

Security in a Fragmenting World: Challenges and Strategies for the Global South.

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Introduction

The world is more divided than ever with growing geopolitical conflicts, economic instability, and emerging security challenges. For Global South, these challenges are particularly acute. The term “Global South” is often used to describe countries that are generally less economically developed, often located in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania. It is more of a geopolitical and economic concept rather than a strict geographical term. The Global South is often contrasted with the Global North, which includes wealthier, more industrialized nations such as the U.S., Canada, Western Europe, Japan, and Australia.



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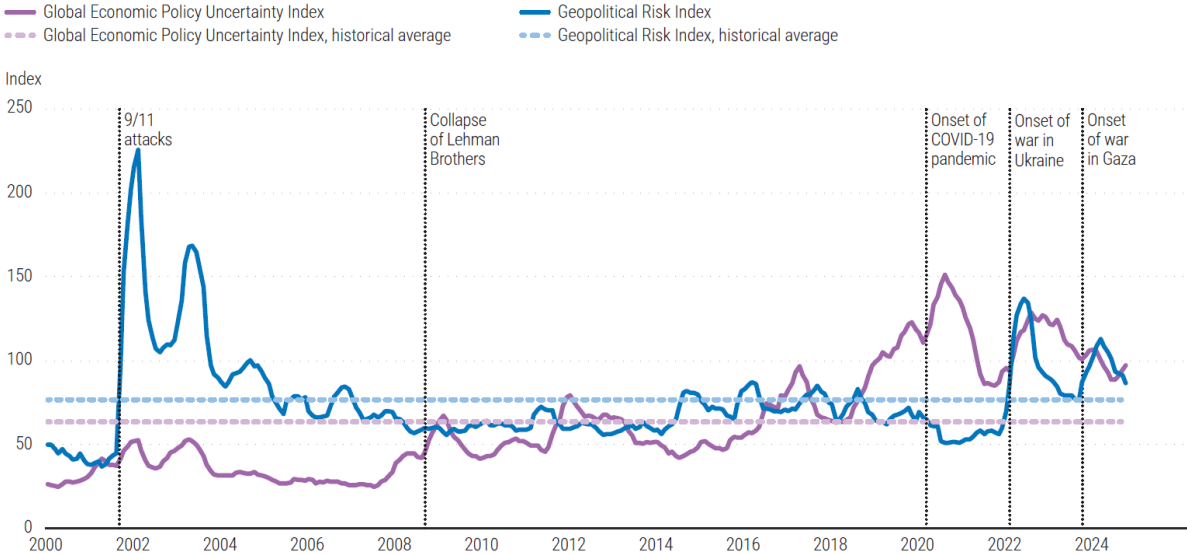
Countries of global south face common challenges such as economic underdevelopment, political instability, and environmental degradation. These issues are further intensified by growing global fragmentation. Today, big powers like the U.S., China, and Russia are competing for influence, which creates challenges for the Global South. These challenges include economic instability and new security threats. Countries in this region must find ways to navigate these challenges while keeping their independence. To do this, they are using strategies like working with multiple countries at once, reducing their reliance on external powers, and developing their own capabilities to deal with cybersecurity, space security, and climate change. By exploring these strategies, countries in the Global South can become stronger and more stable in a rapidly changing world.

Challenges Facing the Global South

- 1) **Geopolitical Rivalries:** As geopolitical rivalries intensify among developing nations, it also complicating Global South's quest for stability and development. Countries in this region are often caught in the crossfire of competing interests. Meanwhile, major powers like the U.S., China, and Russia are vying for influence in this region, often using strategic partnerships, economic aid, and military alliances to extend their reach. The current global fragmentation is driven by rising tensions between those major powers.

