

BRICS Moves to 'Competitive Coexistence' | Anuradha Chenoy

Professor Anuradha Chenoy joins Pascal Lottaz to examine BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and their evolving role in a multipolar world. They discuss India's relations with Russia, diplomatic engagement between rivals, and the legacy of Bandung and nonalignment. Chenoy explains proposals for national currency trade, alternative payment systems, and financial reform. The conversation explores sanctions, strategic autonomy, and the differences between military alliances and cooperative forums, asking how diverse countries can pursue competitive coexistence while maintaining engagement with the West. Anuradha's Links: Articles at Scroll: <https://scroll.in/author/27251> India's Foreign Policy and the Luxury of Strategic Autonomy: <https://www.epw.in/journal/strategic-affairs/indias-foreign-policy-and-luxury-strategic.html> The BRICS Plan for a New Financial Architecture (article record): <https://pure.jgu.edu.in/id/eprint/8836/> Transnational Institute profile: <https://www.tni.org/en/profile/anuradha-chenoy> Neutrality Studies Links: Neutrality Studies Substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Support Neutrality Studies: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Neutrality Studies shop: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Time Stamps 00:00 BRICS and the SCO in a changing world 06:52 India, Russia and Western pressure 10:13 The BRICS declaration and diplomacy 17:00 Bandung and the legacy of nonalignment 23:25 Sanctions, tariffs and financial reform 25:27 National currencies and alternative payments 28:40 Coexistence beyond military alliances 40:29 Iran, sanctions and international law

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies today with an update by Anuradha Chenoy, Professor Emeritus at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in India. Anu, welcome back.

#Anuradha Chenoy

Thank you. Thank you for having me.

#Pascal

Thanks for coming online, because there's a very important meeting going on, or was going on over the weekend, the BRICS meeting in New Delhi. We're very close to where you are now. You want to put that into a bit of a larger context, right? Can you give us the context first, and then we go into the BRICS meeting? What happened?

#Anuradha Chenoy

Right. So I think this was a very significant BRICS meeting. But the fact is that just 10 days before, there was another important meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which was on August 31st and 1st September in Bishkek, where, again, President Xi Jinping, President Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Modi, plus the Central Asian leaders, plus the President of Iran, all met in Bishkek. And I think they came out with some very important points. And just a week, 10 days after that, they again meet in the BRICS meeting and have the New Delhi Declaration, which we'll discuss. But the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which has not really caught the attention of strategic thinkers and analysts and just those, you know, our viewers, that itself was a very important meeting because it also showed the strength and the strategic relationship between Russia and China and their advance into Central Asia.

Central Asian countries. And this meeting, the SCO, as we call it, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, it started as a security grouping just after the time of 9/11, but it's moved into a very strong economic grouping. So this meeting had a very clear declaration on ports and routes, and it indicated how important these ports are and the logistics. It had declarations on finance, where the SCO countries exceed trade of billions of dollars also between themselves. And they have proposed an SCO Development Bank. So that is passed, and that would come up. So it will be a second, like the New Development Bank that the BRICS countries made. So this will be a Shanghai Cooperation Organization Development Bank.

And they proposed national currency settlements and an alternative payment system infrastructure. So, in sum, SCO is becoming an economic bloc, and it's diversifying. And a large number of trade agreements were signed here also. And they also had members of ASEAN and the Gulf Cooperation Council come as observers and potential partners. So what I'm saying is that countries outside the West, because, you know, of course Russia is also West, but this huge global collective outside the West is actually coordinating and getting together, and they're doing it fast, and it's happening every year. Of course, BRICS is the most important forum, but the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is yet another. So there are several plurilateral groupings coming together.

#Pascal

And may I just ask you, you know, BRICS always was centered around the economy, and I think it will stay like that. But the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was always more about, you know, this issue of terrorism that many of these countries had to grapple with in the early 2000s. And it always had that security component. I mean, it's even in the name. But now it seems that also that one, they are trying to attach a very strong, even stronger economic component with that development bank. So probably development financing for security purposes, but probably not in the way the West does it with its alliance systems, but probably more kind of local capacity-building kind of initiatives. But I guess the SCO has had a lot of those initiatives. Where do you see that new development bank in the SCO go? Because I don't think these countries have a big interest in duplicating structures very much, or do they?

