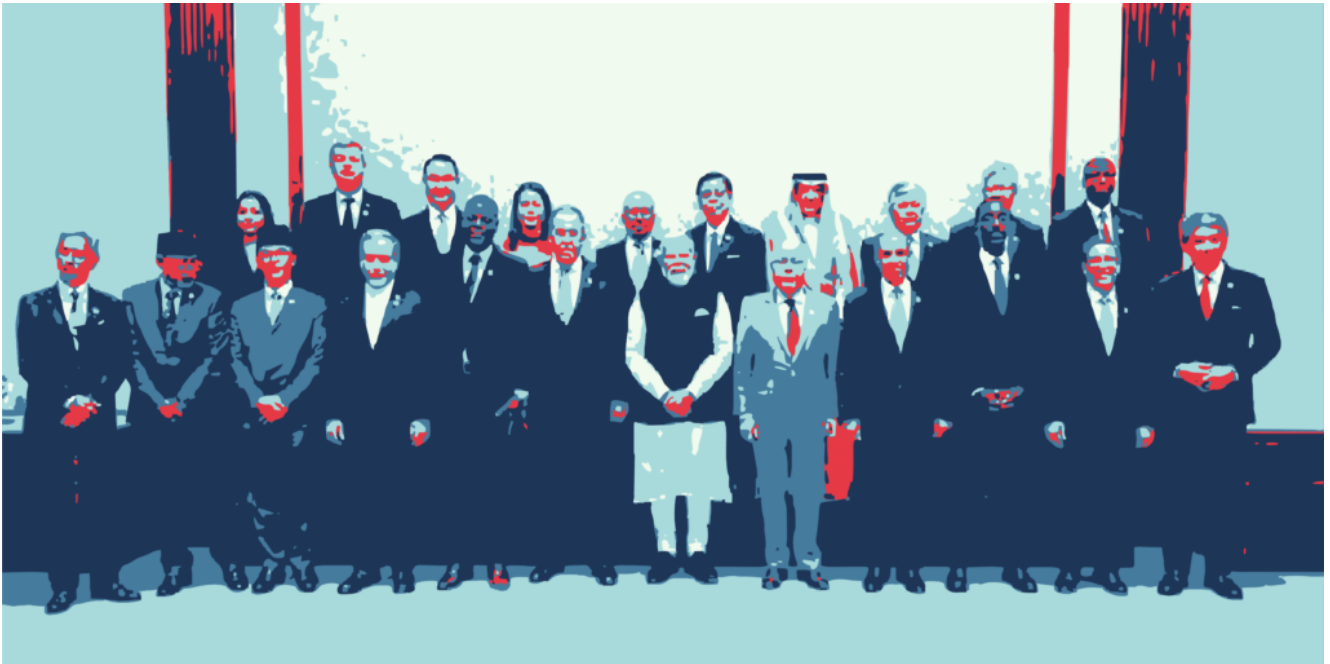


# India's BRICS Chairmanship and the Challenge of the Iran-UAE Divide

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The BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting, held in New Delhi on 14–15 May 2026, ended without a joint statement, highlighting sharp divisions within the grouping over the ongoing conflict in West Asia. The principal [disagreement](#) was between the UAE and Iran. While Abu Dhabi pushed for strong language condemning Iran's actions, Tehran sought explicit criticism of the United States and Israel.

Given the lack of consensus, India, as Chair, released a 63-paragraph [Chair's Statement](#) reflecting shared concerns over growing regional instability. The statement emphasized the importance of ensuring safe and uninterrupted maritime trade through international waterways, particularly amid rising risks to shipping routes in the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz. On Palestine, BRICS members reaffirmed support for a two-state solution and backed the establishment of an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, with

East Jerusalem as its capital.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar [criticized](#) the increasing use of unilateral sanctions and coercive measures, particularly in areas such as Russian oil trade, arguing that they are inconsistent with international law and disproportionately affect developing countries. Speaking on the Israel-Palestine issue, Jaishankar [stated](#) that “India supports a two-state solution where the Palestine issue is concerned”.

The widening gap within BRICS was further reflected in the remarks of Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who indirectly [accused](#) the UAE of blocking consensus due to its close alignment with the United States and Israel. Araghchi also defended Tehran’s actions during the conflict, maintaining that Iran had targeted only American military assets and installations.

These tensions coincided with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s [visit](#) to the UAE on 15 May 2026, where he held talks with President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and condemned the attacks on the UAE in the context of the West Asia war. Emphasizing India’s support for regional stability, Modi stated that India was ready to extend all possible support for peace efforts. The visit also underscored the growing strategic depth of India-UAE ties. Both sides [signed](#) multiple significant MoUs, including agreements between Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL) and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), as well as between Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) and ADNOC for the supply of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG). The two countries are also developing a framework for a Strategic Defence Partnership.

The simultaneous deterioration in Iran-UAE relations, alongside the visible expansion of India-UAE strategic cooperation, raises a larger question over how New Delhi will

navigate these competing regional dynamics as BRICS Chair, particularly amid growing divisions within the grouping over the West Asia conflict.

### ***Walking the Diplomatic Tightrope***

Since the outbreak of the Israel-Palestine war in October 2023, EAM Jaishankar has remained among the few major non-Arab global leaders to consistently and publicly advocate for a two-state solution for Palestine, maintaining that any durable resolution to the conflict must be rooted in Palestinian self-determination. Importantly, this position predates the return of the Trump administration, suggesting that India's official posture on Palestine has remained broadly consistent despite changing geopolitical circumstances. India's voting patterns at the United Nations have similarly continued to reflect support for the two-state framework.