Figure 1

Global economic policy uncertainty and geopolitical risk



Source: UN DESA, based on data from Economic Policy Uncertainty.
 Notes: The Global Economic Policy Uncertainty Index and Geopolitical Risk Index are based on a six-month moving average. The historical average of the indices refers to the arithmetic mean during the period from January 2000 to October 2024.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an example of how geopolitical rivalries play out in the Global South. BRI is a strategy to expand its economic and political influence in the Global South. By investing in infrastructure projects across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, China aims to create a network of economic dependencies. It also raises concerns about debt traps and strategic dependencies. To counter Global South's dependency on China, The U.S. and its allies have responded with initiatives like the Build Back Better World (B3W)², which further complicates the geopolitical landscape. Meanwhile, Russia has been actively seeking to expand its influence in the Global South, particularly in Africa and Latin America. Following its isolation by Western countries after the Ukraine conflict, President Vladimir Putin has declared that Russia is a natural leader of the anti-colonial movement³ among developing countries, with the aim of ending U.S. hegemony. Putin's strategy of offering arms, mercenaries, and energy to gain influence seems to make inroads in Africa, especially in the Sahel and southern Africa. Beyond the rivalries between major powers, the Global South also faces intra-regional competitions. These rivalries often involve leadership struggles within regions or between neighboring countries.



² Widakuswara, Patsy . 2021. "Build Back Better World': Biden's Counter to China's Belt and Road." VOA. November 4, 2021. <https://www.voanews.com/a/build-back-better-world-biden-s-counter-to-china-s-belt-and-road/6299568.html>.

³ Young, Benjamin R. 2024. "Russia Is Riding an Anti-Colonial Wave across Africa." Rand.org. Foreign Policy. September 16, 2024. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2024/09/russia-is-riding-an-anti-colonial-wave-across-africa.html>.



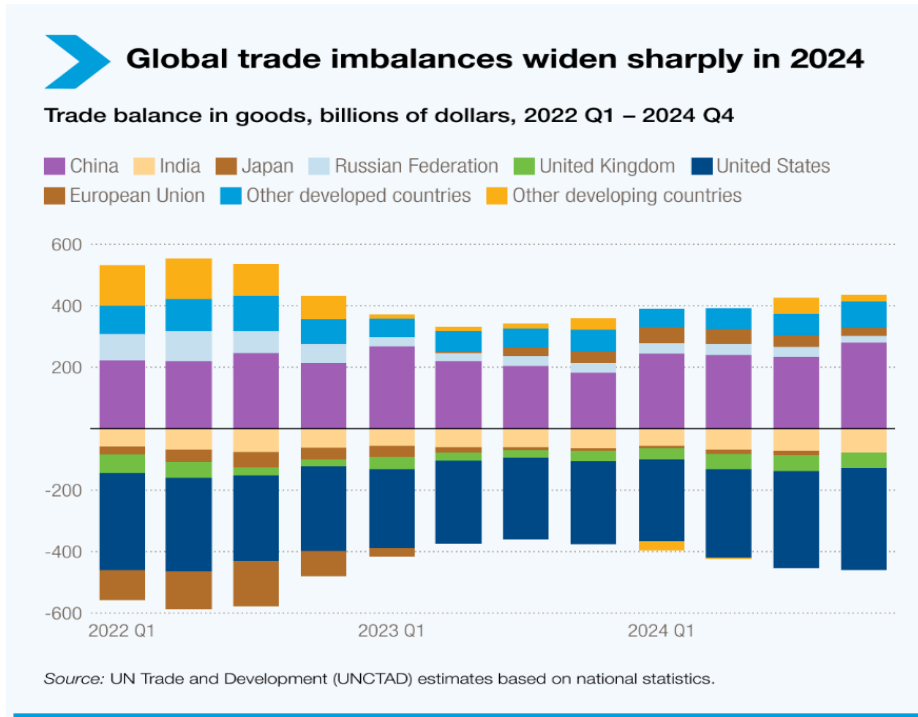
05 March 2024, Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou: Russia's President Putin and Burkina Faso's interim military president Traoré can be seen together on a poster with the slogan "Support for the transition" on a street in a suburb of the Burkinabe capital Ouagadougou.

(Source: Getty Images)

- 2) **Economic Fragmentation:** Geopolitical rivalry has led to a fragmentation of the world economy. The fragmentation of trade and investment flows, poses significant challenges for developing economies. Developing countries often find themselves in precarious economic situations due to the increasing frequency of trade wars and sanctions instigated by major powers⁴. According to UNCTAD's Global Trade Report 2025,⁵ The gap between developing and advanced economies is widening.