#Anuradha Chenoy

No, you're absolutely right. Terrorism was an aspect. Intelligence sharing remains an aspect, and they've already established methods of doing that between SCO countries. Disaster management, early warning—you know, these things which matter between states on the issue of threats and security. But now it is shifting dramatically to economics and focusing on trade, because Russia, India, China, I think they're very clear that their way forward is through global trading, especially when the West is making barriers. They're sometimes violating the WTO. There's the issue of tariffs, of sanctions.

So they're making these fallback options of their own. Of course, these banks, whether it's the New Development Bank of BRICS or the bank which is proposed by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, they're very minimal compared to the IMF and World Bank, etc. But these are new initiatives, and they show the trend in which geoeconomics is moving. So for a multipolar world, you have a multipolar economic system and multipolar economic structures which support this multipolarity. That's where they're moving towards.

#Pascal

Right. So several initiatives for a diverse new setup of the global system. But just on the SCO, before we move to the BRICS, there was this moment when, during the SCO, Narendra Modi actually publicly said Russia should move toward peace. You know, India is the country of Mahatma Gandhi and so on. Peace, peace, peace. Please, Russia, go to a peace agreement with Ukraine. And Vladimir Putin was visibly annoyed. And in my corner of the internet, some people interpreted that as the United States putting pressure on India to put pressure on Russia, and this kind of sowing divisions, because you could see also Turkey and Kazakhstan actually doing something similar with Russia. How did you interpret that episode? And do you think it is relevant for the Russian-Indian relationship?

#Anuradha Chenoy

Hey, just a very quick note.

#Pascal

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#Anuradha Chenoy

Well, yeah, you're right about that, because Russia has explained to India very clearly that now suddenly they cannot have a ceasefire or go in for peace unilaterally, because that will mean that Ukraine, as a proxy of the West and NATO, will rearm, and it will only be a bit of a frozen conflict. This is a stage where Russia is moving fast and it's escalating. And most analysts believe that there's going to be a victory maybe in six, seven months. So they want a definite peace, and their red lines are clear. And I think they made it clear to India. But India has been under tremendous pressure from the U.S., you know, on Ukraine. And in fact, they've been threatened again with sanctions and tariffs—not sanctions, but tariffs—if they continue purchasing Russian oil.

But Indian purchase of Russian oil has actually increased. It's providing 50% of India's needs. Plus, we are importing—out of every three tons of fertilizer, one ton is from Russia. And then Ukraine was not mentioned at BRICS, nor was Iran, though there was a critique of Israel's policies in support of Palestine and the two-state solution, etc. So Ukraine as an issue was dropped at the time of the BRICS, but it did come up in SCO because the foreign minister went to Ukraine and then the prime minister went to the SCO meeting, and they did raise it in terms of, very generally, peace. And I think President Putin was very cool about it, and he thanked them for, you know, talking about peace. But he said, we will move according to, you know, how history unfolds this special military operation.

#Pascal

Yeah, but at the same time, it's clear that Russia does take into account what its partners in the Global South are saying. And you pointed out just before we started that this is now the third time these leaders are meeting within 10 days, right? So there's a lot of coordination going on. How do you think that this impacted the actual BRICS meeting? And what came out of it? I mean, what is in that declaration, and what of it is significant for the future?

#Anuradha Chenoy

Well, look, I think as everyone knows now, 40% of the world population is represented in the BRICS countries, a quarter of the global economy, one third of global GDP in purchasing parity terms, 20% of global exports, and now 35 to 40% of global oil production because Iran and UAE are now members of BRICS. So they do have heft. And though the international structures—the Bretton Woods institutions, IMF, World Bank, the Security Council—do not represent this voice, yet their decisions can and do have an impact. And these meetings now are leading to, they're signaling more coordination, compatibility, and different methodologies. The methodology is different than that of NATO. These are non-military alliances, and they're not even alliances. It's a platform where they get together.

