



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



POLICY BRIEF

BRICS 2026: The Geopolitics of Consensus

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Volume XI, Issue 23

September 18, 2026



Delhi Policy Group

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www.delhipolicygroup.org



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Cover Images:

1. BRICS leaders in front of Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi. Source: [X/Narendra Modi](#)
- 2 Prime Minister Narendra Modi with President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin during informal interactions at the 18th BRICS Summit, Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi. Source: [PIB](#)
3. Prime Minister Narendra Modi chairs the BRICS Leaders' session on 'Inclusive Global Governance and Strengthening Multilateralism' at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, September 12, 2026. Source: [BRICS 2026](#)

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BRICS 2026: The Geopolitics of Consensus

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The 18th BRICS Summit held in New Delhi on September 12-13, 2026 marked the fourth time India has chaired this grouping, and the first since BRICS expanded beyond its original membership. It capped a year of more than 400 meetings and engagements across 30 Indian cities. India had also given the familiar acronym a second reading: 'Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability', which was the theme of the 2026 summit.

The scale of the event was expansive. The summit brought together 32 delegations from member and partner countries, regional organisations and international institutions. Presidents Xi, Putin and Ramaphosa participated, with Xi on Indian soil for the first time since Galwan. Three key West Asian participants were present despite deep divisions over the ongoing conflict. On the summit's sidelines, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed held their highest-level engagement since the conflict began, making Delhi a rare meeting ground at a moment of acute geopolitical polarisation¹.

This coming together of key world leaders presented a diplomatic opportunity. Prime Minister Modi used it to hold 15 formal bilateral meetings over three days, in keeping with his idea of advancing "the spirit of friendship, partnership, and cooperation through the BRICS platform"². His meeting with Xi drew particular attention, marking the continuing stabilisation of India-China relations, even though no major breakthrough was announced. The bilateral meeting with Russia centred around a review of key areas of cooperation, while the meeting with Iran was notable given Iran-UAE differences over the New Delhi Declaration's language on West Asia.

A more revealing measure of the summit was its consensus outcome document, the New Delhi Declaration. Its adoption mattered in its own right, as the expanded BRICS membership makes such consensus much harder to reach, and the preceding foreign ministers' meeting had failed to deliver an agreed outcome.

That consensus, not unexpectedly, was finely calibrated. West Asia was addressed in considerable detail, with Israel, Gaza, Palestine and Lebanon being mentioned

¹Craig Crowther, DW News, 13 September 2026. <https://www.dw.com/en/irans-president-meets-abu-dhabi-leader-at-brics-summit/video-79252231>

²ANI News, Twitter, 13 September 2026. <https://x.com/ANI/status/2099011040298295695>

specifically, whereas Ukraine was not³. The terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir on April 22, 2025 was condemned, but without naming Pahalgam or Pakistan⁴. By comparison, the 2017 Xiamen Declaration⁵ had identified terrorist groups, including Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, by name.

On the reform of global governance, the Declaration endorsed the principle more readily than advance the harder question of redistribution of institutional power. China and Russia simply reiterated “their support to the aspirations of Brazil and India to play a greater role in the UN, including its Security Council”⁶, a familiar formulation rather than a new departure. But this too needs perspective. BRICS is not the forum in which Security Council reform can ultimately be settled, and a more ambitious formulation was never really in prospect.

None of this was particularly surprising. It reflected both the geopolitics of the moment and the intrinsic nature of multilateralism. The more players around the table, with a greater diversity of views and some on opposing sides, the stronger the likelihood of formulations everyone can live with. The Declaration reflected the nature of consensus in an enlarged BRICS: precision where interests converged, carefully negotiated ambiguity where they did not, and silence where differences were hard to bridge.

Tightrope act

The central tightrope that India walked was to keep BRICS relevant without making it ideological. PM Modi had already spelled out the approach in Kazan: “We have to give the world the message that BRICS is not a divisive organisation but one that works in the interest of humanity”⁷. This time the message was similar: “We strive to move ahead with an approach that is not against anyone but instead seeks to take everyone along”⁸.

³BRICS New Delhi Declaration, Paragraphs 30-34, Ministry of External Affairs, 12 September 2026.

<https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/41776>

⁴BRICS New Delhi Declaration, Paragraphs 40, Ministry of External Affairs, 12 September 2026.

