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Brazil and the BRICS in a
Changing Global Order:
Autonomy, Multipolarity,
and Multilateralism

BRICS+ and South-South
Cooperation Challenged
by the Climate Emergency

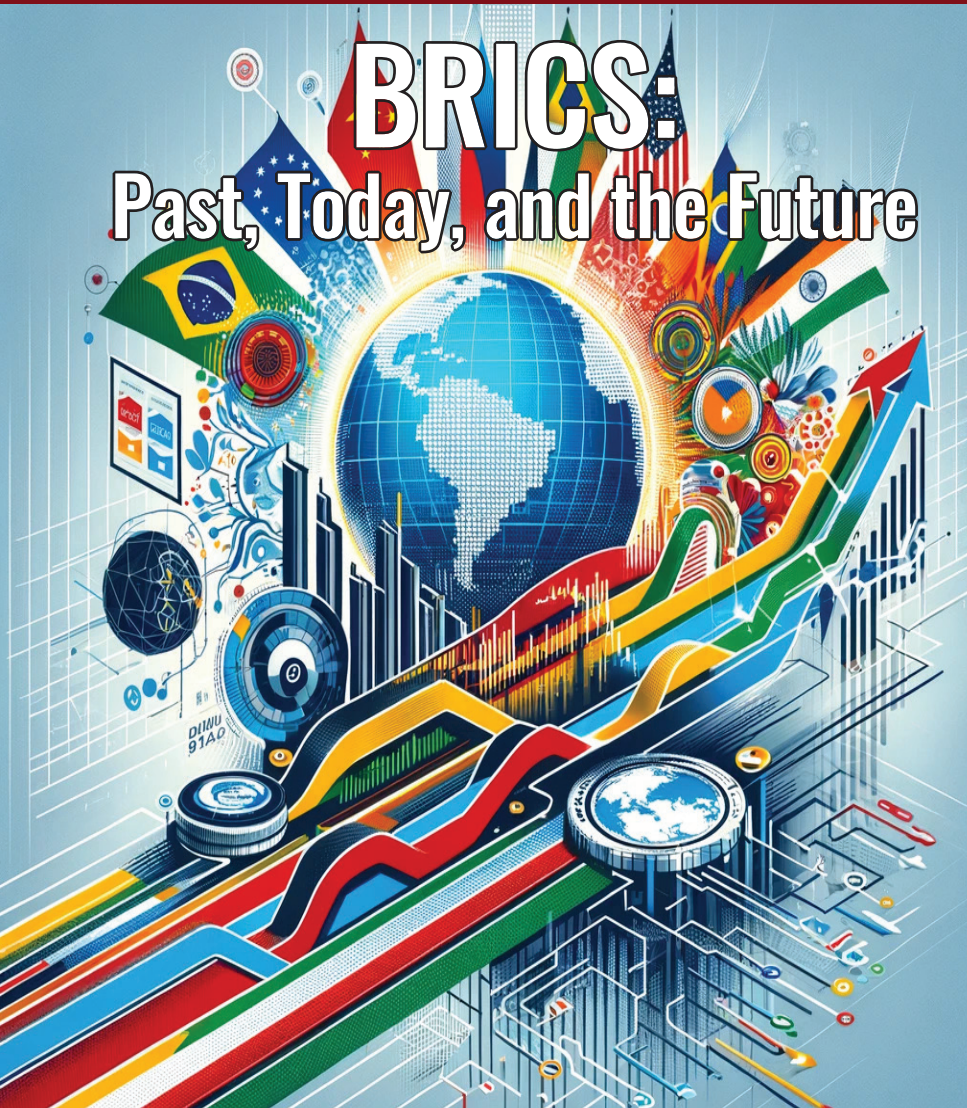
Bolivia and the
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Energy Dynamics in
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BRICS Expansion:
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The BRICS at Humanity's
Environmental
Crossroads: Challenges
and Commitments in
Tackling Climate Change

Intersecting Interests:
The Complex Dynamics of
India, Iran, and China in
BRICS



• Haroldo Ramanzini Junior & Tullo Vigevani • Carlos R. S. Milani • Fernando Lopez Ariñez •
• Pinar İpek • Frank O'Donnell & Mihaela Papa • Hesley Machado Silva • Sujata Ashwarya •
Habibul Haque Khondker • Afonso de Albuquerque & Mayara Soares Lopes Pinto de Araújo •
• Leslie Rogne Schumacher • Ashraf Mohammed Keshk • Greg Simons • Monica Hirst •
• Hanna Kassab • Alexander Ignatov • Hüseyin Korkmaz • Aytaç Durmaz •

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BRICS: Past, Today, and the Future

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BRICS: Past, Today, and the Future

Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, or the BRICS nations, are living proof of how power and influence are constantly changing in the world's politics and economy. Redefining their positions within the global system and laying the groundwork for a multilateral world order that aims to challenge the traditional dominance of Western economies and institutions, the BRICS countries have been active since the acronym was coined in the early 21st century and expanded to include South Africa in 2010. Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Argentina, Bolivia, Indonesia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Cuba, Gabon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Comoros, and Kazakhstan are among the more than 40 nations that have shown interest in becoming BRICS members. Now, after a huge expansion, the BRICS has grown into a more formidable club of nations with the recent addition of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE. Also, Saudi Arabia is still working on becoming a full member, even though Javier Milei, Argentina's newly elected president, turned down the invitation. Given that BRICS now includes over 40 percent of the world's population and 25 percent of the world's economy, it's easy to see why the organization is so essential to be better understood. Given this, the purpose of this TPQ special issue is to delve into the background, reality, and future prospects of the BRICS as well as the various reasons and motivations behind the accession of its member states.

This issue stands out from the rest of the literature in two ways: first, it contains a wide range of opinions and articles; second, it welcomes prominent contributors from academia and diplomacy, both of which contribute to the goal of stimulating meaningful discussions about the future of BRICS. Professor Ziya Öniş, who greatly assisted us in preparing for this special issue, deserves a significant amount of gratitude. It has been a privilege and an honor to work with him on this important special issue, and we are eternally thankful for his unwavering support for our journal throughout the years.

Contributors to this issue come from a wide range of notable countries and regions, all influential in the debates concerning the establishment as well as the enlargement of BRICS in the global stage. These include Argentina, Bahrain, Bolivia, Brazil, India, Latvia, South Africa, Russia, USA, Türkiye, and the UAE, among many more. With this in mind, our goal at TPQ is to provide a platform for constructive conversations on BRICS and beyond.

Professors Haroldo Ramanzini Junior and Tullo Vigevani examine Brazil and the BRICS in the context of a shifting international order from three perspectives: multilateralism, autonomy, and multipolarity. They contend that, starting in 2023, when Lula da Silva assumes the Presidency once more, the BRICS and support for multipolarity in the international system will become important pillars for Brazil's international integration. Even though new problems are likely to emerge because

of both internal and structural limitations, they argue that the new government will restore the primacy of universalism and autonomy in Brazil's foreign policy.

Professor Carlos R. S. Milani poses the question of whether it is possible to make the case that BRICS+ could revolutionize South-South collaboration, especially around climate change mitigation. He argues that the BRICS+ grouping, with its diverse membership, has emerged as a major player in international development cooperation, striving for two goals: first, to create a symbolic regime that questions the norms of the Western liberal global order; and second, to implement economic decisions that address the climate emergency as part of a revitalized development agenda. Considering this, his research delves into the possibilities and challenges of this endeavor, examining national resources and BRICS+ answers to the climate crisis from a Brazilian viewpoint.

Mr. Fernando López Ariñez, Political Scientist at the University of Buenos Aires, who currently works at the Consulate General of Bolivia in Santiago de Chile, argues that the emergence of BRICS has spurred discussion on the reorganization of the global order. Nevertheless, he thinks that in Latin America, this discussion has not been able to move away from a mocking depiction that aims to discount the significance of this new block. Yet, he argues that Bolivia, a Plurinational State, has begun its path towards BRICS membership as part of an international strategy to fortify its relationship with the emerging powers in the global system. Therefore, he believes that the key to comprehending the intricacies of this new reality lies in the bilateral partnerships with Brazil, South Africa, India, Russia, and China.

Professor Leslie Rogne Schumacher structures his paper so that it discusses two simultaneous processes that are occurring in the Mediterranean region. First, concerns that the leading Mediterranean member state of the European Union and NATO, Italy, may start to lean toward authoritarian global powers like Russia and China have been stoked by the 2022 general election victory of the neofascist Fratelli d'Italia. The second point is that Egypt became the first member state of BRICS to be located on the Mediterranean Sea when the leaders of Russia, China, and the other governments in the bloc invited six new nations to join in January 2024. His study examines these two developments simultaneously and concludes that liberal-democratic alliances (such as NATO and the European Union) and partnerships led by illiberal global powers (such as BRICS and the Belt and Road Initiative) are likely to witness rising geopolitical rivalry in the Mediterranean.

Senior Research Advisor Frank O'Donnell of the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network and Senior Fellow Mihaela Papa of the Fletcher School contend that BRICS has been strengthening space security and technological collaboration over the last ten years. They assert that the United States' and China's aspirations to establish space norms have clashed on this subject. In addition, they make one wonder if the growth of the BRICS nations is helping to further bloc politics and the ambitions of China

and Russia. Their research delves into the space policies of the five BRICS countries, as well as the United States, and the potential for fostering space governance and technological collaboration. They contend that the expansion of the BRICS will undoubtedly assist Russia and China's space programs, but that the United States can take advantage of this opportunity to establish new programs that will lessen the likelihood of space conflicts and increase access to space technology for all.

Professor Pinar İpek believes that new strategies in energy diplomacy are necessary in view of the ongoing crises in the Middle East and Ukraine, as well as the energy transition. The energy dynamics of Türkiye are analyzed in her policy brief considering the BRICS countries' positions in international energy politics. She discusses the ongoing issues with Ankara's imbalanced reliance on Russian energy imports and raises concerns about the big obstacles that BRICS and Türkiye will face as they adjust to the changing energy security landscape and trade geographies. Considering the country's participation in international energy commerce and its Middle Corridor multilateral transportation policy in light of changing ideas about energy security and the ongoing energy transformation is her primary point.

Professor Hesley Machado Silva suggests a global stage examination of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and the new BRICS (Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates), focusing on the economic and political aspects while also addressing the necessity to address increasing environmental crises like climate change and global warming. Moreover, his analysis also includes countries such as Argentina and Saudi Arabia, the first has declined the membership with President Milei's decision and the latter is still considering to becoming a full-member. An analysis is conducted on each of the BRICS nations, focusing on their unique traits and the ways in which they impact the political, economic, and ecological domains. He lists the concrete actions taken by each country—from studies of earth systems to plans to increase food security and decrease emissions—and stresses the significance of the BRICS' cooperative and long-term approach to climate change. He stresses the critical role of the BRICS in the fight for global climate justice and environmental preservation, and he ends by saying that the BRICS must act together to combat climate change.

On behalf of Transatlantic Policy Quarterly, I would like to express my gratitude to all the contributors who committed a significant amount of effort and work. Moreover, we are grateful for our Premium Cooparete Sponsor for this issue, Tüpraş. We also like to thank our other sponsors, TEB and Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi for their ongoing support.

Aybars Arda Kılıçer

Editor-in-Chief

BRAZIL AND THE BRICS IN A CHANGING GLOBAL ORDER: AUTONOMY, MULTIPOLARITY, AND MULTILATERALISM

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This article analyzes the general guidelines of contemporary Brazilian foreign policy, as well as the country's stance regarding the BRICS. We argue that, as of 2023, with the return of Lula da Silva to the Presidency, the BRICS and advocating for multipolarity in the international system become relevant pillars for Brazil's international insertion. With the new government, Brazil's foreign policy's dimensions of autonomy and universalism become central once again, in a context where systemic and domestic constraints tend to give rise to new challenges. Some of which are in favor of these dimensions, such as the BRICS. On the other hand, others create difficulties, especially the worldwide advance of unilateralism at the strategic, economic and technological levels.

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Tullo Vigevani**

Keywords: Brazilian Foreign Policy, BRICS, Global Order, Multipolarity, Emerging Countries.



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meeting between the Foreign Affairs ministers of Brazil, Russia, India and China, which took place in September 2006, in New York City, parallel to the United Nations General Assembly, is often considered as the first specific move that paved the way for the emergence of BRIC.

An important meeting that laid the groundwork for the BRIC grouping was held in 2009 in Yekaterinburg, Russia. It started with the participation of ministers of foreign affairs and was followed by another meeting with the leaders of state and government of the four countries. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Dmitry Medvedev, Manmohan Singh and Hu Jintao were all present at the first BRIC summit, which took place on the same occasion. Some of the Summit's principal goals were broad issues that persisted throughout time, including during the 2020s. Among such goals, which were essential for Brazil, were strengthening the global economy and international financial institutions. Certainly, the topic of broadening cooperation between the four countries was central, pointing them toward the future.

During the 2000s, in an international environment undergoing deep changes, the defense of multilateralism and multipolarity has been a guiding feature of Brazil's international action, consistent with its structural characteristics and international action standards. During Michel Temer's government (2016-2018), and especially during Jair Bolsonaro's (2019-2022), this standard for international insertion, whose two defining dimensions are regional integration and cooperation with the Global South, was detracted, in favor of alignment with Western countries, which did not bring forth substantial benefits for the country, nor to the issue of development in the global agenda. Despite Brazil's diminished foreign involvement and priority given to the BRICS from 2016 to 2022, the organization persisted in its initiatives. More and more nations expressed interest in joining the alliance around this time.

From a formal standpoint, the foreign policy's rerouting between 2016 and 2022 did not cause a rupture regarding the BRICS. Even under Jair Bolsonaro, the administration has not shied away from group commitments, particularly in regards to the Russia-Ukraine war that started in February 2022 and in which Brazil cautiously remained neutral for a variety of reasons, including economic and commercial interests. However, during that period, Brazil's stance regarding South American issues was very different, especially regarding regional integration. In such topics, Brazil's position was clearly contrary to the perspective of autonomy.

In 2023, after Lula da Silva's narrow reelection as president in October 2022, Brazil's foreign policy once again revolved around the BRICS and presidential diplomacy, with the goal of reestablishing a connection between Brazil's development, regional integration, environmental preservation, and multipolarity agendas. Furthermore, Lula da Silva's new government reclaims the centrality of the autonomy and universalism dimensions in the country's international insertion. The shape that the international

system seems to take as of the second decade of the 21st century¹ reinforces the relevance of an insertion centered on autonomy and universalism.

In the 2010s, the financial crisis triggered by the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in 2008, created new issues. Even though the crisis was overcome thanks to the coordinated intervention of states and international agencies, distrust grew over the medium term, which would later spill over the global issues. These divergences and distrust on a global scale may accelerate the transformation of the international order. A significant part of Brazil's foreign insertion is structured around the perspective that it can advance this transformation. From the Brazilian standpoint, as of 2023, the BRICS is a coordination factor, an important forum to face a world where instability and tensions are rising. Therefore, it also represents an adaptation to new governance standards in a context of global instability.

Brazil played a part in transforming the BRICS acronym, from a category created by an economist from Goldman Sachs in 2001, to a political and diplomatic grouping of emerging and developing countries in 2009, with the first Summit in Yekaterinburg, in Russia.² Subsequently, the country also supported the bloc's expansion in 2010, with the accession of South Africa, so there would be a country representing Africa. At the same time, they maintained the idea of an attainable governance of the bloc with few countries involved. This criterion explains why Brazil, on the occasion of the fifteenth BRICS summit, in August 2023, was less enthusiastic about immediately expanding the bloc's members.

Since the beginning, BRICS countries have strived to strengthen cooperation through annual Summit, side gatherings in multilateral conferences, and the creation of their own institutions, a highlight being the New Development Bank (NDB), currently directed by former Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff. In past years, the debate has grown to allow the use of the group's own currencies in commerce between the BRICS's member countries. During the Johannesburg Summit, in August 2023, the Economy ministers and Presidents of Central Banks from Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa were asked to foment technical studies on the topic, to be presented in the bloc's next Summit. Brazil's interest also relates to the BRICS's ability to create economic instruments, for which China's power is key.

The regularity of the BRICS's agenda and of its specific institutional bodies, such as the NDB, go against the expectation of some analysts who were betting on the grouping's quick dissolution, after its formalization in 2009, considering the differences between its members and the disparity between their international insertions and formal and informal alliances. According to Desiderá Neto (2016), the plight to attribute responsibility to developed countries for the 2008 financial crisis,

1) Amitav Acharya, *The End of American World Order* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

2) Oliver Stuenkel, *BRICS e o Futuro da Ordem Global*, 1st ed. (Rio de Janeiro/São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2017).

and the joint search for more participation and influence in international financial institutions were the starting point to bring the group together as an international coalition.³ The argument that the five countries should have larger voting quotas in economic institutions is an important and often-stated one. As a result of the 1940s Bretton Woods Agreement, the United States and the United Kingdom continue to hold the position of prominence. This remained as a burden that has not been in line with the realities of global life for decades.

As the years went on, the push forward in the agenda and activities of the BRICS's thematic and technical groups, in addition to the Summits and the fact that China is a prominent presence in the bloc, are aspects that led to the interest of new countries to join the grouping. This does not mean that each country's international agenda is free of idiosyncrasies and significant divergences. For example, regarding UN reform and its Security Council, Brazil converges with India, but not China. It should be noted that other countries' interest in joining the BRICS, apparently larger than the bloc's ability to accept them, indicates the grouping's success, evidently made easier by the fact that accession does not require binding agreements.

With regard to the bloc's expansion, the original members were also interested, especially China and Russia. In the case of China, one can argue that the aim is to expanding Beijing's international influence. In the case of Russia, possibly with the expectation of diminishing the isolation it has suffered from Western countries since February 2022, due to the war with Ukraine. For Brazil and India, there were worries that the bloc's expansion could diminish the role of founding members, especially those with lesser power, as is the case of Brazil. Also with regards to the implications of the accession of new members for the geopolitical balance. During part of the negotiation process, before the August 2023 meeting, these issues were translated into arguments regarding criteria for inclusion and the status of new members. Nevertheless, from Brazil's point of view, as pointed out by Foreign Affairs Minister Mauro Vieira: "It would not be coherent of Brazil, who advocates for reform of global governance and broader participation of developing countries in decision-making bodies, such as the UN Security Council, to block access to the group".⁴

In the Johannesburg Summit, in August 2023, the countries came to an understanding on the bloc's expansion, stating that as of January 2024, the grouping would count with six new members: Argentina, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Iran and Ethiopia. The bloc will concentrate approximately 36 percent of the world's GDP and 46 percent of its population, in addition to encompassing countries from Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Northern Africa, the Middle East, Eurasia, Southern

3) Walter Desiderá Neto, "Os BRICS sete anos depois. Desafios do Desenvolvimento," Ano 12, Edição 85, IPEA, 2016.

4) "BRICS, o Consenso Como Norma," *Folha*, 13 September 2023.

<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/opiniao/2023/09/brics-o-consenso-como-norma.shtml>

Asia and the Asian Pacific. Given the profile of some new members, there is also the possibility the expansion broadens the revisionist aspect of the grouping's agenda, such as advocating for less Western-oriented approaches to international issues, thus capturing the tendencies to redefine the international power distribution and global governance standards. That is, the rise of international tensions, weakening the institutionalist perspective, may broaden the BRICS's protagonism as a pivot in the international system. It is also possible that a BRICS with 10 members tend to be more differentiated between them. This was decidedly limited during the bloc's 15 years of existence. There are reasons for this, and some bilateral severe tensions between part of the 10 members are significant, as those between China and India, Egypt and Ethiopia, and others.

The recently elected President of Argentina, Javier Milei, announced in December 2023 that the country would not formalize its accession to the BRICS, changing the prevailing intention of the previous government, which counted on Brazil's support for its viability. Argentina's decision certainly poses an issue for Brazilian politics regarding the grouping's internal balance. Nonetheless, in all 10 members, original or new, the main political authorities can foresee some continuity of their mandates and leaderships, despite differences in political regimes, a fact that may increase the possibility that the bloc promotes the necessary actions to bolster cooperation agendas in their new format.

It should be pointed out that the bloc's expansion may extend difficulties for purposeful actions, impacting the BRICS's ability to act as a collective arrangement in relevant global government matters. Therefore, states' ability to articulate will become more relevant. Similarly, the BRICS's expansion will demand significant efforts to reorganize the procedures within the group, the organization of meetings, working groups, consultations and decision making. The ability to absorb and manage its new setting will be seen in practice in the 16th Summit, scheduled to take place in Russia, in November 2024, which will include the new members. The same can be said about the group's 17th Summit, which is expected to take place in Brazil, in 2025, during Lula da Silva's government.⁵

Regarding the expansion of BRICS, President Lula da Silva pondered, "Our diversity strengthens the fight for a new order, one which accommodates economic, geographic and political plurality in the 21st century".⁶ With regards to new members, the Brazilian President pointed out that "we are not bringing the ideological issue into the BRICS. We are bringing in each state's geopolitical importance".⁷ Thus, the Lula

5) Monica Hirst, "O Brasil e a ordem multilateral global," Fridrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Brasil, 2023.

6) "Brics confirma entrada de Argentina, Arábia Saudita, Emirados, Irã, Egito e Etiópia," *Folha*, 24 August 2023. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2023/08/brics-confirma-entrada-de-argentina-arabia-saudita-emirados-ira-egito-e-etiofia.shtml>

7) *Folha*, 24 August 2023.

da Silva Government brings focus back to multipolarity as a key topic for Brazilian foreign policy, which becomes a guide to its foreign action. As Celso Amorim, chief advisor to the President, stated, “in the world’s current condition, in economy and other aspects, it is in Brazil’s interest to strive for a multipolar world. Our voice will be more easily heard in it than in a world divided by a cold war between good and evil”.⁸ So far, for Brazil’s current government, the BRICS must contribute for international governability, but with instruments where countries historically excluded from the center of power can weigh in in accordance with current relations, above all in the perspective of diminishing hegemonic and asymmetrical logics. And where they can weigh in for international peace, which includes possible contribution to the resolution of centuries-old conflicts in the Middle East, including the terrible situation in Gaza, Palestine, and Israel.

As of 2023, the understanding that becomes central in Brazilian foreign policy is that multipolarity is the most adequate configuration for international order. Similarly, the idea is that Brazil can play a relevant role in the international system, beginning with South and Latin America, and those multilateral institutions should reflect more accurately the international reality of the 2000s. Despite the inexorable advance of informal international governance bodies and Brazil’s action in such bodies, like the G20, the Brazilian government also argues for the relevance of formal organizations and international institutionality. Brazil’s more active role can be seen in the attention granted to the global environmental issue, as demonstrated by the hosting of COP 30, the Conference of Parties in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which will take place in Belém, in November 2025.

Despite disagreements regarding UN reform, the BRICS strive for converging paths. One such front is UN Security Council reform, with efforts to bring together different stances. During the 15th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, the final Declaration, from August 2023, signed by the leaders of BRICS countries, stated: “We support a comprehensive reform of the UN, including its Security Council, intending to make it more democratic, representative, effective and efficient, and to increase the representation of developing countries in the Council’s memberships so that it can adequately respond to prevailing global challenges and support the legitimate aspirations of emerging and developing countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America, including Brazil, India and South Africa, to play a greater role in international affairs, in particular in the United Nations, including its Security Council”.⁹ According to Brazil’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, ambassador Mauro Vieira, in the Johannesburg

8) “Não somos obrigados a seguir todas as opiniões dos EUA”, diz Celso Amorim,” *Folha*, 18 April 2023. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/colunas/monicabergamo/2023/04/nao-somos-obrigados-a-seguir-todas-as-opinioes-dos-eua-diz-celso-amorim.shtml>

9) “XV BRICS Summit Johannesburg II Declaration,” GOV.BR, 23 August 2023. <https://www.gov.br/planalto/pt-br/acompanhe-o-planalto/noticias/2023/08/em-declaracao-conjunta-lideres-do-brics-anunciam-a-entrada-de-seis-novos-paises/jhb-ii-declaration-24-august-2023.pdf>

meeting, there was an important evolution in the BRICS's and of all its five members' stance regarding the United Nations' and its Security Council's reform, "which should be followed by the countries that want to join".¹⁰

Given the well-known and new difficulties the topic of United Nations and Security Council reform face, including the vetoes of the Security Council's permanent members to new members and the reform layout, it is impossible to predict whether the plight will succeed. Nevertheless, for countries interested in change, Brazil in particular, aiming to broaden support and keeping the issue in the agenda, in search of a window of opportunity to debate it, seems like a coherent strategy.

As of 2023, there was an increased focus on expanding the importance of growth, the struggle against world hunger, and environmental sustainability in Brazil's foreign agenda, along with the topic of bolstering multipolarity. These issues will be an important test for the BRICS. Regarding broader geopolitical issues, Brazil has been striving to maintain an equidistant position in the conflicts between China and the United States, and between the United States and Russia, although this position might come across more difficulties depending on the evolution of such conflicts. Undoubtedly, facing hegemonism is a guideline element in Brazil's position. Inclusion in the agenda of issues that interest all countries, such as those pointed out above, the environment, as well as democracy, labor rights, the fight against hunger, allow for adequate and pragmatic ties with all, including the United States. Operationalizing multilateralism is a theoretical and empirical challenge, as is institutionalizing multipolarity.

It has become common place to state that the world is changing and that this change is complex and unpredictable. For countries and their foreign policy makers, the issue is to capture, address and adjust the direction of transformation, to strive to mold them according to their interests. It is important to consider that governance, global change and consensus building processes have a crucial political and agency dimension, permeated by states power. For Brazil, the strategy and the political choices matter due to the level of contribution foreign policy can offer to the development of the country and the building of structural projects domestically. At the same time, as argued in this article, these goals are attached to matters of principle that should prevail in the world order. Advancing on common interests with countries in the Global South, in the BRICS, and strengthening integration in the MERCOSUR and South America without disregarding the agendas of cooperation with the United States and the European Union, are aspects consistent with the country's structural characteristics and its possibility to influence the directions of international politics.

10) Folha, 13 September 2023.

BRICS+ AND SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION CHALLENGED BY THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

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Can BRICS+ play a transformative role in South-South cooperation, particularly in the field of climate change? Despite its membership heterogeneity, the BRICS+ grouping has become a central actor in the field of international development cooperation in an attempt both to craft a symbolic regime that challenges norms generated within a Western liberal global order and to implement economic decisions that need to respond to the climate emergency within a rejuvenated development agenda. Written from a Brazilian perspective, this paper explores key opportunities and contradictions in this endeavour, considering national assets and multilateral responses to the climate emergency within BRICS+.

Carlos R. S. Milani*

Keywords: BRICS+, South-South Cooperation,
International Development, The Climate Emergency, Brazil.



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Since the first BRIC summit held in Yekaterinburg in 2009, the group initially integrated by Brazil, Russia, India, and China has welcomed South Africa in 2010, then Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates in 2023. Argentina's new president formally announced that Buenos Aires would not join the BRICS (now the BRICS+) grouping in December 2023. The list of countries interested in joining the group is long, which shows that BRICS+ offers several strategic assets to the geopolitical South; however, the expansion process also has political implications in the group's institutionalization dynamics. Since its inception, the group has discussed ways and means toward a less Western-centric global order, and decided to set up innovative economic institutions, such as the Business Council, the Think Tank Council, the BRICS Economy and Trade Ministers Conference, and mainly the New Development Bank.

In less than twenty years of existence, the BRICS+ has already had a considerable impact on issues related to South-South Cooperation (SSC), hierarchy, and status in international politics.¹ That is the ideational dimension of BRICS+ as a coalition of powers in international relations. However, its foundation and development have also contributed to improving a material, strategic, and geopolitical vision of power among its member states, covering a wide span of economic, financial, technological, scientific and political dimensions, for instance, in matters of intra-group trade and financial transactions, food exchange, infrastructure investment, and fossil fuel exports.² In the case of Brazil, research groups and scholarly networks have been created to respond to the needs of understanding this changing global reality, such as the BRICS Policy Center in 2011 and the Brazilian Network of China Studies in 2017. Brazil's foreign policy considers BRICS+ one of the country's key priorities in promoting national trade, investment, and technological interests, but also in fostering a geopolitical vision to what Brasilia qualifies as critical changes in global governance, mainly regarding the United Nations security and development agendas.

In a changing global order, China stands out from within the BRICS+ with extraordinary clarity: a confirmed economic power, it is a strategic, economic, military, and cultural power rivaling the United States. China has a permanent seat with the right of veto at the UN Security Council and its economy still benefits from the recognition of the status of a developing country within the WTO. Beijing has played a central role in the group's recent expansion, bringing in countries where Chinese investments prosper in strategic sectors: Saudi Arabia, for instance, was the first destination of Chinese foreign investment in 2022.³ BRICS+ needs

1) N. Duggan, B. Hooijmaaijers, M. Rewizorski and E. Arapova, "The BRICS, Global Governance, and Challenges for South-South Cooperation in a Post-Western World," *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (2022): p. 469-480; Oliver Stuenkel, *The BRICS and the Future of Global Order* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020).

2) Michael Kahn, "A cooperação dos BRICS na ciência, tecnologia e inovação: retórica e realidades," *Contexto Internacional*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2015): p. 185-213; Siphamandla Zondi (ed.), *The Political Economy of Intra-BRICS Cooperation: Challenges and Prospects* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan & Springer Nature, 2022).

3) CEBC (Conselho Empresarial Brasil-China / Business Council Brazil-China), *Chinese Investment in Brazil 2022*,

China to secure its positioning in the chessboard of international politics; I argue, however, that China also needs BRICS+ for diplomatic reasons associated with the promotion of multilateral organizations and the foundation of institutions in a post-Western global order. The expansion of the group illustrates that argument.

We should not forget that there are ambiguities in the Chinese position regarding the UN Security Council reform, since India and Japan are two of the countries requesting access on this condition. India is a crucial BRICS+ member, but it also has strategic dialogues with Western powers, including the USA, Japan, and Australia. In the area of development cooperation, Beijing seeks to legitimize its trajectory at the multilateral level, with significant support from the G-77 countries. It also proposes institutional changes - as in the case of the latest reforms implemented at the World Bank and the IMF. Votes coming from developing countries matter in the multilateral setting.

Therefore, the context is complex. China is influential within the BRICS+, but so are Russia and India, and to a much lesser extent, Saudi Arabia and Brazil. Furthermore, Western powers sometimes have difficulties understanding the international system's diversity and multipolar nature. Still, they also accept the full integration of new powers as part and parcel of globalization and regionalization processes. In general, the West lacks the skills (and perhaps the will) to respond intelligently and without arrogance to the requests coming from the global and regional powers of the South in terms of recognition, status and representation in the up-to-now failed reform attempts of UN multilateral institutions. In other words, most Western leaders tend not to acknowledge that the international system needs to take onboard visions and norms coming from Asian, African and Latin American powers. Instead, based on a past of glory (and domination), Western diplomacy often deploys instruments of humiliation instead of building a new global order together with other risen and rising powers.⁴

South-South Cooperation as a Key Dimension of the Multipolar Order

South-South Cooperation (SSC) is both a material and a symbolic form of contestation coming from non-Western actors to norms and practices that have been created and diffused by the Geopolitical North.⁵ However, Southern countries in general, and the BRICS+ in particular, do not only build their strategies as a response to prior action by

Technology and Energy Transition (2023). Research Director: Tulio Carielo, available in Portuguese and English at <https://www.cebc.org.br/2023/08/29/numero-de-projetos-chineses-no-brasil-bateu-recorde-em-2022/>

4) Shaun Breslin, *China Risen? Studying Chinese Global Power* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021).

5) North and South are geopolitical ideal types. The geopolitical North refers to central and Western powers (USA, Western Europe, Japan, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand) that tend to act on common grounds in major security and development agendas. They build consensus around some key formal and informal institutions, such as the G-7, IMF, NATO, OECD or the World Bank. The geopolitical South encompasses developing countries that have been marginalized from international governance decision-making roles, given their middle or low position in global hierarchies of power. Such countries may seek recognition, to build Southern coalitions (BRICS' New Development Bank, IBSA, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank), and challenge Northern world-visions (on human rights, climate change, development cooperation, the origins of international inequality etc.).

the North; they also create international norms and generate economic development programs in other developing countries. The BRICS+ grouping carries considerable weight and relevance in the global political economy. In the development cooperation field, they are reluctant to embrace established norms, showing eagerness to propose and diffuse norms, such as non-intervention, redistributive justice, and a socially inclusive development model. For instance, they choose non-conditionality and non-intervention in domestic affairs as norms that cut across official SSC narratives while endorsing “win-win” partnerships, horizontality, and shared commonalities.⁶

Since colonial times, Northern countries have exported (and in many cases imposed) political, economic, social, and cultural models in the guise of promises of modernisation and development; however, pledges of progress have in fact entailed the maintenance of asymmetric relations, often based on dominance, humiliation, and exploitation.⁷ The BRICS+ support development cooperation criteria differ from those set up by the OECD-DAC countries, and they associate their practice with a postcolonial history rooted in autonomy, self-reliance, and political contestation. By refusing the political conditionality, the BRICS+ group recognizes that each sovereign nation has the right to decide which future social models, development patterns, and public policies it will adopt to achieve its goals. For instance, the Chinese government states that “when providing foreign assistance, China adheres to the principles of not imposing any political conditions, not interfering in the internal affairs of the recipient countries, and fully respecting their right to choose their own paths and models of development independently. The basic principles China upholds in providing foreign assistance are mutual respect, equality, keeping promises, mutual benefits, and win-win”.⁸ Likewise, the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme states that, “South-South Cooperation is a partnership born out of a shared sense of solidarity and is entirely voluntary and free of conditionalities”.⁹ The Brazilian Cooperation Agency also claims that Brazil’s cooperation “is demand-driven, and free of impositions or conditionalities.”^{10,11}

What is also interesting is how the UN agencies and funds may perceive the BRICS+ and the rise of countries of the Geopolitical South at the beginning of the 21st century

6) Rubens de S. Duarte, *The Politics behind Aid and Cooperation Norms: Critical Reflections on the Normative Role of Brazil and the United Kingdom* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2019).

7) Ayşe Zarakol, “What Made the Modern World Hang Together: Socialisation or Stigmatisation?” *International Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2014): p. 311-32; Bertrand Badie, *Le temps des Humiliés: Pathologie des Relations Internationales* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2014).

8) *The People’s Republic of China, China’s Foreign Aid* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council, July 2014), p. 1.

9) Available at <https://www.itecgoi.in/about.php>, accessed on 10 January 2019.

10) Agência Brasileira de Cooperação (ABC), *Manual of South-South Technical Cooperation Management* (Brasília: Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2017), <http://www.abc.gov.br/api/publicacaoarquivo/38>, p. 16.

11) Rubens de S. Duarte and Carlos R. S. Milani, “Southern States in International Development Cooperation: From Contestation to Norm Conception,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (2021): p. 506-529.

as an opportunity to reaffirm their relevance in international relations. The arrival of new development cooperation players not only increases the number of possibilities of partnerships for the least developed countries (LDCs), it also results in new institutional arrangements and more legitimacy for UN agencies in a context of crisis of multilateral organizations. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) decided to incorporate norms originating in the South.¹² Since their creation, FAO and UNDP have been key players in delivering multilateral cooperation worldwide, even though Northern countries may consider them relatively unimportant institutions. Mainly via trilateral cooperation, the UNDP and FAO started either implementing or financing social policy programs originating in Southern countries. It is the case of the Food Purchase Programme for Africa, Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, Ardahan-Kars-Artvin Development Project, School Feeding Programmes, and China-UNDP Trilateral Cooperation on Renewable Energy with Zambia and Ghana.¹³

The Climate Emergency as a Major Challenge for BRICS+

Will the BRICS+ be able to take a step further in strategic, development, and diplomatic cooperation around cardinal issue areas, including the climate emergency and its corollary, the need for implementing energy transition frameworks and environmentally sustainable public policies? Anthropogenic climate change is here defined as an interconnected and interdependent set of natural, social, economic, and political problems that relate to unprecedented severity, scale, and complexity.¹⁴ The accelerated loss of biodiversity, increasing deforestation rates, rising emissions of CO₂ associated with the continuous development of the fossil economy, and the climate emergency are fundamental components of the Anthropocene, which have produced intense public debates about the responsibility of states, corporations and lifestyles of the wealthiest nations, groups and individuals.

At the same time, the younger generations and people living in the least developed countries, particularly small island developing nations, and poorer communities living in coastal areas, are more vulnerable and have less causal responsibility. There are historical and geographical differences in terms of causal responsibilities. Some scholars and political actors refer to humankind as the primary bearer of a global responsibility. Still, I argue that the Anthropocene must be interpreted from the intra- and inter-generational climate justice perspective, analyzing the contradictions between responsibility for GHG

12) Carolina Milhorange and Folashade S. Kohndou, "South-South Cooperation and Chance in International Organizations," *Global Governance*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (2017): p. 461-81.

13) Rubens de S. Duarte and Carlos R. S. Milani, (2021).

14) Dominique Bourg, "Anthropocène, Questions d'Interprétation," in R. Beau and C. Larrère (Eds.), *Penser l'Anthropocène* (Paris: Les Presses de Sciences Po, 2014): p. 63-76; E. A. Page, "Distributing the Burdens of Climate Change," *Environmental Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (2008): p. 556-575.

emissions and the right to a socially just and environmentally sound development.

A sense of emergency clearly marks the complexity of the climate crisis due to the acceleration of changes. Acknowledging the Anthropocene and the climate emergency implies coordinating different public policy sectors in space and time. The effects of today's policy actions have extended lead times when it comes to climate stability: what is done today can have a limited impact on climate stability over the next fifty years, but our inaction today may have considerable costs in the coming twenty or thirty years. Situated between environmental and economic, energy, and security debates, but also involving public health issues, the climate emergency requires responses from different institutions at the national (ministries and secretariats) and at the multilateral levels (United Nations Environment Program, UN Development Program, World Health Organization, etc.). The latest debates in Brazil about Petrobras' request to drill for oil at the mouth of the Amazon River, an area of high risk and socioenvironmental vulnerability, showcases this coordination challenge at the national level, which may cause a serious rift within the Lula administration. Internationally, the BRICS+ group must deal with this challenge.

