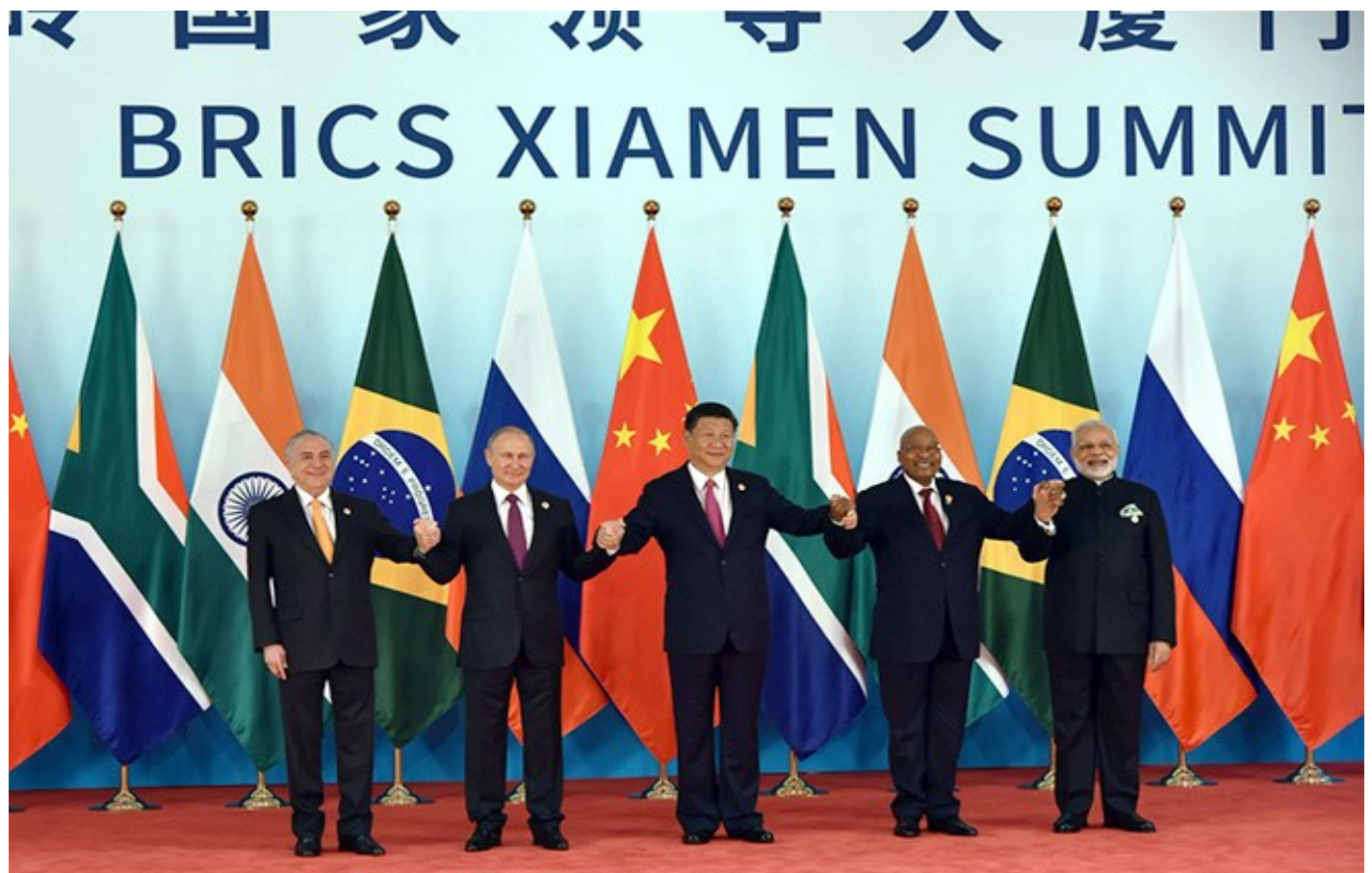


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After Doklam, India and China must begin anew at the Xiamen BRICS meet

- [Samir Saran](#)

India will have to learn the fine art of staring down the dragon to preserve its political space, while embracing China for some important economic opportunities. At Doklam, it did the former; will a different India turn up at BRICS?



BRICS leaders in Xiamen, China

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Leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) have gathered this past weekend for the ninth annual BRICS summit in Xiamen, China. The prolonged Himalayan standoff between India and China will cast its shadows on this meet and will certainly add a new dimension to discussions on the future of this

plurilateral.

The BRICS emerged out of a global order dominated and managed by the United States (US) post the break of the Soviet Union. The US led institutions catalysed global trade and financial flows, which in turn also helped in the organic growth of most of the BRICS economies. Despite their growth, their marginal role in management of key global institutions created an undesirable asymmetry in world affairs. BRICS came about as a vehicle to respond to this, and together they hoped, they would be able to loosen the vice-like grip the Atlantic system had on existing governance institutions.

There were two unstated principles that shaped the ethics of the BRICS formation. *First*, each nation placed a premium on sovereignty and its importance in the conduct of world affairs, and *second*, each state sought greater pluralism and equity in decision-making processes in a multipolar world.

The China and India standoff at Doklam compels us to revisit these organising principles. The Doklam incident was a contest around sovereign concerns. These concerns are rooted in history and muddled by China's determination to implement a political and economic arrangement across Asia that is insensitive to the territorial rights of India. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the associated China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are but thinly veiled attempts to shape an Asian order that plays by the Chinese rulebook alone. While BRICS symbolises a multipolar world, BRI and CPEC are the harsh face of an undesirable and unipolar Asia.

China's latest attempt at creating a 'BRICS Plus' platform, comprised of states who happen to be key actors in the BRI, makes it clear that it sees BRICS as an adjunct of the BRI and merely as a vehicle to catalyse its larger ambitions.

These events make it clear that we must shed the romantic notion that ideological convergence is possible within BRICS. Each member must see the group for what it is—a twenty first century 'limited purpose partnership' among states to achieve specific sets of outcomes. There is nothing inherently improper about such an alliance, however, if progress is to be made, it will be predicated on creating effectively designed institutions.

The most successful BRICS endeavour has been the creation of the New Development Bank. The time has come to build on this initiative and focus on creating more institutions for greater cooperation in issues such as finance, urbanisation, sustainable development and the digital space. This could include setting up a BRICS credit ratings agency, a BRICS research institution and institutionalising the process of managing the global commons such as the oceans and outer space.

It is obvious that each of the BRICS members will have their own reasons for being at Xiamen. Russia continues to see it as a geopolitical bulwark against the US, all the while tacitly acquiescing to Chinese leadership.

South Africa will present itself as the leading voice of the African world and will raise issues of peace and development for the continent at the summit, while Brazil, which is undergoing a period of domestic turmoil, is unlikely to be too innovative or demanding. China is far more certain of what it seeks.

For India, this year's summit becomes important. India will have to learn the fine art of staring down the dragon to preserve its political space, while embracing China for some important economic opportunities. At Doklam, it did the former; will a different India turn up at BRICS? Forums like Xiamen allow India and China the chance to begin anew.

As we enter the second decade of BRICS, Xiamen would have to be the arena where the members recommit

to upholding the founding principles of the BRICS. Thereafter, they must chart a new roadmap for greater institutionalisation of the group's interests.

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