⁴ Personal, Munich, Repec Archive, and Jonathan Muya. 2024. "M P RA Geopolitical Fragmentation in the World and Its Consequences on Developing Countries: A Game of Chess on a Fractured Board." https://mpr.a.uni-muenchen.de/122708/1/MPRA_paper_122708.pdf.

⁵ UNCTAD. 2025. "Global Trade in 2025: Resilience under Pressure." UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD). March 14, 2025. <https://unctad.org/news/global-trade-2025-resilience-under-pressure>.



As trade uncertainty grows, global cooperation and balanced policies remain critical. While China’s stimulus measures and lower inflation in some regions could support trade, protectionism and shifting policies in major economies remain key risks. Ongoing conflicts, geopolitical tensions and potential trade restrictions, as well as climate risks pose significant challenges to the World Economy.⁶ The global economy is set to grow at a slower pace than the pre-pandemic average of 3.2 per cent recorded between 2010 and 2019, reflecting ongoing structural challenges such as weak investment, slow productivity growth, high levels of debt, and demographic pressures. Many developing countries are still experiencing scarring effects from the pandemic and other shocks of the past few years. The growth outlook for the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, and small island developing States is challenging, with growth projected to remain below trend levels.

⁶ “World Economic Situation and Prospects: February 2025 Briefing, No. 187 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs.” 2025. Un.org. 2025. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/world-economic-situation-and-prospects-february-2025-briefing-no-187/>.

Figure 2

Global and regional inflation

◆ Average 2010–2019 ■ 2023 ■ 2024^e ■ 2025^f

Percentage change (YoY)



Source: UN DESA, based on estimates and forecasts produced with the World Economic Forecasting Model.

Notes: e = estimates; f = forecasts; YoY = year-over-year. Regional and country group averages are GDP-weighted. Afghanistan, Argentina, the State of Palestine, Sudan, and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela are excluded.

Vulnerable countries of Global South face numerous challenges, including rising debt servicing burdens, limited fiscal space, and weak investments. Conflict, political instability, and rising trade tensions often exacerbate their economic difficulties. Many remain heavily dependent on commodity exports, leaving them particularly exposed to global market fluctuations.

3) Security Threats:

The international system has never been free of violence and inequity. The Global South faces a myriad of security threats that are increasingly complex and interconnected. These threats range from traditional security challenges to emerging ones, including cyber threats, space security risks, and climate-related security issues. Each of these threats requires a nuanced understanding and strategic responses tailored to the unique challenges of the Global South.

For example, Cyber Security is a critical concern, as many countries in the Global South lack the infrastructure and expertise to counter sophisticated cyber threats. The increasing reliance on digital technologies for economic development and governance makes these countries vulnerable to cyber-attacks, which can disrupt critical infrastructure and

compromise national security. Countries in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and Latin America face unique cyber threats stemming from weak digital infrastructure, outdated technology, and limited cybersecurity frameworks. Low digital literacy further exacerbates vulnerabilities, as users often lack awareness of basic cybersecurity practices, increasing the risk of phishing and malware attacks.⁷ Governance challenges also hinder the development of effective cybersecurity policies, leaving these nations exposed.

Strategic Responses: Multi-alignment and De-risking

Multi-alignment: Countries in the Global South are increasingly adopting multi-alignment strategies to mitigate geopolitical risks. In recent years, they have increased demands for significant reforms to create a fairer global system. This push is driven by economic, social, and climate crises, as well as frustration over unequal COVID-19 vaccine access. The war in Ukraine further worsened their economic struggles by increasing oil prices and essential goods costs, leading to a new debt crisis and reinforcing calls for global reform. The dissent of the South and the defense of its demands for reforming the global system have taken various forms, including putting pressure on existing institutions, the dynamism of the BRICS, and the creation of new institutions bringing Global South countries together.⁸

⁷ "Digital Skills in the Global South: Gaps, Needs, and Progress." n.d. Www.giga-Hamburg.de. <https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/giga-focus/digital-skills-in-the-global-south-gaps-needs-and-progress>.

