perceives the RIC as a diplomatic bridgeable that will help to reduce the great-power conflict and protect its regional and global interests.

The interest in the activity of RIC is also influenced by the urge of India to diversify partnerships with the system led by the U.S, but does not sacrifice its relations with the West. The mechanism gives New Delhi room to shape the geopolitics in the continent, particularly regarding connectedness, energy reliability, counter-terrorism and global governance reforms, and retains its autonomous foreign-policy identity. More than that, the RIC platform provides India with the opportunity to focus on its normative preferences to respect sovereignty, non-coercive economic relationships and inclusive multilateralism.

In the future, the future prospects of the RIC on India are tremendous. *First*, the Troika can increase the cooperation which can stabilise the wider Eurasia region as the centre of the continental outreach of India based on the policy of “*Extended Neighbourhood*”. *Second*, through the RIC, India is able to raise and seek global south agendas especially in climate finance, development assistance and technology governance. *Third*, the trinity will provide India with a platform to contain strategic tensions with China in the long-term as it continues to expand its partnerships with the U.S, Japan and Europe. *Lastly*, an effective and operational RIC is able to facilitate the India outlook believing in a multipolar world order in which no particular power is centralized and in which the emerging economies are allowed to have an enhanced voice and agency.

8. Global Governance and International Order RIC Troika Future Scenarios and Implications

Russia-India-China (RIC) system is considered to be a new form of international management where three strong countries convene themselves with an aim of promoting more multilateralism. Unlike conventional types of coalitions that are based on similar ideology or strategic orientation, the RIC has been defined as pragmatic cooperation which is defined by overlapping of interest and convergence occasionally in the face of turbulence in the global arena. This institution has both huge advantages and inefficiencies as a tool of influencing the world politics. Its essence is the idea of functional polycentrism, the decentralisation of power and influence and more than one centre, each of which is an expert in a particular area (Zhao, 2020).

The various types of power are introduced in this environment by Russia, India and China. Most of the influence of Russia is concentrated to the energy and defence sector considering its strategic position as a supplier of hydrocarbons, nuclear technology and a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (IMF, 2022). China in its turn is using its

enormous manufacturing power, mass initiative of infrastructural developments and trading networks, which are also enhanced by technological benefits in 5G, clean energy and digital innovations (USTR, 2019). The large reserves of human resources, the increasing information-technology wealth, pharmaceuticals, space and voice as a prominent representative of the Global South lend economic and normative or influence to China (World Bank, 2022).

This role differentiation enables the RIC to unite to take on the hegemony of the Global North without necessarily having to agree thoroughly on the strategic or ideological arenas. Functional polycentrism helps to enable complementary collaboration whereas competition co-existence is recognition of the boundaries that are set by divergent national interests. The existence of competition is manifested in the form of competitive coexistence and coexistence in which states maintain cooperation in certain areas, at the same time competing in the others, creating a dynamic tension that form the content and scope of cooperation (Zhao, 2020). The brightest example of the RIC Troika is that of India-China, which is marked by securities issues along the border, economies rivalry and antagonistic regional aspirations in the Indo-Pacific. Although these tensions exist, India and China have remained part of the RIC meetings with Russia and they are together coordinating on selective issues like energy security, climate action and reform of world governing institutions (The Diplomat, 2025). Russia often acts as a balancing force, and it is able to maintain a trilateral dialogue in the process of pursuing its strategic goals. The reason as to why the RIC has not been an integrated alliance but a forum of ad hoc cooperation, however, lies in this coexistence; collaboration is issue-specific and in many cases depends on mutual interest which is short term (World Bank, 2022).

The third force is shock convergence that depicts the ability of RIC to react to external shocks. Shock convergence is the process that takes place when global actors attain mutual benefits or stability by converging temporarily when there is an abrupt event or phenomenon like a pandemic, economic sanctions and a local conflict, forcing normally divergent parties to converge (IMF, 2022). As an example, the war in Russia-Ukraine and the associated Western sanctions are making India buy more energy products produced by Russia, and China extended its strategic approach to Moscow also demonstrate that crisis-based convergence can supersede temporal disputes (The Diplomat, 2025). The “*shock convergence*” usually happens on a case-by-case, momentary basis; when the external pressure is placed within the state, underlying competitive forces again take over, and thereby restrict long-term strategic effectiveness (Zhao, 2020).