<https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/41776>

⁵Xiamen Declaration 2017, Paragraph 48, BRICS Information Centre. <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/170904-xiamen.html>

⁶BRICS New Delhi Declaration, Paragraphs 13, Ministry of External Affairs, 12 September 2026.

⁷PM's Remarks at the Closed Plenary of the 16th BRICS Summit, PM India, 23 October 2024.

https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pms-remarks-at-the-closed-plenary-of-the-16th-brics-summit/

⁸Opening Remarks by the Prime Minister during the 18th BRICS Summit Session: Inclusive Global Governance and Strengthening Multilateralism, Ministry of External Affairs, September 12, 2026.

[https://www.mea.gov.in/speeches-](https://www.mea.gov.in/speeches-statements?dtl/41775/English_Translation_of_Opening_Remarks_by_the_Prime_Minister_during_the_18th_BRICS_Summit_Session_Inclusive_Global_Governance_and_Strengthening_Multilateralism_September_12_2026)

[statements?dtl/41775/English_Translation_of_Opening_Remarks_by_the_Prime_Minister_during_the_18th_BRICS_Summit_Session_Inclusive_Global_Governance_and_Strengthening_Multilateralism_September_12_2026](https://www.mea.gov.in/speeches-statements?dtl/41775/English_Translation_of_Opening_Remarks_by_the_Prime_Minister_during_the_18th_BRICS_Summit_Session_Inclusive_Global_Governance_and_Strengthening_Multilateralism_September_12_2026)

That balance could be seen across the summit's deliberations. Reform of global governance, but not rejection of the existing international order; greater use of local currencies and financial connectivity, but no common BRICS currency or frontal challenge to the US dollar; greater strategic autonomy and a stronger Global South voice, without turning BRICS into a new geopolitical camp. India's diplomacy was about keeping the grouping reformist rather than revisionist, widening its strategic horizon without allowing it to be antagonistic. It was also expressly designed to accommodate different positions.

Sector-specific cooperation

The substantive bet was on expanding areas of practical cooperation, something PM Modi has framed often as a humanity-first or a people-centric approach⁹, moving BRICS “from files to real-life impact”¹⁰.

To this end, a broad range of programmes were announced, spanning trade facilitation and value chains, innovation and digital transformation, and newer areas of resilience, from energy and digital agriculture to infectious-disease surveillance and AI.

Not all these initiatives were equally consequential. Three deserve closer examination because they reveal where BRICS may be moving from declaration to practical cooperation: easing trade through customs and logistics cooperation; building innovation and digital linkages; and expanding cooperation in newer resilience sectors such as AI, energy and public health.

Trade facilitation and value chains is one area where the 2026 BRICS Declaration comes closest to translating cooperation into more concrete instruments. Customs cooperation moves a step closer to operationalisation through the voluntary AEO Action Plan 2026 and plans for a Joint Customs Enforcement Operation to become an annual initiative. There was also convergence on a BRICS Customs Agreement, although its conclusion remains subject to national processes and wider participation. On value chains, the Declaration advances work on a GVC Action Plan for 2026-2030

⁹PM's statement during the BRICS session on Environment, COP-30, and Global Health, PM India, 7 July 2025. https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pms-statement-during-the-brics-session-on-environment-cop-30-and-global-health/

¹⁰Prime Minister's Closing Remarks during the 18th BRICS Summit Session: “Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability: Shaping the Future for Inclusive Global Growth”, MEA, September 13, 2026. [https://www.mea.gov.in/speeches-statements?dtl/41785/English Translation of Prime Ministers Closing Remarks during the 18th BRICS Summit Session Resilience Innovation Cooperation and Sustainability Shaping the Future for Inclusive Global Growth September 13 2026](https://www.mea.gov.in/speeches-statements?dtl/41785/English%20Translation%20of%20Prime%20Ministers%20Closing%20Remarks%20during%20the%2018th%20BRICS%20Summit%20Session%20Resilience%20Innovation%20Cooperation%20and%20Sustainability%20Shaping%20the%20Future%20for%20Inclusive%20Global%20Growth%20September%2013%202026)

and establishes a new Logistics Supply-Chain Cooperation Framework. Neither the customs nor the value chain initiatives represent an entirely new agenda. BRICS has discussed resilient supply chains for years, but the 2026 Declaration gives that agenda greater structure and, in the GVC case, a multi-year horizon. What remains absent is a dedicated financing vehicle for the GVC and supply-chain agenda¹¹.