#Pascal

I mean, it's so significant that at the BRICS meeting, you had Iran there. And correct me if I'm wrong, but the leader of the UAE was there as well, right? And they're basically in a war state, right? The UAE is the staunchest supporter of the United States. However, at the BRICS meeting, they were both there. I didn't see exactly what they did, but did you follow how they mingled?

#Anuradha Chenoy

Well, they had a bilateral relationship. It was facilitated by India. They had a bilateral, and the readout was that it was positive. They both expressed what their views and what their positions were. And I'm sure Iran kind of reassured them that they weren't attacking UAE, but they were attacking U.S. bases. And they have been cornered to such an extent that they were. And the BRICS states also had a statement saying that they did want this kind of, you know, freedom of navigation, where they said about seafarers, their safety. But Iran also explained that they were in a, you know, kind of a situation where they had to defend their interests.

So there was a very anodyne statement about... The BRICS statement didn't mention... But the fact is they provided space for these two countries involved in kinetic, almost conflict, space to meet, as opposed to differentiating them. And, you know, with one side supporting one and the other supporting the other. Here, the entire Global South was arguing for peace, competitive coexistence—that you can have competition, but you can coexist simultaneously also. So it's almost like Kantian, you know, living together separately. Yeah.

#Pascal

I mean, it's almost like the second stage of the Cold War, when we finally moved from "let's destroy communism" to coexistence, right? System coexistence. And BRICS, in a sense, is already there. And it's proving again, it's not an alliance. It's a framework, a framework under which even very competing visions of geopolitics can exchange. So in that sense, it's a very positive thing. And what surprises me is that they were also able to come up with a joint declaration, because what usually happens in the West is that if one of them is not happy with it, especially one of the big ones, they just sabotage the entire affair. And then there's no final statement at all. And that's then taken as proof of weakness or proof of division. Whereas division, I mean, avoiding division is not something that BRICS is aiming for, is it?

#Anuradha Chenoy

Absolutely. And the thing is that, you know, just three weeks earlier, there was a foreign ministers' meeting where the Iranian and UAE foreign ministers were present, and they were not able to come to a kind of common statement. So what India did was that the chair of the meeting, which was, you know, our foreign minister, he came up with a collective statement asking for kind of peace and coexistence. But at this meeting, there was no such friction because they had learned how to accommodate these divergent interests and use linguistically a language that pleased all of them. So

the first sentence in this meeting, it says that BRICS deplores all forms of unprovoked aggression. Now, unprovoked aggression.

#Pascal

And deplores, not condemns.

#Anuradha Chenoy

Deplores, exactly. And this pleased both, because Iran feels it's provoked, and Russia feels that their aggression is provoked. So when you use the word "deplores all forms of unprovoked aggression" and argues for dialogue and diplomacy, it suited all sides who are involved in the various conflicts.

#Pascal

Yeah. And this is, of course, also something, I mean, that could be extended, right? Even Ukraine could sign up to something like this. So, in a sense, it's a statement that is really formulated around the core of this multipolar world that, you know, we shouldn't do that. We deplore it, but we realize it still happens.

#Anuradha Chenoy

Yeah. So, and the whole focus, the geopolitical focus of BRICS was on strengthening multipolarity without saying, you know, naming any country, without being critical of any hegemon or critical of any particular one type of system. So it didn't mention Ukraine or Iran, but it mentioned Gaza, it mentioned Cuba, and others which they support, Third World countries which are in a... And the other interesting thing was, I feel, and I think it relates to neutrality studies and some work that you and I do, is that it said that BRICS is an extension of the Afro-Asian Conference of Bandung. Oh, did it say that? Okay. It says it very clearly. And, of course, from earlier, the Kazan meeting of BRICS, the Rio de Janeiro meeting of BRICS. So it draws a line that historicity of the Bandung Conference has come out for the first time. And that was clearly, you know, that was a foundational kind of arc of non-alignment.