This interaction of functional specialization, pragmatic rivalry and the inclination to join together in the times of global crises makes the concept of RIC Troika an adaptable and unique model of multipolar collaboration. Functional polycentrism will make sure that every member has a yield in different spheres, such that the Troika can respond to various global issues at the same time. The existence of rivalry and collaboration, which forms the foundation of competitive coexistence, should not disrupt the balance in the management of India-China relationship; hence, dialogue continues in spite of antagonism. The “convergence of shocks enables the Troika to quickly form when there is a global crisis, which increases its ability to act with unity when the external shocks require collective action” (World Bank, 2022; IMF, 2022). Nevertheless, there are also such dynamics, which indicate the limitations of the RIC. Clashing national interests and outstanding conflicts, in particular, the competition between India and China, limit closer integration. Functional polycentrism helps to balance functions, but it does not imply compatibility of priorities of strategies or ideology. Competitive coexistence maintains the line of dialogue openness but does not allow formation of a stable and singular system of decision-making. In like manner, shock convergence may unite actors in state of crisis but such unification is temporary and hardly materializes to become long-term collaboration.

Thereupon, the RIC is more of an informal arrangement in the form of a flexible interaction structure in the midst of a multipolar world, rather than a long-term arrangement in strategic coordination (The Diplomat, 2025). The essences of the RIC Troika is in a new polycentric order in the world where people with emerging powers use their personal advantages and controls their rivals and unite their efforts when the world tense compels them to act. The functional polycentrism enables Russia, India and China to specialise in complementary areas; competitive coexistence between collaboration and rivalry; and in times of crises, shock convergence ensures temporary convergence. Collectively, these processes allow the Troika to have significant impact in the changing global system especially with Global South eyeing a stronger grip in global governance. The RIC notwithstanding its limitation’s stresses that 21st century multipolarity is not as much about strong alliances or collective ideology or even functionalism; rather, it is about adaptability and responsiveness to global crises. This is because of this flexibility which allows the emerging powers to work together when their interests collide even when the deeper unity eludes. By so doing, the RIC identifies a future where the world will not be ordered around some form of dominant force but one around various centres of power that do not only form cooperative ties, but also rival (Zhao, 2020; World Bank, 2022).

9. CONCLUSIONS: WAY FORWARD

The Russia-India-China Troika is placed in a paradoxical situation in the growing multipolar international system. On a structural level, the RIC has immense resources like a quarter of the human population, huge lands and resources, and amalgamated armies second to the United States. The three powers have strategic interests in curbing unipolar American domination, reformation of global governance and also venturing into South-Southern collaboration. But in a practical sense, the RIC is still being crippled by geopolitical tensions, cracks in their strategic vision, and being sucked in by other competing multilateral systems.

The triangular structure can occasionally play useful purposes that allow the topmost level of discussion, mechanism to align standpoints on chosen issues in the world, relying on an intimation of device hegemony but not as a viable counter to Western institutions or the main means to create multipolar position.

The alternative multipolar structure of the future is projected to be made up of fluid alignments, numerous overlapping institutions and the continued relevance of great-power competition that is restrained by mutual interest in the avoidance of a catastrophic conflict. In this sense, the RIC can undergo frequent revivals and will never reach the centrality that was initially desired. The lack of strategic independence in India, the economic limitations of Russia and the desire by China to dominate the region make major changes in the structural conditions a prerequisite to further integration of the three countries.