At the same time, there has been visible caution within New Delhi regarding positions that could further complicate ties with Washington, particularly under the second Trump administration. This caution appears less a departure from India's established policy and more an exercise in diplomatic risk aversion, with New Delhi seeking to avoid unintended consequences while preserving strategic space in the bilateral relationship by limiting public expressions that might invite hostility from the Trump Administration, especially as New Delhi and Washington have struggled to reach a bilateral [trade deal](#).

Early indications of this balancing act emerged during the Arab Foreign Ministers' Meeting in February 2026. Although the final [Delhi Declaration](#) strongly endorsed the two-state solution and referenced the Arab Peace Plan, CSDR sources indicated that India was uncomfortable with the posture adopted. Similar sensitivities reportedly resurfaced ahead of the BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting, where differences over references to the United States, Israel, and Iran appeared to

place New Delhi in a diplomatically delicate position during consensus-building within the grouping.

However, this caution has increasingly attracted domestic scrutiny. A growing perception within sections of India's strategic community is that New Delhi's foreign policy choices, particularly on West Asia and energy trade, are becoming overly shaped by American sensitivities. This debate has been especially visible in the context of Russian oil trade, where India's economic decisions have often adjusted according to the opening or closing of sanctions-related space provided by Washington.

Against this backdrop, Jaishankar's reiteration of India's support for a two-state solution at the BRICS meeting carried broader significance. Beyond reaffirming continuity in India's official position, the statement also appeared aimed at signaling strategic autonomy at a time when questions over the extent of American influence on Indian foreign policy are becoming more pronounced domestically. In any case, like the Arab FM Summit, the BRICS FM Summit's outcome document (even if Chair-issued) did retain positions over which India had expressed some caution.

### ***The Iran-UAE Fault Line***

The widening divide between Iran and the UAE has emerged as one of the clearest fault lines within the expanded BRICS grouping. The kinetic dimension of the confrontation has continued to intensify, with Iranian strikes on the UAE during the conflict reportedly exceeding those directed at all other Gulf states combined. This underlines the extent to which Abu Dhabi has emerged as one of Tehran's principal regional targets amid the ongoing West Asia crisis.

For India, these developments present a particularly delicate challenge as the BRICS Chair. The contradiction between Iran and the UAE is not one that New Delhi can realistically

resolve on its own. Instead, India's approach has increasingly centered on navigating around these tensions without alienating either side, particularly as both Tehran and Abu Dhabi continue to push for fundamentally different political outcomes and diplomatic language on the conflict. While Iran has consistently sought stronger condemnation of the United States and Israel, the UAE has resisted language that could directly target either country, making consensus-building within BRICS increasingly difficult.

At the same time, there appears to remain sufficient political goodwill between India and Iran for Tehran to avoid publicly or implicitly blaming New Delhi for the absence of consensus within the grouping. Iranian frustration has instead been directed primarily towards the UAE, which Tehran views as having blocked stronger language within BRICS due to its close alignment with Washington and Israel. This distinction remains significant for India, particularly as New Delhi attempts to preserve strategic space with all sides amid deepening regional polarization.

### ***A Strategic Partnership Deepens***

These developments are unfolding alongside the continued expansion of India-UAE ties, which have steadily deepened over the past decade and remain among India's most strategically significant partnerships in the Gulf. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to the UAE further reinforced this trajectory at a particularly sensitive regional moment. The visit, which followed UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan's visit to India in January 2026, reflected the increasing institutionalization of the bilateral relationship despite both engagements being relatively short in duration.

Most notably, both sides developed a framework for a Strategic Defence Partnership, marking a significant step in the security dimension of India-UAE ties. The visit also underscored the growing importance of energy security within

the relationship. Agreements involving the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL), and Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) reflected not only deepening economic cooperation but also growing concerns over energy security amid continuing instability in West Asia and uncertainty surrounding maritime energy flows.

Thus far, there is little indication that this threshold has been crossed. Iran's public messaging continues to distinguish between its frustrations with the UAE and its broader engagement with India. Nevertheless, as the conflict continues and regional polarization deepens, managing these parallel relationships is likely to become increasingly delicate for New Delhi, particularly in the context of its BRICS Chairmanship and its wider balancing strategy in West Asia.

### ***The Search for Consensus***

Attention is now increasingly shifting towards the upcoming BRICS Summit in New Delhi, where the central question remains whether the grouping will ultimately be able to produce a consensus document. Russian President Vladimir Putin has indicated that he will attend the summit, while China has signaled a lower level of participation, with indications that President Xi Jinping may not attend personally. For India, however, the larger challenge is less about attendance and more about managing the growing political divisions within the grouping, particularly over the West Asia conflict.

Compared to India's 2023 G20 Presidency, the current BRICS Chairmanship presents significantly greater difficulties. The expanded grouping now includes states positioned on opposing sides of an active regional conflict, making consensus-building far more complex. Much will likely depend on the trajectory of the conflict itself. If the intensity of the crisis reduces before the summit, the possibility of arriving at a compromise document may correspondingly improve.

Until then, India's BRICS Chairmanship is likely to remain defined less by opportunities for leadership projection and more by the challenge of balancing competing geopolitical pressures within an increasingly divided grouping.