#Pascal

And this is clearly the Indian hand, right? I think it's the Chinese.

#Anuradha Chenoy

It's the Chinese also, because the Chinese had a huge celebration on the anniversary, the 75th anniversary or 70th anniversary of Bandung. I think it was in Beijing last year, where they invited representatives of all the countries which were present at the Bandung Declaration. And if you see

Chinese documents on the Global South, they always mention Bandung because they were there. Later, they weren't part of the Non-Aligned Movement because they were aligned. They were communist and aligned with the Soviet Union, but they hold Bandung very closely.

#Pascal

True, because Bandung was so early. It was in 1955, and Red China was there, and Japan was there too, actually. So that later changed, right? They kind of went into their camps, but they were there in the beginning. And it was this first moment when I think the collective West kind of had this moment when they thought, like, what is happening here? A big international conference against colonialism and whatnot, and without us, we're not even invited. They took that very badly, actually. That was the first kind of shock. And it took 70 years. So you're saying now BRICS is starting to root itself in the Bandung moment and then the non-aligned movement. Because until now, BRICS and the non-aligned movement have stayed largely separate from each other, haven't they?

#Anuradha Chenoy

Well, the Non-Aligned Movement, which meets, and it's so large, you know, with 110 countries, and then there's that non-alignment plus China meet, the Group of 77 plus China, which they call it, you know, who coordinate their actions in the United Nations pretty well. But the non-aligned countries are all supporting BRICS, if you notice. They all have a similar position now, and they're all looking at strategic hedging. They're all looking to balance between the West. Obviously, you don't want to leave the West, but there's something they can balance with. They can have relations with China, Russia, India, Indonesia. And recently, China has kind of excused the tariffs of 53 African countries.

So Russia has done something similar. India has an India-Africa Forum, where they link with digital health, medicines, et cetera, lots of things. So there's a lot happening in the Global South, within the Global South, where BRICS countries, what they call the emerging economies and developing economies, are actually linking and taking each other's cause. And the fact is that these major BRICS countries are also part of the G20. So they carry that voice into larger forums, whether it's into the UN or G20 or, you know, BASIC, or into the Paris Agreements on climate. And the BRICS touched on all of these because it had 150 paragraphs with different aspects and a 45-page declaration, all of which is consensus.

#Pascal

Yeah, that's a huge achievement for such a big and diverse grouping. And so, in a sense, do you interpret this hint at the Afro-Asian past of the movement and BRICS and so on also as a hint toward a hopeful Afro-Asian future? Because until now, we really only have, I think, Egypt is the only African continent member of BRICS. And Egypt is, of course, kind of an Arab African country. We don't have a single Black African or Sub-Saharan—

#Anuradha Chenoy

Ethiopia.

#Pascal

Ah, Ethiopia. Sorry, Ethiopia is also there. You're right. It was added at the same time as Iran, wasn't it? Yeah. But you could move further. I mean, in the original Non-Aligned and Bandung Movement, Ghana was a very important member as well, right? And we see that Western Africa is... And sorry, of course, South Africa. I'm sorry, I'm forgetting a lot of states actually in the BRICS.

#Anuradha Chenoy

South Africa is a very important part of BRICS.

#Pascal

Yeah, sorry, sorry. I'll take that back. South Africa was there from the beginning, but it wasn't the focus point. The focal point was kind of Central Asian and South Asian.

#Anuradha Chenoy

Yeah, but now Indonesia is also a member, so we've got someone from ASEAN. So there's been a conscious attempt. A lot of countries have applied for membership and are partner countries. But there was an attempt to, you know, Brazil is there from Latin America. The BRICS wanted to include Argentina, but they're the ones who said no, ultimately. And ASEAN and the Gulf Cooperation Council has Iran and UAE as members, and they offered it to Saudi Arabia. And they've been very ambivalent, so they don't come for meetings, and they haven't said yes or no whether they are part of BRICS. So it has.