The RIC Troika is, therefore, not just a complaint of the international order issues, but also a serious indication of the power shifts undergoing transformation to the twenty-first century global politics. The Russia-India-China (RIC) triumvir has become a significant element towards shaping the current world order, whereby, the long-held dominance of the west, and especially the United States, and Europe, determines the self-governing rules of trade, finance, and world order. The rise in the power position of the three power brokers represents the shift to a multi-polar world whereby power is shared between several poles as opposed to one pole. The international transformation is likewise creating space in which the Global South can assume control of making more significant contributions to the process of the international decision-making. It is on this background that the RIC members have the complementary capabilities, which complement one another. The world economy has turned out to be driven by China as the second largest economy in the world today due to its ability to produce and provide development of infrastructure development and advancement of technologies. One can expect Indian input in terms of the growing and fast-growing economy

in the country, the presence of a young and skilled workforce that is internationally competitive in terms of digital services. In the economic sense, Russia, which is inferior GDP-wise, has its strategic power because of its large natural reserves in terms of energy and raw materials which the global supply chains cannot substitute. All three of these amalgamate to create more than a quarter of the world output and about a third of the world fortune in purchasing power parity terms giving them heavy lift in the influence on the trade flows, investment patterns, and development tracks. This helps them with their greater economic involvement, even to the extent of offering alternative to the financial systems that West controlled in the past.

This has been under Trump, since RIC was in the midst of a revival. Washington increased high tariffs on Indian exports as much as 50 per cent and simultaneously, increased its trade war with China and tightened sanctions against Russia. Such actions caused the weaknesses, which had been founded upon reliance on the Western markets to be called into the limelight instead of isolating such economies. This was a wake-up to RIC states. They responded to it by increasing their connections to one another in the sphere of the economy, deepening the foreign relations, building financial instruments that would make them less dependent on the West. The same policies that stoked the eminence of the U.S., however, ironically, gave birth to a tight coordination of Russia, India and China that gave them a strength that influenced each other in world politics. RIC is an apposite topicality because of discontinued consequences in the contemporary world. The Russia Ukraine conflict, energy prices rocketing, and broken supply chains as well as a growing technological conflict between the United States and China have amplified the stabilizing effect of the troika. China continues to expand the connectivity spectrum with its Belt and Road Initiative; India has been promoting its theory of inclusive Growth as well as transformations of multilateral institutions as its G20 presidency; and Russia, maintains internationally its major presence in its defence and energy market. All of these endeavors demonstrate that RIC may become one of the forces that can predetermine various results. This is enhanced with technological innovation. The domains where China has its lead include artificial intelligence and 5G, renewable energy and advanced manufacturing. The Indian pharmaceuticals and missions to the Moon and Mars to explore the space are the strongholds of India. The Russian country continues to enjoy competitive advantages in the military, nuclear power station and high technologies in the aviation industry. All these skills will help the trio not only in the formulation of other technological standards, but also in collaborating in innovations that would be more attractive to the demands of the Global South.

In this Millieu, the Reviving the RIC mechanism does not constitute an exercise it is a strategic necessity. Stability, development and peace in the Eurasia region require long-lasting dialogue between the powers, which is capable of addressing each other at the same level. India, China and Russia are three of the ancient civilizational states and have just come to a point when cooperation becomes an indispensable part of their lives. Their collaboration skills will determine not only the security of the region, but the outlines of the more balanced and inclusive international system.

RIC is not just a diplomatic forum; it is a chance to envision a better world, and to make joint steps in order to create it. There is a lot at stake and it is upon the current generation to ensure that they lay the groundwork to their successors. Nevertheless, the border issues between India and China remain to be unsolved and the increased economic and strategic interests of Russia in China pose a risk to bring about the asymmetry in the relationship. However, the sum total of the advantages possessed by the three nations like the economic, technological richness, population, and mineral wealth are an ideal base to the upcoming alliance. In the future, the RIC format demonstrates the ambiguous belief in global international order of inclusive and equitable world order. Through further collaboration, the troika can stabilise the markets across the world, hasten the rate of renewable energy transitions, advance technology, and promote more equal patterns of development. It also presents new vistas of trade, investment and representation in the international rule-making to the smaller and developing countries.

Finally, it is the RIC experiment that reflects that multipolarity is not merely viable, but may emerge good, re-balancing the power and ensuring that the voices of Global South are heard. Fundamentally, the RIC emergence is not only on a regional ordering scale, but a serious substitution of the balance of power to the non-Global North and foreshadows the design of a more collaborative, representative as well as sustainable global system in the twenty-first century.

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