In fact, many BRICS+ countries are among the world's major emitters in absolute terms, thus needing to address the climate emergency for both international and national reasons. China (1st), India (3rd), Russia (4th), Brazil (5th), Iran (8th), and Saudi Arabia (9th) are among the top-10 major emitters in absolute terms. The United Arab Emirates (7th) and Saudi Arabia (10th) are among the top-10 major per capita emitters.¹⁵

Moreover, China's accelerated growth and double participation in the world's economy as a significant demander of commodities and a large producer of manufactured products have resulted in substantial changes on its bilateral trade with many BRICS+ countries since the beginning of the 2000s.¹⁶ In the case of Brazil, such trade relations have interacted with a series of domestic variables, wherein the development of agribusiness and mining sectors fostered growing deforestation rates and affected the country's land-use and GHG emissions. Considering China's investments, it is important to understand their potential impact on the further development of renewable energies and the national market of electric vehicles and batteries in Brazil and South America. Due to its economy's scale and geopolitical projection, China's investments and technological drivers have environmental and climate-related consequences for the future of socially and environmentally sustainable development programs. Will the BRICS+ group integrate the complex effects of climate change and foster cooperation to speed up the transition to a low-carbon economy? Will they commit to a serious energy transition

15) See at <https://ourworldindata.org/greenhouse-gas-emissions>

16) Oscar Ugarteche and C. De Leon, "China and the Change of the Energy Matrix in Latin America: a Global Political Economy Approach," *Brazilian Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2022): p. 442-459.

programme and to the mitigation of GHG emissions fairly and equitably, considering the singularities of each national context, as well as the pressing needs of planetary severe action? Will BRICS+ show solidarity towards southern countries facing short-term adaptation difficulties, such as the least-developed states, small islands, and countries with threatened coastal zones? These are vital questions that scholars and policy analysts should rigorously monitor in the coming months and years.

BOLIVIA AND THE BRICS OBJECTIVE

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The rise of BRICS has sparked a debate around the reconfiguration of the international system. Regardless, in Latin America, this debate has been unable to break from a caricaturesque portrayal that seeks to reject this new block's relevance. Nevertheless, the Plurinational State of Bolivia has initiated its journey towards adherence to BRICS as a result of a foreign policy that aims to strengthen its relation to the new actors of the international system. Consequently, the bilateral relations with China, India, Russia, South Africa, and Brazil are vital in understanding the nuances of this new reality.

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Keywords: Bolivia, BRICS, Foreign Policy,
Latin America, Luis Arce, Evo Morales.



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Little has been said in the debates within Latin America regarding the rise of BRICS, primarily due to certain political actors who seek to reject and deny the relevance of the countries that constitute the block. In that sense, we are facing strong willpower from certain figures that deny reality and insist on the idea of a world that hasn't undergone significant power shifts in the last thirty years. Notwithstanding, despite these efforts, it's impossible to deny the importance of the geopolitical giants China, India, Russia, South Africa, and neighboring Brazil, founders of BRICS, who have an ever-growing weight within the international scene and who hold promise for many in incentivizing an internal readjustment of an international system inherited at the end of the Cold War.

Parallely, the recent XV BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, set a precedent with the founding members' decision to expand the block, integrating six new members —Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and The United Arab Emirates— after years of internal debates as to in which direction the block should head towards.¹ Evidently, this shift inside the BRICS opens up the possibility for many other countries to join the block in the future. One of the most interested candidates is the Plurinational State of Bolivia, which during 2023 requested its formal introduction to the block when President Luis Arce Catacora attended the summit in South Africa —invited by fellow President of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa— and made the South American country's interest in joining explicit.²

It is worth mentioning that Brazil is the only country from the region that has representation in this block after Diana Mondino, Argentina's Chancellor, announced the end of the country's short-lived integration in BRICS as a clear signal of President Javier Milei's shift in Argentina's foreign policy.³ This situation shows the ruminating fears of an authoritarian world order regarding future additions. Despite certain actors' caricaturesque portrayals, BRICS currently represents 32 percent of the worldwide GDP, which only increases with every new incorporation to the block.⁴

Undoubtedly, BRICS's gravitation towards an international insertion makes it a worldwide showcase in commercial and geopolitical terms. For an emerging nation such as Bolivia, it could represent the opportunity to insert itself into a crucial project at an international scale. This has been an initiative taken by ex-president Evo

1) "BRICS Welcomes New Members in Push to Reshuffle World Order". *Reuters*, 24 August 2023.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/brics-poised-invite-new-members-join-bloc-sources-2023-08-24/>

2) "Bolivia oficializa su deseo de sumarse al grupo de los BRICS y estará presente en la próxima cumbre". *Sputnik Mundo*, 1 August 2023. <https://sputniknews.lat/20230731/el-presidente-de-bolivia-estara-presente-en-la-proxima-cumbre-de-los-brics-1142120166.html>

3) "Argentina's Incoming Foreign Minister says country will not join BRICS Bloc," *Reuters*, 30 November 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/argentinas-incoming-foreign-minister-says-country-will-not-join-brics-bloc-2023-11-30/>

4) "The Growing Role of BRICS on the World Stage," *Forbes*, 28 August 2023.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/greatspeculations/2023/08/28/the-growing-role-of-brics-on-the-world-stage/>

Morales Ayma, who, through diversification of bilateral relations and under a devoted defense of the multipolar system, has ended with a subordinate foreign policy heavily influenced by the interests of the United States. Within this framework, Bolivia's foreign policy has given clear signs that it seeks to strengthen ties with the founding countries of BRICS, which, except for Brazil, previously had a less relevant role in its foreign policy but that have nevertheless been subjected of interest for Bolivia during the last decade, particularly in regards to its commercial flow, political convergence and diverse issues of cooperation.⁵

In the case of China, the Asian giant's exportations reached a record-breaking 1.17 billion in 2023, all meanwhile establishing an agreement between the Bolivia Union Bank and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) to carry out operations with the currencies Bolivianos and Yuans as well as exchange agreement between the public Bolivian company Yacimientos de Litios Bolivianos (YLB) and the Chinese concierge CBC to build the Pilot Plan using of Direct Lithium Extraction (EDL) technology.⁶

As far as its ties to the Republic of India, Asian Mogul has positioned itself as one of Bolivia's main commercial partners during 2021, 2022 and 2023, surpassing traditional partners such as Brazil and Argentina.⁷ At the same time, India's minister of foreign relations and culture, Lekhilíneas' visit to Bolivia has allowed both countries to initiate the project "Centro de Excelencia en Tecnología de la Información y la Comunicación India" for the exchange of scientific tech production of knowledge and experiences, a joint network of traditional systems of medicine as well as the Binational Cultural Program during the period of 2023 and 2025.^{8,9}

On the other hand, one of the most fluid exchanges in Bolivian diplomacy was with the Russian Federation, which gained relevance during the pandemic with the acquisition of the first batches of the Sputnik vaccine as well as, with the arrival of Luis Arce, other agreements in the areas of hydrocarbons, evaporitic resources, nuclear energy, lithium, among others. In this context, the Russian company Uranium

5) "Relación comercial entre Bolivia y China alcanzó cifra récord en 2023," *Sputnik Mundo*, 27 February 2024. <https://sputniknews.lat/20240227/relacion-comercial-entre-bolivia-y-china-alcanzo-cifra-record-en-2023-1148567284.html>

6) "Banco Unión firma acuerdo con el ICBC de China para transacciones en bolivianos y yuanes," *La Razón Bolivia*, 23 February 2024. <https://www.la-razon.com/economia/2024/02/23/banco-union-firma-acuerdo-con-el-icbc-de-china-para-transacciones-en-bolivianos-y-yuanes/>

7) "Bolivia firma un convenio con un consorcio chino para la extracción directa de litio". *France 24*, 18 January 2024. <https://www.france24.com/es/minuto-a-minuto/20240118-bolivia-firma-un-convenio-con-un-consorcio-chino-para-la-extracci%C3%B3n-directa-de-litio>

8) "India es nuevamente el principal comprador de las exportaciones bolivianas". *Opinion*, 11 February 2023. <https://www.opinion.com.bo/articulo/pais/india-es-nuevamente-principal-comprador-exportaciones-bolivianas/20230211150800896812.html>

9) "Bolivia e India fortalecen sus relaciones bilaterales". Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, 20 January 2023. <https://www.cancilleria.gob.bo/webmre/noticia/5099>

One Group signed a deal with Yacimiento de Litio Bolivianos for the construction of a trial plant for direct lithium extraction, while the Russian corporation Rosatom began the construction and operation of Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo en Tecnología Nuclear (CIDTN) which ultimately aims to improve the medical use and development of scientific and productive investigation with the best interest of the Bolivian population in mind.^{10,11,12}

As far as the Republic of South Africa, the relations haven't accelerated at the same pace as with China, India and Russia. Regardless, in 2023, both countries agreed to impulse a bilateral tie, heavily influenced by the visits of the South African ambassador in Chile and concurrent with the Plurinational State of Bolivia, where both countries have agreed to move forward and sign the Memorandum of Understanding for the Establishment of a Mechanism for Political Consultations that will allow them to approach issues of common interest. Likewise, the presence of President Luis Arce at the XV BRICS Summit organized by South Africa and the recent bilateral meeting between the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bolivia, Celinda Sosa Lunda and the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa, Nalenda Pandor at the XIX Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) are examples of the attempts to strengthen the bilateral relationship.¹³

Lastly, the relaunch of the bilateral relation between Bolivia and Brazil is one of the most relevant acts in the Bolivian foreign policy following its stagnant dynamic during Jair Bolsonaro's presidency and especially after his explicit support of the democratic rupture that resulted in President Evo Morales' exit. Without a doubt, the return of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has paved the way in reconstructing this transcendental tie. This initiative was solidified in 2023 with the launch of a robust itinerary that involves many areas of interest for both countries: the reactivation of bilateral mechanisms of dialogue, its physical integration, hydric resources, joint fight against contraband, bio-combustibles, the issue of Amazonia, cooperation in judicial, police, health and consulate matters as well as the key role Brazil's president played in achieving the introduction of Bolivia to MERCOSUR after years of languish in its

10) "Bolivia recibe su primer lote de 20.000 vacunas rusas Sputnik V," *France 24*, 29 January 2021. <https://www.france24.com/es/minuto-a-minuto/20210128-bolivia-recibe-su-primer-lote-de-20-000-vacunas-rusas-sputnik-v>

11) "Bolivia firma un nuevo acuerdo con la rusa Uranium One para producir carbonato de litio," *SWI*, 13 December 2023. <https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/bolivia-firma-un-nuevo-acuerdo-con-la-rusa-uranium-one-para-producir-carbonato-de-litio/49057658>

12) "En Bolivia se realizó una ceremonia de inauguración de un Centro Multipropósito de Irradiación e inicio de la instalación de un reactor de investigación," *Rosatom*, 24 October 2023. <https://rosatom-latinamerica.com/press-centre/news/en-bolivia-se-realiz-una-ceremonia-de-inauguraci-n-de-un-centro-multiprop-sito-de-irradiaci-n-e-inic/>

13) "Bolivia y Sudáfrica dan un nuevo impulso a la relación bilateral," Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, 13 April 2023. <https://www.cancilleria.gob.bo/webmre/noticia/5167>

senate.^{14,15}

Unquestionably, Bolivia's foreign policy has shown clear signs of a desire to nourish and prioritize its ties to BRICS countries, which can be seen in its growing bilateral relation with China, Russia, and Brazil during the administrations of Luis Arce and Evo Morales, manifesting the continuity of international enterprise that characterizes the governments of MAS-IPSP. Furthermore, the need to strengthen ties between President Luis Arce and the Republic of India, which reached its peak with President Ram Nath Kovind's unprecedented visit to Bolivia in 2019, is still evident. A further reinforcement of the bilateral relation with South Africa is also needed, one that contemplates initiating an embassy to achieve an integration to the African continent finally.¹⁶

Without a doubt, Bolivia must take on a more aggressive strategy to enter BRICS. This task will be left in the hands of Bolivia's first Minister of Foreign Relations Celina Sosa Lunda, who has been up for the challenge, centering her efforts on the adhesion of the South American country. Hence, Bolivia must solidify its relations with the founding countries of BRICS through a series of high-level visits and a consolidation of embassies and consulates throughout the Asian and African continents to establish a strong presence in not-so-traditional spaces within its diplomacy, taking into account that in the short and medium term, this is how it can come into contact with other new members of BRICS such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates.

14) "El gobierno de Jair Bolsonaro reconoció a Jeanine Añez como presidenta legítima de Bolivia," *Clarín Argentina*, 12 November 2019. https://www.clarin.com/mundo/gobierno-jair-bolsonaro-reconocio-jeanine-anez-presidenta-legitima-bolivia_0_FhHcn78e.html

15) "Brasil y Bolivia relanzan sus relaciones bilaterales con una agenda de 15 áreas de interés común y cooperación," Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, 4 May 2023. <https://cancilleria.gob.bo/webmre/noticia/5183>

16) "El presidente de la India califica de histórica su visita a Bolivia". *Sputnik Mundo*, 29 March 2019. <https://sputniknews.lat/20190329/presidente-de-india-se-encuentra-con-evo-morales-1086390353.html>

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ENERGY DYNAMICS IN TÜRKİYE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH BRICS COUNTRIES

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The energy transition and on-going crises in Ukraine and the Middle East highlights the need for new approaches in energy diplomacy. This policy brief examines Türkiye's energy dynamics in relation to BRICS's role in global energy politics. It presents continuities in Türkiye's asymmetric interdependence with Russia in energy imports; and questions the major challenges for Türkiye and BRICS in adapting to new energy security environment and new geographies of energy trade. The argument asserts that Turkish policymakers should consider the country's role in global energy trade and its multilateral transportation policy, known as the Middle Corridor within the context of shifting paradigms in energy security and on-going energy transition.

Pınar İpek*

Keywords: Türkiye, Energy Transition, Energy Security,
Energy Diplomacy, Energy Trade.



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In the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, energy dynamics have been reshaped within the context of an on-going global energy transition. Türkiye's already built cross-border energy infrastructure has again underlined its geostrategic position. However, there are remaining challenges within the same context. This policy brief examines Türkiye's energy relation with BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) through two dimensions: (i) Türkiye's energy import dependency and its bilateral energy relations with Russia; and (ii) BRICS role in mediating power shifts in global energy politics.

Türkiye has taken advantage of its geostrategic location to promote energy diplomacy as part of its foreign policy efforts in adopting to changing security environment in its energy-rich neighborhood. Since the completion of the early cross-border pipelines, there have been changes and new developments in the energy market at the global level and energy geopolitics at the regional level. In the early 2000s, the East-West energy corridor, bypassing the Russian-controlled pipeline system, was a shared strategic priority between Türkiye and Western stakeholders to access crude oil/natural gas supplies in the Caspian region. Therefore, the inauguration ceremony for the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan crude oil pipeline in 2006 and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipeline, which became operational in 2007, were major milestones in Türkiye's efforts to diversify pipeline routes accessing the Caspian energy resources. Ankara's policy goals were mainly to supply Türkiye's growing energy demand and to foster regional interdependency.

Once these pipelines were in operation, the Turkish policy elite has increasingly promoted diversifying the European Union (EU) member states' gas imports through Türkiye. Türkiye's long-awaited aspiration to be an energy hub, thus, has evolved through different phases from a transit state or energy corridor to a regional energy trading center. There were limitations as a transit state. Although being a supplier country is not necessarily a condition to be an energy hub, there were difficulties in securing additional natural gas supplies from regional countries to deliver to the European energy market in the late 2000s (i.e., the Nabucco natural gas pipeline project).¹

Within this context, energy dynamics in Türkiye's relationship with BRICS countries present two major continuities. First, Türkiye has a growing energy market, given its relatively higher energy demand as a developing country. For example, Türkiye's primary energy consumption between 2000 and 2020 increased on average annually by 3.1 percent, while the projected increase for the next period between 2020 and

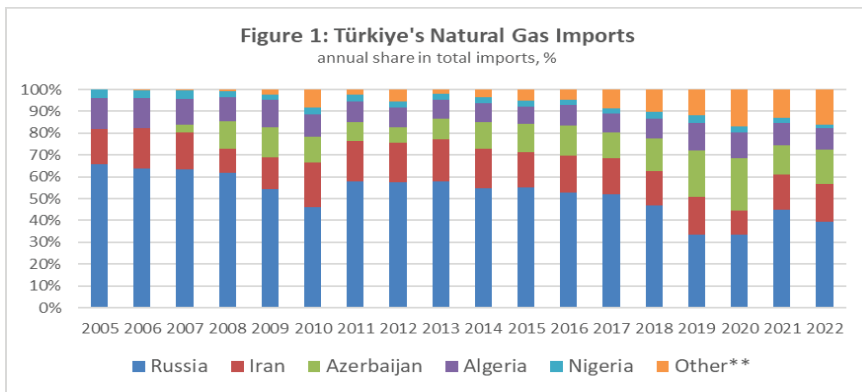
1) For more information on how and under what conditions the Nabucco project was initiated by Türkiye and Austria; and despite an intergovernmental agreement in 2009 why the project was cancelled see Pinar İpek. (2017). "The Role of Energy Security in Turkish Foreign Policy (2004-2016)" in *Turkish Foreign Policy: International Relations, Legality and Global Reach*, Pinar Gozen (ed.) (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2017): p. 176-178.

2035 will be 2.2 percent.² Second, sunk-costs in existing pipelines (Blue Stream and Turk Stream) that deliver natural gas from Russia will continue to shape Türkiye's domestic need for natural gas imports at least in the near term. More than 90 percent of Türkiye's natural gas supplies are imported; and its total installed capacity and electricity production depend significantly on imported natural gas.

Continuities in Türkiye's Asymmetric Interdependence with Russia in Energy Imports

Türkiye's natural gas agreements with Russia in 1986 for the West Route and in 1997 for the Blue Stream pipelines aimed to meet Türkiye's growing energy demand. The Blue Stream's construction started in 2001, and gas flow began in 2003. Türkiye has gradually increased natural gas imports from Russia in parallel to its economic growth rate.

For example, Russian share in Türkiye's total natural gas imports reached 54 percent in 2009, 58 percent in 2011, and 55 percent in 2015. These figures dropped to 34 percent in both 2019 and 2020. Two other sources replaced the decline in natural gas imports from Russia. First, Türkiye's total natural gas imports from Azerbaijan increased to 21 percent and 24 percent in 2019 and 2020, respectively, from 14 percent in 2009 due to the completion of the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP). Second, the share of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in Türkiye's total natural gas imports increased to 28 percent and 31 percent in 2019 and 2020, respectively, from 15 percent in 2009 (See Figure 1).³ Nevertheless, Türkiye's continuing sensitivity to any natural gas disruption highlights asymmetric interdependence between Türkiye and Russia.



Natural gas has the second highest share after hydro in Türkiye's total installed electricity capacity. Moreover, when there is a decline in Türkiye's electricity

2) Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Türkiye National Energy Plan, 2022. https://enerji.gov.tr/Media/Dizin/EIGM/tr/Raporlar/TUEP/T%C3%BCrkiye_National_Energy_Plan.pdf, accessed 4 March 2024.

3) Energy Market Regulatory Authority's Natural Gas Sector Reports from 2005-2020.

production from hydropower (i.e., 30 percent, 26 percent, and 17 percent in 2019, 2020, and 2021, respectively) due to drought, electricity production from imported natural gas increases (i.e., 19 percent, 23 percent, and 33 percent in 2019, 2020 and 2021, respectively).⁴ The start of domestic natural gas production from the offshore wells in the Sakarya field in the Black Sea since April 2023 is important to reduce risks in Türkiye's pipeline-bound imports. However, it is insufficient for Türkiye's current energy demand unless there are substitutes, especially in electricity production.⁵

Despite Türkiye's asymmetric interdependence with Russia, Ankara and Moscow's energy cooperation has continued during the changing geopolitics of the region, given Russia's increasing use of force long before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 (i.e. the Russian-Georgian War in August 2008, Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014, and Russia's military intervention in Syria since September 2015). For example, Türkiye approved the Russian South Stream gas pipeline's transit through the Turkish exclusive economic zone in the Black Sea shortly after signing the TANAP deal with Azerbaijan in 2011. Meanwhile, the EU Commission's anti-trust investigation against Gazprom in 2012 induced Russia to abolish the South Stream project and redirect its proposed natural gas route to Türkiye, later known as the Turk Stream. Against this background, a memorandum of understanding was signed between Russia and Türkiye to build the Turk Stream natural gas pipeline in December 2014. The final agreement of the Turk Stream was signed in October 2016 after serious challenges for Turkish foreign policy and domestic politics.⁶

Türkiye's energy cooperation with Russia expanded into the nuclear sector to build the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant since 2010. It continued despite some conflicting interests between Ankara and Moscow in regional disputes, such as Nagorno-Karabakh, Crimea/late Ukraine, Syria and Libya. In short, the complex relationship between Russia and Türkiye underlines continuities in Türkiye's natural gas import dependency within the context of the changing regional security environment and President Erdoğan's ever increasing power.

4) As of 2022 Türkiye's total installed electricity capacity is distributed by 30.4 percent from hydro, 24.8 percent from natural gas, 10.9 percent from wind, 10.63 from lignite and coal, 9.9 percent from imported coal, 9 percent from solar, 1.6 percent from geothermal, 1.9 percent from biomass. Energy Market Regulatory Authority, Electricity Sector Report, 2022. <https://www.epdk.gov.tr/Detay/Icerik/3-0-24/elektrikvillik-sektor-raporu>, accessed 4 March 2024.

5) The Project will be realized in two phases. In Phase 1, the daily production capacity will reach a maximum of 10 million cubic meter. That amounts to approximately 10 percent of summertime consumption and 4 to 5 percent of Türkiye's wintertime consumption.

6) Türkiye's downing of a Russian fighter at the Turkish-Syrian border in November 2015 was a challenge for Turkish foreign policy and energy security. Though Russia introduced harsh sanctions against Türkiye, such as a set of restrictions on trade, there were no disruptions in the Russian gas exports to Türkiye. Nevertheless, negotiations between Türkiye and Russia on the Turk Stream were suspended in December 2015. Türkiye initiated investment in floating natural gas storage units to reduce risks for any disruption in natural gas imports from Russia. Russian-Turkish relations improved after the coup against President Erdoğan in July 2016.

Türkiye's Energy Dynamics and Shifting Paradigms in Energy Security

According to Türkiye's National Energy Plan, the share of renewable energy sources in primary energy consumption, which was 16.7 percent in 2020, will increase to 23.7 percent by 2035. Nuclear energy, on the other hand, will reach a share of 5.9 percent by 2035. The share of fossil resources, which was 83.3 percent in 2020, will decline to 70.4 percent by 2035. The share of coal will decrease to 21.4 percent, and the shares of oil and natural gas will fall to 26.5 percent and 22.5 percent, respectively.⁷ In fact, Türkiye has already made impressive progress in developing renewable energy sources led by hydro, solar, and wind.⁸ In 2022 the share of renewables from wind, solar, and geothermal increased to 22 percent from 10 percent in 2018 in total electricity production capacity. The share of all renewable resources, including hydro and biomass, is 54 percent in total electricity production capacity in 2022.

In 2022, Türkiye revised its nationally determined commitment (NDC) by 21 percent to by 41 percent by 2030 and committed to net zero by 2053. Thus, Türkiye's commitment to reducing emissions and its efforts to boost the share of renewables in electricity production underline both changes and challenges in Türkiye's energy dynamics. Further, when we take into account the major trend in energy markets, namely electrification due to the growing share of the service sector in the world economy, the major challenge for Türkiye and BRICS is to be ready for new geographies of energy trade and to adopt to new energy security environment.

The on-going geopolitical crises in Ukraine and in the Middle East are merely an accelerator rather than driving forces shaping Türkiye and BRICS energy dynamics. For example, while the United States and the EU have sought to limit Russia's energy exports following its invasion of Ukraine, Brazil, India and China largely abstained from changing their energy relationship with Russia. Hence, a major change in the energy security environment is shifting alliances built on fossil fuels. For example, since the Ukrainian-Russian War, there has been an increasing share of American LNG in Europe's energy security compared to Russia's increasing natural gas exports to China by expanding the capacity of the Power of Siberia pipeline. The Power of Siberia was launched in 2019 and is projected to reach its maximum capacity by 2024. The pipeline transports natural gas supplies from newly developed gas fields in eastern Siberia. That means the pipeline does not divert the gas supplies that have been sent to Europe. Rather, the Power of Siberia-2 project aims to supply China from the gas fields in the Yamal peninsula. These gas fields used to serve the European market through several pipelines, including the Nord Stream-1 pipeline, before it was sabotaged in 2022. Similarly, the crude oil price wars between OPEC and Russia during the COVID-19 pandemic had forced many US shale oil producers

7) Türkiye National Energy Plan, 2022, p. 19.

8) International Energy Agency, *Turkey 2021 Energy Policy Review*.

on the brink of bankruptcy in 2020.

Lastly, recent attacks on shipping vessels by Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in the Red Sea, a strategic choke point for crude oil, petroleum products, and LNG trade, have also disrupted tankers passing through the Suez Canal. The Bab-el Mandeb Strait and the Suez Canal are the fastest sea routes for both northbound and southbound destinations of energy trade. For example, rerouting of tankers from the Red Sea to around the coast of Africa adds about ten days longer to journey time. This is a severe concern for Europe and energy-important dependent India and China among BRICS. For example, India is a major importer of crude oil from Russia and a significant player in the export of petroleum products to Europe, both of which require transportation through the Suez Canal.

In short, Türkiye, China and India share common risks that can undermine the affordability and accessibility of fossil fuels in their energy-import-dependent economies. Türkiye should reconsider its energy diplomacy in the global energy transition context.

Conclusion: Türkiye and BRICS Role in Global Energy Politics

BRICS is an example of informal institutions or informal intergovernmental organizations that facilitate bargaining among states without freezing outcomes in permanent institutions while power transition in international politics evolves.⁹ Thus, Türkiye and BRICS's commitment to net-zero targets is vital in fighting climate change and reconsidering energy diplomacy, given their mediating power in global energy politics.

In its 2021 report, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) underlined that Türkiye will experience three accelerating trends: rising temperatures, dehydration, and rising sea levels. In fact, Türkiye has been experiencing more frequent and more severe weather conditions, such as heavy rain, wildfires, and drought throughout the year. Türkiye signed the Paris Agreement in April 2016. However, it was the last G20 country to ratify the Agreement in October 2022. Ankara's argument for holding back from ratification of the Agreement for five years emphasized that it is historically responsible for a minimal share of carbon emissions. BRICS have also pledged their commitment to net-zero targets with submissions of their NDCs, albeit with some variation given differences in their energy market structure, size of their

9) Felicity Vabulas and Duncan Snidal. "Informal IGOs as Mediators of Power Shifts" *Global Policy* 11 Supplement 3, October 2020, p.40-50.

economy and demography.¹⁰

Accordingly, Turkish policymakers should consider the country's role in global energy trade and its multilateral transportation policy, known as the Middle Corridor within the context of shifting paradigms in energy security and on-going energy transition.¹¹ Türkiye's re-emphasis on its geostrategic position and its long-waiting aspiration to be a regional energy trade center should not be limited to re-balancing acts with non-western great powers, such as Russia and China in a U.S.-led liberal international order. Rather, understanding a multiplex international order, in which BRICS has proven its role in collaborating with like-minded partners in the critical cooperation areas (i.e. political economy, security and sustainable development) can help Türkiye's energy diplomacy in changing the dynamics of energy trade. For example, the US and BRICS policy positions have converged in international renewable energy cooperation. However, the BRICS preferences regarding strengthening energy security cooperation internationally have been diverging from those of the U.S.¹²

Consequently, because of electrification, Türkiye's energy dynamics and its energy diplomacy require an understanding of regional energy infrastructure not only through pipelines but also through regional grids. There will be a gradual shift from global markets to regional grids because of electrification. Moreover, the projected share of renewables in electricity production, transportation, and hydrogen production is crucial for energy transition. This projection requires massive investment in domestic and cross-border grid infrastructure, given the intermittent availability of renewable energy sources and the need for non-renewable and/or non-fossil fuels, such as nuclear power in baseload plants or energy storage in grid systems. Therefore, through several mechanisms, Türkiye and BRICS can work together in international cooperation in renewable energy. For example, development banks and informal alliances among BRICS and Türkiye can facilitate bargaining among key regional partners for financing decentralized regional energy systems. However, a significant challenge for Türkiye and BRICS collaboration in boosting regional energy trade is fulfilling the high level of confidence required for sharing control on a regional grid system.

10) Net zero targets of Brazil by 2060, Russia by 2060, India by 2070, China by 2060 and South Africa by 2050. Brazil and Russia submitted their NDCs in 2020, China and South Africa submitted their NDCs in 2021, while India submitted its NDC in 2016.

11) Trans-Caspian East-West-Middle Corridor Initiative shortly named as "The Middle Corridor" begins in Türkiye and passes through the Caucasus region via Georgia, Azerbaijan, crosses the Caspian Sea, traverses Central Asia and reaches China.

12) A recent study on "BRICS Convergence Index" measures policy convergence of the BRICS states using a novel data set of BRICS cooperation on 47 policy issues between 2009 and 2021. The findings of the study also demonstrate issue areas where BRICS and the U.S. converge or diverge. Mihaela Papa et al. "The Dynamics of Informal Institutions and Counter Hegemony: Introducing a BRICS Convergence Index," *European Journal of International Relations* (2023) 29 (4): 960–989.

BRICS EXPANSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR OUTER SPACE

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Over the past decade, BRICS has been deepening cooperation on space security and technology. This domain has been a major site of contestation between Sino-Russian and U.S. ambitions to develop space norms. Will BRICS expansion support Sino-Russian ambitions and deepen bloc politics? We examine the space policies of individual BRICS members, the U.S., and the prospects for developing space governance and technology cooperation. While China and Russia's space campaign is likely to benefit from BRICS enlargement, there are opportunities for the U.S. to launch new initiatives to reduce the risk of conflict in space and broaden equitable access to space technologies.

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In January 2024, the BRICS group doubled in membership, drawing attention to its policies and role in global governance.¹ While the group's enlargement is a significant step in its development, it has also raised new questions about challenging key aspects of U.S. global leadership and the deepening of bloc politics. The BRICS group's finance initiatives and efforts to shift away from the dollar have received extensive attention. However, policy analysts have largely overlooked an area where BRICS is increasingly competing with Western, and especially U.S., efforts to build a security governance and technology cooperation system in a key domain for the 21st century: outer space.

The importance of investigating the BRICS group's activities in this domain lies in the fact that space has been one of the most successful issues of BRICS policy convergence, as per the BRICS Convergence Index,² and it is also central to geopolitics. China and Russia have been championing the group's cooperation in outer space issues during their BRICS presidencies. The BRICS countries' joint stance on space security governance is to support the Sino-Russian Draft Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects (PPWT).³ Other programs include developing technology cooperation initiatives and coordinating bodies, especially around a remote sensing satellite constellation and a global telescope network. Moreover, all new members have interests in space, and new regulatory frameworks are being negotiated as civilian and commercial space initiatives proliferate.

What are the implications of the BRICS expansion – will it enhance Sino-Russian space ambitions in the group, and how will it affect the United States? This article explores the evolving nature of BRICS space governance and technology cooperation. It contends that while China and Russia's space campaign is likely to benefit from BRICS enlargement, there are opportunities for the U.S. to launch new initiatives to reduce the risk of conflict in space and broaden equitable access to space technologies.

The next section examines the growth of BRICS space cooperation. After that, we analyze whether China and Russia's space ambitions find fertile ground in the new BRICS countries and strengthen their leverage to advance their preferred norms. The article concludes by exploring U.S. responses to this growing BRICS space

1) The BRICS countries, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, were joined by Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE in January 2024. Saudi Arabia has yet to finalize its membership, but has already attended BRICS engagements under the 2024 Russian BRICS presidency.

2) Mihaela Papa, Zhen Han, and Frank O'Donnell, "The Dynamics of Informal Institutions and Counter-Hegemony: Introducing a BRICS Convergence Index," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 29, Issue 4 (December 2023): p. 960-989.

3) Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations and Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, "Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects (Draft)," 10 June 2014, <https://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/cd/2014/documents/PPWT2014.pdf>

challenge, and areas for cooperation with BRICS and Global South states to promote their space ambitions and involvement in building a space security regime without the downsides of the Sino-Russian approach.

The Ascent of BRICS Cooperation on Outer Space

BRICS space arms control and technology cooperation has been a significant element of the group's activities since 2014, and it is only gaining momentum. In 2014, BRICS declared its support for the PPWT treaty, and began collaborating on remote sensing satellite observation and data-sharing under China's 2017 presidency.⁴ The 2021 Cooperation on BRICS Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation agreement formalized this initiative, integrating existing satellites from each state, while preserving national autonomy over the volume and sensitivity of data shared with BRICS partners.⁵ A year later, the BRICS countries launched the Joint Committee on Space Cooperation, a new coordinating body for these efforts.⁶ They have also established an Astronomy Working Group, which has been developing an optical transient telescope network and associated data processing systems for global sky monitoring since 2015.⁷

Growing BRICS-level space technology cooperation is being matched by resilient PPWT support. A recently published BRICS Convergence Index, which examined BRICS policy convergence between 2009 and 2021, found that BRICS support for the PPWT has been consistently expressed since 2014 the same year that Russia and China introduced a revised legally-binding PPWT draft at the UN.⁸ The PPWT treaty has been the centerpiece of Sino-Russian space governance diplomacy, challenging U.S. and Western approaches to space governance.

The U.S. and Western states criticize the design of the PPWT for omitting mechanisms to verify compliance, while permitting kinetic anti-satellite (ASAT) tests and open-ended development and deployment of ASAT systems.⁹ An important

4) Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "VI BRICS Summit – Fortaleza Declaration," 15 July 2014, https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/canais_atendimento/imprensa/notas-a-imprensa/vi-cupula-brics-declaracao-de-fortaleza-15-de-julho-de-2014; South African National Space Agency, "SA Joins BRICS Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation," 4 July 2017, <https://www.sansa.org.za/2017/07/04/sa-joins-brics-remote-sensing-satellite-constellation/>

5) Ayooluwa Adetola, "BRICS to Build Virtual Constellation of EO Satellites," Space in Africa, 1 June 2022, <https://africanews.space/brics-to-build-virtual-constellation-of-eo-satellites/>; South African National Space Agency, "BRICS Space Agencies Leaders signed Agreement for Cooperation in Remote Sensing Satellite Data Sharing," 20 August 2021, <https://www.sansa.org.za/2021/08/20/brics-space-agencies-leaders-signed-agreement-for-cooperation-in-remote-sensing-satellite-data-sharing/>

6) China National Space Administration, "BRICS Countries Launch Joint Committee on Space Cooperation," 26 May 2022, <https://www.cnsa.gov.cn/english/n6465652/n6465653/c6840322/content.html>

7) BRICS Astronomy Working Group, "About," 4 January 2024, <https://www.bricsastronomy.org/about/>; and "BRICS Intelligent Telescope and Data Network (BITDN)," 18 December 2023, <https://www.bricsastronomy.org/brics-intelligent-telescope-and-data-network/>

8) Papa et al (2023): 960-989.

9) Alexandra Stickings, "Outer Space: UK-Japan Responses," in Emily Taylor, Alexandra Stickings, Aki Tonami, and Jun Nagashima (eds.), *Security at the Frontier: UK-Japan Perspectives on Cyberspace, Outer Space, the Arctic and Electronic Warfare* (London: Chatham House, 2021), <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/2021->

concern is that ASAT tests generate substantial and long-lasting debris that threatens the space missions and capabilities of all countries.¹⁰ The treaty would also allow the development of weapons on Earth that can be put into space, and the continued operation of offensive space military platforms.¹¹ By contrast, Western capitals generally favor a legally-binding space arms control treaty in the long-term. Still, they prioritize starting with transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs) to build trust and consensus.¹²

China and Russia have argued that the U.S. seeks to militarize space. They raised concerns about its withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, the threats to their nuclear deterrents, U.S. counterspace capabilities, and using U.S. satellites for spying.¹³ In 2015, they successfully mobilized BRICS to block an alternative EU-sponsored International Code of Conduct establishing norms against damage and destruction of space objects.¹⁴ Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, China and Russia have remained committed to aligning their foreign and security policies, including increasing intransigence on space militarization and non-PPWT arms control approaches. In 2022, a Russian official warned the UN that “quasi-civilian” satellites assisting Ukraine could be legitimate targets for Russia,¹⁵ while a Chinese statement criticized perceived bad-faith motives and policies of “a certain superpower” in stalling PPWT progress.¹⁶

03-30-UK-Japan-security-perspectives-Taylor-et-al.pdf.pdf, p. 13; U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Geneva, “United States Remarks for Conference on Disarmament Subsidiary Body 3 – Prevention of An Arms Race in Outer Space. As Delivered by Advisor Michael Aho,” 22 March 2022. <https://geneva.usmission.gov/2022/03/22/cd-prevention-of-an-arms-race-in-space/>

10) Nivedita Raju, “Russia’s Anti-satellite Test Should Lead to a Multilateral Ban (Commentary),” Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 7 December 2021. <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/essay/2021/russias-anti-satellite-test-should-lead-multilateral-ban>

11) Bradley Bowman and Jared Thompson, “Russia and China Seek to Tie America’s Hands in Space,” *Foreign Policy*, 31 March 2021. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/31/russia-china-space-war-treaty-demilitarization-satellites/>

12) European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “European Union Space Strategy for Security and Defence (Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council),” 10 March 2023. [https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/api/files/JOIN\(2023\)9_0/090166e5f914c8bc?rendition=false](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/api/files/JOIN(2023)9_0/090166e5f914c8bc?rendition=false), p. 1, 14-17; U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Geneva (2022), <https://geneva.usmission.gov/2022/03/22/cd-prevention-of-an-arms-race-in-space/>

13) Alexis A. Blanc, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Khrystyna Holynska, M. Scott Bond, and Stephen J. Flanagan, *Chinese and Russian Perceptions of and Responses to U.S. Military Activities in the Space Domain* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2022). https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1800/RR1835-1/RAND_RRA1835-1.pdf, pp. 8-38

14) Michael Krepon, “Space Code of Conduct Mugged in New York,” *Arms Control Wonk*, 4 August 2015. <https://www.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/404712/space-code-of-conduct-mugged-in-new-york/>

15) Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, “Statement by Mr. Konstantin Vorontsov, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation, Deputy Director of the Department for Non-Proliferation and Arms Control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, at the Thematic Discussion on Outer Space (Disarmament Aspects) in the First Committee of the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly,” 26 October 2022. https://estatements.unmeetings.org/estatements/11.0010/20221026/5yPwCsESxyBr/N5pGP22K6MRm_en.pdf

16) Permanent Mission of the People’s Republic of China to the United Nations, “Document of the People’s Republic of China Pursuant to UNGA Resolution 76/230 (2021),” 3 May 2022. http://un.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/chinaandun/202205/t20220503_10681318.htm

While Sino-Russian and Western differences on space governance policy deepen, the growth of BRICS as a security cooperation group creates new opportunities for Beijing and Moscow to establish greater influence over its space governance and technology cooperation. We next explore the extent of Sino-Russian success in this regard, before highlighting potential responses for U.S. policymakers.

