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INDIA'S MINERAL DIPLOMACY IN PLURILATERAL FORUMS IN 2026

Convergence & Divergence at **BRICS+** & **QUAD**

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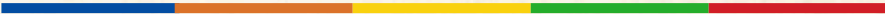
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Executive Summary



Critical minerals, lithium, cobalt, nickel, graphite and rare earths, have moved quickly from the periphery of trade policy to the centre of discussions on clean energy, advanced manufacturing and economic security. This shift is increasingly visible across plurilateral forums: the QUAD, through its QUAD Critical Minerals Initiative (QCMI), tends to approach the issue through trusted supply chains and economic resilience, while BRICS+ engages it more through industrial development and Global South cooperation. For India, involved in both groupings, this reflects a longstanding orientation: its pursuit of strategic autonomy has long relied on multi-vector engagement, and critical minerals appear a natural extension of that approach.

This brief outlines that India's mineral diplomacy is perhaps best understood not as a choice between competing blocs, but as a form of value-chain segmentation undertaken in service of that autonomy. BRICS+ appears to support India's access to upstream resources, development finance and Global South coalition building, while the QUAD offers pathways toward processing technologies, regulatory alignment and trusted partner capital. Taken together, the two platforms seem to serve largely complementary roles, allowing India to build capability across the value chain without depending too heavily on any single partner.

However, a degree of complexity is worth noting, though it appears manageable. India's participation in a QUAD initiative aimed at diversifying away from concentrated supply sources sits alongside its presidency of BRICS+, where China remains a prominent member. This may reflect less a contradiction than the different registers at which the two forums tend to operate i.e. more technical and transactional in the QUAD and more agenda setting and normative in BRICS+.

Strategic autonomy for India is not about avoiding entanglement altogether, but about ensuring that its various partnerships never collapse into dependence on any one of them, with sustained coordination across these arrangements likely to determine how well this balance holds.



Introduction

Critical minerals have emerged as a key topic in geopolitical and geoeconomic discussions in a remarkably short period. Minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, graphite and rare-earth elements were previously seen as industrial raw materials. However, they are now recognised as strategic resources that will shape the future of clean energy, advanced manufacturing and emerging technologies. Concurrently, the concentration of mining, processing and refining capacities in a few countries has exposed new vulnerabilities in global supply chains, prompting governments to reconsider whether their access to these resources is secure.

Critical minerals are no longer just a mining or trade issue; they have become a significant macroeconomic issue, a foundation for industrial strategy, an instrument of foreign policy and a driver of international cooperation.

The agendas of major plurilateral forums increasingly reflect this shift. Despite their different origins and strategic orientations, both BRICS+ and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) are paying growing attention to critical minerals and resilient supply chains. The QUAD approaches the issue from the perspective of trusted supply chains, critical technologies and economic security, whereas BRICS+ approaches it through economic cooperation, industrial development and the aspirations of the Global South. The fact that two very different groupings are converging on the same issue illustrates how mineral diplomacy is beginning to blur traditional boundaries between economics, technology and national security.

This presents an important strategic question for India. Far from being an outlier strategy, India's focus on strategic autonomy reflects how the larger global economy uses **multi-vector engagement** to achieve distinct objectives across different platforms. India, a major power engaged in both BRICS+ and the QUAD, seeks not to choose between competing blocs. Instead, it seeks to leverage multiple partnerships to achieve its long-standing goal of strategic autonomy. This article contends that India's critical minerals diplomacy is best understood through this framework, where different partnerships serve different purposes across the mineral value chain. However, India cannot establish strategic autonomy for critical minerals in a silo. India's alignment choices in the critical minerals domain may directly conflict with its autonomy in other vital fields, such as defence procurement and technology transfer. This brief examines how India navigates this cross-sectoral trade-off, including whether managing this "noodle bowl" of overlapping arrangements forces irreconcilable choices or turns this institutional diversity into a strategic advantage.