On innovation and digital cooperation there is forward movement, even though much of the architecture is still being built. The BRICS Incubator Network is new, while the proposed BRICS Startup Innovation Fund remains under consideration, with no corpus or funding commitment announced. PartNIR continues as the broader framework for industrial and technological cooperation, now supplemented by the Incubator Network and the already established Startup Knowledge Hub and Startup Forum. Digital cooperation is at a still earlier stage; the Declaration proposes a BRICS DPI repository and pilot projects rather than an operational shared platform. The direction is set; delivery will determine the significance¹².

In resilience sectors, energy cooperation now includes a Digital Centre of Excellence for Smart Grids and Energy Storage, launched earlier this year. But its emphasis remains on voluntary dialogue, knowledge-sharing and capacity building. The infectious-disease agenda offers a clearer example of gradual progress. The Integrated Early Warning System has been discussed since 2020, but the 2026 Declaration gives it some institutional shape by establishing a dedicated Sub-Working Group and Terms of Reference. AI, by contrast, remains largely cantered on governance and coordination, carrying forward the 2025 BRICS Leaders' Statement on Global Governance of AI, without creating a major new operational mechanism or funding vehicle.

The enlarged BRICS appears to have found its broadest common ground in practical cooperation, with reform and resilience as 'uniting themes'¹³ around which members have tended to come together. The gains are incremental rather than transformative, but this is where the grouping has appeared most capable of converting consensus into meaningful cooperation. The summit outcome bears out the Chair's consistent approach: to facilitate agreement where possible and keep the grouping moving on areas of shared interest.

Conclusion

¹¹BRICS New Delhi Declaration, Paragraphs 86, 87, 99,104, Ministry of External Affairs, 12 September 2026. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/41776>

¹²BRICS New Delhi Declaration, Paragraphs 68, 77, 81, Ministry of External Affairs, 12 September 2026. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/41776>

¹³EAM Jaishankar on the Successful BRICS Summit, ANI News, 14 September 2026. <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/eam-jaishankar-hails-successful-brics-summit-says-modi8217s-india-demonstrated-strong-convening-power20260914165547/>

Yet, the proliferation of BRICS' initiatives raises a more fundamental question about how they will be carried forward. An expanded membership, an extensive calendar of meetings, multiple ministerial tracks, and a growing portfolio of initiatives create a new risk: BRICS can become very busy without becoming correspondingly effective.

The problem is one of ownership and follow-through. Who owns an initiative once the annually rotating chair passes on? Who tracks the timetable, measures delivery, and prevents priorities from fading? Enlargement has made consensus harder, but it has also made implementation more demanding. The longer-term danger for BRICS may therefore be not paralysis but diffusion: too many priorities and too little institutional follow-through.

This is why India's continuity proposal matters. At the leaders' session on Inclusive Global Governance and Strengthening Multilateralism on September 12, PM Modi proposed a BRICS Continuity and Implementation Mechanism under the Troika¹⁴, with a secure digital repository recording the nodal point, timeline and implementation status of decisions. In doing so, India identified a central institutional weakness of BRICS, of initiatives that accumulate across successive presidencies without an equally strong architecture for following them through.

Significantly, however, the specific mechanism Modi proposed did not make it into the Declaration. While this acknowledges the need for "outcome oriented enhanced coordination, continuity and support for a long-term institutional development"¹⁵ and welcomes progress on an online archival database, it stops short of assigning to the Troika the systematic implementation role PM Modi had envisaged. The principle survived; the mechanism remains an open question.

The final verdict? BRICS 2026 demonstrated that eleven very different countries can reach consensus if they put their weight behind diplomacy and the notion of enhancing cooperation for global good. The harder test will be, in PM Modi's words, converting "ambition into action and our collective strength into global solutions"¹⁶.

¹⁴Opening Remarks by the Prime Minister during the 18th BRICS Summit Session: Inclusive Global Governance and Strengthening Multilateralism, MEA, September 12, 2026. <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements?dtl/41775>

¹⁵BRICS New Delhi Declaration, Paragraphs 138, Ministry of External Affairs, 12 September 2026. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents?dtl/41776>

¹⁶PM Address at the BRICS Business Forum 2026, September 11, 2026. https://www.mea.gov.in/speeches-statements?dtl/41768/English_Translation_of_Prime_Ministers_Address_at_the_BRICS_Business_Forum_2026_September_11_2026



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