And I think the other important thing was it was a very strong condemnation of unilateral economic measures and sanctions, very clearly, several times, and about these tariff sanctions, these kind of tariffs which are being imposed on all countries, which they said don't go with WTO rules. And there are serious concerns about it. And this is, you know, disrupting global supply chains. And they recommended that there should be a proper engagement on how tariffs should be placed rather than these kind of protectionist measures which are going against what WTO said and most favoured nation status, where developing countries are not—so many tariffs are not imposed on them.

And the other thing is India, for example, as a BRICS country, proposed that the African Union be part of G20. So the concern for taking along the Global South is very evident in this. Also in this, there was a very strong statement on quota realignment in the IMF, and appealing that, you know,

in the IMF and World Bank, all these, especially the least developed and those who are going for loans—of course, so is India, Pakistan—they're all taking loans from the IMF. But the U.S. has a veto in the IMF because their weight in voting is much stronger.

So they said this should be made more proportional and more proportionate to the weight of the emerging markets and developing economies. So that was also there. And the other important thing, I think, was that it did not talk of de-dollarization because, you know, this is this threat which is being put about BRICS and the hate being generated, you know, that they're going to de-dollarize. There's no such plan. What the plan is, just trade with bilateral trade in national currencies and creating an infrastructure for unified payment systems where it will be parallel to SWIFT. India has a unified payment integrated system, UPI, which is used now by India and 11 other countries.

So the digital currencies, and it's very easy. Millions are using that. China has that system. Russia has that system. Brazil has that system. So there were proposals. They've set up a task force for studying this interoperability of cross-border payments and messaging initiatives so that everyone is not just dependent on SWIFT. And in this, they also said that it should be voluntary. Whoever wants to join it can. It just makes trade easier. No one size fits all. That's the words they use. But the approach is to resolve and promote and respect national priorities in terms of trading and financial structures.

So then, of course, there was an emphasis that the New Development Bank should grow and they should lend more in local currencies. At the moment, only 30% is lent in local currencies. But the New Development Bank has adhered to international geopolitics. For example, they have not loaned to Russia because of sanctions. Then they also have the CRA, or the reserve, but that has not been functioning. So BRICS said they would reform the rules in it so that it starts functioning. So overall, there were 150 outcomes, and it had everything on agriculture, on sustainable knowledge, on traditional medicines, on skills, on building women's workforce.

And interestingly, they endorsed Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, security and peace. That is a very path-breaking policy, a resolution for the women's movement, who've struggled for years to get women on negotiating tables, on political tables. And every country passed it, and it's international law, but many countries have not implemented it. And BRICS, for the first time, has mentioned Security Council Resolution 1325, which is a good sign for the women's movement.

#Pascal

Yeah, and it's also one more of these ways in which BRICS links up with the United Nations, right? It's clearly signaling it is a forum in support of the United Nations' overall frameworks, not a replacement or something, as some people sometimes talk about it. But one of the things that fascinates me is that all of the things that you just discussed are the outcome of a plurilateral development, right? The way that these countries organize is not by Vladimir Putin saying, like, "Hey, everybody meet in Moscow," and then implement, like, top-down.

This is done with Sherpas who go to each other, the different ministries that start interconnecting and then do things on their own, and in the end deliver back to the individual countries, like organizing places that then link up and create these documents. So it's a much more organic approach than, let's say, the NATO or EU way of doing things, which is very much the pyramid, the classical pyramid we know. I mean, what do you make of the fact that it's such a comprehensive package, that it was even possible to negotiate that?

#Anuradha Chenoy

I think the fact is that the Global South has never been hegemonic, you know, at any point in history. It's also—they've had a history of being colonized, and anti-colonial movements, national liberation movements, which gave strength to that nation-building. So that's quite strong over there, even though the business and, you know, all these countries have regimes and elites which are very integrated with the North. And they're very attached to the North. And sometimes they even function on behalf of the North.

#Pascal

Yeah.