Critical minerals initiatives in plurilateral forums: QUAD and BRICS+

As an emerging clean energy manufacturing hub, India needs stable, diversified and resilient critical mineral supply chains to meet its goals in electric mobility, semiconductors, renewable energy and defence manufacturing.

The increasingly complex landscape of critical minerals governance presents both strategic choices and opportunities for India. India recognises this and has been progressively expanding its engagement beyond bilateral partnerships to plurilateral platforms that aim to strengthen mineral security, including the Quad Critical Minerals Initiative (QCMI) and the critical minerals agenda within BRICS+ (the BRICS members together with their partner economies). These platforms are important for India as they support different dimensions of its critical minerals strategy. The following section examines the QCMI before assessing its implications for India's BRICS+ presidency and partnership.

The QUAD critical minerals initiative

The QUAD, comprising India, Australia, Japan and the United States (US), launched the QUAD Critical Minerals Initiative (QCMI) in 2025. This initiative aims to strengthen cooperation on securing and diversifying critical minerals supply chains, as well as reducing dependence on any single country. In May 2026, the QUAD partners set out a framework for coordinated investments and economic policy tools to establish a diversified, resilient critical minerals market and secure supply to support economic growth and security ([US Department of State, 2026](#)). This framework officially operationalises the QCMI and envisions public-private partnerships to support the critical minerals supply chain ([IEA, 2026](#)). Furthermore, the initiative sets out the following three key areas of cooperation ([U.S. Department of State, 2026](#)):

1

Investment and project development

The objective of this pillar is to address financing gaps across the supply chain and secure up to USD 20 billion through public-private sources. It also aims to assist strategic projects throughout the mining to recycling value chain by de-risking investments through financial and commercial support mechanisms.

2

Regulatory alignment

This pillar aims to create a more investor-friendly ecosystem through cooperation on permitting, licensing, regulatory practices and geological assessments. Additionally, it seeks to strengthen critical minerals supply chains by addressing market distortions and unfair trade practices.

3

Recycling and recovery

Recognising recycling as a strategic source of securing critical minerals, this pillar focuses on scaling investments in advanced recycling technologies, creating robust collection systems and promoting innovation among the QUAD countries.

However, the QCMI is significant because it represents an evolution in critical minerals diplomacy. Although earlier bilateral or multilateral partnerships, such as the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) and Pax Silica, also aim to strengthen and secure supply chains, they differ in their primary emphasis and institutional scope. The MSP emphasises environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards ([Wauters & Hertel, 2024](#)), whereas Pax Silica focuses more on countering coercive supply-chain dependencies on technology-critical inputs and reducing vulnerabilities from concentrated supply chains ([U.S. Department of State, n.d.](#)). The QCMI builds on these overlapping objectives and adopts a broader value-chain approach. It integrates regulatory alignment, financing, technology collaboration and circular economy solutions among the QUAD nations.

This value-chain initiative provides India with the opportunity to accelerate its transition to green energy by building partnerships to address financial and technological challenges. India can capitalise on the comparative advantages of Australia and the US in regulatory related to raw metals and investment. India can tap into Japan's excellence in midstream processing and refining ([Singh A.G, 2026](#)). This should help India establish a complementary supply-chain strategy and strengthen its integration into a resilient critical minerals supply chain.

The QCMI framework is further underpinned bilaterally by the India–US framework on “Securing of Supply in the Mining and Processing of Critical Minerals and Rare Earths”, signed in May 2026, which extends cooperation across the entire value chain, including mining, processing and recycling ([MEA, 2026](#)).

However, the emergence of the QCMI raises an important question for countries such as India, which participate in multiple plurilateral platforms with distinct geopolitical and economic priorities: how will India navigate the strategic considerations arising from the QCMI during its BRICS+ presidency?