Can the Expanded BRICS Facilitate Sino-Russian Space Ambitions?

Brazil's space policy orientation has been dependent on its leadership. Under President Bolsonaro, Brazil adopted a pro-Western space orientation, successfully campaigning for admission to the U.S.-led Artemis space exploration and governance consortium in 2021.¹⁷ This was a change from Brazil's past preference for cooperating with China on a remote satellite sensing system,¹⁸ with Russia on rocket and satellite development,¹⁹ and establishing GLONASS (Russia's equivalent to GPS) ground monitoring stations on Brazilian soil.²⁰ However, President Lula reprioritized the BRICS alignment in Brazil's foreign policy.²¹ Brazil's demand for satellite-based synthetic aperture radar (SAR) technology led to China providing this technology through the new China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite Program (CBERS) satellite, CBERS-6, which China and Brazil equally funded. Although CBERS-6 ostensibly intends to monitor the Amazon, climate, and agriculture,²² its technology could also aid Chinese monitoring of regional U.S. force movements and enable China to embed its technologies within Brazil's space program.²³ The joint China-Brazil statement on CBERS-6 stressed that "the peaceful use of outer space (...) must have international law as its basis,"²⁴ hinting at a shared Sino-Russian preference for fast-

17) U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Brazil, "Fact Sheet: U.S.-Brazil Space Cooperation," 19 August 2021.

<https://br.usembassy.gov/fact-sheet-u-s-brazil-space-cooperation/>

18) Observing Systems Capability Analysis and Review Tool (OSCAR), "Satellite Programme: China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite," World Meteorological Organization, 5 January 2024.

<https://space.oscar.wmo.int/satelliteprogrammes/view/cbers>

19) Imanuela Ionescu, "Brazil-Russia Military-Technical Cooperation A Fruit of the Post-Cold War World Order," *Military Review*, Vol. 98 No. 6 (November-December 2018): p. 73.

20) "Russia to Build New Glonass Station in Brazil by Year-end — Roscosmos," *TASS*, 29 June 2020.

<https://tass.com/science/1173027>

21) Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Joint Communiqué between the Federative Republic of Brazil and the People's Republic of China on the Deepening of their Global Strategic Partnership - Beijing," 15 April 2023. <https://www.gov.br/mre/en/contact-us/press-area/press-releases/joint-communique-between-the-federative-republic-of-brazil-and-the-people2019s-republic-of-china-on-the-deepening-of-their-global-strategic-partnership-beijing-14-april-2023>

22) Brazilian Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, "In Beijing, Minister Luciana Santos Signs International Instruments that Deepen Scientific Cooperation between Brazil and China," 14 April 2023. https://www.gov.br/mcti/pt-br/acompanhe-o-mcti/noticias/2023/04/em-pequim-ministra-luciana-santos-assina-instrumentos-internacionais-que-aprofundam-cooperacao-cientifica-entre-brasil-e-china?_ga=2.88750811.1193637318.1681745427-805030755.1681745427

23) "Brazil's Foreign Policy is Hyperactive, Ambitious and Naive," *The Economist*, 10 April 2023.

<https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2023/04/10/brazils-foreign-policy-is-hyperactive-ambitious-and-naive>

24) Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2023), Paragraph 33.

tracking a binding arms control treaty similar to the PPWT. In 2023, Brazil also engaged in discussions with Russia about a potential bilateral “full-fledged design, production, and technological alliance,”²⁵ defense cooperation,²⁶ and space arms control, signaling a renewed interest in Sino-Russian space cooperation.²⁷

South Africa lacks an indigenous space launch capability, and has variably partnered with the European Space Agency, U.S., Russia, and India to launch its satellites.²⁸ While Russia developed and launched a “Condor-E2” military surveillance satellite for South Africa in 2014, Moscow’s involvement in a more recent French-South African “ZACube2” maritime domain awareness satellite was reduced to only launching the system in 2018.²⁹ Engineers trained by the French South African Institute of Technology were part of the core team that designed and launched three additional maritime awareness satellites from Cape Canaveral in 2022.³⁰ In space governance, South Africa, like China and Russia, prioritizes finalization of a legally binding treaty over an approach based on normative consensus and TCBMs.³¹

India’s space approaches contrast with those of the other BRICS members in terms of its cooperation with the United States. India’s civilian space sector principally uses indigenous technologies, and New Delhi has multiple civilian space cooperation and situational awareness agreements with the U.S. and the Quad.³² Many Indian space initiatives are implicitly or explicitly directed against China, as its foremost geopolitical rival.³³ Meanwhile, India has emerged as a leading international

25) Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Article by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov for the Brazilian Newspaper Folha de Sao Paulo and the Mexican Magazine Buzos,” 13 April 2023. https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1863443/

26) Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Sergey Lavrov, Visits Brazil,” 17 April 2023. <https://www.gov.br/mre/en/contact-us/press-area/press-releases/the-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-russia-sergey-lavrov-visits-brazil>

27) Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s Statement at a Joint News Conference following talks with Foreign Minister of Brazil Mauro Vieira, Brasilia,” 17 April 2023. https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1863937/

28) Keith Gottschalk, “South Africa’s Space Program,” *Astropolitics*, Vol. 8, Issue 1 (2010): p. 35-48; Samuel Oyewole, “The Quest for Space Capabilities and Military Security in Africa,” *South African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 27, Issue 2 (2020): p. 147-172.

29) EOPortal, “ZACUBE-2 (South African CubeSat-2),” European Space Agency, 7 January 2024. <https://www.eoportal.org/satellite-missions/zacube-2#development-status>; Oyewole, “The Quest for Space Capabilities,” p. 159.

30) Joshua Faleti, “South Africa Launches MDASat-1 Constellation to Monitor Oceans,” *Space in Africa*, 13 January 2022, <https://africanews.space/south-africa-launches-mdasat-1-constellation-to-monitor-oceans/>

31) Permanent Mission of the Republic of South Africa to the United Nations, “Statement by South Africa at the Open-Ended Working Group on Reducing Space Threats through Norms, Rules and Principles of Responsible Behaviours,” 9 May 2022. https://documents.unoda.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Statement-delivered-by-South-Africa_-OEWG-on-reducing-space-threats_May-2022_docx.pdf

32) Park Si-soo, “US, India Agree to Cooperate on Space Situational Awareness,” *Space News*, 12 April 2022. <https://spacenews.com/us-india-agree-to-cooperate-on-space-situational-awareness/>; US White House, “Fact Sheet: Quad Leaders’ Summit,” 24 September 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/24/fact-sheet-quad-leaders-summit/>

33) Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, “India’s Space Priorities Are Shifting Toward National Security,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 1 September 2022. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/09/01/india-s-space-priorities-are-shifting-toward-national-security-pub-87809>

civilian space launch provider, capturing market share from Russia.³⁴ A new U.S.-India agreement may replace Russia as India's historical provider of astronaut training.³⁵ Moreover, the NASA-Indian Space Research Organisation NISAR SAR technology cooperation project positions the U.S. as a key partner in providing India with sophisticated SAR systems and operating experience.³⁶ The U.S. is helping India to develop its own space sector, while limiting opportunities for Russia and China as technology suppliers.

Egypt and Ethiopia have benefited from China's early support for their space programs. Beijing has almost solely financed Ethiopia's nascent space program, supplying and launching satellites on Ethiopia's behalf. While there are plans for increased use of Ethiopian technology, Addis Ababa will likely continue to rely on Chinese platforms.³⁷ China also provides financial and technical assistance to Egypt to develop a Space Center to co-develop and launch satellites.³⁸ Additionally, Russia has launched three satellites for Egypt and is exploring potential space technology cooperation with both Ethiopia and Egypt.³⁹ Regarding governance, Egypt regularly proposes resolutions at UN General Assembly sessions to advocate for a legally binding treaty on disarmament, possibly based on the PPWT. Its statements emphasize that TCBMs alone are not enough, echoing the Sino-Russian position.⁴⁰ Ethiopia has also urged international consensus to prevent an arms race in space to avoid harming smaller states' developmental needs.⁴¹

Saudi Arabia and the UAE are diversifying their international technology partners

34) Girish Linganna, "Russian Loss now Indian Win: OneWeb Launch by ISRO after Russia Ukraine War," *Financial Express*, 18 October 2022, <https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence-russian-loss-now-indian-win-oneweb-launch-by-isro-after-russia-ukraine-war-2717996/>; Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "Taking India's Cost-Effective Space Launches to the Next Level," *The Diplomat*, 30 October 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/taking-indias-cost-effective-space-launches-to-the-next-level/>

35) Jeff Foust, "United States and India Expand Civil Space Cooperation," *Space News*, 4 February 2023, <https://spacenews.com/united-states-and-india-expand-civil-space-cooperation/>

36) NISAR NASA-ISRO SAR Mission, "Mission Concept," NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, 7 February 2024, <https://nisar.jpl.nasa.gov/mission/mission-concept/>

37) Nico Wood, "Mawu and Artemis: Why the United States Should Make Africa a Priority for Space Diplomacy," *Space Review*, 23 January 2023, <https://www.thespacereview.com/article/4516/1>

38) Wood, 23 January 2023.

39) Stephen Clark, "Egyptian Observation Satellite Launched by Russian Rocket," *Spaceflight Now*, 21 February 2019, <https://spaceflightnow.com/2019/02/21/egyptian-observation-satellite-successfully-launched-by-russian-rocket/>; "Glavkosmos Presents Capacities of the Russian Space Industry in the countries of North Africa," Glavkosmos, 26 June 2023, <https://www.glavkosmos.com/en/glavkosmos-presents-capacities-of-the-russian-space-industry-in-the-countries-of-north-africa/>; Muhammad Nooh Osman, "Moscow to Boost Ties With Ethiopia and Africa Based on Principles of Equality, Says Envoy," *Sputnik Africa*, 13 July 2023, <https://en.sputniknews.africa/20230713/moscow-to-boost-ties-with-ethiopia-and-africa-based-on-principles-of-equality-says-envoy-1060503942.html>

40) Hatem Elatawy, "Can We Defuse the Outer Space Arms Race?," *National Interest*, 31 October 2022, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/can-we-defuse-outer-space-arms-race-205556>

41) Permanent Mission of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the United Nations, "Statement by Yoseph Kassaye, Representative of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia at the General Statement of the First Committee of the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly," 5 October 2021, <https://documents.unoda.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ga-76-fc-gd-ethiopia-en.pdf>: p. 2-3.

for their space programs. In 2023, Saudi Arabia sent its first manned spaceflight program to the International Space Station under a SpaceX launch contract from Cape Canaveral. Still, it remains open to both cooperation partners and initiatives in the future.⁴² China launched two Saudi indigenous earth observation satellites in 2018.⁴³ The more advanced UAE program has also engaged various partners, including agreeing for Mitsubishi Heavy Industries to launch its recent Mars probe from Japan.⁴⁴ This comes after Saudi Arabia chose Russia to launch its first indigenous satellite in 2018 and hired Boeing, EADS, and South Korea's Satrec Initiative to build earlier satellites.⁴⁵ Saudi Arabia has sided with BRICS states in space governance, seeking a binding treaty. By contrast, the UAE's space security diplomacy aligns more with the U.S. advocating for TCBMs as the initial step for UN states.⁴⁶

Iran is arguably the BRICS member most inclined towards cooperating with China and Russia in space technology and arms control. In 2022, Russia constructed and launched the first of four planned Iranian remote-sensing satellites. Additionally, Russia is reportedly constructing a geostationary communications satellite with limited SAR capabilities, enhancing Iranian military surveillance.⁴⁷ Iran also recently launched an imaging satellite from a civilian spaceport northeast of Tehran.⁴⁸ Regarding space governance, Iran openly doubts the effectiveness of TCBMs and calls for a legally binding treaty based on the PPWT. Alongside China and Russia, Iran criticizes Starlink as destabilizing to international security and condemns the U.S. for conducting direct-ascent ASAT tests.⁴⁹

Overall, the expanded BRICS is not likely to significantly facilitate Sino-Russian

42) Marcia Dunn, "SpaceX Sends Saudi Astronauts, Including Nation's 1st Woman in Space, to International Space Station," *Associated Press*, 21 May 2023.

<https://apnews.com/article/spacex-private-launch-saudi-arabia-3caf2f6538f3fe6059dfb84e6f627517>

43) Stephen Clark, "China Launches Satellites for Saudi Arabia," *Spaceflight Now*, 7 December 2018.

<https://spaceflightnow.com/2018/12/07/china-launches-satellites-for-saudi-arabia/>

44) "MHI Successfully Launches the Emirates Mars Mission, HOPE Spacecraft," Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, 20 July 2020. <https://www.mhi.com/news/20200720.html>

45) Stephen Dowling, "How the UAE got a Spacecraft to Mars – On the First Try," BBC, 18 December 2022.

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20221206-how-the-uae-got-a-spacecraft-to-mars-on-the-first-try>

46) Algeria et al, "Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (A/C.1/69/L.3/Rev.1)," United Nations General Assembly First Committee, 23 October 2014, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/781656?ln=en>; Kristian Alexander and Gina Bou Serhal, "The UAE's Space Program is Propelling the Nation to the Forefront of Space Exploration," *Jerusalem Post*, 2 May 2023. <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-741830>

47) Bart Hendrickx, "Russia and Iran Expand Space Cooperation," *Space Review*, 31 October 2022.

<https://www.thespacereview.com/article/4475/1>

48) "Iran Says it has Successfully Launched an Imaging Satellite into Orbit Amid Tensions with the West," *Associated Press*, 27 September 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/iran-satellite-launch-cfc5081862c41c4f6b10d8ac9bcb1f88>

49) Theresa Hitchens, "At UN Meeting, Space Cooperation Picks Up Momentum, but Moscow and Beijing Play Spoilers," *Breaking Defense*, 3 February 2023. <https://breakingdefense.com/2023/02/at-un-meeting-space-cooperation-picks-up-momentum-but-moscow-and-beijing-play-spoilers/>; Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations, "Statement by Mr. Nabi Azadi, Representative of The Islamic Republic of Iran, on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space, PAROS Before the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva," 30 March 2023. [https://docs-library.unoda.org/Conference_on_Disarmament_-_ \(2023\)/2023.0330-Iran_Statement_before_the_Plenary_Meeting_of_the_CD_on_PAROS.pdf](https://docs-library.unoda.org/Conference_on_Disarmament_-_ (2023)/2023.0330-Iran_Statement_before_the_Plenary_Meeting_of_the_CD_on_PAROS.pdf)

space ambitions in the short term. While Iran is the strongest supporter of their ambitions, other member states are divided concerning their preferred providers of space technologies and governance preferences. That said, both China and Russia have made significant moves to meet the needs of the group's other members, enabling them to use their leverage to elicit greater support for the PPWT treaty. At the same time, the expanded BRICS presents an opportunity for U.S. policy development in outer space.

U.S. Policies in Outer Space and Possible Responses

U.S. policy clearly articulates the threat of China and Russia in space. The 2022 U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency “Challenges to Security in Space” report suggests that China and Russia are challenging U.S. security in space by expanding space operations, Earth-focused space services, and intended explorations of the moon and beyond.⁵⁰ Similarly, the 2022 U.S. National Defense Strategy warns that their space activities threaten U.S. military operations, critical infrastructure, and the space-based systems that support “daily civilian life.”⁵¹ The more recent 2023 U.S. Strategic Framework for Space Diplomacy remarks that “New, emerging space partners balance space relationships with us and our strategic competitors. Some governments may not recognize the vulnerabilities of increased intermingling with competitors’ space industries.”⁵²

The Artemis Accords is a principal U.S. space exploration and governance cooperation initiative, which the U.S. promotes as an example of its global coalition-building. Joining the agreement itself is non-binding, and signatories reaffirm the principles of the Outer Space Treaty while supporting new norms of “interoperability, the deconfliction of activities, protection of lunar heritage, and obligations addressing orbital debris and spacecraft disposal.” Brazil, India, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE are the only BRICS states that are also Artemis signatories.⁵³ However, the policy divergence between Gulf monarchy Artemis members Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and across BRICS states more broadly, highlights the limited value of the initiative in shaping member state preferences.

50) C. Todd Lopez, “Defense Intelligence Agency Report Details Space-Based Threats From Competitors,” U.S. Department of Defense, 12 April 2022. <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2997723/defense-intelligence-agency-report-details-space-based-threats-from-competitors/>

51) U.S. Department of Defense, 2022 National Defense Strategy, 27 October 2022, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>, p. 5.

52) U.S. State Department, “A Strategic Framework for Space Diplomacy,” 25 May 2023, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Space-Framework-Clean-2-May-2023-Final-Updated-Accessible-5.25.2023.pdf>, p. 14.

53) Christopher Johnson, “SpaceWatchGL Feature: The Space Law Context Of The Artemis Accords (Part 1),” Spacewatch.Global, 27 May 2020. <https://spacewatch.global/2020/05/spacewatchgl-feature-the-space-law-context-of-the-artemis-accords-part-1/>. U.S. State Department, “Artemis Accords,” 15 February 2024. <https://www.state.gov/artemis-accords/>

A second form of U.S. space engagement is through the proliferation of commercial space companies, which serve as price-competitive launch and technology partners with access to world-leading American space launchpads. The 2023 U.S. Strategic Framework for Space Diplomacy commits the U.S. government to promoting new market opportunities for these private firms. However, Russia and China have been able to influence these companies to deviate from Washington's preferences. For example, the Russian Ambassador to the U.S. reportedly persuaded Elon Musk, SpaceX's CEO, to restrict Ukrainian access to the company's Starlink satellite system over Crimea, asserting that its use could lead to significant – and potentially nuclear – escalation.⁵⁴ Musk also accepted Beijing's request to ban Starlink access in China. International analysts and Taiwanese officials believe that Beijing has leverage over Musk because Tesla, his car company, heavily relies on China-based manufacturing facilities.⁵⁵ Rather than expanding NASA's capacity, reliance on the commercial space sector undermines U.S. efforts to address Chinese and Russian challenges in space technology cooperation.

The Strategic Framework for Space Diplomacy recognizes the inextricable link between space technology cooperation and success in space security governance. However, aside from the Artemis Accords and new U.S. commercial space contracts, it remains unclear how the U.S. will build out the capacity to compete effectively with China and Russia. In particular, the real under-resourcing of U.S. government civil space cooperation – as a more reliable mechanism of U.S. space and strategic policy influence than commercial contracts – is inadvertently highlighted in the challenges of meeting a Framework goal to “facilitate new market opportunities for U.S. commercial space capabilities and services, including civil applications that rely on USG-provided space systems.”⁵⁶

The U.S. GPS system is a leading example of such a U.S. government-provided service. However, recent research suggests that the Chinese BeiDou rival system now has the largest number of satellite ground stations outside of its territory. The Chinese investment affects comparative global data availability, as “BeiDou satellites are more frequently observed than GPS satellites in 130 of 195 United Nations member countries.”⁵⁷ For example, while Ethiopia relies more on BeiDou than GPS for civilian

54) Walter Isaacson, “‘How Am I in this War?’: The Untold Story of Elon Musk’s Support for Ukraine,” *Washington Post*, 7 September 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/09/07/elon-musk-starlink-ukraine-russia-invasion/>

55) Adam Satariano, Scott Reinhard, Cade Metz, Sheera Frenkel and Malika Khurana, “Elon Musk’s Unmatched Power in the Stars,” *New York Times*, 28 July 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/07/28/business/starlink.html>; Zeyi Yang, “Elon Musk’s Quiet, Untweeted China Trip,” *MIT Technology Review*, 7 June 2023, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/06/07/1074131/elon-musk-quiet-china-trip/>

56) U.S. State Department (2023): p. 27.

57) Sarah Sewall, Tyler Vandenberg, and Kaj Malden, “China’s BeiDou: New Dimensions of Great Power Competition,” Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, February 2023, https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/Chinas-BeiDou_V10.pdf, p. 13.

applications due to its stronger signal, South Africa has formalized its use of BeiDou, and China is engaging with Brazil, Egypt, and UAE on BeiDou cooperation.⁵⁸ China has granted Saudi Arabia and Iran access to BeiDou's military communications and positioning services, while it is working with Russia on interoperability with Moscow's similar GLONASS system.⁵⁹

Competition and Cooperation in Space?

The Russian 2024 BRICS Presidency lists promoting cooperation in science and high technology among its priorities, suggesting that space cooperation will likely remain an important area of policy coordination.⁶⁰ BRICS expansion means that the new members need to be socialized into the BRICS group's agendas, and they are now being integrated into various working groups. However, it is also important to note that the Russian BRICS presidency seeks to offer engagement opportunities to a large number of states that applied to join BRICS. Namely, President Putin indicated that BRICS will consider the preparedness of around 30 other countries "to join the BRICS multidimensional agenda in one form or another."⁶¹ Thus, Russia – together with China – can use the presidency to mobilize a broader group of countries around their space priorities.

If the United States wants to exert leadership in space technology cooperation and governance, it needs to elevate space challenges in its policy development and in parallel, work on a robust U.S. BRICS policy that engages the development needs of the Global South. There is geopolitical room for a greater U.S. role in engaging some old and new BRICS states on space technology cooperation and approaches to outer space governance. This can be done within the Strategic Framework for Space Diplomacy, focusing on BRICS states outside China, Russia, and Iran, as well as Global South states indicating interest in space programs. A U.S. government civil initiative to provide low-cost access to sophisticated space technology and launch

58) Rumi Aoyama, "China's Dichotomous BeiDou Strategy: Led by the Party for National Deployment, Driven by the Market for Global Reach," *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, Vol. 11 No. 2 (2022): p. 292; Peter B. de Selding, "Brazil Bypassing the U.S. as it Builds Out a Space Sector," *Space News*, 16 April 2015, <https://spacenews.com/brazil-bypassing-the-us-as-it-builds-out-a-space-sector/>; South African National Space Agency, "South African National Space Agency and China Satellite Navigation Office Signed an MoU at Science Forum SA 2021," 3 December 2021, <https://www.sansa.org.za/2021/12/03/south-african-national-space-agency-and-china-satellite-navigation-office-signed-an-mou-at-science-forum-sa-2021/>; Toru Tsunashima, "In 165 Countries, China's Beidou Eclipses American GPS," *Asia Times*, 25 November 2020. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Century-of-Data/In-165-countries-China-s-Beidou-eclipses-American-GPS>

59) David H. Millner, Stephen Maksim, and Marissa Huhmann, "BeiDou: China's GPS Challenger Takes its Place on the World Stage," *Joint Force Quarterly*, Issue 105 (2nd Quarter 2022): p. 30; Heath Sloane, "Droning On: China Floods the Middle East With UAVs," *The Diplomat*, 2 September 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/09/droning-on-china-floods-the-middle-east-with-uavs/>

60) Russian Presidential Executive Office, "Address by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on the Start of Russia's BRICS Chairmanship," 1 January 2024. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/73202>

61) Russian Presidential Executive Office, 1 January 2024.

services to these states – while complying with Missile Technology Control Regime restrictions – could reduce demand for alternative Sino-Russian cooperation packages. The long-term U.S. space strategy should prioritize the rebuilding of capacity in the public space sector over commercial ventures. This is essential to ensure that the differing interests of domestic and commercial actors do not compromise U.S. strategic goals.

The developments analyzed in this article illustrate the interconnectedness of space technology cooperation and diplomacy on space security governance but also the challenge of ensuring meaningful progress on responsible norms of space behavior – a key security and sustainable development issue for the whole world. If the China-Russia PPWT campaign gains further ground across BRICS, the deepening of bloc politics is making collective action at the global level unlikely. In turn, the downsides of the PPWT – its inability to prevent weaponization of space and prevent debris – can lead to a tragedy of the commons. Thus, it is timely for the U.S. to reenergize its space policy while being open to a potential legally binding agreement, bridging the Sino-Russian demand for such a document with the imperative to ensure its contents safeguard outer space for all.

THE BRICS AT HUMANITY'S ENVIRONMENTAL CROSSROADS: CHALLENGES AND COMMITMENTS IN TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE

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The article proposes an analysis of the role of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and the new BRICS (Argentina, Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) on the global stage, emphasizing not only their economic and political dimensions, but also the need to tackle growing environmental crises such as climate change and global warming. Each BRICS country is examined, highlighting its distinctive characteristics and influences in the economic, political, and environmental spheres. The importance of the BRICS' collaborative and sustainable approach to climate challenges is emphasized, highlighting specific measures adopted by each nation, from earth system sciences research to food security and emissions reduction strategies. The conclusion highlights the urgent need for a joint BRICS approach to tackling climate change, underlining their crucial role in the quest for global climate justice and environmental preservation.

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Keywords: BRICS, Climate Change, Sustainability,
Global Cooperation, Global Warming.



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This article aims to carry out a detailed analysis of the rise and role of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) on the global stage, highlighting not only their economic and political dimensions,¹ but, above all, focusing on the imperative of tackling the growing environmental crises, notably climate change and global warming.² Each member of the BRICS, both the original ones and the more recently integrated nations such as Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, and Iran, is thoroughly examined, highlighting their distinctive characteristics and the complexity of their influences in the economic, political and environmental spheres.

South Africa is emerging as a significant economic and political player, playing a crucial role in international trade and contributing to regional stability.³ Brazil, one of the largest emerging economies, is influential in international negotiations, especially on environmental and sustainable development issues.⁴ As a rising economic power, China leads in manufacturing, trade, and technology, expanding its global political impact.⁵ With its fast-growing economy, India stands out as a technological and services hub, playing a strategic role in global issues.⁶

Despite economic challenges, Russia maintains its global political prominence, being a permanent member of the UN Security Council.⁷ The inclusion of nations such as Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, and Iran further expands the diversity of BRICS countries perspectives and agendas, highlighting the relevance of this conglomerate not only in the political and economic spheres,⁸ but also in the environmental context.⁹

Faced with the inevitable challenge posed by climate change to global stability and the very survival of humanity, the BRICS are urged to take on an expanded responsibility that goes beyond their immediate national interests. The article supports the thesis that these nations, given their significant influence, must play a proactive and committed role in leading collective efforts to tackle climate change and mitigate the harmful

1) M. Larionova and Kirton JJ, *BRICS and Global Governance* (Routledge New York; 2018).

2) F. Petrone, "BRICS, Soft Power and Climate Change: New Challenges in Global Governance?" *Ethics Glob. Polit.* Vol. 12 (2019): p.19–30.

3) S. Scholvin, *The Geopolitics of Regional Power: Geography, Economics and Politics in Southern Africa* (Routledge, 2016).

4) P. Dauvergne and BL Farias D, "The Rise of Brazil as a Global Development Power," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 33 (2012): p. 903–17.

5) RS Ross and Feng Z, *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics* (Cornell University Press, 2008).

6) R. Sagar, "State of Mind: What Kind of Power will India Become?" *International Affairs*, Vol. 85 (2009): p. 801–16.

7) L. V. Kochtcheeva, *Russian Politics and Response to Globalization* (Springer, 2020).

8) D. Setiawan, Alatas MS, Dinda AN, "BRICS Six and the Hegemonic Stability Theory," *Emerald J. Econ. Soc. Sci.* Vol. 2 (2023): p. 115–22.

9) A. El Alfy, El-Bassiouny D, and Cochrane L, "Shifting Geopolitical Sands: COP 28 and the New BRICS+," *Manag. Sustain. An Arab Rev.* (2023).

effects of global warming. This collaborative and viable approach is essential to contribute to a more balanced and sustainable future globally.

The Original BRICS Members are Suffering the Impacts...

The discussion around climate change and environmental preservation becomes even more complex when we consider the different contexts and challenges the BRICS countries face. The original members and those more recently integrated into this bloc of nations, such as Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, and Iran, have unique realities regarding climate change impacts.

Climate change has significant consequences in different regions, requiring immediate and adaptive actions to mitigate its effects. In South Africa, water security in rural areas is markedly affected by extreme weather events, exacerbating concerns about water reserves. This condition is exacerbated by the low water collection capacity in the region, the low use of technologies, and the marked poverty of the population.¹⁰ The tragic episode of deadly rains in 2022, clearly related to climate change, underscores the urgency of effective responses to protect both the environment and rural communities and points to the ineffectiveness of the South African government in dealing with extreme weather events.¹¹

In Brazil, record heat indexes in 2023 are increasing concerns about the impacts of climate change, which will strongly affect the large cities of the southeast region and, in particular, the poor populations of the peripheries, which tend to suffer the most from an increase in global warming.¹² These impacts are particularly felt in the Atlantic Forest, an ecosystem of great biodiversity and vulnerability.¹³ Rising temperatures in Brazil highlight the importance of assertive measures for environmental conservation and preservation.

In China, the link between climate change and food security is accentuated by rising temperatures and threats to food production. The country will need urgent and precise measures to face this threat and be able to feed its population.¹⁴ As the world's most populous country, China plays a crucial role in global dynamics, making a holistic approach imperative to ensure resilience and food security in the face of growing

10) S. Kusangaya, Warburton ML, Van Garderen EA, and Jewitt GPW, "Impacts of Climate Change on Water Resources in Southern Africa: A Review," *Phys. Chem. Earth, Parts a/b/c*, Vol. 67 (2014): p. 47–54.

11) BS. Ngcamu, "Application of the Disaster Management Cycle and Climate Change: Studying Flood Disasters in South Africa," *Soc. Sci. Humanit. Open*, Vol. 8 (2023): 100657.

12) MC. Valverde, Rosa MB., "Heat Waves in São Paulo State, Brazil: Intensity, Duration, Spatial Scope, and Atmospheric Characteristics," *Int. J. Climatol* (2023).

13) FR. Scarano and Ceotto P., "Brazilian Atlantic Forest: Impact, Vulnerability, and Adaptation to Climate Change. *Biodivers. Conserv.* Vol. 24 (2015): p. 2319–31.

14) L. Ye, Xiong W, Li Z, Yang P, Wu W, Yang G, et al., "Climate Change Impact on China Food Security in 2050," *Agron. Sustain. Dev.* Vol. 33 (2013): p. 363–74.

climate challenges. Within this context, sustainable water management policies, such as preserving water sources, are gaining prominence, considering the need to preserve vital resources for agriculture.¹⁵

On the Indian subcontinent, climate change presents considerable challenges for the agricultural sector, which is vital for livelihoods and the economy. Indian farmers will have to watch how their crops react to global warming and rely on new technologies.¹⁶ The intensification of the monsoon is already a reality and adds complexity to the search for food security, requiring robust adaptive strategies and mitigation measures.^{17,18}

In Russia, accelerated warming and impacts on permafrost present a unique narrative. In addition to the challenges of soil stability, subsidence, and landslides, the release of stored greenhouse gases such as methane contributes to a climate feedback loop, which could exacerbate warming not only in Russia, but across the planet.¹⁹ The vastness of Russian territory requires urgent strategies to deal with the complex consequences of climate change, as it seems that warming is accelerating in this country and, obviously, with its consequences.²⁰

The New Members Also Feel the Consequences...

The challenges posed by climate change in the new BRICS members, such as Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, and Iran, are specific and worrying issues.

In Saudi Arabia, the combination of desert nature and climate change has exacerbated the irregular rainfall and rising temperatures, intensifying water scarcity. This country has an essential example of a finite resource in water, which is becoming even more limited with global warming and all the resulting risks.²¹ Along the same line, the potential expansion of deserts, aggravated by overgrazing, puts native vegetation and wildlife at risk, while the risk of biodiversity collapse in the Afro-Arab region is an

15) X. Lian, Jiao L, Hu Y, and Liu Z., "Future Climate Imposes Pressure on Vulnerable Ecological Regions in China," *Sci. Total Environ.* Vol. 858 (2023): p. 159995.

16) DB. Lobell, Sibley A, and Ivan Ortiz-Monasterio J., "Extreme Heat Effects on Wheat Senescence in India," *Nat. Clim. Chang.* Vol. 2 (2012): p. 186–9.

17) G. Vaidyanathan, "How India is Battling Deadly Rain Storms as Climate Change Bites," *Nature*, Vol. 614 (2023): p. 210–3.

18) A. Katzenberger Levermann A, Schewe J, and Pongratz J., "Intensification of very wet Monsoon Seasons in India under Global Warming," *Geophys. Res. Lett.* Vol. 49 (2022): e2022GL098856.

19) O. Anisimov and Reneva S., "Permafrost and Changing Climate: the Russian Perspective," *AMBIO A J. Hum. Environ.*, Vol. 35 (2006): p. 169–75.

20) T. Gustafson, *Klimat: Russia in the Age of Climate Change* (Harvard University Press; 2021).

21) E. DeNicola, Aburizaiza OS, Siddique A, Khwaja H, and Carpenter DO., "Climate Change and Water Scarcity: The Case of Saudi Arabia." *Ann. Glob. Heal.* Vol. 81 (2015): p. 342–53.

imminent threat if effective environmental preservation actions are not taken.²²

Argentina is experiencing a direct effect of climate change on the incidence of diseases that are now non-existent or infrequent in the country. Mosquitoes that transmit arboviruses, such as dengue, are expanding, is occurring in a country that did not suffer from such ailments due to the temperatures of yesteryear.²³ In addition to the public health issue, Argentine agriculture, especially winemaking, faces growing challenges due to climate change, adding an additional layer of complexity in the face of economic problems in 2023.²⁴

Egypt has only a small portion of arable land, most of which is desert, but this small strip is highly productive but has proved vulnerable to climate change.²⁵ Research indicates adverse impacts on food production and food safety, as well as effects on the population's health, such as the significant increase in the incidence of parasitic diseases in the country.²⁶

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), due to its significant dependence on imports and desert nature, faces significant food security challenges while being a major oil producer, which is exacerbating the climate issue.²⁷ The worsening of aridity, with the substantial increase in temperature in recent decades, poses a direct threat to food sources and the health of the population.²⁸

In Ethiopia, heat waves and increased droughts are substantial challenges for water security and local agriculture, these phenomena strongly impacting the country's socio-economic conditions.²⁹ Flooding and agricultural losses highlight the complexity of the impacts of climate change, highlighting the vulnerability of small farmers in a country that is very vulnerable to this phenomenon and faces problems feeding its population.³⁰

Under climate change's impacts, Iran faces significant challenges in water management, with water scarcity, reduced groundwater tables, loss of water

22) A. Soultan, Wikelski M, Safi K., Risk of Biodiversity Collapse under Climate Change in the Afro-Arabian Region," *Sci. Rep.* Vol. 9 (2019): p. 955.

23) MA. Robert, Stewart-Ibarra AM, and Estallo EL., "Climate Change and Viral Emergence: Evidence from Aedes-borne Arboviruses," *Curr. Opin. Virol.* Vol. 40 (2020): p. 41–7.

24) E. Straffellini, Carrillo N, Schilardi C, Aguilera R, Orrego MJE, and Tarolli P., "Viticulture in Argentina under Extreme Weather Scenarios: Actual Challenges, Future Perspectives," *Geogr. Sustain.* Vol. 4 (2023): p. 161–9.

25) HR. El-Ramady, El-Marsafawy SM, and Lewis LN, "Sustainable Agriculture and Climate Changes in Egypt," *Sustain. Agric. Rev.* Vol. 12 (2013): p. 41–95.

26) WM. Lotfy, "Climate Change and Epidemiology of Human Parasitosis in Egypt: A Review," *J. Adv. Res.* Vol. 5 (2014): p. 607–13.

27) RM. Ajaj, Shatin SM, Salem MA., "The Challenges of Climate Change and Food Security in the United Arab Emirates (UAE): From Deep Understanding to Quick Actions," *Curr. Nutr. Food Sci.* Vol. 15 (2019): p. 422–9.

28) F. Paparella and Burt JA., *Climate of the United Arab Emirates: Present, Past and Impacts on Life. In: A Natural History of the Emirates* (Springer: 2023): p. 65–94.

29) A. Teshome and Zhang J., Increase of Extreme Drought over Ethiopia under Climate Warming," *Adv. Meteorol.* Vol. 2019 (2019): p. 1–18.

30) MS. Demem, Impact and Adaptation of Climate Variability and Change on Small-Holders and Agriculture in Ethiopia: A Review," *Heliyon* (2023).

quality and ecosystems.³¹ The waves of extreme droughts predicted for the coming decades, aggravated by global warming, are putting pressure on the country's water resources, requiring an urgent response to ensure sustainability and long-term water security.³² These scenarios reinforce the need for urgent local action and robust international cooperation to tackle climate challenges and preserve the global environment.

The BRICS Reacts Individually to the Climate Threat...

The BRICS countries have shown an increasing commitment to fighting climate change separately, reflecting the growing awareness of the importance of sustainability and the need to mitigate environmental impacts. However, reducing greenhouse gas emissions is an ongoing challenge, especially in the economic and political fields, and it must be tackled collectively.³³ Each nation adopts specific approaches to tackling climate challenges, with concrete measures reflecting this commitment.