⁸ "Multi-Alignment and De-Risking: The Global South Response to World Fragmentation | Ifri." 2024. Ifri.org. October 31, 2024. <https://www.ifri.org/en/papers/multi-alignment-and-de-risking-global-south-response-world-fragmentation>.



Leaders of the BRICS alliance

Global South countries are increasing their mutual relationship through the strategy of multi-alignment. It's basically the diversification of alliances; aiming to strengthen and protect their interests within the global system. This new strategy of multi-alignments breaks from the non-alignment strategy that prevailed in the alliances and positions of these countries between late 1950s until the late 1970s. This new strategy has accompanied significant transformations in the global system, particularly after the end of post-World War II bipolarity. During the Cold War, these countries pursued non-alignment to avoid siding with either the U.S.-led liberal world or the Soviet socialist camp. Today, the world is multipolar, with the decline of U.S. dominance and the rise of emerging powers like China, India, Brazil, Russia, and South Africa, which formed the BRICS group.

The multi-alignment strategy adopted by Global South countries is a pragmatic approach to protect their interests amid global uncertainties. Unlike Cold War-era non-alignment, it is not driven by ideology but by transactional diplomacy and flexibility. This strategy allows dialogue with all global powers while reducing dependence on Western alliances, as seen in Saudi Arabia's recent move⁹ to join BRICS. It enhances the geopolitical and

⁹ Köhler-Suzuki, Nicolas, Pascal Lamy, and Marco Sibona. n.d. Accessed March 27, 2025. https://institutdelors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/PP298_Comparing_Economic_Security_Strategies_Fabry_Kohler-Suzuk_Lamy_Sibona_FR.pdf.

economic independence of Global South countries, enabling them to navigate global shifts while challenging the traditional expectations of major powers. Implementing this strategy requires specific conditions that many Global South countries may lack. Key factors include geostrategic, financial, economic, or resource advantages to resist pressure from major powers and former allies. Political stability is also crucial to maintain consistent geostrategic decisions.

Many researchers have studied the evolving positions of certain Global South countries in this multipolar world. Nirupama Rao, former Indian Foreign Secretary, discusses India's strategy of neutrality and independence in an uncertain, multipolar world in her article "The Upside of Rivalry: India's Great Power Opportunity."¹⁰ She emphasizes India's efforts to navigate complex global geopolitics while maintaining a balanced and independent foreign policy. India's foreign policy navigates complex relationships with China, the West, Russia, and the Global South through a multi-alignment strategy. Despite ongoing border conflicts and military tensions, India maintains strong trade ties with China and remains a member of the China-dominated Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Simultaneously, India fosters close relations with the West, particularly France and the US, collaborating on advanced technology, security, and defense, and is a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) to counter China's influence in Asia. With Russia, India balances its stance by refusing to condemn the Ukraine intervention while continuing to rely on Russian military equipment and diplomatic support to ease tensions with China. India seeks to expand its influence in the Global South through active participation in the BRICS group and engagement in Africa. This pragmatic approach allows India to maintain strategic flexibility while advancing its national interests in a multipolar world.

¹⁰ Rao, Nirupama. 2023. "The Upside of Rivalry." *Foreign Affairs*. April 18, 2023. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/india/modi-new-delhi-upside-rivalry>.