At first, India’s engagement with the QCMI may seem to contradict its leadership role in BRICS+. Structurally, the two forums occupy distinct positions in the critical minerals value chain. The QUAD largely comprises countries that consume critical minerals and increasingly seek stable, diversified supply chains. In contrast, BRICS+ brings together major resource producers and processors, such as Brazil, China, and South Africa ([Muller, 2025](#)). However, a closer examination suggests the relationship between the two architectures is more complex than a choice between competing blocs. The QUAD primarily focuses on diversifying critical minerals supply chains and de-risking, whereas BRICS+ promotes industrialisation and local value addition among the Global South. BRICS+ provides opportunities for resource cooperation, industrial development and South–South global cooperation, which differ in emphasis from frameworks such as the MSP.

The following sections examine the objectives and roles of the two forums for India.

Different approaches, same objective: Mineral diplomacy for India

India's critical mineral diplomacy is not a strategy of balancing between BRICS+ and the QUAD; rather, it is an exercise in value-chain balancing. Traditional international relations assumes that countries balance power. Mineral diplomacy more closely resembles traditional trade relationships, as it suggests countries increasingly balance value chains.

Table 1: India's Mineral Diplomacy across BRICS and QUAD

Dimension	BRICS+	QUAD	India's Strategic Position
Primary objective	Economic development, industrialisation, South-South cooperation	Economic security, strategic resilience, trusted supply chains	Pursues both development and resilience simultaneously
Geopolitical orientation	Reforming global economic governance and strengthening the Global South	Preserving resilient Indo-Pacific supply chains among like-minded partners	Avoids bloc politics while leveraging both architectures
Value chain emphasis	Upstream resources, investment, industrial cooperation, development finance	Midstream & downstream processing, technology, standards, resilience	Needs engagement across the complete mineral value chain
Principal instruments	Development finance, institutional cooperation, investment partnerships	Technology collaboration, supply-chain coordination, standards, strategic partnerships	Uses complementary instruments depending on national requirement
Security dimension	Indirect (economic security)	Direct (national security, defence industrial base)	Integrates economic security with strategic autonomy
Partnership model	Inclusive and resource-rich economies	Trusted partner network with technological capabilities	Maintains diversified partnerships without exclusive dependence
Strategic outcome for India	Access to mineral resources and financing (New Development Bank NDB)	Access to technology, processing capability and resilient markets	Building end-to-end mineral ecosystem

BRICS+ and the QUAD are frequently depicted as competing geopolitical blocs, but the comparison in Table 1 shows that their approaches to critical minerals are neither identical nor inherently contradictory. These forums are increasingly operating at different stages of the critical mineral value chain, rather than competing for the same strategic space. BRICS+ provides opportunities for resource partnerships, development finance, industrial cooperation and engagement with resource-rich economies across the Global South. Conversely, the QUAD's agenda has progressively focused on supply-chain resilience, processing technologies, trusted partnerships, innovation and strategic industrial cooperation. These objectives are largely complementary from a mineral diplomacy perspective, rather than mutually exclusive.

Mineral value chains are fundamentally global, requiring concurrent access to geological resources, capital, processing technologies, manufacturing capabilities, logistics infrastructure and end markets.

Currently, no single plurilateral arrangement provides the complete ecosystem needed to secure resilient mineral supply chains. Consequently, India's engagement with both BRICS+ and the QUAD reflects an effort to participate across multiple nodes of the value chain, rather than choosing between competing geopolitical camps.

Table 2: India's multi-vector mineral diplomacy

Vector	Strategic objective	Examples
Resource diplomacy	Secure access to mineral assets	Australia, Argentina, Chile, Africa, BRICS+ partners
Technology diplomacy	Acquire processing, refining and recycling capabilities	QUAD
Industrial diplomacy	Build domestic manufacturing and value addition	Make in India, National Critical Mineral Mission
Governance diplomacy	Shape emerging global norms, ESG standards and resilient supply chains	BRICS+ Presidency, G20, QUAD, International Solar Alliance (ISA), World Trade Organization (WTO) discussions

The apparent contradiction lies less in the platforms' objectives regarding critical mineral cooperation and more in the broader geopolitical narratives surrounding the two institutions. India's dual engagement faces its most direct test on the question of China.