In South Africa, developing a research program in earth system sciences is a significant step towards understanding climate change scenarios specific to the region. In addition, the development of national guidelines in the National Response to Climate Change White Paper reflects the country's commitment to translating research into tangible policies, despite challenges in practical implementation. Research into the impacts of climate change on water availability, agriculture, and biodiversity, which are key sectors, is being consolidated in South Africa, and research into this impact on cities needs to be expanded, generating a reaction based on mitigating these consequences.³⁴

Brazil is focusing its efforts on the water-energy-food triad, recognizing the critical interconnection between these elements. The development of analyses on the transformation towards sustainability in the Cerrado and Caatinga biomes, which are the areas most available for the expansion of agriculture, is necessary for Brazil and the world. Also, research carried out in the Paraíba do Sul River basin, a more developed and industrialized region that suffers from an increase in climatic extremes, shows a practical and comprehensive approach to assessing environmental and socio-economic impacts, by sizing up the effects of these events on the region's cities.³⁵

31) K. Madani, "Water Management in Iran: What is Causing the Looming Crisis?" *J. Environ. Stud. Sci.* Vol. 4 (2014): p. 315–28.

32) F. Behzadi, Yousefi H, Javadi S, Moridi A, Shahedany SMH, and Neshat A., "Meteorological Drought Duration–Severity and Climate Change Impact in Iran," *Theor. Appl. Climatol.* Vol. 149 (2022): p. 1297–315.

33) R. Leal-Arcas, "The BRICS and Climate Change," in: *International Affairs Forum* (Taylor & Francis, 2013): p. 22–6.

34) G. Ziervogel, New M, Archer van Garderen E, Midgley G, Taylor A, Hamann R, et al., "Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation in South Africa," *Wiley Interdiscip. Rev. Clim. Chang.* Vol. 5 (2014): p. 605–20.

35) LM Alves, Ometto JPHB, Arcoverde GFB, Branco EA, Toledo P., "Water-Energy-Food Nexus Under Climate Change: Analyzing Different Regional Socio-ecological Contexts in Brazil." in: *Water-Energy-Food Nexus and Climate Change in Cities* (Springer, 2022): p. 59–75.

China, for its part, has been active in formulating and implementing national policies for mitigation and adaptation since the 2014 Climate Summit. The country seeks a delicate balance between economic growth and emissions reduction, as evidenced by the critical analysis of climate action plans, highlighting the need for comprehensive data and market transformation. The Chinese government has been concerned about and invested in the unpredictability of climate extremes, considering the population's economic and health costs.³⁶

India adopts a varied adaptive approach when faced with adverse impacts on the agricultural sector. The analysis of farmers' perception of and adaptation to global warming highlights the complexity of decisions, emphasizing the influence of socio-economic factors. These measures aim to improve the resilience of the agricultural sector in the face of climate change. The Indian government will have to overcome local difficulties, such as farmers' lack of access to information, low incomes, as well as the size of farms.³⁷

Russia is focusing its efforts on the carbon sequestration potential of its vast forests. The proposal to integrate remote measurements and strengthen institutional support highlights the importance of ensuring quality data, while at the same time highlighting the significant economic benefits of increasing carbon absorption capacity. Based on this data, it has been considered how it is possible to increase the carbon absorption capacity of the Russian ecosystem. Given the country's immense potential in this area, Russia and the world can benefit positively from this policy of mitigating carbon emissions into the atmosphere.³⁸

Saudi Arabia, the main producer of fossil fuels, is taking a proactive approach to promoting renewable energy to diversify its energy matrix. Engaging in research and international cooperation illustrates the country's awareness of the environmental and economic challenges of transitioning to more sustainable sources. This country has engaged, and perhaps could do more, in these sources, such as solar, wind, and geothermal energy, and generate energy security in an economy marked by fossil fuels.³⁹

Argentina has aligned its strategies with the goal of a post-fossil economy, promoting strategies such as the green economy and the bioeconomy. However, the country faces debates about the compatibility of these strategies with climate objectives,

36) E. Ng and Ren C., "China's Adaptation to Climate & Urban Climatic Changes: A Critical Review," *Urban Clim.* Vol. 23 (2018): p. 352–72.

37) P. Datta and Behera B., "Climate Change and Indian Agriculture: A Systematic Review of Farmers' Perception, Adaptation, and Transformation," *Environ. Challenges*, Vol. 8 (2022): p. 100543.

38) E. Vaganov, Porfiryev B, Shirov A, Kolpakov A, Pyzhev A., "Assessment of the Contribution of Russian Forests to Climate Change Mitigation," *Econ. Reg.* Vol. 17 (2021): p. 1096–109.

39) I. Tlili, "Renewable Energy in Saudi Arabia: Current Status and Future Potentials," *Environ. Dev. Sustain.* Vol. 17 (2015): p. 859–86.

highlighting complex challenges in resource governance during this transition. Buenos Aires has two examples of dynamics in this direction, lithium mining and soy agribusiness, showing that economic development and environmental concern are possible, as long as techno-managerial strategies are used.⁴⁰

Egypt has adopted a proactive approach to mitigating methane emissions from rice cultivation, highlighting the importance of sustainable practices, such as not burning waste, to tackle climate change. Among the techniques developed to mitigate the cultivation of this essential agricultural product, the most effective is the choice of short-duration rice varieties that can withstand the new environmental conditions and raising farmers' awareness of the new climate reality.⁴¹

The United Arab Emirates faces significant water-related challenges and is seeking technological solutions to reshape the use of this asset. Exploring the capacity to recover water highlights the need to address water challenges regardless of predicted climate change, such as desalination as a potential mitigation of the problem. The country has been investing in a constant technological quest to improve actions relating to water security, taking into account complex technical procedures and the social and historical trajectories of the region.⁴²

Ethiopia, dependent on agriculture, adopts indigenous and improved strategies to face climate challenges. Reducing barriers, such as lack of technologies, agricultural insurance, and training and financing, is recognized as crucial to effectively promoting climate adaptation, highlighting the importance of tailor-made approaches. Addis Adaba has been improving practices in subsistence farming and the use of indigenous techniques, as well as the rational use of chemical inputs, in order to reduce the impact of climate change.⁴³

Iran, especially in mountainous regions, is facing challenges in the agricultural sector due to climate change. The exploration of socio-environmental factors in the adaptation of farmers, with emphasis on incentives and awareness, highlights the complexity of the adaptation process. In this process, farmers are urged to assess the risks, whether or not to adapt to the new climatic conditions, in order to help them make decisions based on more accurate information in different geographical areas and crops.⁴⁴

40) FM. Dorn, Hafner R, Plank C., "Towards a Climate Change Consensus: How Mining and Agriculture Legitimize Green Extractivism in Argentina," *Extr. Ind. Soc.* Vol. 11 (2022): p. 101130.

41) E. Hasan, "Proposing Mitigation Strategies for Reducing the Impact of Rice Cultivation on Climate Change in Egypt," *Water Sci.* Vol. 27 (2013): p. 69–77.

42) G. Günel, "The Infinity of Water: Climate Change Adaptation in the Arabian Peninsula," *Public Cult.* Vol. 28 (2016): p. 291–315.

43) T. Bekuma, Mamo G, Regassa A., "Indigenous and Improved Adaptation Technologies in Response to Climate Change Adaptation and Barriers Among Smallholder Farmers in the East Wollega Zone of Oromia," *Ethiopia. Res. Glob.* Vol. 6 (2023): p.100110.

44) S. Ghazali, Azadi H, Kurban A, Ajtai N, Pietrzykowski M, Witlox F., "Determinants of Farmers' Adaptation

These specific measures reveal the diversity of strategies adopted by the BRICS countries to tackle climate change, reflecting an individual commitment to building a more sustainable and resilient future. However, collective, concrete and adaptive actions are key to achieving global mitigation goals and promoting resilience in the face of emerging climate challenges.

Joint Confrontation...

The quest for global climate justice falls considerably on the shoulders of the BRICS countries, possibly more than on the more developed nations that have better resources to mitigate its effects, such as the members of the G7, many of the latter being among the biggest polluters per capita.⁴⁵ Although not the biggest polluters, regions such as South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa face the prospect of being disproportionately impacted by climate change.⁴⁶ In addition to environmental challenges, these countries are also susceptible to significant migration caused by extreme weather events and global warming, which can result in large-scale displacement in search of essential resources, such as water, or to escape urban areas that may become uninhabitable.⁴⁷

The environmental responsibility of the BRICS must be assessed individually, with Brazil standing out as the holder of the world's largest rainforest,⁴⁸ Russia, with its vast tracts of forest, China, currently the biggest polluter, but also the country that is transforming its energy matrix most rapidly,⁴⁹ and India, with the largest global population.⁵⁰ However, it is important to consider the positive or negative impact that each of these countries can have on humanity's environmental future, it is possible to envision the significant potential of this group acting cohesively to tackle climate change and preserve the environment.⁵¹

Decisions under Changing Climate: the Case of Fars province in Iran," *Clim. Change* Vol. 166 (2021): p. 6.

45) S. Petropoulos, "The Emergence of the BRICS--implications for Global Governance," *J. Int. Glob. Stud.* Vol. 3 (2013).

46) M. Nilsson, Sie A, Muindi K, Bunker A, Ingole V, Ebi KL., "Weather, Climate, and Climate Change Research to Protect Human Health in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia," *Glob. Health Action*, Vol. 14 (2021): p. 1984014.

47) G. Hugo, *Migration and Climate Change* (Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2013).

48) LC. Barbosa, *The Brazilian Amazon Rainforest: Global Ecopolitics, Development, and Democracy* (University Press of America, 2000).

49) R. Yuan, Ma Q, Zhang Q, Yuan X, Wang Q, Luo C., "Coordinated Effects of Energy Transition on Air Pollution Mitigation and CO2 Emission Control in China," *Sci. Total Environ.* Vol. 841 (2022): p. 156482.

50) J. Sathaye, Shukla PR, Ravindranath NH., "Climate Change, Sustainable Development and India: Global and National Concerns," *Curr. Sci.* (2006): 314–25.

51) R. Leal-Arcas, Al Zarkani M, Jbara L, Margaritidou M, Mubwana RM., "The BRIC and Climate Change Mitigation," in: *International Trade and Sustainability: Perspectives from Developing and Developed Countries* (Springer, 2022): p. 229–80.

Conclusions

The relevance of the BRICS transcends the political and economic dimensions and urgently calls for decisive attention to tackling climate change. Each member, whether a founder or a new member, is affected by the impacts of these transformations, with an emphasis on global warming. Each nation's experience in implementing mitigating actions and sometimes timid initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions points to the need for a joint approach. There is an urgent need to design and implement unified strategies that not only bear witness to the concern, but also demonstrate the bloc's capacity to confront the climate problem, which is the most imminent threat to humanity. The BRICS' commitment to practical cooperation in the environmental field reinforces their position of global influence and signals a significant commitment to planetary sustainability.

INTERSECTING INTERESTS: THE COMPLEX DYNAMICS OF INDIA, IRAN, AND CHINA IN BRICS

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Despite supporting the BRICS expansion to incorporate 'strategic partners' such as Iran, India is now navigating a geopolitical shift. The expansion not only bolsters China's influence through its partners' involvement in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) but also complicates India's relations with Western allies, considering Iran's contentious actions. India's strategic involvement in Iran, primarily through the Chabahar port amidst the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan and tensions with China, underscores the intricate balancing act New Delhi must perform. In addition, domestic political maneuvers, leveraging relations with Iran to appeal to Shia voters, further intertwine India's foreign policy with its internal political agendas amid the evolving BRICS landscape.

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Keywords: BRICS' expansion, Strategic Partners, Iran, China, BRI, Chabahar, Western Allies, United States.



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As of 1 January 2024, the BRICS coalition has broadened its membership to encompass Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates. The acronym ‘BRIC’ was initially formulated in 2001 by Jim O’Neill, the chief economist at Goldman Sachs at the time, in a research paper that underscored the economic potential of Brazil, Russia, India, and China. The formal establishment of this grouping was spearheaded by Russia, which hosted the inaugural BRIC summit in 2009 in Yekaterinburg. The expansion continued with South Africa’s invitation to join the coalition in 2010, which necessitated the addition of an ‘S’ to the acronym, thus evolving BRIC into BRICS.

The recent enlargement of BRICS, incorporating five new members from key strategic areas like the Middle East and Africa, is expected to augment the bloc’s GDP by \$2.6 trillion. This expansion not only strengthens the economic influence of BRICS but also substantially broadens its economic foundation by bringing in economies from crucial global regions. As a result, the total economic output of the bloc is projected to reach \$28.5 trillion, accounting for 28.1 percent of the world economy.¹ Additionally, the total investable wealth within the BRICS bloc is now estimated at USD 45 trillion.² However, as a coalition of rapidly developing economies, BRICS is poised for substantial economic expansion, with the potential to eclipse the G7’s economic dominance within the next three decades.³

At the 2010 summit in Brasilia, Brazilian President Lula da Silva notably stated, “We have a fundamental role in creating a new international order,” emphasizing the coalition’s ambition to shape global governance. However, BRICS’ journey towards offering an alternative to the conventional financial and political structures has been complex and met with mixed success. Its most significant achievement to date is the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) with \$50 billion in capital, aimed at financing infrastructure and sustainable development projects. Yet, the NDB’s impact pales in comparison to the World Bank.

Criticisms, notably from BRICS acronym creator O’Neill, highlight the group’s limited success beyond establishing the NDB and annual meetings. Despite significant growth, particularly from China, intra-BRICS trade and investment remain low, underscoring the challenges in deepening economic ties within the bloc. The modest achievements of BRICS can, to a significant extent, be ascribed to the varying and at times conflicting interests among its member states, especially between China

1) Andrew G. Ross, “Will BRICS Expansion Finally End Western Economic and Geopolitical Dominance?” *Geopolitical Monitor*, 26 January 2024. <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/will-brics-expansion-finally-end-western-economic-and-geopolitical-dominance/>

2) Henley and Partners, *The BRICS Wealth Report: Challenging the Global Economic Order*, 30 January 2024. <https://www.henleyglobal.com/newsroom/press-releases/brics-wealth-report-2024>

3) Niccolo Conte, “Charted: Comparing the GDP of BRICS and the G7 Countries,” *Visual Capitalist*, 23 October 2023. <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/charted-comparing-the-gdp-of-brics-and-the-g7-countries/>

and India. These two countries have experienced historical border disputes, with their relationship notably deteriorating after the Doklam standoff in 2017 and the escalation of tensions in Ladakh beginning in May 2020.

The 2023 BRICS summit gained prominence due to the expected expansion, driven by China and Russia as a strategic effort to increase their political sway against rising U.S. tensions, aiming to make BRICS a key counter to Western dominance towards a multipolar world. In contrast, India approached the expansion cautiously, mindful of its growing alliances with the U.S. and Europe. Without a doubt, the expansion of BRICS introduces further divergences in the foreign policies of its members, complicating efforts to achieve consensus and potentially diminish the group's effectiveness. Without a clear, shared purpose among the original five members, this enlargement risks exacerbating issues of internal cohesion.

Expanded BRICS and India

At the Johannesburg summit, India consistently rejected Pakistan's application due to the longstanding tensions between the two nations. India's preference leaned towards adding "strategic partners" that would align with its economic and development priorities.⁴ Indian officials also sought a consensus on criteria that would bar nations under international sanctions from membership, a stance that could effectively exclude countries such as Iran. Furthermore, India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, championed the introduction of a minimum per capita GDP threshold for membership, a proposal that led to intensive negotiations at the summit.⁵ India's careful positioning aimed to prevent BRICS from being leveraged for influence by China.⁶

Yet, all the new BRICS members are partners in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), highlighting China's strategic expansion into the Middle East, including collaborations with both the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Iran. Countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Iran which maintain significant trade and investment relationships with India and are deemed its 'strategic partners,' present a complex strategic situation. Given the inclination of these regional allies towards China, the expansion of BRICS appears less advantageous for India.

4) Rezaul H. Laskar, "At crucial Brics meet, India focuses on inclusion of partners in expanded Brics," *Hindustan Times*. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-takes-lead-in-forging-consensus-on-expansion-criteria-for-brics-grouping-and-selection-of-new-members-101692777695081.html>

5) Carien du Plessis and Krishn Kaushik, "BRICS expansion faces eleventh hour hurdle as divisions persist," *Reuters*, 24 August 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/brics-leaders-weigh-expansion-criteria-with-blocs-future-balance-2023-08-23/>

6) Ankit Tiwari, "India's hesitation as China pushes for BRICS expansion," *Lowy Institute*, 22 August 2023. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/india-s-hesitation-china-pushes-brics-expansion>

Notably, Saudi Arabia and the UAE stand out as China's major global trade and investment partners under the BRI, with their trade volumes substantially exceeding those with India. For example, bilateral trade between China and Saudi Arabia reached \$77.7 billion, compared to the Indo-Saudi trade at \$34.27 billion, which is less than half.⁷ Moreover, in the first half of 2023, among 45 countries benefiting from Chinese financing and investment, Saudi Arabia led in construction volume with \$3.8 billion, followed by Tanzania at \$2.8 billion, and the UAE at \$1.2 billion. In recent years, there is an increasing focus in both countries on diversifying their trade with China beyond oil, encompassing cooperation in the security and technology sectors.⁸

The dynamics across the Persian Gulf illustrate a complex scenario where China's role is pivotal. By continuing oil purchases in defiance of U.S. sanctions, China has become Iran's top oil importer, serving as a crucial economic support, especially significant after the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal in 2018 and the re-imposition of stringent sanctions. In 2023, Iran's oil exports reportedly hit record highs, with a considerable share of this increase linked to an expanded trading relationship with China.⁹ Between 2018 and 2022, China's contributions to Iran totaled \$618 million, mainly directed toward the construction industry, playing a crucial role in supporting the Iranian economy.¹⁰

In March 2021, Iran and China entered into a 25-year strategic cooperation agreement, encompassing significant Chinese investments in Iran's energy and infrastructure sectors, alongside military cooperation, despite both facing U.S. sanctions.¹¹ Iran, facing isolation due to its confrontational approach and various international violations, has been seeking closer ties with China. Beijing sees this relationship as an opportunity to engage with Iran, recognizing the economic challenges it faces, and to foster collaboration with a government that shares some of its governance characteristics. This partnership helps China enhance its strategic influence.

7) "China/Saudi Arabia," Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), 2022; <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/chn/partner/sau>; "India/Saudi Arabia," OEC, 2022, <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/ind/partner/sau>

8) Dayan Abou Tine, "Saudi Arabia's trade surplus with China soars by 257% in September," *Arab News*, 27 November 2023. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2416091/business-economy>

9) Congressional Research Service, Iran's Petroleum Exports to China and U.S. Sanctions, 28 February 2024. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN12267>

10) Umud Shokri, "Obstacles and opportunities for closer Iranian-Chinese economic cooperation," Middle East Institute, 23 June 2023. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/obstacles-and-opportunities-closer-iranian-chinese-economic-cooperation>

11) The Iran Primer, Iran's Increasing Reliance on China, United States Institute of Peace, 1 August 2023. <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2019/sep/11/irans-increasing-reliance-china>

Beyond Expansion: India, Iran, and the China Equation in BRICS

India's apprehension regarding its investments in the Chabahar port escalated following the China-Iran strategic agreement. New Delhi India feared that sanctions limiting its investments could inadvertently favor China. India's commitment to developing the Chabahar port, a linchpin for its strategic access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, commenced with a strategic partnership agreement with Iran in 2002. This commitment was further solidified in May 2016 when Iran, India, and Afghanistan signed a trilateral transit agreement to develop Chabahar into a key hub for trade and a gateway to Kabul and Central Asia.

The United States recognized the importance of the port for India's commerce and for providing Afghanistan with access to seaports, thereby exempting it from the sanctions imposed on Iran. Nonetheless, the collapse of Ashraf Ghani's government in Afghanistan in August 2021 cast a shadow over the project, introducing new uncertainties regarding the engagement of the Taliban-led government, which, although showing interest in maintaining some of the previous administration's projects, has changed the geopolitical dynamics. From India's perspective, the shift in Afghanistan's leadership potentially paves the way for increased Chinese investments. With China maintaining its embassy and actively engaging in discussions about trade, investment, and aid with the Taliban, the development of infrastructure linking Chabahar to Afghanistan, such as roads and railways, could fall within China's sphere of influence.

At a time when China's interest in Iranian ports and coastal infrastructure is increasing, Iran has been urging India to accelerate the development of the Shahid Beheshti terminal, managed by India Ports Global Limited, highlighting the evolving dynamics in the region. In January 2024, India and Iran signed a long-term agreement, effective for ten years with provisions for automatic renewals, replacing the initial agreement governing India's operations at the Shahid Beheshti terminal in Chabahar.¹² This crucial update was facilitated by the joint decision to remove the arbitration clause that involved foreign courts, which had been an obstacle to finalizing a durable agreement for the port.¹³

However, India's decision to forego commercial arbitration in foreign courts in favor of investment arbitration introduces a vulnerability to its investments in Chabahar. While the host state's consent cannot be withdrawn, disputes over India's investments in the port would fall under the jurisdiction of Iranian and Indian courts.

12) ET Online, "Iran says final agreement reached with India on Chabahar Port: Report," *Economic Times*, 15 January 2024. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/transportation/shipping/-transport/iran-says-final-agreement-reached-with-india-on-chabahar-port-report/articleshow/106863677.cms>

13) Kallol Bhattacharjee, "India and Iran drop foreign arbitration clause in Chabahar port issue," *The Hindu*, 25 August 2023. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-and-iran-drop-foreign-court-arbitration-for-chabahar-port/article67234071.ece>

This is because “national law is part of the applicable law in investment arbitration, and national courts are authorized to interpret and apply national law,”¹⁴ leading to potential legal complexities. Scholars critique investment arbitration for its lack of legitimacy, attributing this to “the impermanent nature of the tribunals chosen to decide disputes as well as the perceived potential for arbitrators to have conflicts of interest.”¹⁵

It is pertinent to note here that this development occurred simultaneously with the BRICS bloc’s decision to expand its membership, including Iran among five other new entrants, highlighting a period of significant geopolitical shifts. Eager to counter China’s influence in Iran and lacking oil trade due to sanctions, India viewed this as a step to strengthen India-Iran commercial ties. Yet, this leaves India without legal recourse in disputes, whether from restricted investments or other bilateral disagreements. Additionally, while it remains speculative, Iran could potentially use the prospect of closer ties with China as a strategic bargaining chip against India, as state decisions of this nature tend to unfold subtly and gradually. Indian policymakers may have overlooked that maintaining commercial or political relations is more advantageous for Iran, enhancing its international stature by associating with a democratic and stable nation.

Iran is pressing India to boost its investments in Chabahar, particularly emphasizing the need to expedite the development of the Chabahar port and to complete the Chabahar-Zahedan railway line, with less than 200km left to finish. India’s reluctance is due to concerns about partnering with a construction firm linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which faces U.S. sanctions.¹⁶ Given India’s strengthening ties with the U.S. across diplomatic, military, and economic spheres, it is highly unlikely that India would choose to defy U.S. sanctions, even at the cost of diminishing its involvement in Chabahar, potentially benefiting China.

Chabahar port comprises two separate ports: Shahid Beheshti, where India’s investments are focused and which is intended to become a regional hub, and Shahid Kalantari, a traffic port developed in the 1980s with potential for further expansion and modernization. In early 2023, Hellenic Shipping reported a logistical shift: Chinese vessels, formerly docking at Bandar Abbas, started unloading their cargo there for subsequent transfer to Chabahar,¹⁷ likely via smaller ships to Shahid

14) Aniruddha Rajput, “National Courts as Actors in Investment Arbitration,” in Catharine Titi (ed.), *Public Actors in International Investment Law* (Switzerland: Springer Nature), https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-58916-5_3

15) Maria Laura Marceddu and Pietro Ortolani, “What Is Wrong with Investment Arbitration? Evidence from a Set of Behavioural Experiments,” *European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (September 2020): p. 405.

16) Financial Tribune, “India Allocates Just Over \$12m to Development of Chabahar in 2023-24 Budget,” 5 February 2023. <https://financialtribune.com/articles/domestic-economy/116979/india-allocates-just-over-12m-to-development-of-chabahar-in-2023-24>

17) Hellenic Shipping, “China launches direct shipping line to Iran’s Chabahar port,” 3 January 2023. <https://www.hellenicshippingnews.com/china-launches-direct-shipping-line-to-irans-chabahar-port/>

Kalantari port. This change suggests a strategic adjustment in the region's logistics, potentially favouring China over India.

Iran in BRICS: Challenges and Prospects for India

The BRICS bloc, already perceived as China-dominated, sees its dynamics further complicated with the inclusion of Iran, underscoring Beijing and Moscow's intent to forge BRICS as a geopolitical counterbalance to the Western alliance. Iran's growing estrangement from the West, exacerbated by stalled nuclear negotiations, its support for Russia in the Ukraine conflict, and its suppression of pro-democracy protests, aligns with the thinking and interests of China and Russia. The Ukraine crisis has notably strengthened military collaboration between Russia and Iran, highlighted by Iran's provision of unmanned combat aerial vehicles to Russia.

India is in a precarious position within this evolving framework. Its strengthening ties with the West and concerted efforts to improve relations with the United States over the past two decades contrast with its association with a bloc that includes Iran, presenting a discordant image. The risk of India being inadvertently involved in decisions that could aid Iran in bypassing sanctions is a concern, particularly given Iran's antagonistic actions in the Middle East, especially against Israel, a key regional ally of India, through its proxy wars.

Iran's inclusion in BRICS also raises questions about the bloc's economic coherence. Iran's current economic and geopolitical stance offers limited value to BRICS' economic ambitions and its role as a stabilizing force in global affairs. In addition, Iran brings controversy into BRICS, given its label by many as a leading state sponsor of terrorism. The Islamic Republic's engagement in regional conflicts through proxies, targeting both a BRICS member, Saudi Arabia, and U.S. forces, contradicts the values upheld by BRICS.¹⁸ India finds itself in a challenging situation, as its involvement could be interpreted as indirectly endorsing Iran's controversial actions. Such a perception might further complicate India's relations with the U.S., Israel, and the broader Western community, raising questions about its commitment to global peace.

Challenges notwithstanding, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's January 2023 visit to Tehran, which secured the Chabahar deal, reflects India's strategic depth. Opting for investment arbitration indicates India's broader strategic intent, possibly to gain leverage in domestic politics where the ruling Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) aims to increase sway, as in the Shia-majority areas of Jammu and Kashmir.¹⁹ This nuanced

18) Seth G. Jones et al., "The Iranian and Houthi War against Saudi Arabia," CSIS Briefs, December 2021.

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/iranian-and-houthi-war-against-saudi-arabia>

19) See K.P. Nayar, "Jaishankar's visit to Iran and playing the long game," *National Herald*, 19 January 2024.

use of Iran's 'structural power' suggests the BJP's tactical play to bolster its regional influence, highlighting the interplay between domestic factors and foreign policy.

Conclusion

Iran's BRICS membership complicates India's strategic stance, potentially boosting China's influence and aligning new members closer to China through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This realignment and existing India-China border tensions could marginalize India in BRICS. In addition, China's involvement in Iran's infrastructure projects may limit India's investment prospects, especially given India's adherence to sanctions affecting its competitiveness in Iran. The Islamic Republic's inclusion in BRICS poses a risk of the bloc being perceived as anti-Western amidst global tensions, complicating India's efforts to strengthen ties with the U.S. and maintain relationships with allies like Israel. India must navigate the challenge of not aiding Iran in sanctions evasion or alienating regional partners.

Furthermore, leveraging Iran's influence poses risks for India, especially with Iran's proxy conflict history. This strategy, previously used to show solidarity with India's Muslim minority, now faces hurdles due to Iran's human rights issues, potentially affecting New Delhi's global standing. These dynamics underscore India's challenge to balance its relationship with Iran amidst shifting geopolitical landscapes and domestic considerations.

EXPANSION OF BRICS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH ASIA

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This paper explores the implications of the expanded BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) for South Asia, focusing on economic and political aspects. It analyzes the economic imperatives that brought India into BRICS and the aspirations of countries like Bangladesh to join. Despite economic opportunities, political constraints, such as historical rivalries and strategic alliances, shape the dynamics within BRICS. The essay examines how South Asian countries position themselves concerning BRICS, considering their diverse geopolitical and economic interests. Through case studies of countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, it highlights the complexities and opportunities arising from the expanded BRICS framework.

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Keywords: BRICS, South Asia, Geopolitics,
Economic Implications, Political Constraints.



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The expansion of BRICS, announced during the 15th BRICS summit in Johannesburg in August 2023, marked a significant moment in the global geopolitical landscape. The invitation for the membership of six new nations—Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—alongside the original members (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), effectively transformed BRICS into a more inclusive platform, heralding the rise of a multipolar world. This expansion has sparked considerable interest, particularly in regions like South Asia, which grapple with diverse economic, political, and geopolitical challenges.

South Asia, comprising countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, is characterized by its cultural richness, demographic diversity, and economic potential. However, it also faces daunting challenges, including poverty, political instability, and the impacts of global climate change. Against this backdrop, the expanded BRICS framework holds promise and opportunity for the region.

At the core of this analysis lies the exploration of how the expanded BRICS configuration influences South Asia's economic trajectory and political dynamics. India's pivotal role within BRICS, driven by its economic stature and geopolitical aspirations, underscores the region's significance in shaping the group's agenda. Bangladesh, an aspirant for BRICS membership, signals the nuanced interplay between economic imperatives and political constraints, especially Bangladesh's foreign relations beyond the region.

India's strategic considerations, particularly its historical rivalry with China and burgeoning ties with the United States, shape its stance within BRICS. The Quad, comprising India, the U.S., Japan, and Australia, represents a counterbalance to China's growing influence, reflecting India's alignment with Western powers. However, India's participation in BRICS also underscores its commitment to advancing the interests of the Global South, despite occasional tensions with China.

Bangladesh's aspirations for BRICS membership underscore its strategic positioning between India and China, two major BRICS players. While Bangladesh enjoys cordial relations with both countries, its exclusion from the expanded BRICS raises questions about regional dynamics and power politics inside the BRICS.

Pakistan's complex relationship with BRICS reflects its geopolitical alignment with China and historical tensions with India. Despite its strategic partnership with China, Pakistan's exclusion from BRICS underscores the region's geopolitical fault lines. Nepal and Sri Lanka navigate a delicate balance between India and China, reflecting broader regional dynamics shaped by economic interests and strategic considerations.

The expanded BRICS framework offers opportunities for enhanced economic cooperation, infrastructure development, and geopolitical dialogue within South

Asia. However, it also poses challenges, particularly in managing competing interests, resolving historical tensions, and navigating power dynamics within the group.

This paper seeks to analyze the implications of the expansion of BRICS for South Asia, focusing on economic and political aspects. The expansion of BRICS has a direct impact on evolving geopolitical shifts and their impact on the region. And in some crucial sense, beyond the region.

The main argument of this paper is to flesh out the contradictions between the economic imperatives that brought the major South Asian country, India, into BRICS and the aspirant in the wing, Bangladesh. The political constraints are manifold, bringing India and China on the same platform.

BRICS emerged in 2009, representing Brazil, Russia, India, and China (with the "s" indicating plurality). In 2001, Russia's GDP in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms stood at \$1.12 trillion, ranking it as the world's 10th largest economy, while Brazil, with \$1.21 trillion in PPP terms, held the 9th spot. South Africa joined the group later, transforming "bricks" into "BRICS," a term coined by Goldman Sachs economist Jim O'Neill.

BRICS established the New Development Bank in 2015, and the following year saw the founding of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in Beijing, with 57 founding members, including Bangladesh. AIIB aimed to balance the dominance of institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank in providing financial assistance to developing countries. Today, AIIB boasts 109 members, representing 81 percent of the global population, with Bangladesh as one of its founding members.

The original BRICS cohort comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa added substantial new financial firepower and geopolitical clout, including this month of new Middle East and North Africa (MENA) members Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The BRICS bloc now represents more than 45 percent of the world's population. It accounts for a larger share (nearly 36 percent) of global GDP than G7 countries (30 percent) when adjusting for purchasing power parity (PPP).

The expansion of BRICs announced in the 15th BRICS summit in Johannesburg in South Africa on 22 – 24 August 2023 was a momentous occasion. The invitation for the membership of six other nations Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, effective from January 2024 to the original four Brazil, China, Russia, and India plus South Africa created a lot of excitement in the Global South, especially in South Asia. The expansion signals the rise of a multipolar world.

The present paper examines the implications for the expansion of BRICS for South Asia, a region that is as diverse as it is populous. South Asia is also a region of exciting economic development, democracy, and reversal of democracy, as well as

geopolitical rivalry. Poverty is endemic in part of South Asia and part of this region is also faced with grave effects of global climate change and their fall outs.

This paper focuses on exploring the impact of the expanded BRICS on South Asia. South Asia, as a bloc, represented by the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), is comprised of eight countries. The largest are India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. Despite Myanmar (Burma contiguity to Bangladesh, it is counted as part of Southeast Asia because of its for historical and cultural reasons Myanmar is a member of Southeast Asia represented by ASEAN with its cultural links with Thailand and common borders with China, Thailand, and Laos. Afghanistan, though considered as South Asia and is a member of SAARC has gone to self-isolation or recluse since the ascendancy of Taliban.

BRICS countries represent nearly half the world's population. The expanded BRICS region has overtaken the G7 in total gross domestic product. In both population size and population growth rate, BRICS has an advantage over G7.

From the point of view of the Global South including that of South Asia the expanded BRICS could be a platform for upholding the interests of the non-Western world. For example, BRICS-eleven can help reduce tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran. And there are clear signs of tension reduction between these two powers in the Gulf region. Yet, from a Western perspective, especially from the U.S.-cantered world this is not very comforting since the U.S. views Russia, China, and Iran as an anti-Western "axis" which is now nestled within the expanded BRICS.

Though BRICS has not presented itself as political bloc challenging the hegemony of the U.S.-led western world over time it could both be an economic bloc with growing political weight. While this could rattle the United States, it is a source of solace for South Asian countries that want to see a multilateral world.

A growing number of countries, including some of the South Asian countries, have expressed interest in joining the BRICS group. There is a general perception expressed in the media in Bangladesh that India has reservations about admitting many new members too quickly, while China is pushing for the expansion of BRICS bringing on board countries which China has strong relations.

India's concern has much to do with its historic, bitter border disputes with China and the current strength of India's bilateral relationship with the United States and the Western world. India's contribution in keeping BRICS from becoming outwardly anti-Western only strengthens the country's geopolitical importance for the United States. India, along with the U.S., Australia, and Japan are members of the quad which is ostensibly a bloc to desist China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The so-called quad was formed at the insistence of the then Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to counteract Chinese influence in the region in 2007. The Quad

was revitalized in 2017.

Some commentators who are aligned with India even suggest that India should leave BRICS, which they claim to be China-centric. “But BRICS+ is more political in focus, more China-centric in leadership, and more anti-West in motivation. Its composition is shaping its character. The question for India, then, is whether it still makes sense to belong to such a grouping”.¹

It is in the existing geopolitical context one must explore the implications of expanded BRICS in South Asia. Below we explore how the south Asian countries position themselves vis-à-vis BRICS.

One of the aspiring South Asian countries was Bangladesh. Its Prime Minister attended the BRICs meeting at Johannesburg, and it was no secret Bangladesh wanted to be a member of this bloc. When Bangladesh was not included in the additional six, it raised various speculations. Bangladesh in recent past, especially under the rule of Sheikh Hasina has maintained excellent relationship with both India and China, the two major players of BRICS. It was somewhat of a puzzle that even Indonesia too was not included. Jim O’Neill who coined the term BRIC back in 2001 was little surprised: “Why Indonesia was not asked, why Argentina and not Mexico, or Ethiopia and not Nigeria?”.² For O’Neill the expanded BRICS will grow in symbolic power.

One of the reasons for Bangladesh to be hopeful was because Bangladesh was one of the three additional members of the New Development Bank, the official bank of the BRICS. The other two members, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates were included in the expanded BRICS.

Some commentators in Bangladesh immediately pointed their fingers at India suggesting that India did not back Bangladesh, because India wants to retain its position of pre-eminence in the South Asia. Yet, India has seen Bangladesh under Prime Minister Hasina more favorably and as a trusted friend. Bangladesh earned that trust by not allowing separatist forces to operate from the territory of Bangladesh. The past government of Bangladesh allowed separatists forces to operate against India at the instigation of Pakistan. Bangladesh, as such, has no interest in destabilizing the border regions with India and only doing the bidding of Pakistan, a mortal enemy of India who wants India to be engaged in its eastern border tackling the separatists.

Bangladesh saw itself as a logical choice for membership to BRICS, because Bangladesh has excellent relationships with the three major BRICS countries:

1) Arvind Subramanian and Josh Felman, “India Should Quit BRICS,” *Project-Syndicate*, 7 September 2023. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/india-should-quit-brics-by-arvind-subramanian-and-josh-felman-2023-09>

2) Jim O’Neill, “Does an Expanded BRICS Mean Anything?” *Project-Syndicate*, 25 August 2023. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/brics-expansion-potential-and-limitations-by-jim-o-neill-2023-08?barrier=accesspaylog>

India, China, and Russia. India supported Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan diplomatically and militarily to the displeasure of the United States and Pakistan's other Western allies.

Pakistan officially asked to join BRICS but failed in its bid. India's position on Pakistan's request is a plain no. While Pakistan has maintained friendly relations with China since 1960s, yet its relationship with India has not improved in all these years. Rather the relationship took a dive down in 1971 when India backed Bangladesh's independence, which Pakistan saw as dismemberment of its nationhood.

Pakistan's relationship with China grew out of their common enmity with India. Pakistan's relationship with China grew stronger with China's Belt and Road Initiative, especially the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CEPA) that would link to the Gwadar port which China itself took upon itself to build at the cost of over 1 billion USD. India never viewed Pakistan's closer economic and military collaboration with China too kindly. As such Pakistan is caught in between in a triangular relationship with two of the original four. Pakistan's relationship with Russia has been fraught, especially in the days of the Soviet Union.