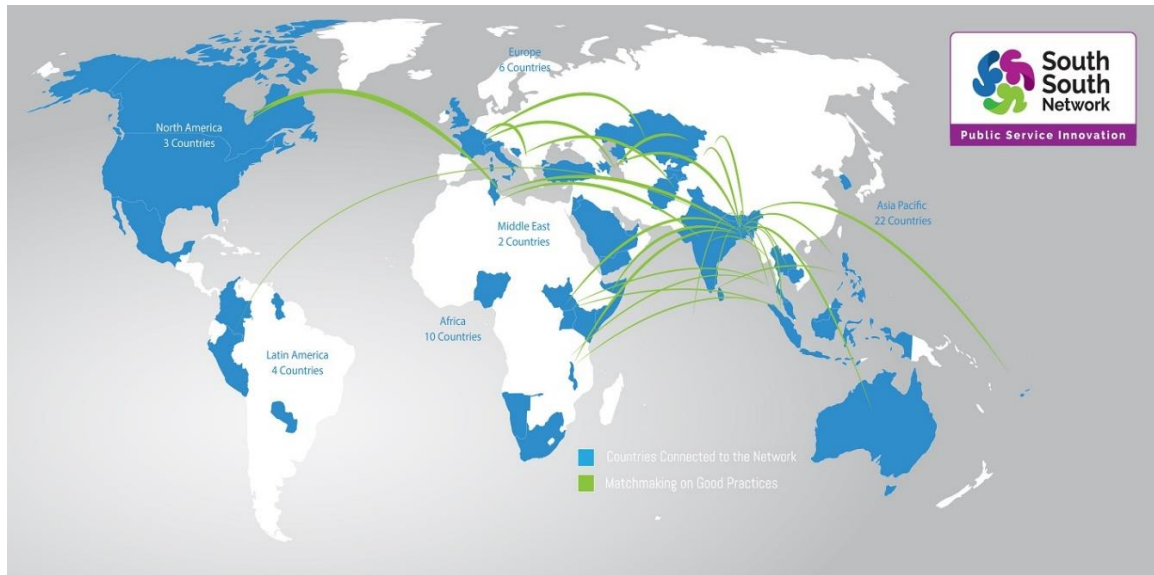
Another nation, Saudi Arabia's strategic choices reflect a multi-alignment approach, balancing ties with major powers. While remaining a key US ally, it collaborates with Russia through OPEC to control global oil prices. With Chinese mediation, Saudi Arabia has worked to ease tensions with Iran and addressed various regional security concerns. Countries in the Global South have adapted these strategies to the multipolar world by responding to global challenges and shifting dynamics. They took initiatives like revitalizing BRICS and multiplying their alliances and with that they aim to better protect their interests and play a more significant role in reforming the global order.

De-risking: The term “de-risking” was first used by the President of the European Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen, on March 30, 2023, in a conference on the relations between the European Union and China.¹¹ In her speech, she highlighted the importance of the relationship but noted inequalities favoring China due to government distortions, advocating for a diplomatic de-risking strategy to address these imbalances. Sooner, De-risking became a global response from the US and European and Western countries to reduce strategic dependence on China. In Global South, the de-risking strategy has influenced especially after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which led to a significant shift in trade flows. A key trend is the increase in trade and interdependence among Global South nations while decreasing ties with Western countries. For example, Russia's interdependence with China grew by 5.8% in 2023¹², while its interdependence with the European Union (EU) fell by 4%. Similarly, Brazil's interdependence with China rose by 3.3%, while with the EU it fell by 0.8%. This shift is also marked by greater investment diversification and the acceleration of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)¹³ between Global South countries.

¹¹ Leyen, Ursula von der. 2023. “Press Corner.” European Commission - European Commission. March 30, 2023. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_2063.

¹² “Goods Trade Posts 1% Growth in the First Quarter of 2024 after 2023 Plateau.” 2024. Wto.org. 2024. https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news24_e/stat_02jul24_e.htm.