#Anuradha Chenoy

You can see that in many of these countries where they're interested, the economic elite is interested in investing more in the North than sometimes they are even in their own countries. If they get profits, they're very linked with AI and technology, information technology structures, and so they don't want to overturn these, but they also want to have alternatives, fallback options, what we call strategic hedging. And now China is presenting many alternatives to this. They have their own AI grouping, just like the US is making one. India is part of that, and many countries of the Global South are part of the Chinese AI new setup.

It's quite technical, so we can talk about that at some other point. But overall, these countries now feel that they should be part of global decision-making structures, which was like a pyramid, whereas they want multiple pyramids, all connected, without being antagonistic. So they want this coexistence as opposed to, you know, kinetic and real or unreal conflicts, threats, zero-sum games, security dilemmas. They seem to be moving away from it. But within all these countries, including in India, there are some strategic analysts who believe India should sabotage BRICS. They've used these kind of words, some important strategic analysts.

Yeah, they said we should go with the West. There's nothing in the BRICS. But there are others. And India, you can see, has taken the middle path again. They have not gone with those very influential think tanks which are talking about dissociating or distancing from BRICS and linking with the West. And there was a fear, you know, when the prime minister visited Israel just a few days before the

Iran war. A lot of people thought that they're actually moving towards this I2U2, which they had developed: UAE, US, Israel, and India, or Quad, etc. But again, they've come back to the center. So they shift between center and right in foreign policy.

#Pascal

Yeah, but it seems to me that BRICS itself, the way it is made and the way that these countries now function, they, in theory and in practice, actually display the multipolar world. As in, okay, we don't demand any allegiance, right? If you're part of BRICS or the SCO, it doesn't mean that you cannot be a buddy with the United States in the Pacific or something like that. It is the other side, again, that tries to create this bipolar moment, right? As in, okay, we need to build them up as the enemy, but BRICS is not playing along. The United States did something really dumb recently, right, with this whole, what is it, the economic D-Day idea of Scott Bessent of, like, telling India, look, you must stop all trade with Russia or else, like, 50% tariffs, and, like, the dumbest things on earth.

Right. I mean, he didn't say five million. I'm exaggerating. But the idea was this: 100% tariffs unless you stop all trade. And India, unsurprisingly, said, like, no, that's not what we're going to do. China also said, like, no, that's not what we're going to do. We're just not going to play along. And that kind of went away. So the one thing the Americans didn't do yet is to say, like, guys, if you want to trade with us, you need to exit BRICS. They didn't do that. They could do it. But it's kind of—it doesn't work anymore, right? It's building up the other one as a significant other, as a bloc. So BRICS seems to be escaping being made into a bloc by itself, isn't it?

#Anuradha Chenoy

Absolutely. And also, Pascal, you can see what happened at 9/11, now that we had that anniversary. Yeah. They said, "You're either with us or against us."

#Pascal

They didn't say it again.

#Anuradha Chenoy

They said it then. But when they're saying this, that you either stop trading with Russia or you're not going to be with us, it's a similar kind of positioning.

#Pascal

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

#Anuradha Chenoy

You know, they don't say this again, but in their bilateral relations, the kind of pressure they put is, you're either with us and with NATO, or you're against us. So, but the BRICS now, because of their solidarity, are willing to push back against this bullying. Those who, you know, within BRICS also, there are the centrists, there's the right wing who would like to go with the West, and there are the radicals, you know, many in Latin America, et cetera, who are clearly anti-hegemonic. So even their argument on multipolarity has differences, where China and Russia are strongly anti-hegemonic in their behavior. But they still engage.

They're all— all BRICS countries are in talks with the U.S. They don't want hegemony, but Xi is going to the U.S. He's not saying, "I'm not talking to you," you know, because we are against each other. But they are aware that they're in a stranglehold kind of competition. Putin and Trump are at loggerheads. There's a kinetic war in which the U.S. and Europe are supporting Ukraine with war aid, information, everything. Ukraine could collapse without it. But yet, when President Trump picks up the phone or sends Witkoff and Kushner, they're welcome there. So they're all willing to engage, and they do not, they really do not want wars. They're willing to sign non-aggression pacts, whatever the West wants. But the West wants to continue with new forms of imperial dominance.