Sharply divided over Afghanistan when Pakistan sided with the U.S. while the USSR was a strong backer of Afghanistan. In 2022, newly elected Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan was tilting towards Russia as a counterweight to U.S.'s bullying. It so happened that on the day of Russian invasion of Ukraine, Prime Minister Khan was in Moscow.

Nepal too has to navigate between India with whom it has a border free access and China which is trying to build a closer relationship with China as a counterweight to India's hegemony. To make matter complex, the U.S. has granted a huge infrastructure development project in Nepal.

Sri Lanka has had good relations with Pakistan to balance India's regional influence. Relationship in recent years has improved with India with the latter's economic success. Also, to balance India's domination, Sri Lanka cultivated a friendly relationship with China and under the Belt and Road Initiative invited China to build a major port. The deal went sour, and as Sri Lanka defaulted on the loan payments, China was given control over the Hambantoto International port to the displeasure of China's rival India.

Pakistan has excellent relationship with both UAE and Saudi Arabia, both countries have provided crucial financial aid to Pakistani in times of need to help avoid defaulting multilateral loans. In that regard expansion of BRICS will benefit Pakistan.

O'Neill (2023) wishes, "if China and India could resolve their border disputes and develop a closer constructive relationship, both countries would benefit, as would

world trade, global economic growth, and the BRICS' effectiveness.³ China and India could cooperate in many areas, and in ways that would influence the other BRICS and many others throughout the Global South.”

On a positive note, despite geopolitical tensions, “economic relations between China and India. Total bilateral trade volume tripled in the space of 15 years, from \$38 billion in 2007 to \$113.8 billion in 2022. Since 2013, China has sat alongside the United States as India's biggest trade partner”.⁴

The implications of the expanded BRICS for South Asia are multifaceted, reflecting the region's diverse interests, challenges, and opportunities. By examining the economic and political dimensions of BRICS expansion, this paper underscores the need for nuanced analysis and strategic engagement to harness the potential benefits while addressing the complexities inherent in regional dynamics. As South Asia navigates its role within the evolving global order, BRICS serves as both a platform for cooperation and a catalyst for geopolitical realignments, shaping the region's future trajectory in an increasingly multipolar world.

As South Asian countries position themselves within the evolving BRICS landscape, they must reconcile economic imperatives with political realities, fostering inclusive dialogue and cooperation for mutual prosperity.

3) Jim O'Neill, 25 August 2023.

4) Kasai Ryohei, “Collaboration and Confrontation: Geopolitics, Global Affairs, and the India-China Relationship,” *Nippon*, 12 March 2024. <https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/a09503/>

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RUSSIA AT WAR: THE CONSEQUENCES FOR GREAT POWER POLITICS, THE BRICS AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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Great power competition, the hardening of the U.S.-China rivalry, and worsening tensions between Russia and the West following Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, had already strained international governance and multilateral institutions like the BRICS even before Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Now in its third year, the Kremlin perceives it has turned the tide in its fight against Ukraine, foiling Western plans to inflict a "strategic defeat" on Russia. Many experts in the United States and Europe worry not only about a possible Russian victory of varying scales against Ukraine, the bleak transformation of European security, and Putin's recurring mentions of how the war could escalate into a civilization-ending nuclear conflict. There are also fears that such confident and aggressive rhetoric may next be heard in support of armed conflicts initiated by Beijing on the other side of the world.

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Keywords: Russia, Great Power Politics, BRICS,
Global South, Russian Foreign Policy.



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Great power competition, the hardening of the U.S.-China rivalry, and worsening tensions between Russia and the West following Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, had already strained international governance and multilateral institutions like the BRICS even before Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022.¹ Now in its third year, the Kremlin perceives it has turned the tide in its fight against Ukraine, foiling Western plans to inflict a "strategic defeat" on Russia.² Many experts in the United States and Europe worry not only about a possible Russian victory of varying scales against Ukraine, the bleak transformation of European security, and Putin's recurring mentions of how the war could escalate into a civilization-ending nuclear conflict. There are also fears that such confident and aggressive rhetoric may next be heard in support of armed conflicts initiated by Beijing on the other side of the world.³

The consequences of Russia's war further intensify international competition, deepening existing cleavages while fostering convergence within blocs in both the East and the West. NATO is accelerating efforts to strengthen collective defense and has quickly expanded to include Finland and Sweden. Russia similarly stretched its alignments to include North Korea and Iran while also deepening economic and military cooperation with China. The Sino-Russian partnership is one that both countries claim has never been better, anchored by Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, who have personally invested in and built a resilient relationship that brings benefits to both sides, even if it is not without limits and boundaries. There is also an emerging Sino-Russian axis with North Korea and Iran that Moscow has been exploiting to assist its war effort. Although none of these relationships are without fissures that could widen and rupture as they have in the past,⁴ the current material benefits loom large for Moscow, which unlike Beijing, has largely been cut off from the West.

Strikingly, the rest of the world resists being drawn into taking sides, with individual countries pursuing instead transactional interests while preserving as much autonomy to maneuver as possible. Despite this, the Global South has proved more responsive to Russia and China's courting, counter-norms, and inducements than the West. To a significant degree, Putin and Xi act as "fear dictators" in their respective countries. Still, they remain impactful "spin dictators" across the Global South and in selected other places.⁵ Thus, despite the overwhelming majority of UN member states that

1) Cynthia Roberts, "The BRICS in the era of Renewed Great Power Competition," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 43, No. 6 (2019): p. 469-486.

2) Vladimir Putin, Address of the President to the Federal Assembly, 29 February 2024. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/73585>

3) Evan S. Medeiros, ed. *Cold Rivals: The New Era of US-China Strategic Competition* (Georgetown University Press, 2023).

4) Oriana Skylar Mastro, "The Next Tripartite Pact?" *Foreign Affairs*, 19 February 2024. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/next-tripartite-pact>; and Thomas J. Christensen, *Worse than a Monolith: Alliance Politics and Problems of Coercive Diplomacy in Asia* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

5) Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman, *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century* (Princeton &

voted in March 2022 to condemn Russian aggression, only about 30 are imposing sanctions against Moscow or otherwise supporting Ukraine. In the UN vote, 40 countries with different views of Russia and the current international order opposed or abstained, and among the 35 abstentions were G20/BRICS members China, India, and South Africa. More than a year later, a majority (57 percent) of Indians, whose government refrains from condemning Russia's war continues to hold a favorable opinion of Russia.⁶

This article explores Russia's strategies and policies related to the BRICS context to protect and advance the regime and national interests in the new era of competitive great power rivalries.

***BRICS are Non-Western and Counter-Hegemonic,
But Divided about an Anti-Western Orientation***

When Vladimir Putin repurposed Goldman Sachs' BRICs idea into a multilateral club for large emerging economic powers, geoeconomic and geopolitical drivers were deeply rooted in its structural foundations. In the first decade of the 21st century when Russia started to organize informal caucuses, the balance of power and the structure of international order were still dominated by the United States and its Western partners. China was growing but not yet an economic powerhouse while Russia was a major energy exporter to Europe and prided itself as one of the top ten emerging global economies. The Kremlin's geopolitical strategy featured two critical vectors of Russian foreign policy, the traditional arena in Europe and the Global West where strategic and economic stakes loomed large, and the other to the East where a rising China was starting to transform and energize Asia's regional economies.

When the original four founding BRICs members began to assert themselves in global governance, their common interests were relatively thin given varying domestic and economic profiles. But their common aversions to U.S. hegemony and hypocrisy ran deep, even among fellow democracies Brazil and India as all had experienced the long arm of U.S. sanctions and coercive diplomacy and held grievances about their respective status and roles in the international order and Bretton Woods Institutions.⁷ Following the Global Financial Crisis 2008-9, the United States was perceived to be declining in power and status, exposed by its misdeeds, double standards and regulatory scandals originating with the U.S.

Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2022).

6) "Overall Opinion of Russia" Pew Research Center, 10 July 2023.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2023/07/10/overall-opinion-of-russia/>

7) Cynthia A. Roberts, Leslie Elliott Armijo, and Saori N. Katada, *The BRICS and Collective Financial Statecraft* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

subprime mortgage markets and American-style crony capitalism.⁸ The BRICS cleverly parlayed such self-inflicted U.S. wounds and the increasing use of Western (non-UN authorized) sanctions swords into a global narrative about the world's need to "democratize international relations" led by the self-appointed emerging economic powers, the BRICS. The priorities were to de-dollarize, increase the role of BRICS local currencies, and build parallel financial institutions while gaining more voice and rule-making power in the existing order. Some Russian and Indian elites even optimistically hoped that multilateral groups like the BRICS could help bind China.⁹

The return of great power competition and intensifying U.S.-China rivalry in the mid-2010s strains such diverse multilateral institutions as it stresses international relations,¹⁰ but the BRICS approach to geopolitics has been bifurcated. First, in the whole group, the five BRICS have succeeded by putting conflicts (such as security and territorial disputes between China and India) to one side, focusing on consensus-based decision-making and largely non-controversial cooperation in arenas where it is possible.¹¹ The results have led to greater institutionalization, including the creation of the BRICS New Development Bank, a Contingency Reserve Agreement, interlinked payments systems, and initiatives to promote de-dollarization through trade in local currencies and digital currencies. Russia has occasionally attempted to build support for its geopolitical interests by proposing anti-Western initiatives, but Brazil and other BRICS members have so far nixed such overtures.

Second, the BRICS is an elite club where some members are more privileged than others (e.g. by simultaneously holding valuable permanent memberships in the U.N. Security Council) and can pursue more controversial initiatives in alternative fora. Club-within-the-club rivalries¹² create underlying tensions as some of these subgroups pursue narrow common interests not shared by other members. These vary from Sino-Russian alignment in containing U.S. and Western democracy promotion initiatives that they perceive as threatening their regimes to China's (and now Russia's) push to enlarge BRICS to further geo-economic and geopolitical interests. The elite members are disincentivized to dilute their power in other institutions where they value other elite pacts while favoring an expansion of the BRICS brand.

8) Leslie Elliott Armijo and Cynthia Roberts, "The Emerging Powers and Global Governance: Why the BRICS Matter," in Robert E. Looney, ed. *Handbook of Emerging Economies* (Routledge, 2014): p. 503-524.

9) Cynthia Roberts, "Russia's BRICs Diplomacy: Rising Outsider with Dreams of an Insider," *Polity*, Vol. 42 (2010): p. 38-73.

10) Roberts, "The BRICS in the Era of Renewed Great Power Competition."

11) Raj Verma, "India's Quest for Status and Neutrality in the Russia-Ukraine War: BRICS, a Case Study." *International Journal* (2023); Raj Verma and Mihaela Papa, "BRICS amidst India-China rivalry," *Global Policy*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2021): p. 509-513; and Oliver Stuenkel, "The BRICS Grouping," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (2022).

12) Armijo and Roberts, "The Emerging Powers and Global Governance," p. 12-13.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and its failure to rapidly achieve the aims of regime change and subordination of Ukraine, radically changed the equation for Moscow. First and foremost, Russia sought to demonstrate strength and resolve while it struggled to adapt to the abject failure of its initial war plan. Putin, like past Russian leaders, lives by the motto, "the weak get beaten." The Kremlin had prepared for economic sanctions, but not a long war that could require the military mobilization of hundreds of thousands of men and material over a dragged-out fight. It prioritized partners who were able and willing to provide concrete assistance, not only rhetorical and diplomatic boosts in multilateral forums but also exploiting all opportunities to make end-runs around punitive Western sanctions and boost competing financial mechanisms and networks.

Russia is Resilient, and Neither its Economy nor its Military is Collapsing

The immediate cost of Russia's war in blood and treasure was shocking in comparison with Russia's recent limited conflicts, with an estimated 300,000 casualties and reportedly 800,000 well-educated, young men rushing into exile during the first two years. Over the medium to long term, the outlook for Russia's potential growth is expected to worsen given the regime's failure to diversify and modernize the economy, poor demographics, and underinvestment.¹³

However, Washington and the European Union (EU) underestimated Russia's ability to prepare for increased sanctions by accumulating a huge reservoir of reserves, scaling up the "Fortress Russia" strategy, adapting with skillful policy responses, and recovering from the initial economic and military disasters. The IMF estimates that the Russian economy will grow 3 percent in 2023 and predicts 2.6 percent growth in 2024. Russia has been running a "hot" war economy with defense spending tripling since the start of the invasion in 2022 and now approaching 8 percent of national output. Energy revenues still power the economy as oil and gas revenues increased 28 percent from 2021 but were insufficient to cover sizeable spending increases in 2022 and 2023, requiring a drawdown of nearly \$50 billion from the national wealth funds and a record 3 trillion-ruble domestic debt issuance to cover the 2023 federal budget deficit of roughly 3.2 trillion rubles (\$37 billion) amounting to about 2 percent of GDP.¹⁴

Sanctions indisputably have imposed high costs on Russia and blowback against Europe. Still, Russia has proved more determined and cleverer in evading restrictions, more able to rely on a web of countries reluctant to cut ties, and more

13) Elina Ribakova, "Sanctions against Russia will worsen its already poor economic prospects," PIIE, 18 April 2023; and idem, "Economic Sanctions risk losing their bite as a US policy weapon," *Financial Times*, 7 November 2023.

14) Bank of Finland Institute for Emerging Economies (BOFIT) *Weekly Review* 2024/03, 19 January 2024. https://www.bofit.fi/en/monitoring/weekly/2024/vw202403_1/

resilient than many coalition policymakers expected. Moscow also resolutely made firm macroeconomic adjustments to right the economy after the initial shock and found means to circumvent controls, restore advantages in manpower, materiel, and defense production, and do whatever it took, including throwing tens of thousands of conscripted convicts into the meat grinder in the front lines.

One is frequently reminded of the Prussian leader Otto von Bismarck's observation that lack of capital would not make Russia more peaceful. Bismarck only partly exaggerates when he claims that the Russians would "spend the necessary money for railways and wars whether they have it or not."¹⁵ Liberal finance ministers—from Mikhail von Reutern (under Alexander II) to Aleksei Kudrin (under Putin) have repeatedly failed to restrain the nexus of interests pushing protectionist, military-industrial and imperial expansion. The current logrolled domestic coalition supporting Putin ominously may also include Russia's nuclear sector and the nationalist hawks that denounce the U.S. for seeking Russia's 'strategic defeat' and advocate for direct action against the West.¹⁶ It's not unimaginable, for example, that the Kremlin is rethinking the cost-benefit scenarios of nuclear proliferation and will decide that support for Iran's nuclear ambitions is justified payback against the West, poses little risk to Russia and is reasonable compensation for Tehran's military support.

Even in the Western world, Moscow has proven adept at limiting damage from restrictions on Russian oil and other natural resource purchases. In 2023, the European Union added €1 billion to Russia's war chest through fuel purchases despite sweeping bans on Russian oil.¹⁷ Similarly, a Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG) project subject to U.S. sanctions was resurrected with Chinese expertise filling the technical and logistical void left by Western companies.¹⁸ Russia and its suppliers have also adroitly exploited globalized supply chains and third countries to acquire critical technology, even from Western manufacturers, and access dual-use components for its weapons.¹⁹ Russia further reduced its vulnerabilities, including to a partial cutoff from SWIFT (the Belgium-based cooperative connecting global banks), through new and adapted institutions in domestic payments systems, trade in local currencies and greater digitalization while other actors successfully pursued non-compliance and means to evade sanctions.

15) Cynthia Roberts, "Russian Brinkmanship Meets Weaponized Finance," *The National Interest*, 24 December 2021. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/russian-brinkmanship-meets-weaponized-finance-prepare-deterrence-fail-198496>

16) For the definitive study of how such logrolled domestic coalitions promote international aggression and conflict, see Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Cornell University Press, 1991).

17) "Putin banked €1B last year from EU fuel buys despite ban," *Politico*, 23 February 2024. https://www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-russia-banked-1-billion-euros-2023-eu-fuel-despite-ban/?utm_source=RSS_Feed&utm_medium=RSS&utm_campaign=RSS_Syndication

18) Shotaro Tani and Anastasia Stognei, "Russia foils Western Sanctions on Natural Gas Project as Shipments Near," *Financial Times*, 21 February 2024. <https://www.ft.com/content/665e913d-ae92-4c29-8bbb-598e121ffd50>

19) Steven Feldstein and Fiona Brauer, "Why Russia Has Been So Resilient to Western Export Controls," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 11 March 2024.

Despite a consensus among Washington elites to the contrary, it was foreseeable that the threat of punishing sanctions would be unlikely to deter a major power from taking actions its leadership viewed as both necessary and wholly feasible, regardless of the fact they later proved costly miscalculations.²⁰ Likewise, even unprecedented sanctions, such as those levied against Russia, and weaponizing Western financial channels like SWIFT and Euroclear (a Belgium depository for global securities) to cut out Russian banks and immobilize \$300 billion of Russian central bank reserves are unlikely to successfully coerce a major power to back down or completely isolate a large economy integrated into global markets.

Nor will such punitive actions escape blowback effects ranging from fueling resentment, evasion and possible counter-measures against the West.²¹ They partially backfire by accelerating financial fragmentation as targeted states like Russia, China, and other BRICS (now including Iran) shift to alternative sanctions-proofed financial mechanisms that better protect their assets despite transaction costs. Such mechanisms include changes in domestic payments systems, trade in local currencies and greater digitalization which do not constitute de-dollarization but do limit the future impact of the West's ability to weaponize financial networks.²² Moreover, China benefits from expanding the role of the renminbi (RMB) through renminbi clearing banks, Peoples Bank of China bilateral swap lines, and the Chinese Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) as BRICS and other countries increasingly use these instruments. Renminbi trade even between third parties, such as Russia and India, is facilitated without China having to increase RMB convertibility and end capital controls. Reportedly 30 Russian banks are already indirect participants in CIPS and in the first three quarters of 2023 70 percent of Russia-China trade was settled in RMB.²³ Also worth noting, a year before it joined the BRICS in 2024, the United Arab Emirates started taking payments in RMB from China and rupees from India instead of U.S. dollars to settle oil and gas transactions.

Looking back on the failure of the Biden administration's inflated deterrent and coercive threats to deliver desired results against Moscow and the lack of an "obvious knock-out blow that coercive statecraft" could inflict on China (absent "severe collateral damage") is sobering. One senior participant acknowledges that "more than two-thirds of the world's population lives in countries that have not joined the

20) Roberts, "Russian Brinkmanship Meets Weaponized Finance."

21) Cynthia Roberts, "Avoid Allowing Opponents to 'Beat America at its own Game': Ensuring US Financial and Currency Power," in *Chinese Strategic Intentions: A Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) White Paper*, U.S. Department of Defense, (2019).

22) Agathe Demarais, *Backfire: How Sanctions Reshape the World against US Interests* (Columbia University Press, 2022); idem, "The Unintended Consequences of Seizing Russian Assets," *Foreign Policy*, 27 November 2023.

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/11/27/russia-ukraine-war-central-bank-reserves-assets-seize-reparations-sanctions/>.

On Russia's earlier threats to retaliate see Roberts et al "BRICS," and Roberts, (2019).

23) Robert Greene, "The Difficult Realities of the BRICS' Dedollarization Efforts—and the Renminbi's Role," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2023.

sanctions coalition [against Russia].” Whether such recent warnings against overreach in deploying “economic statecraft” will be heeded while others were brushed aside remains to be seen.²⁴

Russia is Not Isolated in the World Arena

Internationally, Russia’s war caused a sharp break with the West, which rallied to Ukraine’s side, but not with the rest of the world despite second-order effects such as reduced Ukrainian agricultural exports like wheat and grains that contributed to a global food crisis. In fact, Russian elites maintain that “relations with the ‘World Majority countries’ have proved to be Russia’s most important foreign policy asset.”²⁵

One of the most important consequences of Russia’s war has been to elevate the already strong Sino-Russian partnership and coalesce previously secondary players like Iran and North Korea into a nascent bloc even if not a happy family from Beijing’s point of view. China is now Russia’s largest trade partner, surpassing the European Union, with trade exceeding \$200bn in 2023.²⁶ China has also significantly expanded the volume of manufactured goods and technologies – from heavy trucks and digging equipment to ball bearings and silicon chips – it is supplying that are vital to Russia’s war effort even as it appears to avoid directly sending “lethal aid.”²⁷

India also made public and unapologetic displays of not cutting off Moscow and maintaining a neutral transactional stance, despite growing ties with the United States, and the Biden administration’s effort to convince New Delhi to join the anti-Russia coalition. India’s energy trade with Russia skyrocketed, as it increased Russia’s share in its total oil imports to 35 percent in 2023, from 2 percent before the war, and this helped total trade reach almost \$50 billion in 2023. India also boasted that it’s refinement of Russian crude oil and exports to Europe and other countries were a stabilizing factor in the global oil market.²⁸ The Russia-India defense trade has fared less well given sanctions and constraints on Russia’s ability to supply weapons. Going forward the India-Russia partnership may also be negatively impacted by

24) Daleep Singh, “Forging a Positive Vision of Economic Statecraft,” *New Atlanticist*, 22 February 2024. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/forging-a-positive-vision-of-economic-statecraft/>. See also Roberts, “Avoid Allowing Opponents to ‘Beat America at its own Game’”; and Former Treasury Secretary, Jacob J. Lew remarks at the Atlantic Council in Washington on 19 February 2019.

25) Sergei A. Karaganov, Alexander M. Kramarenko, Dmitry V. Trenin, *Russia’s Policy Towards World Majority* (Moscow, 2023): p. 15.

26) Elina Ribakova, “Our Experience with Russia holds lessons for Future Sanctions,” *Financial Times*, 27 February 2024.

27) Markus Garlauskas, Joseph Webster, Emma C. Verges, “China’s support for Russia has been hindering Ukraine’s counteroffensive,” *New Atlanticist*, 15 November 2023. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/chinas-support-for-russia-has-been-hindering-ukraines-counteroffensive/>

28) Jagannath Panda, “The Limitations of India and Russia’s Transactional Relationship,” United States Institute of Peace, 22 February 2024. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/02/limitations-india-and-russias-transactional-relationship>

Moscow's need to prioritize relations with China which asymmetrically dominates both bilateral and BRICS relationships.

None of the other BRICS, including Russia, Xi's best friend, or the four new BRICS members, are linchpin states²⁹ for China's hegemonic ambitions, meaning they are not indispensable and their preferences that run against China's are likely to be ignored when Beijing is strongly motivated, such as in enlarging the group. On the other hand, China as well as North Korea and Iran, Russia's new supporters in a nascent anti-Western axis, are pivotal partners for the Kremlin at war, but not indispensable in the sense of having the potential "to pull the wheels off and undermine it."³⁰ Seeking significant material support for its war, Moscow drew closer to Pyongyang as Beijing has been unwilling to provide direct lethal aid despite Russia's requests for military equipment. North Korea rapidly restored a mutually beneficial relationship supplying more than 1000 containers of long-range artillery shells needed for the war in Ukraine. In July 2023, the two countries defense ministers pledged to expand military cooperation to "resolutely stand against" their "common enemy," the United States. Subsequently, at a September summit with Putin in Russia, Kim Jong Un toasted the Kremlin's "sacred struggle" against "a [Western] band of evil" and Putin as the "Korean people's closest friend."³¹ In return, Russia has provided food aid, fighter aircraft, surface-to-air missiles, and equipment for ballistic missile production that probably helped Pyongyang test launch a sophisticated ICBM in July 2023 and deploy its first military reconnaissance satellite in November. Between North Korea and Iran, Russia has reportedly purchased one to three million artillery rounds, while succeeding in scaling up its own production of 122-millimeter and 152-millimeter artillery shells to two million by the end of 2024.³²

Likewise, despite mistrust and Iran's revolutionary Shiite ideology, Moscow and Tehran believe they have a common enemy in Washington. Russia will increase its engagement with Tehran in multilateral institutions now that it has joined the BRICS (and before that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization) while continuing to cooperate bilaterally against the United States militarily in Syria. As Moscow repeatedly claims to be fighting against the United States in Ukraine, the next logical step was the expansion of the sale of military technologies, including Russian military aviation for thousands of Iranian attack drones, notably the Shahed-101s and the more advanced Shahed-107s.³³

29) Michael Mastanduno, "Partner Politics: Russia, China, and the Challenge of Extending US Hegemony after the Cold War." *Security Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2019): p. 479-504.

30) Mastanduno, (2019).

31) Mastro, "The Next Tripartite Pact?"

32) Dara Massicot, "Time is Running Out in Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, 8 March 2024; Euromaidan Press, (19 January 2024).

33) Nikita Smagin, "Comrades-in-Sanctions: Can Iran Help Russia Weather the Economic Storm?" Policy Brief. *Politika*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <http://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88318> (2022); and idem, "United Against America: Russia-Iran Military Cooperation Is a Looming Threat," Carnegie Endowment, 27 February 2024.

The world that Russia is now navigating is not a replica of the Cold War, but a more complicated version of the variegated multipolar arenas that existed before and between the world wars. It is even more dangerous as this emerging variant involves power shifts along multiple dimensions, including high technology and nuclear weapons. It is also increasingly becoming unmoored from stabilizing institutionalized arrangements in arms control, trade and finance, some of which, as noted above in global financial fragmentation and Iran's nuclear ambitions, are being sidelined by alternative non-Western – and sometimes anti-Western – institutions that will increase international polarization and strains.

BRICS Enlargement and Russia's Revisionist Partners Tilt towards Anti-Western Coalitions?

China is now the de facto driver of the BRICS, but Russia remains one of its principal beneficiaries, given the active efforts by the United States and the West to sanction and isolate Russia. None of the BRICS favors such isolation, partly because they reject on principle sanctions not passed by the UN and also because of their pragmatic self-interests, that Russia promotes, from oil and arms to India and China to fertilizer sales to Brazil which in turn has replaced the U.S. as the primary supplier of soybeans to China.

Russia further joined China in supporting the enlargement of the BRICS following a similar increase in the SCO as it sought to build support and an informal axis of opportunists and other resentful partners in the rest of the world, particularly the Global South, now deemed the Global Majority. Reflecting its status as the foremost rival to the G-7, more than 40 states expressed interest in joining the BRICS. While Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates were four of the six invited countries to become members on 1 January 2024, Argentina opted out, and Riyadh is still considering Saudi Arabia's entry. In 2010, China facilitated South Africa's integration.

The BRICS' new joiners displace the artificial center of gravity away from democratic BRICS to autocratic regimes although both the UAE and Saudi Arabia are also close partners with the United States. Nonetheless the shift to the Middle East focus will likely increase polarization and sharpen some tensions within the group. Now it's not just China and Russia that prefer a world that is "safe for autocracy"³⁴ as Iran has actively sided with Russia, and Egypt and the other Arab countries are inclined to play the major powers off each other. Brazil and India quietly opposed the BRICS expansion but lacked the leverage to block China's agenda.

34) Jessica Chen Weiss, "A World Safe for Autocracy?" *Foreign Affairs*, 11 June 2019.
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-06-11/world-safe-autocracy>

In the past, regime type was a less important factor as domestic political groupings in the BRICS countries generally opposed U.S. hypocrisy, double standards about sanctions and use of force, and rules they have had no say in making. South Africa as a member of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is the sole democracy among the three BRICS democratic countries to face a legal obligation to detain Putin given the warrant for his arrest over war crimes in Ukraine. When Johannesburg hosted the annual BRICS leaders summit in August 2023 this calamity was averted by Putin's decision to participate virtually.

Competition for influence in the Global South (previously called the Third World) is not presently taking the destructive form that it did in the Cold War, even within the new blocs. One recalls the Sino-Soviet rivalry where the two principal actors of the communist world engaged in dangerous out-bidding strategies for leadership that made them "worse than a monolith" facing the West.³⁵ Now their cooperation reflects a shared interest in containing the United States, its spread of democracy and alliances. U.S. hegemony poses a threat to their illiberal political systems, China's aspirations to be the regional hegemon in Asia, as well as to Russia's imperial aspirations in dominating the former Soviet space.

However, the current coalitions nonetheless have internal fissures that could cause ruptures in any of the bilateral relationships. In particular, China is uncomfortable with Russia's close partnership with North Korea, fearing it lacks firm boundaries and may be used to escalate the war or as leverage against China. China also dislikes Moscow's engagement with New Delhi and may force Russia to choose between partners in the future. Moreover, among both Russian and Chinese elites, there is a longer-term fear in both countries that the other will sell it out.

Yet in wartime, Russia is more constrained than China. Thus, it is more motivated to appeal to the article of faith among BRICS comrades in multipolarity and as the legitimate successor to the nonaligned movement. Never mind that the world is not genuinely multipolar in its actual power configuration. Multipolarity is as much symbolic, even sometimes a meme to warn the West not to take developing countries and the rest of the world for granted. It's also what each BRICS country and others in the Global South – or Global Majority – imagine it to be.

Accordingly, Moscow seeks to elevate the BRICS role in the international arena to the "vanguard of the Global Majority," according to an important 2024 study by a leading Russian think tank.³⁶ The rise of the rest is thus a strategic asset, and Russians are talking about the need to diversify ties with the world's majority countries now more than ever before. Moscow's imperialist aggression has met largely regional pushback in Europe, but not global counter-balancing. This is the result of self-

35) Christensen, "Worse than a Monolith".

36) Karaganov, et al., *Russia's Policy Towards World Majority*.

interested behavior by other powers like China and India, who were pleased to buy Russian exports of natural resource-based commodities at discounted prices. It also reflects the spread of counter-norms in the Global South, that have created a cross-current underappreciated in the West.

BRICS AND THE CHALLENGES OF A MULTICULTURAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER

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The BRICS group has exhibited increasing international relevance, surpassing the G7 in GDP/PPP and attracting new members. Despite diverse political and cultural backgrounds, BRICS shares a critical stance towards the neoliberal global order. However, some challenges persist, particularly in countering Western cultural imperialism. Even though BRICS countries made notable progress in politics and economic articulation, culture remains a weak point of the BRICS. Without addressing these obstacles, achieving a more diverse and inclusive global order remains uncertain. The paper underscores BRICS' evolving role and the imperative of addressing cultural barriers to international cooperation.

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"BRICS' Aspiration to Dethrone the G7 is Fanciful".¹

The title of a piece published by Forbes is symptomatic of a general attitude of disdain that has characterized much of the Western approach to BRICS since its inception in 2009. Ladwig called the BRICS "an artificial bloc built on a catchphrase".²

Writing in 2013, Pant called the BRICS group "a fallacy," which "has begun to lose much of its sheen".³ Sparks also derided the importance of BRICS. According to him, BRICS have two main weaknesses as a group: 1) It is too diverse in terms of models of political organization, culture, and social structures; 2) it is too dependent on China, which he perceives as the only real economic power in the group, much larger than the other members of the group.⁴

In the countercurrent of these negative evaluations and predictions, the BRICS' international relevance increased significantly in the 15 years following its inception. If we consider the World Bank's data referring to GDP/PPP, the five members of the original BRICS group already surpassed the seven members of the G7 (52 trillion dollars versus 49 trillion dollars). Even more important, many countries have shown interest in joining the BRICS group. Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates joined in 2024, and another round of expansion is predicted for the following year. It does not support the idea that BRICS is a mirage, as those Western authors proposed. At the same time, they lost sight of evidence suggesting that the G7 countries have lost much of their international prestige in the last 15 years.

Naturally, this does not mean that BRICS will replace G7 as the leading group in the world. It will not happen because – as the critics above correctly observe – BRICS countries lack political, economic, and cultural unity, allowing them to set civilizational standards for the rest of the world. However, this will not happen mainly because replacing the G7's "civilizational leadership" is not the primary goal of animating BRICS members. The notion that exercising international power necessarily means setting normative rules to be followed by other societies cannot be taken for granted. It reflects expectations deeply entrenched in an imperialistic mind. Western nations have imposed their will and subjugated other societies in successive waves since the 16th century. The last of these waves was the neoliberal globalization process, which began in the 1980s/90s and provided the context for the rise of the G7 group.

1) Harry G. Broadman, "BRICS' Aspiration to Dethrone the G7 is Fanciful," *Forbes*, 31 January 2024. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/harrybroadman/2024/01/31/brics-aspiration-to-dethrone-the-g7-is-fanciful/?sh=8333af16c038>

2) William Ladwig, "An Artificial Bloc Built on a Catchphrase," *New York Times*, 26 March 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/27/opinion/an-artificial-bloc-built-on-a-catchphrase.html?_r=0

3) Harsh V. Pant, "The BRICS Fallacy," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2013): p. 91.

4) Colin Sparks, "Deconstructing the BRICS," *International Journal of Communication*, Vol. 8 (2014): p. 392-418.

The idea that the BRICS countries would attempt to impose a different civilizational model on the world makes no sense. This is because these countries are very different from each other in terms of their political models, social structures, cultural values, and traditions. Instead, what unites the BRICS countries is their typical negative attitude concerning the global order founded upon the neoliberal principles of the Washington Consensus.⁵ Therefore, what unites these countries is a shared struggle for recognition in the world. Their manifest purpose is to establish the basis of a more diverse, multipolar world instead of replacing one unipolar order for another.

The recent interest demonstrated by numerous countries in joining BRICS has less to do with their willingness to adhere to a model supposedly represented by the group than with the simple fact that it offers them an alternative to the Western-centered global order. Some reckless attitudes recently adopted by Western countries have stimulated other countries to join the BRICS. A concrete example refers to the weaponization of the U.S.-controlled global financial system as a resource for punishing Russia in response to its military intervention in Ukraine. Regardless of their position with respect to Russia, many countries perceive that they can also fall victim to similar sanctions in the future.

The BRICS group has been more successful in certain areas than in others. Concerning economics, BRICS has advanced in promoting mechanisms allowing its members to exchange goods in their currencies instead of the dollar; it created its investment bank, an alternative to the (largely U.S.-dominated) World Bank and IMF. They also have made progress in forging more stable political ties among its members, although they are still far from forming a coherent bloc. Cultural exchange is one of the less developed aspects of the BRICS building process. Why does this happen? What are the main challenges faced by the BRICS group in this regard? What problems result from this?

We contend that the United States (seconded by other Western countries) still exerts a unipolar form of control concerning cultural affairs, which derives from cultural imperialistic policies developed since the end of World War 2. These policies gained new breath in the 1980/90s due to neoliberal globalization.

Cultural Imperialism

Simply put, imperialism refers to the capacity of certain countries to explore others for their benefit. Imperialism can assume different forms. Imperialistic countries can expropriate other societies from their natural resources, explore cheap labor, build a captive market for their products, exert political control over these societies,

5) Sarah Babb, "The Washington Consensus as Transnational Policy Paradigm: Its Origins, Trajectory and Likely Successor," *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2013): p. 268-297.

establish military bases on their territories, etc. To obtain such advantages, imperialist countries may sometimes resort to intimidation and violence. In most cases, however, imperialistic relationships operate through softer means, as some fractions of the societies that have submitted to imperialism naturalize and even justify it. Why does this happen? Here, the concept of cultural imperialism provides a useful analytical tool.

Cultural imperialism refers to the structures and entrenched behavior patterns allowing certain countries to impose their worldviews, values, and cultural tastes on others. Cultural imperialism works at two levels: intellectual imperialism and media imperialism. Intellectual imperialism refers to efforts targeting elites of other countries, as media imperialism aims to touch the hearts and minds of ordinary people. Although the term “imperialism” has been usually associated with the Western European colonizing process initiated in the 16th century, “cultural imperialism” typically refers to the United States’ efforts to become the hegemonic power in the world after World War 2. Under the standard label of cultural imperialism, Intellectual and media imperialism have become the subjects of different bodies of literature.

Intellectual Imperialism

After the end of World War 2, the United States took advantage of the difficult situation of Western European countries in assuming a protagonist intellectual role worldwide. Naturally, this did not happen overnight. In the context of the Cold War, the United States assumed the role of leader of the "Free World" in opposition to the Communist bloc led by the Soviet Union. In the wake of the process of decolonization that happened in the 1960s, many new countries emerged. Both blocs engaged in a dispute to exert influence on their models of social and political organization.

In opposition to the Communist model, the United States presented its Modernization model, championed by authors such as Lerner⁶ and Rostow⁷, as "the right kind of revolution". The U.S. efforts also targeted other countries, such as Latin America (especially after the Cuban revolution in 1959) and even Western Europe. Lundestad⁸ referred to the influence on this region as an "Empire by invitation." The U.S. universities apparatus and the so-called philanthropic foundations were central pieces of this effort, as they invested much money to exert intellectual influence on the national elites of these countries.⁹

6) Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (New York: Free Press, 1958).

7) Walt Whitman Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

8) Geir Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (1986): p. 263-277. doi:10.1177/002234338602300305

9) Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the*

A second wave of U.S. influence on the global intellectual debate happened in the wake of neoliberal globalization in the 1980s-'90s. Now, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States became the uncontested leader of a unipolar global order, in alliance with global-reaching institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This position allowed the United States to establish the basis of a new, U.S.-centered global academic system structured around a global ranking system. This system has a strong bias towards the United States, as institutions based in the United States or controlled by U.S. scholars (universities and academic journals, among others) are overrepresented and occupy the top positions in these rankings. They also dominate the peer-review system in the more prestigious journals. This situation confers the U.S. scholars with the power of working as gatekeepers of the world academic milieu, defining what perspectives are worth attention to and what perspectives are not.

Media Imperialism

Media imperialism refers to the instrumentalization of media by certain countries to exert cultural domination over others. Still, during World War 2, the United States began to use the media to exert political influence abroad by exporting the "American Way of Life." The earlier efforts targeted Latin American countries as a part of the U.S. effort to contain the threat presented by Nazi Germany in the region. In the following decades, the United States systematically employed the media as a resource for selling its modernization model to a worldwide audience.

Beginning in the 1960s, these efforts became the subject of growing criticism from the part of intellectuals, who denounced them as part of a project of cultural imperialism. According to critics, the massive export of U.S. media content to other countries threatened world cultural diversity. Latin American scholars were especially vocal in presenting the case against media imperialism. Drawing on the economy's dependency theory, they argued that the U.S. media exports fostered cultural dependency in other countries, particularly those outside the West. The export volume of U.S.-made media content was not the sole element of media imperialism. Other two important aspects are the use of entertainment to legitimize U.S. worldviews and institutions (especially the military) and the pressure exerted on other countries to raise barriers aiming to contain the excessive import of U.S. cultural products.