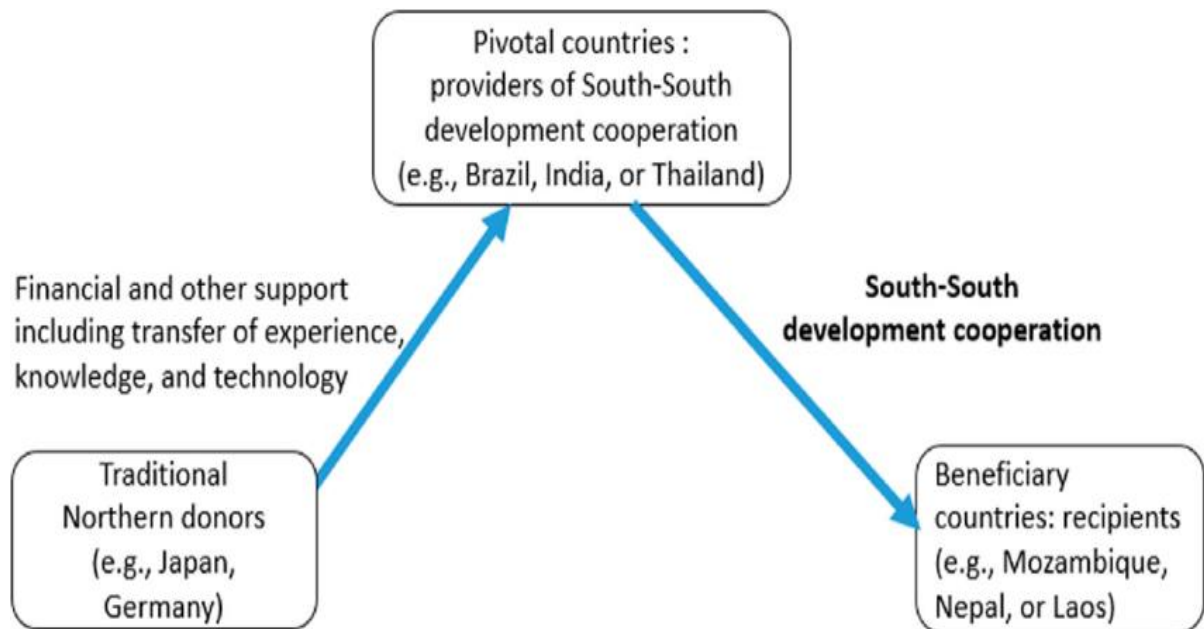
¹³ UNCTAD. 2024. “Global Trade Update (July 2024).” UNCTAD. July 2, 2024. <https://unctad.org/publication/global-trade-update-july-2024>.



Economic de-risking involves strengthening cooperation within the Global South to reduce reliance on external actors. Initiatives like regional trade agreements and investment partnerships help diversify economic ties, making these economies more resilient to global shocks. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are examples of regional frameworks that promote economic integration and stability. AfCFTA, for instance, aims to create a single market for African countries, enhancing intra-regional trade and reducing dependence on external markets. This initiative not only fosters economic growth but also provides a platform for African nations to negotiate with other global powers from a position of strength.

South-South Cooperation: South-South Cooperation plays a vital role in addressing transnational security threats like terrorism. By sharing intelligence, best practices, and resources, countries in the Global South can enhance their collective security without relying solely on external powers. For example, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has facilitated cooperation among its member states to combat terrorism and violent

extremism. This cooperation includes joint training exercises, intelligence sharing, and legal assistance to strengthen counter-terrorism frameworks.



Source: ResearchGate

Triangular Cooperation: Triangular cooperation, involving developing countries, donor nations, and multilateral organizations, offers a framework for leveraging resources and expertise to address common challenges. This approach can facilitate technology transfer, capacity building, and joint problem-solving in areas such as climate change and economic development. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been instrumental in promoting triangular cooperation, particularly in areas like sustainable development and disaster management. By bringing together developing countries, donor nations, and international organizations, UNDP facilitates partnerships that enhance the capacity of Global South countries to address pressing development challenges.

Conclusion

To navigate the complex landscape of geopolitical rivalry and geoeconomic fragmentation, the Global South must adopt strategic approaches that balance engagement with major powers while preserving autonomy. This includes fostering regional institutions, promoting economic diversification, and engaging in multilateral forums to advocate for reforms that better serve their interests. Regional institutions like the African Union and ASEAN play a crucial role in promoting stability and cooperation within their respective regions. These organizations provide platforms for member states to coordinate policies, resolve conflicts, and negotiate with external powers from a position of strength. The future of security in the Global South will depend on the ability of its nations to navigate these complexities while fostering a more inclusive and equitable global order. Ultimately, the success of strategies like multi-alignment, de-risking, and regional cooperation etc will require a commitment to collective action, innovation, and diplomacy. By working together and leveraging their collective strengths, countries in the Global South can build a more secure and prosperous future in a rapidly changing world.