#Pascal

Yeah, yeah, it does.

#Anuradha Chenoy

Whereas these countries continue with decolonization. Sometimes it's one step forward. Sometimes it's two steps backward. You know, they do compromise.

#Pascal

The interesting thing to me is, of course, the approaches that these countries are taking. For a long time, I was saying that nobody outside of the West is building alliances. And it strikes me that that is still true, although we now see a couple of places in which something like alliances, like military alliances, I mean hard alliances, are forming. We have an agreement between the North Koreans and the Russians. We have agreements now between Russia and Iran, although it's still a very weak security agreement. But we do have this idea from a month ago of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. However, they never published a text. It doesn't seem to me anything that is very strong. And Saudi Arabia ever since has been hit, and the other two just forgot to mention that. So still, I mean, overall, we are not in a world of alliances, right? We are in a world of actually anti-alliance behavior from the entire rest of the world that's not Europe or North America.

#Anuradha Chenoy

Yeah, so the West is still into alliances because they still have NATO, and they still have gone in for AUKUS. And they have these—they're building these alliances with various specific islands. So they're continuing with that. But the rest of the world, they have these platforms because they don't have a common foreign policy, whereas the West has a common foreign policy. But Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey do not have a common foreign policy. They don't have a common threat. You know, so for Pakistan, India is a threat, but not for Turkey and Saudi Arabia. And Egypt might join this one. That's what they're saying. So it could become a stronger defense pact. But those countries of West Asia, they don't see India as a threat. They see them as a partner.

#Pascal

It's just such a different approach. In a sense, if you have to put it in a nutshell, it's something like coordination for coexistence instead of integration for hegemony, right? Something like that.

#Anuradha Chenoy

Absolutely. You're right on. I think you formulated it very well. So that's what it is.

#Pascal

That probably helps us to understand how they're also doing that. They just coordinate among each other, and they go as far as you can get. And there you stop. If you don't have agreement, you don't have agreement, but you find another formulation. And that's how BRICS now continues. And the next year will be organized again by South Africa, or by...

#Anuradha Chenoy

No, in China. Interesting. China is. Yeah. So China and Russia are actually leading BRICS. And India still, you know, wants it to be very consensus-based, so that there's no—and Brazil and South Africa, they are obviously closer to the West than Russia and China are. So they kind of, you know, they say, "We're not anti-West, we're just non-West, and the West should understand us, that there are different ways of thinking, acting, coordinating, and building platforms which are not how the West has done it, and they must understand the differences."

#Pascal

Do you think that some countries like—let's take Iran—that have been under, you know, relentless pressure from the West, not just since the war that broke out this year slash last year, but for the last 25, 30 years—I mean, ever since '79, basically, right? Do you think they will be able to capitalize on the outcomes of BRICS, the movement of BRICS? Because at the moment, I mean, everything is still being built, right? There's no direct way of circumventing Western sanctions, although Iran is

already able to trade a good part of its oil with China and so on. The United States tries to bomb them to stop that. But the fact that they need to use bombs means to me, oh yeah, the structural power is declining. Do you think that there are new ways in which Iran and other countries can then start actually, like, concretely profit from what BRICS is creating?

#Anuradha Chenoy

Well, look, you know, since BRICS is not a geopolitical bloc, it's not a bloc at all, but it enables a lot of bilateral engagements and ways of thinking and exchange of ideas and a solidarity that, yes, you know, these countries are in solidarity with Iran. They feel that they've been victims of—they didn't provoke an aggression, but they've been attacked by Israel and the U.S. three times. And the Strait of Hormuz was actually open and now it's closed, not because of Iran. And so the terms of engagement have changed.