The QUAD's critical minerals agenda is explicit: the initiative aims to diversify global supply chains for critical minerals and rare-earth elements; the IEA estimates that China refines close to 90% of the world's rare earths (IEA, 2025). The framing is clear—the framework was launched amid concerns over the concentration in critical minerals refining and processing. Further, QUAD members have responded to China's expansion of export controls by regulating raw materials and controlling the entire supply chain, including magnets, processing equipment, technology transfers and even foreign-made goods containing Chinese-origin inputs (Risse, M. 2025). India, meanwhile, is both a QUAD partner shaping the QCMi and the chair of BRICS+, where China remains a founding and economically prominent member.

This is not a peripheral issue; it is a structural and coordination challenge at the centre of India's mineral diplomacy. Although the intersection of the QUAD's supply-chain diversification agenda and India's presidency of BRICS+, of which China is a prominent member, necessitates careful diplomatic engagement, the following four factors suggest that this tension is manageable within India's multi-vector approach:

1

BRICS+ is not a cohesive economic or trade bloc on minerals

Unlike more targeted frameworks like Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), which include mechanisms for supply-chain coordination and have an action plan on critical minerals (PIB, 2024), BRICS+ is a large, heterogeneous grouping whose members—Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and new entrants—have divergent interests in mining and processing. The QUAD, in contrast, is a closely aligned forum that advances cooperation through a range of practical initiatives. India, as a member of both the QUAD and BRICS+, occupies a unique position that enables it to engage with both institutional frameworks. India's presidency allows it to influence BRICS+ agenda items (connectivity, resilience, financing) without implying alignment with China's export policy or its position on technology transfer.

2

India's exposure to concentrated supply chains is one reason why engagement with both platforms is useful.

Given India's reliance on rare-earth imports from China, the latter's expanded export controls pose risks to India's electric vehicle, semiconductor, clean energy and defence manufacturing industries. Membership in BRICS+ is not sufficient to address this dependency; which is why QUAD-anchored diversification (Australian ore, Japanese processing, and US capital) can help reduce exposure to these chokepoints.

3

The two forums can be read as operating at different registers of engagement—transactional/technical in the QUAD and agenda-setting/normative in BRICS+—rather than as alternative security guarantees.

India does not seek to use BRICS+ to address its dependence on Chinese refining capacity; rather, India's BRICS+ presidency offers it a means to advance resilience language and Global South financing architecture, while it continues to rely on the QUAD and bilateral frameworks (such as the India-US critical minerals framework) to build a diversified supply chain.

4

Implementation of the QUAD's de-risking agenda is still at an early stage.

Despite ambitious targets to diversify away from China, QUAD member states, including the US, remain heavily dependent on Chinese refining capacity. The QUAD's alternative mineral architecture is not yet operational. Thus, India's engagement with the forum remains a long-term strategic hedge rather than representing an immediate diversification away from China, thereby preserving its space to manoeuvre within BRICS+.

The contradiction is genuine; however, it is more of a contradiction of narrative than of function. India is attempting to compartmentalise these forums by engaging with China as an operational partner within BRICS+ while leveraging the QUAD to diversify concentrated supply chains. It can treat them as separate conversations because the two groupings serve different diplomatic purposes.

However, diplomacy never operates in a vacuum, and other member countries may not interpret India's internal compartmentalisation the same way. While Washington (Congressional Research Service, 2025) often regards India's BRICS+ participation with scepticism, partners such as China (Raja Mohan C. 2022) and Russia (Kortunov.A., 2021) view India's QUAD alignment with suspicion. Managing these perceptions may require India to demonstrate that its multi-vector approach is not a zero-sum game but a framework in which both forums serve different, complementary functions across the mineral value chain. India's BRICS+ presidency provides it a timely opportunity to shape the agenda and translate this multi-vector strategy into concrete initiatives.