The criticism against media imperialism had concrete consequences: it inspired UNESCO to publish a document denouncing that the "free flow of information" model advocated by the United States poses a threat to the sovereignty and cultural diversity of the world. It led to the proposal to establish the New World Order of

Information and Communication (NWICO).¹⁰ The United States reacted to this initiative by withdrawing from UNESCO in 1983.¹¹

However, the impact of the UNESCO document was quite limited. It happened for two reasons. First, the rise of the new U.S.-centered scholarship model, discussed in the previous section, contributed to marginalizing non-Anglophone voices. In this scenario, the media imperialism paradigm lost ground to other perspectives that justified the emergent hegemonic role performed by the United States in the world. Examples include "globalization"¹², "soft power"¹³, and the use of Keohane and Nye's¹⁴ international relations concept of "asymmetrical interdependence" to describe the global flow of media content.¹⁵

The second reason has to do with the rise of the digital media. The Internet, originating from a military project led by the United States and established by American entities such as ICANN, utilizes the Domain Name System (DNS) to translate domain names into IP addresses. When centralized in the USA, this system implies that its physical infrastructure, servers, and associated operations are within U.S. territory. This centralization results in a significant concentration of power in the hands of the United States, raising issues related to digital sovereignty and the privacy of other nations that rely on this infrastructure globally. Currently, internet access occurs through digital platforms, defined as "a programmable digital architecture designed to organize interactions between users - not just end users but also corporate entities and public bodies. It is geared toward the systematic collection, algorithmic processing, circulation, and monetization of user data".¹⁶ These actors are not neutral; their interfaces and algorithms reflect strategic choices made by developers. Systematic data collection, storage, and analysis are essential components of platform functioning with direct consequences.

10) Vicente Freije, "The 'Emancipation of Media': Latin American Advocacy for a New International Information Order in the 1970s," Vol. 14, No. 2 (2019): p. 301-320.

11) A. Bhuyan, *Internet Governance and the Global South: A Demand for a New Framework* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014); Ulla Carlsson, "The Rise and Fall of NWICO: From a Vision of International Regulation to a Reality of Multilevel Governance," *Nordicom Review*, Vol. 2 (2003).

12) John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism* (London: Continuum, 1991).

13) Joseph S. Nye Jr, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

14) Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (London: Pearson, 2012).

15) Joseph Straubhaar, "Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1991): p. 39-70.

16) José Van Dijk, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal, *The Platform Society* (New York: Oxford Academic, 2018): 4.

The BRICS in Face of Cultural Imperialism

According to Bourdieu and Wacquant,¹⁷ cultural imperialism "rests on the power on the power to universalize particularisms linked to a singular historical tradition by causing them to be misrecognized as such".¹⁸ It applies both to its intellectual and media versions. Presenting themselves as endowed with the right (and the burden) of defending universal values was a crucial element in allowing Western European countries to legitimize their imperialistic expansion. The flip side of this rhetoric is to strip societies subjected to imperialist control of any intrinsic meaning or value. Santos called this process "epistemicide."¹⁹

The ability of the Western countries to present their perspectives as endowed with a universal character has solid historical roots that date back to the time when they ruled large empires across the world. As seen in the previous sections, this power is currently grounded on a vast array of institutional and technological devices, which allows the United States to define the entire world about itself (and secondarily its allies). No other term illustrates better how this logic works than "democracy.

The United States and its Western allies have successfully presented themselves as model democracies. The academic literature has massively supported this idea. Political Science and Communication works often use the term "established democracies" to designate Western countries. With few exceptions, all the others fell into the categories of "authoritarian" or "transitional democracies." In fact, democracies outside the core West have remained "transitional" for decades, frozen in a perpetual adolescent status. Terms such as "fragile" or "defective" democracies are also used. Scholars using these classifications rarely feel compelled to justify their choices. They are taken for granted. This classification has concrete consequences: Established democracies should lecture other societies by "promoting democracy" abroad. Otherwise, transitional democracies and especially authoritarian regimes – the categories comprising most of the BRICS countries – provide examples to avoid.²⁰ The negative consequences of this situation for the international legitimacy of the BRICS group are apparent. On the academic front, BRICS face an uphill battle against the U.S. and its Western allies.

An analogous problem happens concerning the media, as the United States controls most of the global infrastructure of digital media. In the mid-2010s, a group of companies known by the acronym FAANGs (Facebook, Apple, Amazon, Netflix,

17) Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, "On the Cunning of the Imperialist Reason," *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1999): p. 41-58.

18) Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, (1999): p. 1.

19) Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

20) Afonso de Albuquerque, "Transitions to Nowhere: Western Teleology and Regime-type Classification," *International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 85, No. 6 (2023): p. 479-497.

and Google) controlled about 80-90 percent of the global platform market. For this reason, even though many countries can now produce media content, the U.S. platforms can exert a gatekeeping role in distributing this content worldwide. Netflix provides a vivid example of how this works. It has demonstrated monopolistic ambitions concerning the internet distribution market for audiovisual content. Unlike in the past, Netflix has a diversified catalogue, including content produced in many countries. Still, Netflix plays an influential role as a mediator of the global imaginary, as it defines which audience has access to which content a given country produces. For instance, how Netflix presents China for the Brazilian audience overrepresents Taiwan and Hong Kong over Mainland China, the past over the present, and provides a stereotyped view of China. An even more blatant example refers to Russia. Following the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, Netflix removed all Russian content from its catalogue. The results are that the U.S.'s current control over the global platforms market strongly inhibits the cultural exchange between the BRICS countries.

Towards a Multicultural International Order?

How has the BRICS group dealt with the challenges of the present-day unipolar order? What steps should be taken to build an alternative to it? What have the BRICS effectively done in this regard?

In the last two decades, calls for de-westernizing the international research agenda gained much traction. Prestige journals and international scientific associations have often affirmed their commitment to the cause of de-westernizing. However, the impact of such discourse has been minimal. It happens because western-centrism is not a matter of goodwill but is deeply entrenched in the institutional logic of international scholarship. Without challenging this structure, it is not possible to overcome academic unipolarity. Similarly, it is not possible to boost the intercultural exchanges between the BRICS countries if the market of global platforms is in the hands of U.S. companies.

How consistent have the BRICS efforts been in coping with this situation? In its summits, BRICS has repeatedly emphasized the role of culture as a means of connecting people around the world. It is right. Since its inception, the European Union made a considerable effort to build a common market as a part of their project of building a European identity.²¹ Given the cultural differences and geographical distances separating its members, the challenge presented to BRICS is much more significant. However, concretely, its actions have been very modest in scope.

21) Stylianos Papathanassopoulos and Ralph Negrine, *European Media: Structures, Policies and Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

Initiatives such as the BRICS Network University and the BRICS League University may be embryos of a more ambitious effort to build academic articulation between the BRICS countries, but the results are still modest. Currently, collaboration among scholars from BRICS countries is still minimal.²²

Concerning the media, the initiatives aimed at promoting BRICS cultural integration are still less expressive. One of their most expressive is the BRICS Film Festival, which, however, targets a very narrow audience. On the other hand, in the last years, China has made significant advances regarding social media platforms, better exemplified by TikTok. Still, the Chinese expansion in this sector does not seem to occur in articulation with policies aiming to reinforce BRICS' cultural identity.

Despite the notable progress that the BRICS group has made concerning political and, especially, economic articulation, culture remains the soft belly of BRICS. Without a solid technological and institutional infrastructure allowing the BRICS countries to exchange ideas and cultural products, the dream of a more multicultural world will remain a distant dream.

22) N. Comel, Kohls, C., Orso, M., Otavio Prendin Costa, L., & Marques, F. P. J. "Academic Production and Collaboration Among BRICS-Based Researchers: How Far Can the 'De-Westernization' of Communication and Media Studies Go?" *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, [10776990231217466](https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990231217466)

OLD CROSSROADS AND NEW FRONTIERS: BRICS+, THE EUROPEAN UNION, AND THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

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This article puts two concurrent developments in the Mediterranean region in conversation with one another. First, the victory of the neofascist Fratelli d'Italia in Italy's 2022 general election has led to fears that the EU's and NATO's leading Mediterranean member state might begin gravitating toward authoritarian global powers like Russia and China. Second, the January 2024 expansion of BRICS saw the leaders of Russia, China, and the bloc's other states invite six new countries to join, including the organization's first member state on the Mediterranean Sea, Egypt. In analyzing these two events side by side, this article suggests that the Mediterranean is likely to see increasing geopolitical competition between liberal-democratic alliances (like the EU and NATO) and partnerships steered by illiberal global powers (like BRICS+ and the BRI).

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When Giorgia Meloni's *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI) won over a quarter of the votes cast in Italy's 2022 general election, many long-time observers of Europe's radical right advised caution in assuming that Italy would immediately go down the same populist-nationalist, anti-Brussels path trod by Poland's PiS party, Hungary's Fidesz, or even Sweden's SD, whose own victory predated FdI's by two weeks. However, as the first country among the signatories of the Treaty of Rome of 1957 to see a truly far-right government take power, no neat comparison could be drawn between Italy's relationship with the European Union and those of latter-day EU members similarly snagged by the lure of sovereigntist, EU-devolutionist thinking. A few days after Meloni's victory, one expert even commented that Euroscepticism, as a whole, "does not have to be seen as a bad thing, rather as a reassertion of values at the state level in order to pursue the EU's continued development at the supranational level."¹ Nearly a year later, long after Europe had enjoyed a moment to catch its breath and take stock of things, the German Historical Institute-Rome's Alexander Carlo Martinez deemed the quest to nail down Meloni as a Eurosceptic to be a "red herring."² Instead, Martinez compared her and others like her to the two-headed god Janus, concluding that "the (far-)right both construct and contest, use and discard, European integration and ideas of Europe when they see it fit."³

In many ways, this impulse to trim down the broad, next-Brexit brushes wielded by more excitable journalists and policy wonks is a good one. How, indeed, could even the most far-right Italians argue that the EU had been imposed on them by external forces when, from the very beginning, Italians were the ones doing the imposing? That is, on, first, themselves by Italy's leading role in the negotiations that, in the 1957 Rome treaty, ushered in the European Economic Community (EEC), and on, second, the rest of the continent via Italy's outsized influence in Brussels from thereon forward? As Martinez shrewdly notes, the fact that FdI is in many ways a direct descendant of the neofascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) is key: MSI strongly criticized the economic and political implications of the EEC, while at the same time supporting it in parliament when it came time to ratify the treaty.⁴ More so than their equivalents in France, Italy's neofascists understood that a united Europe could benefit their movement if Italy could shape that unification. Indeed, Italy, possibly more than any other parties of the Treaty of Rome, saw the EEC lead to prosperity where previously endemic poverty reigned. Italy's economic miracle was arguably far more impressive than the German one, given both how far behind Italy started and how truly destroyed Italy's less advanced industry and infrastructure was by WWII.

1) Alexander Brotman, "Giorgia Meloni and the New Face of Euroscepticism," *Geopolitical Monitor*, 27 September 2022. <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/giorgia-meloni-and-the-new-face-of-euroscepticism/>

2) Alexander Carlo Martinez, "Interview with Giorgia Meloni – Is Italy's New PM a Eurosceptic?" *De (Constructing Europe | Hypotheses*, 14 August 2023. <https://europereisist.hypotheses.org/2226>

3) Alexander Carlo Martinez, 14 August 2023.

4) Alexander Carlo Martinez, 14 August 2023.

Thus, unlike Hungary's Victor Orban, Meloni and Italy as a whole have far more to lose than to gain from playing a game of constant brinkmanship with EU leaders. Hungarian influence in Brussels is miniscule in comparison to Italy's, and thus Euroscepticism works better as a tactic in Budapest than it does in Rome. In Meloni's case (and also in the case of Sweden's SD), the more surprising factor was FdI's push to roll back the anti-NATO and pro-Russia rhetoric that the Italian right had flirted with since the days of Forza's Silvio Berlusconi and, more recently and more emphatically, Lega's Matteo Salvini.⁵ Indeed, one noted far-right activist, Fabrizio Verde, has expressed rage at Meloni's Atlanticist foreign policy, saying that her pro-Europe and pro-NATO comments, far from benefiting the Italian nation, ensure that Italy remains "locked in the European cage and subservient to the wishes of the USA and NATO."⁶ Instead, Verde calls for Italy to adopt the "the BRICS alternative" and rejoin China's Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), the latter in response to Meloni's decision to withdraw from the BRI in 2023, after her country had been the first G7 member to join it in 2019.⁷

Verde, a neofascist gadfly and frequent blogger for the Türkiye-based United World International (UWI), which is in fact an organ operated by the infamous pro-Kremlin "troll farm" that calls itself the Internet Research Agency (IRA), is not representative of the average member of the Italian or broader European right.⁸ Most far-right Europeans do not have enough of a true interest in world politics to walk very far down such paths without returning to their old region-specific, revanchist claims. But Verde's repeated criticisms of Meloni (and other pro-EU, pro-NATO leaders on the far right that he finds disappointing) in UWI outlets, in the *Tehran Times* (Iran's English-language, state-controlled paper), and in the pro-China Turkish journal *Belt & Road Initiative Quarterly* go to show that his words hold strategic merit among well-funded propaganda operations associated with the "R" and the "C" in BRICS+ as well as Iran—the second "I" to join the bloc via this year's expansion.⁹ To be sure,

5) I have intentionally avoided using the phrases "pro-Western" and "anti-Western" to refer to conflict between the various geopolitical blocs I discuss. Although they continue to pass muster in journalistic and political venues, such terms are too vague and too loaded to be worthy of use in a serious critical analysis. Instead, I endeavor to stick to specific, named organizations (EU, NATO, BRICS+, etc.) or nations (US, Russia, China, etc.).

6) Fabrizio Verde, "Giorgia Meloni Wants an Even More Atlanticist Italy," *United World International*, 17 November 2022. <https://unitedworldint.com/27530-giorgia-meloni-wants-an-even-more-atlanticist-italy/>

7) Fabrizio Verde, "Italy and the BRICS Alternative," *United World International*, 27 March 2023. <https://uwidata.com/29356-italy-and-the-brics-alternative/>; Fabrizio Verde, "Missed Opportunities," *United World International*, 5 January 2024. <https://uwidata.com/32794-missed-opportunities/>

8) For more information on United World International's connections to Russia's IRA, see the report from the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab: DFRLab, "Disinformation Campaign Removed by Facebook linked to Russia's Internet Research Agency," Medium, 24 September 2020. <https://medium.com/dfrlab/disinformation-campaign-removed-by-facebook-linked-to-russias-internet-research-agency-3cbd88d0dad>

9) See Fabrizio Verde, "Italy 'chose the old order,'" *United World International*, 11 December 2023. <https://uwidata.com/32638-italy-chose-the-old-order/>; Mohammed Mazhari, "Ukraine War Breaks U.S. Global Geopolitical Dominance: Italian Expert," *Tehran Times*, 30 April 2022. <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/472207/Ukraine-war-breaks-U-S-global-geopolitical-dominance-Italian>. Verde's pro-BRICS article for UWI, cited above, originally appeared in the *Belt & Road Initiative Quarterly*, thusly: Fabrizio Verde, "Italy and the BRICS Alternative," *BRIQ*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2023): p. 78-82.

there are numerous Verdes in European far-right social media and the blogosphere who are either in the pay of or are simply providing free service as mouthpieces for the EU's and the U.S.'s strategic competitors.¹⁰ And not just activists: the Italian senator Vito Petrocelli, a member of the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) recently decried Meloni's exit from the BRI and blamed U.S. involvement in European affairs as responsible for "a new cold war," a dramatic pronouncement made in an interview with none other than the Chinese Communist Party tabloid, the *Global Times*.¹¹ The fact that BRI membership turned out to be, according to a Council on Foreign Relations report, a losing deal for Italy's balance of trade with China appears not to have mattered to Petrocelli—defaming the U.S. and its allies by means of a new global Kultur is, to him, worth Italy's losses.¹²

Thus, loud and powerful voices in BRICS+—an organization predicated on acting as a counterbalance to NATO and the EU in global politics—clearly think that it is worth their time and money to aggressively platform anti-NATO, anti-EU, and anti-U.S. voices in places critical for the expansion of their international clout. What is more, with Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine and China's possible one in Taiwan, time is of the essence. With Egypt joining Iran, Ethiopia, and the UAE in the same January expansion,¹³ BRICS+ has its first Mediterranean member and therefore its first formal step into that sea's complex political economy. As Algeria, Palestine, Tunisia, Syria, and (most importantly) Türkiye are all either official or potential candidates to join BRICS+, the bloc's reigning nuclear states of Russia, China, and India are likely to see their profile raised in Mediterranean affairs—a mirror of European neoimperialism in Africa and Asia throughout the post-WWII era. Where the old Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) failed, Verde's "BRICS alternative" might end up being a viable goal for any Mediterranean state looking to link up with other regional partners along an alternative axis to those currently on offer. At the very least, for many Mediterranean states excluded from NATO (e.g. all of North Africa) or denied accession to the EU (e.g. Türkiye, whose official candidacy seems permanently stalled), membership in BRICS+ feels like a promise of being part of a growing organism on the offensive, which might be all the appeal needed for states whose culture and politics often feature a feeling of being unjustly ignored on the world stage.

10) For a more comprehensive portrait of this phenomenon, see Catherine Belton, "Kremlin Runs Disinformation Campaign to Undermine Zelensky, Documents Show," *Washington Post*, 16 February 2024.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/02/16/russian-disinformation-zelensky-zaluzhny/>

11) Wang Wenwen, "China Spearheads the Growth of Most Innovative Cooperation Formats," *Global Times*, 22 October 2023. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202310/1300329.shtml>

12) See David Sacks, "Why Is Italy Withdrawing from China's Belt and Road Initiative?," *Asia Unbound*, Council on Foreign Relations, 3 August 2023.

<https://www.cfr.org/blog/why-italy-withdrawing-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative>

13) Although Saudi Arabia and Argentina were also accepted in the same expansion, the former has not yet confirmed that it will officially join while the latter, in a resonance with the Italian case, decided to decline its acceptance in preference for a reaffirmation of its alliance with the U.S.

What, then, does Egypt gain from membership in BRICS+? Above all, it provides Egypt's president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, with serious advantages in cementing his authoritarian rule. Hosni Mubarak, Egypt's also-brutal leader between 1981 and 2011, had rather artfully performed a regional balancing act, somehow maintaining (however uneasily) alliances with the Arab League, Israel, and the U.S. while still currying support among the Egyptian populace by dangling the carrot of well-paying government jobs. Sisi has none of Mubarak's pragmatism, but he definitely understands the need to cultivate foreign ties. As *Middle East Eye*'s founder, David Hearst, has written, "Sisi is a dictator for slow learners": by the time it was too late, Egyptians realized that Sisi had no interest in returning anything to normal but instead only cared about enjoying iron rule.¹⁴ Sisi effectively cast his coup overthrowing the democratically elected Mohammed Morsi as a symbol of ardent patriotism, casting out the transnational Muslim Brotherhood in favor of a regime favoring the Egyptian nation above all. Worse still, U.S. and EU leaders have become, Hearst argues, "useful idiots" for Sisi, as they continue to buy Sisi's propaganda that, without him, Egypt would descend into total chaos.¹⁵

In such an atmosphere, enjoying the friendship of leaders who foment nationalist fervor in order to reinforce their executive power—like Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, and Narendra Modi do—is essentially a no-lose proposition. There is very little chance that the U.S., Israel, and the Arab League will break things off with Sisi over his joining BRICS+. An additional advantage for Sisi (and possibly, but by no means assuredly, for his country) is that Egypt can take a leading role in shaping the regional direction and character of the BRI, whose rapidly accreting influence in Africa has frightened U.S. and EU leaders used to treating that continent as an economic and strategic space primarily in the orbit of NATO member states.¹⁶

France, as another Mediterranean, NATO, and EU power, has been arguably the worst offender of African nations' sovereignty in this regard, but there are of course other states that have had to quickly adjust to the fact that a Chinese alternative for investment and alliances seems to offer more promise than the current system, based as it is mostly on old neoimperial legacies and the U.S.'s blue-water, orbital reach.¹⁷ Should Algeria join BRICS+, then the character of post-imperial, Cold War-relevant (and, not coincidentally, anti-French) complaints should further serve to

14) David Hearst, "Sisi's Useful Idiots: How Europe Endorses Egypt's Tyrant Leader," *Middle East Eye*, 21 February 2019. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/sisis-useful-idiots-how-europe-endorses-egypts-tyrant-leader>

15) David Hearst, 21 February 2019.

16) On BRI's influence in Africa and EU/NATO response tactics, see O. Felix Obi, "Africa-Centric New World Order: A Transatlantic Alliance in Commercial Diplomacy," *Georgetown Public Policy Review*, 17 March 2023. <https://gppreview.com/2023/03/17/africa-centric-new-world-order-a-transatlantic-alliance-in-commercial-diplomacy/>

17) Indeed, France's clandestine African power had for so long been an open secret that, last year, President Emmanuel Macron went so far as to publicly declare that France was done with trying to secretly manage African affairs. See Andrew Hilliar, "France Interference in Africa is 'Over,' Macron Says during Four-Nation Tour to Rebuild Ties," *France 24*, 2 March 2023. <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20230302-french-interference-in-africa-is-well-over-president-macron-says-during-four-nation-tour>

create a multipolar, possibly divisive Mediterranean space—a situation that would reinforce an assumed north-south, east-west divide already long argued for by the ardent nationalists found on all sides of the sea.

This last possibility brings us to the issue of the Mediterranean Sea as a historically plastic, transnational space that, for more than two hundred years, has progressively been reinscribed as a space of frontiers and borders. Of course, as everyone knows, there has been no era of true “togetherness” in the Mediterranean; it has been one of the hallmark spaces of competition and fracture throughout the entirety of human history. However, it is only in the modern era that nationalist ideologues have attempted, with varying degrees of success, to convince their respective populaces that the Mediterranean is, truly and eternally, a violently divided space. As I have written in other venues, this modern tendency to divide up the sea appears to have its genesis, paradoxically, in precisely those liminal, overlapping qualities that define it (and, perhaps, any region characterized by high population and ease of transport).¹⁸ Heretofore a union of far-flung and geographically large countries, BRICS+’s entry into the Mediterranean holds not only the promise of future influence but of future dilemmas stemming from local grievances.

Still, despite the EU’s attempts to the contrary, defining the Mediterranean as a non-European space can be made not only with geographical ease but by referring to the very histories European anti-African and anti-Asian (thus also, according to the present migratory moment, anti-immigrant) voices draw on to mark out the sea as a province of Europe. For example, the Greeks and the Romans are central to the European mythos and yet, in reality, featured key cultures and figures whose provenance lay in regions today deemed to be African or Asian.¹⁹ The Crusades may be central to Europe’s conception of its international role in the Mediterranean, yet virtually the entirety of the centuries-long conflict drew its energy from the specific conditions of the Levant.²⁰ Napoleon only sought to conquer Egypt because to do so would claim the original human civilization for France and, moreover, for the united Europe he hoped to build upon the continent’s heterodox ashes.²¹ In other words,

18) See, for example, my articles: “The Eastern Question as a Europe Question: Viewing the Ascent of ‘Europe’ through the Lens of Ottoman Decline,” *Journal of European Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2014): p. 64-80; “Small Islands, Global Challenges: Greece, COVID, and Mediterranean Migration,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, 3 May 2021, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/05/small-islands-global-challenges-greece-covid-and-mediterranean-migration/>; “Malta, Italy, and Mediterranean Migration: A Long History and an Ongoing Issue,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, 24 September 2020. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/09/malta-italy-and-mediterranean-migration-a-long-history-and-an-ongoing-issue/>

19) On this topic, see Shane Weller, *The Idea of Europe: A Critical History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

20) As Paul M. Cobb argues in *The Race for Paradise: An Islamic History of the Crusades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), the Eurocentric portrait of the Crusades ignores the local origin, meaning, and impact of the overall conflict and its eventual resolution.

21) On Napoleon’s concept of European integration, see Tigran Yepremyan, “Napoleonic Paradigm of European Integration: Theory and History,” *Napoleonica. La Revue*, Vol. 1, No. 39 (2021): p. 35-53.

the fiction is the reality when it comes to transnational, world-facing blocs. Lest one consider the above to be facile examples born out of a too-loose attention to recent conditions, consider that the EU made the conscious decision to have all Euro notes depict only imaginary representations of European-seeming artifacts: windows, arches, bridges, facades—none of which actually exist.²² Advancing a composite identity involves the sterilization of diversity, at the margins and in the center.

A much fuller study than this one would methodically run through, at the very least, the potential participation in BRICS+ among each of the Mediterranean Sea's twenty coastal countries to explore the above point, not just the several states mentioned here. Hence, I am the first to admit that one must be cautious about any broader conclusions drawn from something so simple as a single Mediterranean country joining BRICS+. That said, we should consider the possibilities for divergence from a geopolitical norm in which EU states' national politics result, no matter the outcome, in a reinforcement of the pro-EU, pro-NATO status quo, as has occurred in Italy. As my brief analysis points at, generalizing about political outcomes becomes more difficult the farther one travels from established positions of power and the closer one gets to the often razor-thin pluralities parties need to embark on the iconoclastic goals that form their popular appeal. Italy, despite its complaints, is a world power. The same is not true for all EU countries.

For example, one can imagine Spain's anti-immigrant, anti-EU Vox party, having come third in the country's last two elections, attempting to reorient Spanish foreign policy along a multipolar line should it ever achieve enough votes to form a government. After all, unlike Italy, Spain's entry into the EU came after decades of post-WWII authoritarianism and relative international isolation. Along with Poland, Spain's high population and demonstrated tendency toward regional and rural vs. urban political divisions makes it a potential site for BRICS+'s leaders to contribute to those local wedge issues that weaken the reputation of the EU and NATO as friendly partners.²³ The fortunes of France's Rassemblement National (RN), which seems to have entirely replaced the French center-right (and large parts of the old French left), is an additional X factor, given France's famously fraught relationship with the U.S. over NATO's character.²⁴ Both RN's current leader, Marine Le Pen, and her ambitious, talented niece, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, have criticized France's ties to NATO for limiting the country's influence on the global stage, the latter going so far

22) On Euro notes' intended style and subsequent updates, see "Design Elements," European Central Bank, <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/euro/banknotes/current/design/html/index.en.html>

23) For example, see the report on suspected Russian influence in the Catalan separatist movement by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP): Antonio Baquero Iglesias, "Spain Extends Probe into Russian Involvement in Catalan Independence Plans," *OCCRP*, 29 January 2024, <https://www.occrp.org/en/daily/18412-spain-extends-probe-into-russian-involvement-in-catalonian-independence-plans>

24) On RN's success among Northern France's previously Communist left, see Katy Lee and Claire Sergent, "How Leftists Learned to Love Le Pen," *Foreign Policy*, 7 February 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/07/how-the-left-learned-to-love-le-pen-national-front-france-communists/>

as to argue in 2022 that France should “refuse any form of alignment” given Russia’s BRICS partners having carefully avoided condemning the Kremlin outright for the war in Ukraine.²⁵ Meanwhile, the rising fortunes of Germany’s far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has put scrutiny on how key China has been in elevating the status of the party’s current man of the moment, Maximilian Krah.²⁶

There are also other EU countries, like Cyprus and Malta, whose ties to Russia and China might make them sites of even greater propaganda efforts by Russia’s secretive IRA or China’s public equivalent, Xinhua.²⁷ Despite Cyprus’s earnest attempts to distance itself from its past as a site for Russian money-laundering, the country’s continuing failures on that front led Jack Straw (the UK’s former Foreign Secretary and a noted pro-EU, anti-Brexit voice) to declare that Cyprus’s original bid for EU membership should have been rejected.²⁸ BRICS+ will never capture all Mediterranean states’ eyes, let alone a majority of EU member states in the region, but it has a foothold in the EU’s southern extremity. This should not be dismissed as a mere aside in the long and storied history of Mediterranean international relations. Amid such new, unstable frontiers, it may be in the best interest of liberal-minded EU leaders to pitch the peaceful notion of the Mediterranean Sea as an old, reliable crossroads and, that done, hope for the best.

25) Qtd. in Mahaut de Fougères, “NATO as Seen by France’s Presidential Candidates, Expressions, Institut Montaigne, 25 March 2022. <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/expressions/nato-seen-frances-presidential-candidates>

26) On Krah’s Chinese connections, see Tim Hildebrandt, “Germany’s Far-Right Pivot to China,” *The Diplomat*, 6 October 2023. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/10/germanys-far-right-pivot-to-china/>

27) On Malta and China, see Karl Azzopardi, “Malta Committed to China’s Belt and Road Initiative as Italy Mulls Pulling Out of the Agreement,” *Malta Today*, 26 October 2023, <https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/125616/malta-committed-to-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-as-italy-mulls-pulling-out-of-the-agreement>.

On Xinhua’s rising influence in international media, see Raksha Kumar, “How China Uses the News Media as a Weapon in Its Propaganda War against the West,” Reuters Institute, University of Oxford, 2 November 2021. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/how-china-uses-news-media-weapon-its-propaganda-war-against-west>

28) Jack Straw, “We Should Never Have Let Cyprus Join the EU,” *Politico*, 7 September 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/cyprus-eu-vladimir-putin-russia/>

STRATEGIC VISION FOR THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE UAE AND SAUDI ARABIA IN BRICS

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This paper aims to analyze the decision of the BRICS group to include six new member states, including the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The underlying idea of this paper revolves around the Arab Gulf states, which have a security partnership with the United States, also expressing interest in acquiring membership in the BRICS group, which includes countries considered competitors to the United States, such as China and Russia. This raises questions about how Gulf states can achieve a balance between economic considerations and security interests, in addition to inquiries about the added value that Gulf states can obtain from membership in these organizations.

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Keywords: BRICS group, UAE and Saudi Arabia joining the BRICS, Global Economic Blocs, Economic Visions of UAE, Saudi Arabia Economic Vision.



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On 1 January 2024, the BRICS group announced the invitation of six new countries to join its membership, including both the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. While obtaining membership in such associations and organizations, whether with a security or economic focus, is a goal pursued by many countries, especially if those associations hold significant economic weight, it has sparked debate about the relationship between the parties. BRICS is a grouping of several countries united by common interests, but among its goals is "confronting the dominance of the U.S. dollar" in the global economy, which implies a restructuring of the global system itself, especially since among its members are what can be called "anti-Western" countries in general, including Russia and China. Gulf countries have security partnerships and diverse areas of economic cooperation with Western countries, foremost among them the United States, which is a long-term target for BRICS policies. So, how can this dilemma be understood?

Determinants of the Accession of the Arab Gulf Countries to Regional & Global Economic Blocs

There are three determinants that explain the Arabian Gulf countries' pursuit of joining regional and international blocs. Firstly, the Arabian Gulf countries are classified as small and medium-sized states, necessitating them to adopt three security options: achieving self-security, which remains linked to the size of the state; non-alignment, yet remaining an active option if adhered to by other parties, especially those sharing regional affiliations with the Arabian Gulf countries; and establishing international partnerships. While these partnerships primarily have security dimensions, they also entail areas for economic cooperation given the close linkage between security and economy. As oil and gas-producing countries, the Arabian Gulf countries have Western partners who are among the consumers. Therefore, the importance of partnership options is tied to regional and global power balances, mandating diversification of these partnerships, even from an economic perspective.¹

Secondly, any single state alone cannot address current challenges facing the world, whether economic, security-related, or pertaining to climate change and food security. They require greater coordination within larger frameworks such as the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League. Among these blocs that the Arabian Gulf countries seek to join in various capacities are the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the BRICS bloc, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.²

Thirdly, the emergence of oil's influence in the international relations equation

1) Ashraf Mohamed Keshk, "The Evolution of Regional Security Since 2003: A Study on the Impact of NATO's Strategy." Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies (2015).

2) Youssef Kamel Khattab, "The Participation of Gulf Arab States in Regional and International Blocs: Necessity or Choice?" Jeddah: Gulf Research Center (2023).

is notable, as BRICS countries produce 44 percent of the world's total crude oil.³ Certainly, significant oil-producing countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in such a grouping allow for coordination on oil production levels and maintaining an appropriate price for this strategic commodity in global markets. The OPEC Plus alliance, established in 2016 by OPEC and ten oil-producing countries outside the organization, including Russia, presents a significant experience in coordinating oil policies and maintaining a suitable price for producers in global markets. This experience could enhance cooperation between the Gulf countries and BRICS countries on the same issue.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE Vision to Join BRICS Membership

Taking into account the nature of the BRICS as an economic and political bloc, the accession of some Gulf Arab countries to this grouping does not signify their intention to replace partnerships with Western countries, as reflected in the official Emirati discourse articulated by Abdullah Al Marri, the Minister of Economy of the UAE, who stated, "The decision of the UAE to join BRICS is based on economic considerations and not political ones." He added, "We are not living in a cold war, and joining this bloc is part of cooperation among southern countries, and the UAE will always engage with the West."⁴

The Saudi official vision aligns with that of the UAE. Despite no official Saudi confirmation regarding the Kingdom's final decision to join BRICS at the time of writing this paper, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister, commented on the issue by stating, "The BRICS group is not against America or the West." He added, "How the group will work towards phasing out the use of the dollar will be a crucial matter for policymakers in the Arab Gulf countries."⁵ These statements by high-ranking officials in both the UAE and Saudi Arabia underscore an important reality: the partnership of Arab Gulf countries with Western nations is a strategic matter despite occasional differences in perspectives on certain issues. Therefore, pursuing some Arab Gulf countries to join blocs comprising countries seen as competitors to Western states does not imply a desire to replace their partnerships with the United States with other parties. Instead, this could be interpreted as a calculated economic maneuver.

3) BBC Arabic Website "What is the BRICS Group and Which New Countries Will Join It?" 29 December 2023. Accessed on 7 February 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/articles/c13ygy4y3vo>

4) Sky News Arabia, "Reuters: Saudi Arabia Still Considering Joining BRICS," 18 January 2024. Accessed on 7 February 2024. <https://www.skynewsarabia.com/business/1686444>

5) The New Khalij, "Will Saudi Arabia and the UAE's Joining of BRICS Bring About a Change in the Bloc?" 19 September 2023. Accessed on 7 February 2024. <https://thenewkhalij.news/article/303914/>

The Importance of the UAE and Saudi Arabia's Joining the BRICS

BRICS is a significant economic bloc. According to data from the International Monetary Fund, BRICS contributed around 28.3 percent to the global economy in 2023. It controls about 20 percent of global trade and approximately 25 percent of the world's land area. BRICS aims to achieve global economic balance by reducing the dollar hegemony. The bloc's importance increases, with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov confirming that "there are 30 countries interested in establishing relations with the bloc." With the expansion of BRICS to include ten countries, the population of the bloc will exceed 3.625 billion people, nearly half of the world's population, compared to approximately 40 percent before the addition of these countries.⁶

Therefore, considering the economic transformation in both the UAE and Saudi Arabia through ambitious economic visions, there are gains they can achieve. In this context, Abdullah Al Marri, the UAE Minister of Economy, stated that "there are many economic gains for the UAE from joining this group, including supporting foreign investment attraction, enhancing economic competitiveness, supporting non-oil exports, and facilitating the UAE's access to global markets."⁷ As for Saudi Arabia, joining this group would open up investment opportunities in both traditional and non-traditional energy sectors, in addition to finding new sources of funding for economic diversification projects, a key aspect of Saudi Vision 2030. Given the importance of the oil-rich kingdom, it would also play a pivotal role in the global energy sector through BRICS.⁸ Furthermore, there would be an increase in trade exchanges with BRICS countries and diversification of international economic partnerships. BRICS countries like China and India could provide added value to both the UAE and Saudi Arabia. China could offer significant investment opportunities through the Belt and Road Initiative.

On the other hand, both Saudi Arabia and the UAE could expand economic partnerships with India, opening up new investment prospects. This aligns with India's strategy of targeting the infrastructure and manufacturing sectors. Additionally, the economic corridor proposal between India, the Middle East, and Europe could increase opportunities for Arab Gulf countries. Moreover, if the importance and role of BRICS increase, it could achieve a balance with the G7 industrialized nations, enhancing the benefits for both Saudi Arabia and the UAE, as well as the Gulf Cooperation Council as a regional organization. Undoubtedly, having a multipolar international economic

6) Sky News Arabia, "BRICS in 2024... Massive Economic Power with the Addition of These Countries," 1 January 2024. Accessed on 8 February 2024. <https://www.skynewsarabia.com/business/1681853/>

7) Russian Times Arabic, "Davos" Forum... The Emirates Talk About Their Gains from Joining "BRICS", 19 January 2024. Accessed on 7 February 2024. <https://arabic.rt.com/business/1530918->

8) Karim Ramadan, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates Joining "BRICS": What are the Expected Economic Benefits? 20 September 2023.

system would be beneficial for Arab Gulf countries.⁹ On another note, it's important to consider the political context of the UAE and Saudi Arabia's pursuit of joining this bloc. This includes heightened U.S.-China competition and noticeable tension in Saudi Arabia's relations with the U.S. during President Biden's administration. While China is not a security player in the Arabian Gulf region, it has played a significant role in mediating between Saudi Arabia and Iran.¹⁰

Challenges facing the UAE and Saudi Arabia within the BRICS Membership

Despite the economic partnership's significance for both the UAE and Saudi Arabia within BRICS, debates about the group's ability to achieve its main goal of confronting the dominance of the dollar in the global economy continue to attract researchers' attention. There are doubts about the feasibility of achieving this goal, considering the difficulty of implementing mechanisms such as issuing a unified currency as an alternative to the dollar, which still dominates 70 percent of international financial transactions. Moreover, the United States remains a major partner for Arab Gulf countries in existing projects, unlike BRICS projects, which are still proposals.