So they recognize all this, but they do not want to alienate the West either. They want it to be literally, you know, a global system which everyone can benefit from because of trade disarmament, rechanneling finances, and all this comes out, if anyone cares to read the statement. It has from agriculture to subsidies to women's development to disarmament to zones of peace. It has everything. I mean, imagine, there are 45 pages of declarations. So it's a different way of thinking, and you can contrast it with what comes out of NATO, let's say.

#Pascal

Yeah.

#Anuradha Chenoy

You know, it's so wonderful if some student of yours would like to do a comparative analysis. It's all there to see for anyone. You don't have to have a thesis for it. But this difference is not being recognized because of this Eurocentrism and now this American-centricism. That intellectual culture which dominates from the West is so strong that ideas of the East get left out. And these very old ideas of ethics and coexistence, there is a thread which also runs through them.

#Pascal

Oh, there is. And there's also this kind of, you know, mental prison, actually, that's becoming more and more obvious that the West itself has trapped itself in. I mean, even in my native Switzerland right now, we are debating a neutrality initiative that we're going to vote on on the 27th of September. I am, of course, in the pro committee, but the other side is fighting it almost uniquely, almost solely with the argument that this would enable trade with Vladimir Putin, and that would be evil. Switzerland needs to uphold international law by applying unilateral coercive measures. And whenever I say, like, "But look, two-thirds of the planet says the latter coercive measures are illegal."

The United Nations says it's illegal. I mean, the majority says it's illegal. They say, like, no, because of the Security Council, we need to be able to uphold international law. This is international law. Even in Switzerland, people define international law as what we make of it, not as how it is codified. And this is a mental prison. And I think the BRICS and so on is actually working on, you know, not at breaking that, but at creating the space outside of it in order to keep developing. It's really fascinating why the West is going back into its colonial mindset even deeper. The BRICS and so on are going out of it even further and further.

#Anuradha Chenoy

That's right. And there's no antagonism with the West, despite those, you know, five centuries of colonialism, exploitation, et cetera. The BRICS still wants, you know, they just want dignified, equal relations and not vassalization, not extractive vassalization, and they want to share technology. And they're willing to give a lot for this, but I don't think the West is really— they want that hegemony, hegemonic control, dominance, that superiority, the supremacy, and quite frankly, a bit of the racism. Yeah.

#Pascal

Yeah, I mean, the thing is, a good part of the West cannot actually reason within what you just explained. They're just like, it's not within their conceptual framework. So it doesn't really make sense to them. That's why then immediately they think it's an anti-Western affair. But yeah, this will still take many, many decades.

#Anuradha Chenoy

But also, you can see the entire Global South, China, and all of the globe, they don't see Russia as a threat, and they can't understand why Europe is seeing Russia as a threat because, one, Russia has been on your side in World War II, which was very decisive. And why is this? And we were not part of these. These were actually not even World War I and II. They were European wars because the Global South were colonies. They didn't have a say in those wars. They were dragged into it. So there were European wars. And now you have a third European war at the same level as World War I and II. But now, because the Global South has a say, it hasn't become a world war.

#Pascal

That is true. Yeah, yeah. It's the Global South that is saving us from World War III by not joining it. So thank you, Global South. And thank you, Anu, very much. I mean, this was a very nice kind of tour de force of what happened. For people who want to follow you and see more of your work, where should they go?

#Anuradha Chenoy

Actually, the thing is, I'm so busy that I don't have a Substack and things, but I write a lot, and it's just available on the internet. If you Google me, I write for Economic and Political Weekly. I do their strategic affairs column, and I write chapters and books and in the popular, you know, online media. So I do write a lot. But if they also want something, they can always email me at Chinoy@gmail.com, and I send it to them. Maybe I'll start a Substack sometime.

#Pascal

Substack is a very nice way of distributing little nuggets of what's going on or what we're working on. I recommend it highly. And once you have one, we will, of course, also distribute it here via Neutrality Studies. Until then, I'll put a couple of links to some of your articles into the description box below, the ones that I find. And until the next time, Anuradha Chenoy, thank you so much for your time today.

#Anuradha Chenoy

Thank you. Thank you, Pascal. Thank you for having me, and thank you very much.