India need not view its engagement with BRICS+ and the QUAD through the same strategic lens, as the two platforms have different objectives, memberships and areas of cooperation. At the same time, managing these parallel engagements will require careful diplomacy, particularly as discussions around economic security, de-risking and strategic resilience evolve. India's BRICS+ presidency could therefore provide an opportunity to demonstrate how it can maintain constructive engagement across different plurilateral platforms while advancing its own economic and strategic priorities.

Will India's BRICS+ presidency create an impact on India's minerals value chain?

India inherits the BRICS+ presidency at a time when the world is navigating a fragmenting global order characterised by increasing institutional paralysis of multilateral forums, escalating geoeconomic competition and numerous supply-chain disruptions. The presidency provides India with an opportunity to shape the bloc's agenda on critical minerals as global competition for these minerals intensifies. Under the theme "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability" (BRICS, 2026), the discussions emphasise the overarching case for building resilience across member and partner countries, including efficient critical minerals supply chains.

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Pre-thematic events are already shaping this agenda. One such event was organised during the thematic conference, "Strengthening BRICS Connectivity: Fostering Cooperation" (6 July 2026, organised by India's Observer Research Foundation [ORF] in collaboration with the BRICS Expert Council—Russia).

The session, "Corridors of Cooperation: Securing Critical Supply Chains", focused on strengthening resilient supply chains for critical minerals and other strategic sectors that support the energy transition and advanced technologies.

Discussions highlighted the need to diversify sourcing, strengthen regional value chains, and promote greater value addition. Participants also underscored the importance of sustainable financing and trusted partnerships to build long-term supply-chain resilience while supporting industrial development across BRICS+ economies ([ANI, 2026](#)). India can contribute by fostering collaboration in geological exploration, sustainable mining practices, technological partnerships and other areas. India's value in this process lies in its ability to shape the direction of mineral cooperation among the BRICS+ countries.

India's BRICS+ presidency need not be viewed as a competition with the QUAD. The two forums serve different but complementary functions within India's mineral diplomacy. India's concurrent engagement in both forums presents a multi-vector approach. India is leveraging diverse partnerships to strengthen different segments of the critical minerals value chain rather than advancing any single geopolitical alignment.

Conclusion

India's critical minerals diplomacy is best understood not as a balancing act between rival blocs, but as a deliberate strategy of value-chain segmentation: BRICS+ anchors India's access to upstream resources, development finance and Global South coalition-building, whereas the QUAD anchors its access to processing technologies, regulatory standards and trusted-partner capital. These platforms do not compete for India's alignment; instead, they complement each other, feeding into a single national objective: building an end-to-end, resilient mineral ecosystem.

This does not imply that the arrangement is free of friction. India's simultaneous role as a QUAD partner, where the stated aim is to diversify supply chains away from concentrated sources, and as the president of the BRICS+ bloc, where China remains a prominent economic power, represents a real but manageable structural tension. This tension is manageable today because the two forums operate in different registers, though it could come under strain if either grouping's framing hardens.

The increasing density of overlapping platforms, such as QCMI, MSP, bilateral frameworks, and BRICS+ initiatives, is also not optimal, as these initiatives could become a "noodle bowl". The overlaps will remain manageable only as long as India actively coordinates across these arrangements, rather than allowing them to accumulate as parallel, uncoordinated commitments.

Ultimately, India's multi-vector diplomacy is a thoughtful response to a simple fact: no single plurilateral platform currently offers a complete critical minerals ecosystem. In this context, strategic autonomy is not about avoiding entanglement but about ensuring that entanglement with multiple partners never collapses into dependence on any of them. Whether this remains an advantage will depend less on how many platforms India joins and more on whether it can coordinate what each delivers and maintain sufficient consistency in its approach toward members across both forums to sustain the credibility of its multi-vector strategy.

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