Secondly, assuming that both the UAE and Saudi Arabia affirm their purely economic objectives from this membership, the current international reality witnesses a fierce competition, making it difficult to differentiate between economic objectives and political dimensions. Western countries may perceive those states opposing Western policies seek to attract Arab Gulf countries, even from an economic perspective, especially with the ongoing war in Ukraine.¹¹

Thirdly, given the United States' continued role as a primary guarantor of the security of Arab Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and the strategic importance of these two countries, they must balance their security interests with the expected economic benefits of BRICS membership. This membership might send a message to the United States that both countries desire to diversify partnerships, even in the long run. This is particularly significant considering some obstacles facing Arab Gulf countries in acquiring military technology and the nature of security challenges, including food security, which requires diversification of international partnerships as a lesson learned from the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹²

9) Alexander Katib, "The Expanded BRICS Group and the Gulf: Membership Privileges," 1 January 2024. Accessed on 8 February 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/91326>

10) Middle East Council for International Affairs, "BRICS Summit: Shaping a New Geopolitical Scene - Perspectives from the Council," 31 August 2023.

11) Fawaz Al-Olaymi, "Pros and Cons of Joining the "BRICS" Group," 5 June 2023.

12) Ashraf Mohammed Keshk, "Gulf States and International Economic Blocs," 4 September 2023. Accessed on 8 February 2024. <https://akhbar-alkhaleej.com/news/article/1340920>

Conclusions

Despite the significance of the strategic partnership between the Arab Gulf countries and Western nations, particularly the United States, some Gulf states have observed an effort to diversify their economic partnerships, especially seeking membership in certain economic blocs, but in a balanced manner alongside their traditional partnerships. This is a result of the current global system's transformations, occasional tensions in Gulf-U.S. relations, and the emergence of challenges that no single state can confront alone. While the UAE and Saudi Arabia stand to gain economic benefits from joining the BRICS group, the political and security benefits remain contingent on the evolution of the bloc itself and its ability to achieve consensus among its members, considering the bounds of change in U.S. policy towards its Gulf partners

BRICS AND THE GEO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF ENGINEERING A NEW GLOBAL ORDER

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In the geopolitics of 21st-century international relations, there is a noticeable shift and transformation of the global order away from the Western-centric United States unipolar order (Global North) towards a Non-Western multipolar order (Global South). Key actors in the Global South have increasingly stood in opposition to the excesses of the Global North's words and deeds. However, standing in opposition to something does not change the status quo, the hegemonic power remains, and the challengers remain just that. Building durable institutions, that are based on the symmetry of relations and outcomes, is necessary. This is what BRICS represents, where it is evolving to enable better and support the creation of a new world geopolitical order.

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Keywords: BRICS, Global South, Global North, Geopolitics, Geo-economics, Transforming Global Order.



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Twenty-first-century international relations are rapidly changing as the geopolitical balance of power increasingly shifts. As a topic, this can be interpreted and analyzed from a theoretical perspective or a pragmatic perspective. Geopolitics in its practical and operational sense concerns managing and regulating the balance of power and influence.¹ Geo-economics as a subset supports and facilitates geopolitical goals and ambitions. These elements become crucial to understand and operationalize within the context of the relative decline of the Western-centric United States unipolar order (Global North) and the relative rise of the Non-Western multipolar order (Global South).² The current state of international affairs is that the old order has not disappeared, and the new order is in the process of consolidating. Thus, the transformation is not yet finalised or completed.

This present article seeks to lay out and understand the geo-economic imperatives of a geopolitical shift in power and influence. Understanding the geo-economics of this specific moment in the history of international relations requires an accurate understanding and definition of geopolitical transformations and their impact to establish the recent environmental context. Once this is established, BRICS will be a challenger to the geo-economic institutional structure. When a geopolitical order challenges for hegemony, they must go beyond an oppositional stance in their words and deeds. They need to offer an alternative vision of global relations and interactions that is superior to the existing model, which can be achieved through a viable and resilient geo-economic vision such as BRICS.

Geo-economics and its Relations to Geopolitics

At its simplistic and basic level of academic definition, geopolitics as “the struggle over the control of geographical entities with an international and global dimension, and the use of such geographical entities for political advantage.”³ In essence, it is the deployment of strategy in the regulation and the management of the balance of power and influence by actors in international relations. However, geopolitics is a form of interpretive knowledge, but it is very far from being ‘objective’ or neutral owing to its highly situational nature. “Geopolitics is a form of situated knowledge, neither a socially neutral nor a politically innocent form of understanding, but one deeply marked by who is using it, when, and for what purposes. It is a form of knowledge created by specific people at certain times for particular purposes.”⁴ This forms the grand vision of the actor towards power relations in international relations, whether they be a hegemon, challenger, niche, support role, or neutral.

1) John Rennie Short, *Geopolitics: Making Sense of a Changing World* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022).

2) Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nexon, *Exit From Hegemony: The Unravelling of the American Global Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

3) Colin Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics*, 3rd edition (London: Routledge, 2017): p.36.

4) John Rennie Short (2022): p. 3.

Geo-economics is linked and interacting with geopolitics, which is not a single approach but different ideas that share the belief that economic conditions precipitate political events. This could be an invasion of another country, where powerful countries exploit weaker ones and are forced to react by creating trade and financial relations terms. It is a means of interpretation of human geography where, for example, economic activity creates changes.⁵ Competition for relative power tends to drive state behaviour, whereas geo-economics is the interplay between economics and politics in the global arena, and economic forces and considerations mould political decisions. The focus of geo-economics is rather narrow and homes in on the accumulation of economic power from a geographical and strategic viewpoint.⁶ “The asymmetric vulnerabilities and dependencies inherited to this international system make economic power a potent means to pursue strategic objectives.”⁷ Therefore, geo-economics plays a subordinate and supportive role to international actors' geopolitical aims and objectives.

The Contemporary Transformation of the Global Order

As the 21st century has progressed, the elements sustaining the Global North's (Western-centric U.S. unipolar order) hegemony, namely military and economic supremacy as well as the dominance of Western liberal politics, have come under increasing pressure and threat. This is partly owing to an internal ideological identity and culture war, but also through arrogant and self-destructive foreign and security policy. The current consequences of these have been the Global North's relative decline and the Global South's relative ascendancy (Non-Western multipolar order).⁸ It is a trend and process in international relations that the U.S. has sought to halt by any means to preserve its hegemonic status and privileged position.⁹ Therefore, it is in the interests and security of actors maintaining a challenger or neutral stance in international relations to preserve their ability to subject and not object of the current iteration of 21st-century geopolitics.

One way to attempt to preserve what is left of the Global North's hegemony is using economic warfare, which was successful in history at containing other powers. Economic warfare falls within the realm of geo-economics, which in turn, is a subset

5) Colin Flint (2017): p. 6-7.

6) Sören Scholvin and Mikael Wigell, "Power Politics by Economic Means: Geoeconomics as an Analytical Approach and Foreign Policy Practice," *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 37, No.1 (2018): p. 73-84, DOI: [10.1080/01495933.2018.1419729](https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2018.1419729)

7) Sören Scholvin and Mikael Wigell (2018): p. 81.

8) Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015); Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony: The Unravelling of the American Global Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Greg Simons, "West Versus Non-West: A New Cold War?" *Turkish Policy Quarterly* (TPQ), Vol. 21, No. 4 (2023).

9) Greg Simons, "Brzezinski's Geostrategic Imperatives in a Transforming Global Order," *Geostrategic Pulse*, No. 287 (December 2022): p. 25-27.

of geopolitics. Consequently, actors that feel actual or potential threat by this means logically seek to hedge, mitigate or shield themselves from the consequences of possible effects. One of the means of maintaining the subject and not object status when pursuing self-interest and security by the elements of the Global South has been to create new sets of foreign and security relations with other countries from the Global South. Russia, in the 21st century has been actively engaged in reconfiguring its foreign relations focus as tensions continue to grow with the Global North towards a focus on the Global South – politically, culturally, diplomatically, economically, and militarily.¹⁰ There are also more geo-economically informed responses to the threats and opportunities present in transforming global order.

Many countries have also sought to cushion themselves against the very likely economic warfare to be waged against them, which has seen an increasing cross-section of the Global South, such as China, Saudi Arabia and Russia seeking to reduce their vulnerabilities and means of being economically (and politically) manipulated and coerced. Russia has been leading the way at this stage in securing their ability to remain in opposition to the Global North by engaging in and encouraging others in the process of de-dollarization.¹¹ There are also geo-economic attempts to create credible and viable alternatives to the unequal terms and conditions offered by the Global North, such as the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that is seen as a significant threat to the Global North's continued global hegemony.¹² The rapidly expanding geo-economic project of the Global South known as BRICS, which can be seen as a much collective variation of the BRI, which started small initially and was consequently mocked, but is in the process of rapid expansion in light of the increasing level of coercion by the U.S. towards friend and foe alike.

When challenging a hegemonic power for their position, if the challenger merely rhetorically and in policy opposes the hegemon, then they are likely to remain as a challenger in opposition and beyond taking that power. In essence, they play a role of disruption and irritation to the hegemon and their hold on power. To overthrow a hegemon and to take its place requires the challenger to additionally offer a qualitatively better and more attractive alternative to the hegemon. Furthermore, words, deeds and outcomes must match. To create a successful challenger that can challenge and become a hegemon requires innovative and insightful leaders with vision. However, this is merely the initial step. To consolidate their position requires the creation of a viable geo-economic organizational culture, identity and outlook as well as a durable and resilient institutional structure that can regulate and manage the

10) Andrey Baykov and Tatiana Shakleina (Eds.), *Polycentric World Order in the Making* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan (2023).

11) Xu Wenhong, "Dedollarization as a Direction of Russia's Financial Policy in Current Conditions," *Studies on Russian Economic Development*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2023): p. 9-18.

12) Peng Jiang, *Geostrategic Psychology and the Rise of Forbearance* (London: Routledge, 2023).

weaknesses and threats to be encountered.

BRICS: The Birth of an Idea and Vision for the Future

When the concept and ambitions of the BRICS vision were announced, it was ridiculed for some time as being incapable of offering the same terms and conditions as offered by the Global North, despite the obvious potential and resonance in the promise of bringing greater parity and equality for actors of the Global South in their economic relations. BRICS has created a significant innovation in global governance by bringing together, at first glance, very different countries with little in common.¹³ The first BRICS meeting occurred in July 2006 at Russia's initiative, which was done on the margins of the then G8 group. The stated focus being on finance, trade, and development. In June 2009, the first BRICS summit was held, where a joint document and declaration on the purpose and goals of BRICS was given. "To promote dialogue and cooperation among our countries in an incremental, proactive, pragmatic, open and transparent way. The dialogue and cooperation of the BRIC countries are conducive not only to serving common interests of emerging market economies and developing countries, but also to building a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity."¹⁴ During the 14th BRICS summit in China in 2022, China noted that "the influence of BRICS cooperation has gone beyond the five countries and become a constructive force for boosting world economic growth, improving global governance and promoting democracy in international relations."¹⁵ The articulated narratives of the idea and vision for BRICS include a more symmetrical political hierarchy and tangible outcomes as well as a more reciprocal and inclusive process oriented towards pragmatism in international relations and securing national interests. This is a very attractive alternative offer to the less optimal hegemonic dictates, where this geo-economics supports building a community of Global South to secure a more stable economic future, within the context of a global geopolitical transformation that creates an environment of uncertainty and risk.

Over time and with the development of the BRICS organizational focus, three pillars of issues and activities have clearly emerged, these are: political and security matters; economic and financial concerns, and cultural and people-to-people exchanges. By 2019, BRICS accounted for 41 percent of the world's population, 24 percent of the global GDP, and over 16 percent share of world trade.¹⁶ BRICS is in the process of

13) Dominic Wilson and Roopa Purushothaman, "Dreaming with BRICs: The path to 2050," Global Economics Paper 99 (2003): p. 1-24. Oliver Stuenkel, *The BRICS and the Future of Global Order* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020).

14) Infobrics, "History of BRICS," Info BRICS, <https://infobrics.org/page/history-of-brics/> (11 February 2024).

15) BRICS China 2022, "BRICS countries," XIV BRICS Summit, www.brics2022.mfa.gov.cn/eng/gyjzgj/jzgjjj/ (11 February 2024).

16) BRICS India 2021, "Evolution of BRICS," BRICS India 2021, 11 February 2024.

expansion as an organisation, which may create additional issues on matters that require consensus, but it demonstrates the relative attractiveness of the BRICS idea and promise concerning the increasingly aggressive and unpredictable reactions of the declining Global North.

The newly elected leader of Argentina, President Javier Milei, chose to withdraw the decision to join BRICS in December 2023, instead aligning to become an object of events by the Global North. His presidency is being wracked by political and economic strife and may serve as a helpful illustration of what happens to contemporary objects of international relations. Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates have joined BRICS in 2024. This increase in membership has increased the proportion of the global population to 45 percent and the share of the global economy to 28 percent.¹⁷ Therefore, BRICS is transforming from what was initially thought of as being a non-viable and non-serious challenge to the Global North's economic hegemony towards something increasingly seen as an emerging threat to that hegemony.

BRICS: The Influence of Personalities Versus Institutional Structure

The initial mental work that helped to realise the Global South's vision, ambitions and goals for a new global economic and political order originated from the dialogue and the work of the political leadership of the BRICS countries. They are instrumental in creating and establishing the innovative intellectual foundations of this ambitious geo-economic project. A project that was created out of necessity was born in the chaos of increasing competition and conflict generated by the transforming global order. This process was seemingly assisted by countries and leaders who shared similar outlooks and values through their specific forms and sets of social and cultural conservatism that oppose the fundamentals of the ideologically driven agenda of woke Western liberalism.¹⁸ Political leadership in BRICS is tied to political leadership at the home of each member state, which has somewhat hinged upon the long-term survival of key political leaders such as Putin, Modi, Xi and so forth.¹⁹ Political leadership, vision and innovation are needed to establish the organization's vision and approach. This is a strength, but it is also potentially a political weakness if the Global North engages in political warfare against those leaders and successfully instills regime change, as

<https://brics2021.gov.in/about-brics>

17) BBC, "Brics: What is the Group and Which Countries Have Joined?" 11 February 2024.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-66525474>

18) Greg Simons, "Role of Social Media in Amplifying Neo-Liberal Cancel Culture," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* (TPQ), Vol. 20, No. 3 (2021): p. 71-79.

19) Cintia Quiliconi, Marcelo Saguier and Diana Tussie, "BRICS: Leadership in the making," Documento de trabajo N°71, Área de Relaciones Internacionales, *FLACSO* (Argentina), https://ri.conicet.gov.ar/bitstream/handle/11336/36553/CONICET_Digital_Nro.4a41898a-f189-4687-86c8-900ffa125b40_A.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y (August 2014).

the recent case of Argentina demonstrates.

However, to create a more resilient and durable organization that will long outlive its creators requires going beyond the personalities and capabilities of the respective political leadership of the countries involved. Institutional structures need to be established and developed, with the vision to increase the organization's capability and capacity and enhance its resilience and durability.

New multilateral financial institutions have emerged to support infrastructure projects globally, including the Silk Road Fund, the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB), and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). These institutions aim to raise additional liquidity for infrastructure development worldwide, offering alternatives to traditional financial mechanisms.²⁰

The institutional and organizational structure are intended to increase the level of environmental predictability, plus expanding capability and capacity in terms of the regulation and management of operational matters and considerations. Political personalities' role and effect on an organization should not be perceived or regarded as being something separate from the institutional structure. Rather, these elements should be understood as being complementary to one another and mutually interactive, the result of the combined effects being greater than their individual parts. The political success of BRICS can be measured in the assessments regarding whom they are geo-economically competing. Therefore, the recent expansion of BRICS is seen and understood in the context of the relative context of BRICS success as representing a defeat for U.S. global leadership.²¹

BRICS: The Future Prospects

The Global North under U.S. leadership has lost its absolute hegemony in the 21st century, they seek to keep their relative hegemony. But this is being done under the most trying and difficult of circumstances, many of which have been self-inflicted through poor profoundly asymmetrical foreign and security policy. Rather than working with powers of the rising Global South, the U.S. has chosen a path of obstructing their rise to retain some relative hegemony.²² This is increasingly difficult to achieve as the political, economic, military, and diplomatic capability and capacity is in decline. This leaves all countries, regardless of being perceived as ally or foe

20) Nivedita Das Kundu, "BRICS and the Political Economy of the New World Order", *Valdai Club*, 29 June 2023. <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/brics-and-the-political-economy-of-the-new-world/>

21) The Editorial Board, "A bigger BRICS marks a failure of US leadership," *Bloomberg*, 29 August 2023. <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2023-08-29/a-bigger-brics-marks-a-failure-of-us-leadership>

22) Greg Simons, "International Relations in the Age of US Decline: Orthodoxy of Knowledge and Obstructive Foreign Policy," *Russia in Global Affairs*, 2 August 2021. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/us-orthodoxy-of-knowledge/>

of the U.S. the choice or decision, to be subjects or objects of international relations. The spectacular example of the deindustrialization of Europe during the Ukraine War is no better example of what can happen to objects of events.²³ A new global order is in the making, but the old order has not ended, and the new order is not yet firmly established.

BRICS opposes the unequal political and economic terms and conditions imposed by the Global North. This pattern has lasted some 500 years of Western global hegemony. The trend of the relative decline of the Global North in the last decades has exposed their vulnerabilities and weaknesses, but also the determination to retain the asymmetrical status quo in the distribution of power and influence in the geopolitics of 21st-century international relations. Therefore, BRICS is a well-conceived and well timed geo-economic program to support the geopolitical goal of challenging the hegemonic power. It enables different powers from the Global South to hedge their weaknesses and threats to remain a subject and not an object of events in international relations.

Conclusion

BRICS has risen from global obscurity to global prominence in a concise space of time. It emerged from the need to create a viable geo-economic organizational means of standing in opposition to the Global North's excesses by key Global South players. Its relevance and significance are likely to continue to grow within the context of the transforming global geopolitical order and the reaction of the U.S. to preserve its global hegemony by coercing into conforming other countries that is against their interests as subjects, and not to be forced into being objects. The primary value of BRICS is that it represents more than just an organization that stands in opposition to something. Still, instead it is also an offer that is seemingly qualitatively more attractive than what is offered by the Global North with a more reciprocal and relational approach and more symmetrical outcomes.

23) Matthew Karnitschnig, "Rustbelt on the Rhine," *Politico*, 13 July 2023.
<https://www.politico.eu/article/rust-belt-on-the-rhine-the-deindustrialization-of-germany/>

THE BRICS ENLARGEMENT HAS BEEN A MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR SOUTH AMERICA

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Argentina's refusal to join the BRICS, in the context of its membership expansion, approved at the 15th summit at South Africa, is an indication of the difficult times faced by South American regionalism. Argentina's foreign policy is geared to a 100 percent pro-Western orientation, that which implies immediate cooling off relations with China and the Global South. Within this context, ties with Brazil became an unavoidable geoeconomic necessity. Hence, joining the BRICS, which had parted from a Brazilian diplomatic move, is out of the question. During the late 20th century Brazilian-Argentine bilateralism had translated into unprecedented confidence-building schemes that put South America on track to becoming a pluralistic security community. This trajectory was gradually dismantled, largely as a result of the foreign policy orientations of both countries. At present, Lula da Silva's commitment to reactivate South American multilateralism has not been as successful as Brazil's proactive involvement in global affairs. While Argentina's "no thanks" hardly affected BRICS renewal; it most of all brought costs to South America and to Brazil's aspirations to promote a new wave of constructive regionalism in the area.

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Keywords: South America, Brazil,
BRICS Enlargement, Lula da Silva, Xavier Milei.



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In the context of its membership expansion, Argentina's refusal to join the BRICS, approved at the 15th summit in South Africa, is not difficult to understand. Groucho Marx's saying, "I don't want to belong to a club that would me accept me as a member", fits as a glove to explain the decision. President Javier Milei announced since day one of his administration his determination to gear Argentine foreign policy priorities, translating into a strong alignment with the United States (and Israel) and little interest, if any, towards the Global South.¹ This involved keeping a distance from all options that could hurt such orientation and adopting a very narrow pick-and-chose approach in foreign affairs. Cultivating relations with China and the Global South is perceived as undesirable, while maintaining ties with Brazil became an unavoidable geopolitical necessity. These are to follow a bilateral give-and-take style, with no sort of team-playing in global or regional affairs. Hence, joining the BRICS, which had parted from a Brazilian diplomatic move, is out of the question. While Argentina's "no thanks" hardly affected BRICS renewed façade; it most of all brought costs to South America and to Brazil's regional aspirations.

A Decade of Mediocre Performance for South American Regionalism

Even if Argentina's empty seat at BRICS may be temporary, it sends a message regarding South American regionalism's health conditions. During the last decade, this area has shown symptoms of persistent regressive regionalism. South America has receded in its efforts to become a zone of peace, to consolidate itself as a stable democratic neighborhood, and to teamwork in global governance.² Besides the paralysis of major regional cooperation initiatives in defense and/or strategic agendas – as those between Argentina and Brazil, Venezuela, and Colombia – multilateral innovations - as UNASUR and its Defense Council- were dismantled and interstate coordination experiences abandoned.

Concurrently the region has reached the highest-ever ranking in local violence and public insecurity, which comes hand and hand with widespread humanitarian needs caused by unprecedented intraregional flows of migrants, particularly from Venezuela. South American regionalism has also failed dramatically in a core human security as public health, with special mention to the lack of regional responses during the Covid-19 pandemic. South American deficient economic performance and regressive

1) Bosworth, James "Milei is Planning to shake-up Argentinas`s Foreign Policy, Too" See <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/milei-argentina-foreign-policy/>; Malacalza, Bernabé and Tokatlian, Juan Gabriel "Argentine: avec Javier Milei la diplomatie complotiste arrive au pouvoir", *Le gran Continent* (November 2023). <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2023/11/19/avec-javier-milei-en-argentine-la-diplomatie-complotiste-aux-portes-du-pouvoir/>

2) See Guadalupe Gonzalez, Hirst, Monica, Lujan, Carlos, Romero, Carlos and Tokatlian, Juan Gabriel, "Critical Juncture, Power Transition and Latin American Vacuum", *Nueva Sociedad*, Abril 2021, on-line <https://nuso.org/documento/critical-juncture-power-transition-and-latin-american-vacuum>; Barros, Pedro da Silva and Goncalves, Julia de Borba "Crisis in South American regionalism and Brazilian protagonism in Unasur, the Lima Group and Prosur" *Revista Brasileira de Politica Internacional* .on line: <https://www.scielo.br/j/rbpi/a/5mx4T7zmBC6HrZHZZKkpfwb/>

regional integration intertwined with a relentless process of deindustrialization and re-privatization of national economic structures. Within the Latin American context, this region faces persistent impediments to reversing the accumulated slowdown in economic and social development.³ The reversal of Argentina-Brazil bilateralism speaks highly in this process.

Not too long ago, Argentine-Brazilian close political ties played a central part in the built-up of South American regionalism based upon peace, democracy, and regional integration. A robust list of bilateral collaborative initiatives in trade, defense, technological advancement, and shared foreign policy priorities occurred in close articulation with the democratization processes in the last two decades of the 20th century. Confidence-building regarding national nuclear developments was essential for Argentina and Brazil to lock in their regional peace and non-proliferation commitments. Now, the disarticulation of previous bilateral commitments seriously compromised such achievements.⁴ Contrasting foreign policy priorities slowly dismantled diplomatic commonalities in regional and global affairs, shared economic development strategies, and similar autonomous world views. The Right-wing administrations of Mauricio Macri (2016-2019) in Argentina, of Milton Temer and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (2016-2022), and now of Xavier Milei in Argentina have generated a de-facto path-dependency dynamic in which a sequence of foreign policy decisions managed to reverse, paralyze and/or suspend preceding bilateralism. In this context, Argentina's "no thanks" to join the BRICS represents an episode of the most recent season of a non-stop Argentina-Brazilian disintegration process. While it undoubtedly indicates the foreign policy intentions pursued by Argentina, only Brazil should take it personally within the BRICS group.

The Return of Brazil as a Progressive Voice

After the four-year-term of the extreme-right administration of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, the inauguration of the Lula 3.0 government gave new impetus to the country's projection on multiple international fronts. Since his electoral campaign in 2022, Lula da Silva announced his intention of resuming an assertive presence at the global chessboards, built on the learned lessons of previous governments and the urgency of putting Brazilian activism back on stage.⁵ Brazil immediately picked up on a judgmental tone when addressing international finance, climate change, world peace and security. Hence, Lula's international presence became crucial to

3) See "Preliminary Overview of the Economies of Latin American and the Caribbean" 2023. ECLAC, p.66. <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/bafc36b3-6b27-4afb-a44f-73fd3321d6c5/content>

4) Bernabe Malacalza and Tokatlian, Juan Gabriel "Argentina-Brasil, entre la Desintegración y el Desacoplamiento" *Revista CEBRI*, No.1 (3) (2022).

5) Lula da Silva's First Presidential Term (2002-2006) and Second Presidential Term (2006-2010).

vindicating an inclusive multipolar world, committed to a reinvigorated, fair and secure international world. Besides, Brazilian foreign policy rapidly disclosed the intention to retrieve discrepancies with Western rule-settings. An adjourned narrative contesting Northern preponderance in the World Order reemerged with special mention to the need of inclusive reforms in global governance, the condemnation of geopolitical worldviews leading to securitized methods and military escalation of local crisis, and the questioning of the Dollar dominance in international trade and finance. Special mention ought to be made to Brazil's attempts to promote inclusive and just peace negotiations to end the war of Russia against Ukraine and in the condemnation of the genocidal actions of Israel in Gaza.

To summarize, Brazil resurfaced as an eager emergent power ready to share its revisionist views with Southern partners and participate in global transformations. This has been the aim behind Brazil's role in multiple arenas, with special mention to: the temporary presidency of the G20, which will culminate in the November 2024 summit in Rio de Janeiro; the presidency of the BRICS and the status of host country for the 30th UN Climate Change Conference, both in 2025.

Notwithstanding, Lula's Latin/South American multilateral initiatives have not moved ahead as swiftly as in global affairs. Initial expectations were raised that Brazil would return to the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), constructive lines of action would take place in MERCOSUR, with the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) and the South Atlantic Peace and Cooperation Zone (ZOPACAS). A first summit of South American Presidents organized in Brasília in the first quarter of 2023 did not meet Da Silva's expectations.

Throughout the first year of government, even reconstructing support among other like-minded governments- as those of Chile and Colombia- encountered more barriers than incentives. Besides, purposeful leadership in South America has not incited meaningful domestic support. The ambiguities of Lulas' relations with Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela represent a permanent obstacle to generating positive regional and domestic backing. In this context, teamwork with Amazonian neighbors, provided by the environment and climate change common interests, has proved easier than Mercosur's revitalization.

Putting regional integration back on its feet has become a repeated aim in Brazil's South American diplomatic narrative, with particular attention to Mercosur. The country assumed the temporary presidency of the group last July, having to face a less favorable sub-regional context. This context combined: a significant reduction on intra-regional trade a delicate and unstable political scenario of its main partner, Argentina, and an external agenda dominated by an uneven and worn-out negotiation with the European Union. Brazilian foreign policy officials do acknowledge that

South American regionalism represents a useful platform in articulations between Brazil and the Global South. Brazil's regional leadership could play a crucial part in its efforts to deepen ties with African multilateralism, particularly the African Union, with ASEAN value chains interdependence experience and with the Arab community, stimulated by converging interests in fossil fuel issues and the predisposition of involvement in geopolitical issues in the Middle East. Besides, inter-regional dialogue in the Global South could contribute to strengthening global governance negotiations in the UN system all together..

The Strategic Importance of BRICS for Brazil

The Brazilian government perceives BRICS as a privileged arena for its emergent multilateral diplomacy. As a founding member of the group, political coordination with BRICS fellows is a valuable tool to promote the reconfiguration of the multilateral architecture, emphasizing its economic-financial institutions in line with a redistribution of global power. When former president Dilma Rousseff was appointed for the presidency of the New Development Bank (NDB)⁶ in 2023, intra-BRICS convergent positions were refined in challenging exclusionary financial global normative guidelines, which impose conditionalities and normalize unilateral coercive practices.

During the XV BRICS meeting in South Africa, in August 2023, Brazil found itself compelled to deal with new global challenges. The unprecedented political presence of the Global South in world affairs, in a context of geopolitical turmoil and loss of importance of the international multilateral system, favored the inclusion of new members to the BRICS. The idea of expanding the group gained momentum, particularly in response to the strategic interests of its heavy-weight partners, China and Russia. Hard power logic prevailed over a shared balanced evaluation of pros and cons between its founding fathers. For Lula da Silva government, the incorporation of new members opened a front for domestic questioning regarding the risk that Brazil's could be overstretching its non-western preferences in world affairs. The XVI BRICS Summit will take place in Russia in November 2024, when the group is expected to operate with all of the eleven members. For Brazil, it is essential to advance propositional agendas, especially launching a common currency – the BricsCoin – that facilitates commercial transactions in emerging markets.⁷ The Group's XVII summit, which will take place in Brazil in 2025, will represent an opportunity to assess the country's capacity to absorb and manage its expanded membership, which

6) Since its creation in 2014, the presidency of the NDB has been held by a Brazilian representative; Paulo Nogueira Batista was the first to hold the position.

7) Monica Hirst and Tokatlian, Juan Gabriel, "The End of the Dollar Supremacy," *IPS Journal*, <https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/economy-and-ecology/the-end-of-dollar-supremacy-6700/>

will also involve dealing with the tensions generated by global geopolitical turmoil and advancing Global South common agendas..

A Loss for All

Argentina's refusal to join BRICS opens an opportunity to reflect upon the interplay of regional and global dynamics for the Southern world. Regionalism has long been a challenging card of the Global South affairs. Interstate conflicting agendas stimulated by territorial disputes, metropolitan preferences and cultural/religious differences have kept different regions in the developing world from building strong neighborhood environments. Collective initiatives based upon common interests and shared resources have seldom prevailed in post-colonial foreign policies during and after the Cold War

South America is of marginal strategic importance in world politics and does not present any threat regarding possessing mass destruction weaponry. This region has stood out for its history of minor inter-state conflicts during the 20th century and has had limited participation in post-Cold War UN Security Council interventionism. Structural asymmetries and strong ascendancy from North to South in the Americas have not kept South America from pursuing autonomy through political initiatives. Such impulse reached a new benchmark in the context of democratic consolidation in the post-Cold war years. This process was led by Brazilian-Argentine bilateralism and the achievement of unprecedented confidence-building schemes and programs in defense, non-proliferation, world, and regional affairs. In the opposite direction, Argentina and Brazil took turns in right-wing oriented foreign policy during the last eight years that fully subscribe to the basic pro-U.S./anti regional integration blueprint. This text overviews the dismantlement of bilateral efforts this vicious sequence produced.

The return of Brazil to the forefront of progressive global politics since the inauguration of Lula da Silva 3.0 has not been fully successful at the South American front. Most recently, the chances of rebuilding a meaningful South American project have been particularly affected by domestic developments in Argentina. The inclusion of Argentina in BRICS would have contributed to bridging the group's broadening process with the intents of Brazil to promote a new wave of constructive regionalism in South America. In a context of strengthened Global South in world affairs, lacking positive regional echoes reduces Brazilian soft-power attributes in hard-power agendas.

South America must adjourn its connection with the Global South. Bringing Argentina to BRICS would have meant a step forward for Brazil to improve its brokerage capacities and better intertwine its regional and global agendas. Instead, a special dose of strategic patience now becomes for Brazil the best prescription to deal with the complexities of its close neighbor, while keeping the ball in the court to face the challenges placed by global settings. Brazilian president Lula da Silva has become an active Southern player in promoting peaceful negotiations in conflictive scenarios, committing resources and diplomatic engagement to alleviate the severe humanitarian crisis in vulnerable contexts, and the defense of reform of global governance architecture. Teaming with BRICS fellows is crucial to give voice and agency to these efforts, with or without Argentina membership.

THE FUTURE OF BRICS: THE REVISIONIST'S CENTURY

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The BRICS conglomerate was created to balance against the power of the United States. This paper applies the assumptions of SR to contemporary international political developments, specifically the challenges posed by BRICS to American hegemony. As the BRICS continues to close the relative power gap, the international system will become more balanced. It is possible that a united BRICS could displace the American international order. Structural Realist assumptions provide useful tools to explain contemporary international politics. Hence, power politics might best explain the future of the BRICS and its continued expansion.

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Keywords: Structural Realism, Power, BRICS,
Relative Power, BRICS Expansion.



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Prediction is a fool's errand, but theories of International Relations help us generate future possibilities. While many argue that Structural Realism (SR) is better left in the trash, its assumptions provide useful tools to explain contemporary international politics. Power politics might best explain the future of the international system. The BRICS conglomerate was created to balance against the power of the United States. American power has long dominated the international system since the Soviet Union's collapse. The BRICS, along with its international banking institutions, seeks to create a parallel international economic and political system with its own rules and regulations.¹ The intention to create a BRICS currency is the most recent development.² The new currency would destroy the monopoly enjoyed by the USD as the world's reserve currency ensuring the end of American hegemony.³ This paper will place these issues on the broader context of power politics best explained by the dynamics of SR.

This paper applies the assumptions of SR to the challenges posed by BRICS to American hegemony. As China continues to rise (albeit not without challenges), it will use economic means to increase its power position relative to the United States. A united and expanding BRICS is the vehicle for international systemic change as revisionist states, particularly China and Russia, pool power to enhance their power position against American hegemony. Relative power is at the center of this challenge. As the BRICS closes the relative power gap, the international system will become more balanced. It is possible to argue that a united BRICS will displace the American international order. Said differently, SR's focus on relative power will help scholars prepare for significant changes in the international system, predicting the future of the BRICS and the international order. This paper will outline the assumptions of SR and define relative power to indicate the nature of the international system and the continued expansion of BRICS as a driving force of international politics in the 21st century.

Structural Realism and Relative Power Defined

The international system incentivizes security competition due to the anarchical structure and its interacting states defined by power, primarily military power.⁴ Economic power is also central as economic power can be translated to military power.⁵ Their power or lack of it hence defines states. The unequal distribution of power across states is referred to as relative power.⁶ Waltz states that power is by

1) Blackwill and Harris, *War by Other Means*, 74.

2) Ahmed Sule, 'Common Currency for BRICS?', *New York Times*, 29 April 2011, A14.

3) Barry Eichengreen, 'Bretton Woods after 50', *Review of Political Economy* 33/4 (2021), 555.

4) Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Waveland Press, 2010): 79, 91

5) See Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981; Michael Beckley, *Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World's Sole Superpower* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018): 53.

6) Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 198.

no means precise but can only be estimated by comparing its relative distribution across state actors. Since power is zero-sum, states pursue interests to increase their relative power positions. Relative power is an integral part of the international system as power is needed to secure the state's interests from competitors.⁷ Interests are defined in relative power as “the perceived needs and desires of one sovereign state concerning other sovereign states comprising the external environment.”⁸ States are constantly sizing and comparing power differentials across the international system.⁹ As a result, relative power is not evenly distributed across actors due to the zero-sum nature of the international structure of anarchy.

This structure drives power-seeking security behavior. States seek security through power to survive as independent political units. Hence, the international system reshapes the distribution of capabilities across states as less powerful states may bandwagon with the threat or ally themselves with other states to survive. Some states will be more powerful than others because of the zero-sum and conflictual nature of international relations. Imbalances drive security-behavior as rival states seek to balance the system to attain security. This dynamic was clear after the fall of the Soviet Union and the ensuing American unipolar system. Russia clearly expressed its concerns in the Primakov doctrine and hoped to restore an international bipolar balance of power. These very concerns are the driving force of the BRICS and will be explained next.

The Primakov Doctrine and BRICS: Bipolar Ambitions

Any power imbalance in the international system generates competition as states seek security.¹⁰ Since relative power is not evenly distributed across actors due to the zero-sum nature of the international structure of anarchy, states struggle to concentrate power to themselves whether through military investment or through alliances. Stephen Walt defines alliances as a “formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states.”¹¹ Cooperation is determined by the size and scope of threat that drives alliance members together. While the BRICS is not a security alliance, it has similar designs as an economic conglomerate. It is a type of external balancing due to its international political aim. The cognitive reasoning is similar to the Russian Post-Cold War motivation of

7) Snyder, “Mearsheimer’s World-Offensive Realism and the Struggle for Security.”

8) D. Nuechterlein, “National Interests and Foreign Policy: A Conceptual Framework for Analysis and Decision-Making” *British Journal of International Studies* 2, 3: 247.

9) Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

10) Waltz, “Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory,” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (1990): 21–37.

11) Stephen S. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019): 1.

returning to a bipolar world.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia expressed a deep insecurity driven by NATO expansion into Eastern Europe.¹² The Primakov doctrine is an external balancing effort that seeks to destroy American hegemony to guarantee Russian security. There are five major points based on the independence of Russia, bolstered by cooperation with another major power, China:

1. Russia is an indispensable actor in global politics, pursuing an independent foreign policy;
2. Russia's foreign policy is surmised within a broad vision of a multipolar world managed by a group of nations;
3. Acceptance of Russia's primacy in the post-Soviet space and in Eurasia is fundamental to all diplomatic overtures to the nation;
4. Russia is fundamentally opposed to any expansion of NATO; and
5. Partnership with China forms a cornerstone of Russia's foreign policy.¹³

These five points make it clear that Russia rejects American hegemony as a threat to itself. By pooling power resources with China in point 5, points 1-3 become a reality. This same reasoning explains the rise and expansion of BRICS. China and Russia cannot balance against or challenge American hegemony alone. By increasing membership to other states and increasing economic ties with other major states in the international system (Brazil, India, South Africa, and more recently Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Ethiopia, and a large number of other possibilities in the future), Russia and China have a greater chance of supplanting American unipolarity. The anarchical international system generates this behavior, as power drives threat. All states compete for interests in terms of power necessary for survival as independent political units.¹⁴ The anarchical structure forces self-help behaviors where states must survive through power. States are ranked from greatest to weakest based on an estimation of power. Great powers balance against other great powers to protect interests, creating the international order.¹⁵

While BRICS may not be a military alliance, it is an economic-political grouping that seeks economic-political influence independent of the United States and its hegemonic system. The aim of BRICS is to create a competing economic bloc challenging

12) A. Franekova, "Uneasy Expansion: NATO and Russia" *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2002): 10-11.

13) S. Kainikara, "Russia's Return To The World Stage: The Primakov Doctrine – Analysis." *Eurasian Review*, 5 November 2019. <https://www.eurasiareview.com/05112019-russias-return-to-the-world-stage-the-primakov-doctrine-analysis>

14) Morgenthau and Thompson, *Politics Among Nations*; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

15) Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*.

the U.S. liberal order. Alone, these states cannot challenge the United States. With enough coordination and cooperation, the BRICS may be able to balance against U.S. hegemony creating a serious systemic challenge. Acting together, relatively weaker states can impact international political outcomes by leveraging their collective power and influence. This redistribution is occurring now with China's rise and Russia's resurgence. This distinction becomes clear as the international system changes from unipolarity to multipolarity and as great power competition increases.¹⁶ We will begin to see them more as China rises. The United States and China may begin to encourage or reward other states to bandwagon to pursue their own survival interests as independent units.¹⁷

The power-seeking behavior described above is a zero-sum game as threatened states undermine an opponent's power to bolster their own "because one state's gain in power is another state's loss."¹⁸ The BRICS expansion signals a loss of power for American hegemony; as the bloc grows, the American decline continues. Thus, power is not unit specific but is a systems-based concept. Hence, when we think of major international political changes, we must focus on the concentration of power relative to other centers of power. American hegemony is not just the United States, but its partners and allies across the international system like the European Union and Japan. The BRICS challenge is another manifestation of the concentration of power. States may increase this power by increasing investment in their militaries and, more important for this paper, through alliances.

As BRICS expands, the more power it will accrue. The recent increase in membership, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt and Ethiopia in 2024 is an interesting development. This might only be the beginning as other states like Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Pakistan, Palestine, Senegal, Thailand, Venezuela, and Vietnam have all applied.¹⁹ Other states, like Afghanistan, Angola, Comoros, DR Congo, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Libya, Myanmar, Nicaragua, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Türkiye, Somalia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, are also seeking membership.²⁰ These sizable economies will increase the purchasing power of the bloc. This is significant if we consider the centrality of the US Dollar (USD) to American hegemony. If a BRICS currency is developed, states, including non-BRIC member states, may be forced to sell USD and adopt the BRICS currency. This will

16) Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

17) Renato G Flôres Jr., *The World Corona Changed: US, China and Middle Powers in the New International Order* (Routledge, 2023), <https://www.routledge.com/The-World-Corona-Changed-US-China-and-Middle-Powers-in-the-New-International/Jr/p/book/9780367763855>; Patrick James, *Realism and International Relations: A Graphic Turn Toward Scientific Progress* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

18) John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (W.W. Norton, 2001), 34

19) V. Dsouza "25 New Countries Ready To Join BRICS in 2024" *Watcher Guru*, 2 January 2024. <https://watcher.guru/news/25-new-countries-ready-to-join-brics-in-2024>

20) M. Lu, "Visualizing the BRICS Expansion in 4 Charts" *Visual Capitalist*, 24 August 2023. <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/visualizing-the-brics-expansion-in-4-charts/>

greatly weaken the political power of the United States and cause economic disorder. Hence, the more powerful BRICS becomes, the more of a challenge it will be to American hegemony. The future of the BRICS seems bright, but that depends on its ability to stay together.

Expanding BRICS power-seeking behavior is for survival within the anarchical structure long dominated by American power. Hence, the future of the BRICS might best be explained by SR as BRICS exists to revise the international order. Waltz refers to power within the international systems as being spread across actors as a distribution of capabilities. States are thus categorized by their power differences, that is one state's power relative to other states in the international system. The behavior of more powerful states threatens weaker states. Generally, all states, great, weak, and middle, seek power to survive as independent actors. Since no state alone can challenge the hegemony of the United States, it is essential that BRICS states create the infrastructure to increase membership and project economic power to continue to balance against the United States.

SR sees power as central to international politics. Power is needed to compel state actors to shape their behavior. If the structure is truly to become bipolar, then China, Russia, and other revisionist states must pool their resources under the BRICS banner. The United States has long been the most powerful actor in the world. While it is declining in power, no other actor has power equal to it. The more power becomes balanced, the more we can expect the international structure to change, and the tumultuous international politics will become. BRICS now wield significant economic and political power and potential and can, for now, navigate the international system confidently with little reliance on the United States to achieve international political goals.

Conclusions

A simple sentence might summarize international politics: great powers rise and fall. Power ebbs and flows in the anarchical international system. One cannot expect American hegemony to last forever. The United Kingdom once dominated the globe and its oceans. It is now a middle power along with France (a former continental giant under Napoleon Bonaparte). The middle powers of today could be the great powers of tomorrow. Russia was a weak state after the collapse of the Soviet Union but now is relatively more powerful. Similarly, the United States and Imperial Germany arguably started as weak, divided, and developing states. These states grew into middle powers and then great powers. German power collapsed after World War II. China in the 1970s was relatively weaker when compared to the United States and the Soviet Union back then. During the 1980s, China began to open up to the rest

of the world and increased in wealth and economic power over forty years. Today, China is a serious player in world politics even though it is undergoing some serious economic, environmental, demographic and social challenges.²¹ Still, China is a major leader of BRICS and seeks to alter American hegemony. This explains why we must always expect state competition for power. Russia also possesses this drive and its Ukraine War (2022) is an ongoing effort to alter the international status quo. The BRICS is a manifestation of a power struggle. Since states compete for power given the anarchical international structure, they must resort to self-help, undermining competitors to secure survival interests. The BRICS will continue to increase in size and scope. As a result, the international system transforms as power is distributed and redistributed. As more members join, the more powerful it will become. Since power is zero-sum, we can expect the continued decline of the United States.

21) See X. Meng, "The People's Republic of China's 40-year Demographic Dividend and Labor Supply: The Quantity Myth," *Asian Development Review*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2023): 111-144, W. Yang, Zhang, Z., Wang, Y., Deng, P., & Guo, L. "Impact of China's Provincial Government Debt on Economic Growth and Sustainable Development," *Sustainability* (Basel, Switzerland), Vol. 14, No. 3 (2022): 1474; and Y. An and Zhang, L., "The Thirst for Power: The Impacts of Water Availability on Electricity Generation in China," *The Energy Journal* (Cambridge, Mass.), Vol. 44, No. 2 (2023): 205-240.

RUSSIA'S BRICS PRESIDENCY AMID INCREASE IN MEMBERSHIP: WHAT LOOMS AHEAD?

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The BRICS transitioned from the Group of Five to the Group of Ten, but what seems to be the demonstration of power may be a challenge, not a reward. Russia's 2024 BRICS presidency is extremely important for the grouping's future with important decisions to be made on economic cooperation priorities and requirements for future newcomers. In this article, the author presents his view on the nature of the BRICS membership extension, and how it would affect the forum in years to come based on new BRICS members' positions analysis, and also defines what should be done immediately to secure the future of BRICS as an efficient and attractive cooperation mechanism.

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Keywords: BRICS, Russia, Global Governance,
Russia in BRICS, BRICS Governance.



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2023 turned out to be a very important year for the global governance. Two significant institutional pillars of the international system – the Group of Twenty (G20) and BRICS, decided to extend their membership – the African Union was invited to join the G20 with initially six countries (Argentina, Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Ethiopia) being approved to embark on the BRICS platform. Later, after the presidential elections the new Argentinian cabinet recalled the formal application to join the grouping. Invitation of new members representing the global majority reflects the recent trend towards greater representation of developing countries' interests on the global stage that also contributes to an increase in the overall legitimacy of the global governance system drifting away from the pro-Western, “unjust” model of international cooperation.

As a reasonable decision from the conceptual perspective, the enlargement of the BRICS membership is a mixed blessing. Transition from the “Group of Five” to the “Group of Ten” requires from the new players something above and beyond formal attendance at annual summits giving a picture of having a hand on global politics, but also full participation in activities of dozens of working mechanisms covering more than 30 spheres of mutual interest, and, ideally, further implementation of decisions made – otherwise, why bother? Won't the BRICS effectiveness as a cooperation mechanism become the first victim to make the good picture?

As one of the founding BRICS nations, Russia is a capable and experienced global governance player. However, the context of its 2024 BRICS presidency is as far from three past examples (2009, 2015 and 2020) as the sky above us all from the earth under our feet. The COVID-19 pandemic, growing tensions between Russia and the West, recent tragic terrorist act in Moscow, the BRICS transition from a compact club of one-minded nations to the Global South avantgarde – all of that make us think about the world as a totally different place. In the “old world” adherence to an established agenda was one of the efficiency indicators; the new rulebook of global politics is full of hints that considerations of prestige and loyalty should replace the first fiddle. It cannot but certainly would change the very nature of BRICS as a cooperation mechanism. The question is what to expect from such a dramatic shift.

BRICS Plus Five = Equals Ten?

Most of all, the very diverse nature of new membership should threaten the BRICS scholars. The old BRICS membership was based on a loose but at least easy-to-explain concept of “five continents = five nations” with Brazil representing “non-Western America”, South Africa – the African continent, Russia, India, and China – Greater Eurasia. With introduction of Saudi Arabia, Iran and the UAE the BRICS incorporates a new sub-region – the Middle East along with the proliferation of “African block” now comprising South Africa, Egypt, and Ethiopia. In the new configuration, the

Latin America remains underrepresented with only Brazil to having a word.

The BRICS is definitely transitions from a geography-based representation to a way more controversial alignment method based on situational considerations. Both Russia and China as the BRICS leaders are keen on enlarging their presence in Africa, with Russia acting more politically and China opening cashflow to the local economies; from that perspective, inclusion of Egypt and Ethiopia (and Saudi Arabia with the UAE to a large extent if we take them as leaders in the Arab world covering the north of the targeted continent) looks more or less logical. However, it does not give a clue how the BRICS as a grouping would win from enlargement besides “making a splash”.

Next comes the obvious challenge of bringing the new membership to the global governance routine. In 2006 the BRIC started from a high position with two founding countries (Russia, and China) to be permanent UN Security Council (UN SC) members, and a duet of Brazil-India to be seriously considered the primary candidates for inclusion in the UN SC contributing much to their estimated international prestige also empowered with economic prospects. Regardless of formal status, all four BRIC nations were considered experienced in shaping the international agenda. With that premise, dubious decision to invite South Africa (rather than Nigeria that back in time was considered a more suitable candidate based on growth assumptions¹) did not change much in overall decision-making capacity of the grouping with South Africa taking more proactive position of a gatekeeper to Africa later on.

Referring to the new BRICS members, we see that only Saudi Arabia combines both a respectable international position and considerable experience as a global governance actor. The Kingdom did well amid the 2020 pandemic being in position of the G20 host party. The Group of Twenty lagged behind in action that year causing wider criticism, but after all decided to suspend international debt service for the most vulnerable countries, and also demonstrated full support for the World Health Organization against the backdrop of accusations regarding the Organization’s involvement in China’s authorities attempts to conceal the real scope of the pandemic.² Decisions made in Riyadh were later on reenforced in the successive G20 summits in Rome in 2021 and on Bali in 2022 proving the country’s ability to have a firm hand on the process. No other new BRICS party can be compared with Saudi Arabia in terms of economic power.

1) V. Shubin “South Africa in the BRICS: Last but not Least,” *International Organisations Research Journal*, Vol. 10, No 2 (2015): p. 229-247 (in Russian and English). DOI: [10.17323/1996-7845-2015-02-229](https://doi.org/10.17323/1996-7845-2015-02-229)

2) Interfax, “US senator demands WHO CEO fired for ‘covering up’ China.” <https://www.interfax.ru/world/702315> (accessed 28 March 2024) (in Russian)

Egypt, Ethiopia, the UAE, and Iran look like a way less compelling candidates. Iran's international position is probably the most challenging among the new members with dozens of active sanctions being imposed since 1979. Noteworthy its long-lasting proxy conflict with Saudi Arabia with the two parties came to a decision to re-establish diplomatic ties only in March 2023 after years of hostilities.³ Another line of tensions is the Egypt – Ethiopia clash over the usage of Nile River water, with parties failing recently to achieve any tangible results through negotiation channels.⁴ Ethiopia itself is in danger of another round of internal conflict with the federal government, which is struggling to settle a final deal with the Tigray rebels.⁵ The UAE is more or less stable in any aspect including their external affairs, but when it comes to choosing sides, Riyadh tends to solidify with the Saudis that was set clear in the UAE decision to cease diplomatic ties with Tehran in 2016 (resumed in 2022).⁶

All these considerations are worrisome. The BRICS's unique ability to settle decisions based on consensus is something that even the G20 does not possess – we should recall the USA's exclusion from the G20 collective decision to promote the implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate made in 2019. It's hard to imagine how the former belligerents would decide on matters relating to regional security – the topic widely discussed on the BRICS margins for more than a decade; how the parties would reach agreements on implementation of the BRICS decisions on promotion of national currencies; how the BRICS agenda on ICT development would look like taking into consideration obvious gap between the parties in terms of digital economy development, etc. Instead of focusing on building in-block solidarity among already established and capable partners, all successive host parties starting with Russia would deal with inevitable growing internal fractures.

As for the 2024 Russia's presidency we shall talk about the BRICS plus Five, or the BRICS plus Four if we consider Saudi Arabia to be a reliable partner with whom all the BRICS "old" nations have established forum-type connections thanks to the G20. Recent additions look more like proponents of taking something from the grouping rather than giving.

3) Al Jazeera, "What Countries Have Normalised Relations with Iran after Saudi detente?" 24 September 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/24/what-countries-have-normalised-relations-with-iran-after-saudi-detente> (accessed 28 March 2024).

4) The National News, "Egypt says Deadline over for Ethiopia Dam Negotiations after Talks Fail," 19 December 2023. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/2023/12/19/egypt-ethiopia-gerd-nile-dam/> (accessed 28 March 2024)

5) A. Ross, "Ethiopia just ended one war. Is another one beginning?" *Reuters*, 8 August 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopia-just-ended-one-war-is-another-one-beginning-2023-08-08/> (accessed 28 March 2024).

6) Iranintl, "Trade Offers Economic Diplomacy Channel Between UAE And Iran," <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202309115082> (accessed 28 March 2024).

To Make 2024 a Success Story and Beyond

Whether we take the BRICS membership extension with a round of applause or with moderate caution, the decision made in Johannesburg in August 2023 is still a crisis factor for the BRICS. How the grouping would look like in years is hard to say for now, but it fully depends on how Moscow would spend the rest of the year.

The ultimate goal of Russia in the BRICS remains to consolidate the minds and actions of those ready to challenge the agenda proposed by the Group of Seven and re-translated through the G20 and other channels. If there had been no conflict in Europe, Moscow would have embarked more on providing material benefits, just like its Eastern counterpart. Still, under current circumstances newcomers shall ideally take the costs of new alignment at their expense without explicit proposal of immediate gratification. Enlarged BRICS under Russia's 2024 presidency is not a donation club, but a sweatshop, and the point here is to avoid taking extra obligations while receiving favors guaranteeing that Russia would never be isolated under the Western pressure.

This principle – receiving more than giving, shall be the guiding light for those responsible for a new BRICS Economic Cooperation strategy edition for another five-year period. Tremendous challenges of the future shall be treated as a shared burden, not a headache for more prosperous ones free-heartedly sharing the fortune with junior partners. The BRICS itself and Russia in particular do not need “partners of fortune” ready to advocate only when there is a payment check on the table, but those who willingly join the adventure of building something new, something just and reliable.

To make it so, Moscow shall cease the continuing process of the BRICS institutional proliferation and strongly focus on two things: 1) revitalization of previously established working mechanisms; and 2) introducing newcomers to the plethora of cooperation formats. In other words, work shall be guided by the concept of quality over quantity. With dozens of working groups, programs, platforms, forums, and other formats established in more than a decade of cooperation, the BRICS demonstrates great achievements in providing room for deeper bilateral partnerships with multilateral agreements rarely having their golden hour. The only major exception is the New Development Bank, but new circumstances require a new great deal.

Finally, the new round of membership enlargement shall be considered as a matter of distant future, at least no sooner than two other things would be realized. First, new members shall demonstrate adherence to the BRICS principles and prove that they are capable of making a good image on the global governance stage. Second, the introduction of new members shall be based on a strict set of requirements – not only expression of intent, but also macroeconomic soundness, global political

profile, internal stability and, ideally, non-involvement in regional political tensions – the list of requirements should smooth future rounds of membership extension and shorten inevitable shock of growth to the period in-between two successive national presidencies that usually equals one full year.

BRICS AND THE NEW COLD WAR: TOWARDS A MULTIPOLAR WORLD ORDER?

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BRICS, initially comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, has emerged as a significant force in the global economy. Its expansion to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has sparked debate on multipolarity. Dissatisfied nations are increasingly seeking alternative cooperation through BRICS, challenging Western global dominance to pursue a more equitable global system. In this context, BRICS is pivotal in shaping the contours of a new multipolar world order; redefining the geopolitical landscape, and signaling a paradigm shift in global governance.

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Keywords: BRICS, Global Hegemony, Global Competition, Multipolar Word Order, New Cold War.



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The Western-centered global order established after the Second World War drifted towards the center of a new Cold War. The world is transitioning from an old to a new global order. With the rise of China and the resurgence of Russia, the traditional dominance of the West over the global order has been challenged, as never before. During this period of fluid shifts in the balance of power, could the BRICS, led by China and Russia, open the door to the possibility of a multipolar international order? Can the international system, which has become more polarized and blocked by the new Cold War, point to a new era with international alliances such as the BRICS?

The rise of BRICS in the global arena has sparked debate regarding its impact on the existing world order. The BRICS grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa is critical in shaping a multipolar world order.¹ In particular, after the global financial crisis in the U.S. in 2008, the importance of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) in the global governance structure increased. As of 2024, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates joined the BRICS.² This recent expansion reignited the ongoing debate on BRICS and its multipolarity.

In this context, the BRICS is expected to serve as an alternative to global governance. It could allow member nations to collaborate in a different future, where their shared interests can advance globally. By utilizing their combined economic and political power, BRICS can create an option to promote cooperation among nations while simultaneously supporting stability and prosperity globally.

The ongoing global competitive struggle between the U.S. and China, as well as Russia's war in Ukraine, places BRICS expansion in a more global and ambitious context. In this context, BRICS is challenging the Western global order and demands a fair global order. On the other hand there is a risk of global stability, which could escalate into a new Cold War.

The BRICS countries have become significant players in the global economy. Their collective ascent has precipitated endeavors aimed at reforming existing international institutions. Of note, these efforts include the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB), which serves as a vehicle for providing alternative financing avenues to support their respective developmental agendas. Such efforts aim to reduce their dependence on Western-dominated financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

These initiatives and their increasing involvement in regional and global governance issues demonstrate BRICS's desire to challenge the existing power dynamics in

1) Naik Shraddha, "Rising BRICS: A Path To Multipolar World Reality?" (2018). DOI: [10.24411/2221-3279-2018-00008](https://doi.org/10.24411/2221-3279-2018-00008)

2) BBC News, "BRICS: What Is the Group and Which Countries Have Joined?" 1 February 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-66525474>

the international system. Moreover, the BRICS countries are strengthening their economic ties through increased trade and investment. Therefore, BRICS's demand for a multipolar global order is now felt much more in the global backdrop created by the new Cold War. The growing rapprochement of China and Russia based on BRICS and the new dynamics developed in the context of anti-U.S. opposition have become more visible with BRICS. While this new normal caused the new Cold War to deepen, it also made countries uncomfortable with the existing order to become a power focus with BRICS. BRICS promotes a multipolar world order and challenges the United States's and its allies' dominance. In this context, BRICS represents an essential force in shaping a new multipolar world order; however, it also faces various challenges and limitations in achieving its goals.

The New Cold War and the Expansion of BRICS

Founded in 2006, the BRICS held its first official summit in 2009. In 2010, BRICS grew with the accession of South Africa and reached a total of (10) members with its expansion in 2024. The total population of the newly expanded BRICS countries has reached approximately 3.5 billion, corresponding to roughly 44 percent of the world population. The total economic size has increased by about 30 trillion dollars, while the global financial share has risen to 28 percent. The daily oil production of BRICS members has increased to 45 million barrels and 45 percent of the global crude oil production.³

Given these figures, BRICS has become a reality that deserves global attention. The BRICS group is changing the world order by challenging the Western-dominated financial system and by offering an alternative framework.⁴ The BRICS group has set its sights on the limited but significant transformation of the current global order. This group seeks to challenge the long-standing dominance of the Western-led financial system and offers a viable alternative framework that supports economic growth and development in emerging market economies. BRICS countries intend to promote greater cooperation and coordination among themselves and other developing nations to achieve a more equitable and inclusive international economic system.

The emergence of BRICS has changed power dynamics and made it stand out as a potential counterweight to traditional international financial institutions. As an emerging 21st-century element, the BRICS grouping emphasizes the need for a multipolar world order and advocates for the expansion of the UN Security Council

3) AA, "BRICS Doubles Number of Member Countries, Expands Role in Global Economy and Energy," <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/uye-ulke-sayisini-iki-kat-artiran-brics-kuresel-ekonomi-ve-enerjideki-rolunu-buyutuyor/3100861>

4) I. Yu. Gerasimova, "BRICS in a Changing World," *Diplomaticheskaja Sluzhba* (Diplomatic Service) (2022): p. 420-428. DOI: [10.33920/vne-01-2206-01](https://doi.org/10.33920/vne-01-2206-01)

and reforms in international financial institutions. With the emergence of a "new bipolarity" between the U.S. and China and the continued influence of Russia, the concept of multipolarity has gained traction.⁵ The global order is transforming towards multipolarity, brought about by the emergence of new global powers such as China, India, and Brazil, and Russia's increasing influence due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

In today's world, power is no longer solely concentrated among Western powers. The distribution of resources is not centralized; instead, they are spread across various centers. This has allowed countries, such as China and Russia, to gain significant influence on the global stage, posing a challenge to the existing world order. The concept of multipolarity is gaining traction in understanding and navigating this new global landscape.

The deepening trade wars between the U.S. and China, especially after 2018, have drawn global order into a new Cold War. The deepening of the U.S.'s efforts to reorganize its allies with the Biden era has led to a unique Cold War-like situation and the re-emergence of diplomatic approaches, such as blocking and risk aversion, among countries.

In today's world, the rivalry between the United States and China has become increasingly important in the geopolitical climate. These two superpowers are engaged in a complex, multifaceted rivalry resembling a new Cold War. Both countries strive to use global trade routes as "geopolitical tools" to enhance their interests and deepen their influence. The primary battleground of this rivalry is the economic front, with both countries vying for dominance in various sectors such as technology, finance, and trade. The consequences of this competition are global and affect not only the two countries, but also their allies and trading partners.

In this context, initiatives such as China's Belt and Road Initiative and the IMEC (India Middle East Corridor), which the U.S. has recently tried to project, are becoming geopolitical instruments for the new Cold War. The G20 summit saw the announcement of the IMEC initiative, which was significant in restructuring the global position of the BRICS and G20.

As John Mearsheimer states in his book *The Great Delusion*, "American leaders cannot know China's future intentions with certainty..."⁶ The mentioned competition signifies an unpredictable future, while according to the U.S. National Security Strategy Papers, China and Russia are seen as "revisionist powers," posing a challenge to the United States. These documents accuse China and Russia of building a world

5) Denis Andreevich Degterev, "Multipolar World Order: Old Myths and New Realities," Vol. 19, No. 3 (2019): p. 404-419. doi: [10.22363/2313-0660-2019-19-3-404-419](https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2019-19-3-404-419)

6) John J. Mearsheimer, *Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (Yale University Press, 2018). <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv5cgb1w>

that is antithetical to American values and also state that China is trying to push the U.S. out of the Indo-Pacific region.⁷

This approach, frequently mentioned by the U.S. and now perceived as a Chinese threat, has resulted in the widespread use of metaphors such as the "Thucydides Trap." Graham Allison argues that war between a rising and established power is likely "when power relations come into balance".⁸ The conflict between the United States and China is no longer a traditional war but rather a prolonged irregular warfare in which both sides aim to exhaust the other. This irregular warfare led to the emergence of the Hybrid Cold War.⁹

BRICS and Multipolar Global Order

When we examine the primary energy and trade routes across the globe, it becomes apparent that new BRICS members are of immense significance. Moreover, it is common knowledge that as many as 40 other countries are interested in joining the BRICS.¹⁰ Of these, 23 had already expressed a desire to become a part of this group. At the last BRICS summit in South Africa, where BRICS decided to expand, China and Russia's discussions on the multipolar world once again left their mark on the agenda. Although India has a non-aligned position, it supports the BRICS agenda and has not developed rhetoric against the multipolar world discourse that has emerged with the expansion.

Whether this expansion will pave the way for a de-dollarization-like process is debatable. Still, it is known that Russia, in particular is inclined to use national currencies in trade and encourage other countries to do the same.¹¹ Still, BRICS shows the Global South's tendency to participate more in the current global order and to have a say. Although the coordination of BRICS and communication among its members are not at the desired level as of the current period, it is evident that the general demand of China and Russia, which constitute the center of gravity, is a

7) White House, "National Security Strategy," 2022. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

8) Graham Allison, "Destined for War: Can China and the United States Escape Thucydides' Trap?" *The Atlantic*, 21 June 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/united-states-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/>

9) Hüseyin Korkmaz and İdris Turan, "Analysis of the Competition Between China and the US in the 21st Century from the Perspective of the Concept of Hybrid Cold War," *Anadolu University Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (29 June 2021): p. 367-90. <https://doi.org/10.18037/ausbd.959232>

10) Reuters, "What Is BRICS, Which Countries Want to Join and Why?" 22 August 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/what-is-brics-who-are-its-members-2023-08-21/>

11) Reuters, "Russia Finance Minister says in talks with China on Yuan Loans," 26 February 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/currencies/russia-finance-minister-says-talks-with-china-yuan-loans-2024-02-26/>

"multipolar global order." These countries have often expressed this demand.¹² China supports the centralized position of the UN, but wants it to be more functional.

BRICS's economic growth and cooperation have the potential to reshape global governance and challenge global dominance in the United States.¹³ The formation of institutions such as the New Development Bank has led to further clarification of the trend and its forward-looking ambition. While there is little evidence that BRICS intends to overhaul the existing global order, it is poised to play a vital role in reforming the global financial system and shaping the new development agenda. Some even see the BRICS as a balancing coalition in the financial world.¹⁴ The expansion of BRICS membership and development of a new financial system have accelerated the emergence of a multipolar world order.¹⁵

However, the extent to which BRICS can assume a global leadership role depends on addressing the internal fragilities and conflicting interests.¹⁶ BRICS countries play a central role in the transition to multipolarity in the global system, as they represent some of the world's most promising and dynamic economies and the collective leaders of the Global South. However, it is worth noting that China, Russia, and India have different visions within this group. Countries such as India oppose BRICS as a geopolitical instrument in the struggle for global competitiveness.

The global order faces a complex and multifaceted organic crisis, resulting in a global interregnum.¹⁷ This crisis is characterized by a wide range of ecological, social, economic, and political challenges that are interconnected and often mutually reinforcing. The key issues driving this crisis include climate change, environmental degradation, social inequality, political instability, and economic uncertainty. The interregnum we are experiencing is marked by uncertainty and unpredictability as old systems and structures break down, while new ones struggle to emerge. China envisioned that BRICS countries could play a complementary role in addressing what it perceives as a "problematic" global order. Notably, BRICS, seen as an alternative to existing international forums such as the G20, has become increasingly controversial.

12) Al Jazeera, "Russia's Putin and China's Xi Denounce US 'Interference'," *Al Jazeera*, 8 February 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/8/russias-putin-and-chinas-xi-denounce-us-interference>

13) Mihaela Papa, "BRICS' Pursuit of Multipolarity: Response in the United States," *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 7 (2014): p. 363–80. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40647-014-0022-2>

14) Li Xing, "The International Political Economy of the BRICS in a Changing World Order: Attitudes and Actualities," (2019): p. 1–17. DOI: [10.4324/9780429507946-1](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429507946-1)

15) Sung Hoon Jeh, "Russia-Ukraine War and the Changing World Order," *Gugje ji'yeog yeon'gu - han'gug oe'gug'eo daehag'gyo*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2023): p. 1–32. DOI: [10.18327/jias.2023.1.27.1.1](https://doi.org/10.18327/jias.2023.1.27.1.1)

16) Qobo Mzukisi and Soko Mills, "The Rise of Emerging Powers in the Global Development Finance Architecture: the Case of the BRICS and the New Development Bank," *South African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2015): p. 277–288. DOI: [10.1080/10220461.2015.1089785](https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2015.1089785)

17) Hüseyin Korkmaz, *Global Organic Crisis and the New Cold War* (Nobel Publications, 2021) (in Turkish).

Conclusions

China and Russia aim for a multipolar global order to build on existing institutions and to provide a platform for others to have a voice. The BRICS alliance also supports the idea of a multipolar world order at the discursive level and challenges the global dominance of the United States and its allies. While there are challenges and limitations in achieving these goals, BRICS represents a significant force in shaping the new multipolar world order. Although the grouping has coordination problems, the trend towards a multipolar global order is evident.

The U.S. and Western-centered structure containment of China has led to a new global normal, which aligns countries such as China and Russia in an intense anti-Western position. The economic size of the enlarged BRICS region are significant developments. While BRICS is not very prominent in this transitional phase and the synchronization among its members is currently low, it is a crucial key to the imagination of a multipolar global order in the future.

BRICS faces the challenge of maintaining a balance between non-alignment and multipolarity. Countries such as India have mainly contributed to this balance through neutral foreign policy. The U.S. is trying to deepen its intensified "containment strategy" and labeling China as a "strategic threat." The U.S. also attempted to strengthen its alliances and partners in this effort. China and Russia aimed to break through this siege by establishing a multipolar international system at the discursive level. The opposing positions of the West and mechanisms such as BRICS and SCO create a new Cold War-like environment.

The traditional balance of power in the world is changing, and new alliances have been formed. The BRICS countries are gaining economic and political influence. While the intellectual, economic, and institutional capacity to build a multipolar world is yet to emerge fully, this trend is becoming increasingly evident.

ESTABLISHING BRICS

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The international environment today is characterized by increasing threats to the international security environment due to globalization and increased competition, which is a natural consequence of the economic approach between countries. While emerging markets and opportunities are strengthened by cooperation, crises are mitigated by such collaborations. Cooperation models that increase gains and partially mitigate losses are a subject that countries are working on. Various international organizations emerge as a result of these efforts. BRICS is an organization that aims to compete with the countries of the region by using the manpower, underground riches and scientific knowledge of the countries of the region and to increase its regional and global influence. In this article, we will look at the brief history of BRICS and evaluate its advantages and risks.

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Keywords: BRICS, Risk Management, Advantages of International Cooperation, International Competition, Enlargement of BRICS.



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BRICS is a formation that offers an alternative to the global system with its constantly developing and expanding structure in terms of economy and geography since its establishment. The name "BRIC" was introduced to the literature by Jim O'Neill years before the emergence of the organization. It was formed with the initials of four rapidly developing countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China). While discussing the power of these countries, Brazil, Russia, India, and China, to establish an alternative eastern bloc based on development, the leadership of the world's dominant economic system until 2050 has been analyzed. The fact that these four countries account for a quarter of the world's surface and more than forty percent of the planet's population is a point taken into account in these analyses. Before the 2008 crisis, the GDP growth of these countries ranged from 5 to 13 percent per year.

Moreover, the BRIC countries characterize the key to their rapid development as the abundance of energy resources and mineral raw materials in Russia, agricultural products and mineral reserves in Brazil, and the abundance of cheap labor and its contribution to production in China and India. The first step in transforming the idea of "BRIC" into an organization was gathering the leaders of the four countries at the United Nations meeting in the United States in 2006, where they agreed to work together in many areas. A separate dialog between the heads of state and heads of government of the BRIC countries at the G-8 conference in Japan in 2008 followed this. Afterward, they signed a number of fundamental agreements on a number of important economic issues. On 16 June 2009, the four leaders met in Yekaterinburg, Russia. The countries were represented by Dmitry Medvedev (Russia), Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (Brazil), Manmohan Singh (India) and Hu Jintao (China).

It is not a coincidence that the pronunciation of the word BRIC matches the English word "Brick". In English, the word "Brick" is used in the sense of "mudbrick". On the other hand, BRIC gives the message of being the bricks, yeast and mudbrick of the system to offer an alternative direction and path for growth, contribution to the world economy, the future of stock markets, and diversification of production.

In the early 2000s, it was not assumed that the BRIC countries would form some kind of economic bloc or formal trade union like the European Union. However, the process has evolved towards an "economic alliance" between Brazil, Russia, India and China. Thus, there are signs that their growing economic power is translating into greater geopolitical influence. This is the basic idea behind BRIC's expansion. Hence, the accession of South Africa in 2011. On 12 April 2011, leaders gathered in China and announced the accession of South Africa. The name of the organization was updated as BRICS. With the accession of South Africa, BRICS now has 42 percent of the world's population.

Optimistic calculations suggest that by 2040, the combined GDP of the G-7, which includes the U.S., Japan, Germany, the UK, Italy, France, the UK, Italy, France and

Canada, will be below that of the BRICS countries.

The 2012 BRICS meeting was held in Delhi, India with the theme "BRICS Partnership for Global Stability, Security and Prosperity". One of the most important issues at this meeting was Iran and Syria. It was recommended that Syria's territorial integrity be preserved and be restored as soon as possible. Iran, on the other hand, was emphasized as an important actor in the region and it was emphasized that the positions taken against Tehran were not beneficial. All leaders also discussed the possibility of creating a joint development bank. At the summit, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev spoke about his vision of the strategic goal of BRICS. According to the Russian leader, this is "the gradual transformation of BRICS into a full-fledged mechanism of interaction on the most important issues of the world economy and politics." The idea of creating a new Development Bank implies, first of all, the gradual abandonment of the euro and the dollar in payments between countries and provides for the process of strengthening national currencies.

The sixth BRICS summit was held in Fortaleza, Brazil in 2014 under the theme "Inclusive Growth: Sustainable Solutions". At the end of this meeting, an agreement was signed on establishing the New Development Bank and creating a contingent foreign exchange reserve pool. The authorized capital of the Development Bank was set at 100 billion dollars.¹ It was agreed that the contribution to the Development Bank would be calculated according to the size of the countries.

The seventh BRICS summit was held in Ufa, Russia with the theme "BRICS Partnership - a powerful factor in global development". The summit addressed the issues of Iran and Ukraine. On Moscow's initiative, the BRICS Economic Partnership Strategy until 2020 was adopted, which speaks about the expansion of interaction between states both in socio-economic terms and in foreign policy. The Ufa Declaration and Action Plan were signed at the summit, which set the course for the transition to trade in national currencies within the BRICS framework. One can indeed argue that the Ufa summit was a turning point. The NDB (New Development Bank) was established by a joint decision of the BRICS.

The ninth BRICS summit was held in China under the theme "BRICS: Strengthening Partnership for a Bright Future". China emphasized the concept of "BRICS plus" announced by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in early 2017, with the intention to attempt to develop BRICS as a global association. Countries such as Egypt, Mexico, Guinea, Thailand and Tajikistan were invited to the Xiamen Summit in the BRICS+ format.

1) "Agreement on the New Development Bank," University of Toronto – BRICS Information Centre.
<http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/140715-bank.html>

Moscow, Russia hosted the twelfth BRICS summit on 17 October 2020. The BRICS summit was held via video conference for the first time in history. The summit's theme was "BRICS Partnership in the Interests of Global Stability, Shared Security and Innovative Growth". One of the important discussions at the summit was to review current issues on the international agenda and compare positions on the upcoming G20 summit on 21 – 22 November 2020. At the end of the summit, the five states adopted the Moscow Declaration, as well as the BRICS Economic Partnership Strategy until 2025 and the BRICS Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

South Africa hosted the 15th BRICS summit in Johannesburg. The most important decision of the summit was the invitation of Saudi Arabia, Argentina, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Egypt, and Ethiopia to BRICS membership.

BRICS Expands Amid Risks

Initiated by Brazil, Russia, India and China, the organization covers 41 percent of the world's population with the participation of 10 countries as of 2040. Moreover, its GDP has reached 56 trillion dollars. China, Russia, India, Brazil, and South Africa have developed a specific algorithm of activities within the organization for fifteen years. They have gone a certain way to unify their positions and interests in the face of global challenges, create and implement common programs. Now, the adaptation of new members to this process and the value of their positions in the international arena may change the balance within BRICS. The organization, which was initially formed based on "alternative to the West, multipolarity", has recently started to evolve towards the "against the West" axis. It seems that hopes for a more emphatic, politicized opposition to the West have created cracks within the organization. Russia, China, and Iran can be categorized with certainty as countries ready to challenge U.S. hegemony. The majority, including India, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, the UAE, and Egypt, clearly favor a moderate approach, détente and compromise rather than escalating relations with the U.S. and the G7 group. The increasingly radical positions of the member states not only affect the common economic programs and joint activities within BRICS, but also lead to a change in the character and fundamental nature of BRICS. The main reason for the rapprochement of the BRICS countries was to create a new power capable of changing the global political-economic process in its favor.

One of the main common characteristics of BRICS member countries is their dependence on external demand, whether for traded goods or manufactured products. The export-oriented economic development model inherent in the BRICS countries (except India) is arguably self-defeating. Beijing has introduced a series of measures to balance external and domestic demand. As commodity exporters,

Brazil, Russia, and South Africa need to undertake economic diversification and structural transformation. On the other hand, structural imbalances accumulate in the economies of BRICS countries. Together with these imbalances, household incomes require significant investments in social innovations. China and India have rich experience in implementing these structural reforms. In the Russian Federation, however, making these structural changes and managing the process seems quite difficult in today's conditions. In general, BRICS countries have extreme income inequality, which is a source of socio-political instability that can hinder sustainable development in society. They should implement socially-oriented economic policies that will ensure fair distribution of income in society and reduce income inequality to socially acceptable levels.

In addition to the problems listed above, the future of BRICS is clouded by the problems that countries need to solve. For example, China's main economic problems are excessive production capacity and the creation of high-tech industries. The high debt of Chinese companies is an important factor. It creates macroeconomic risks for the sustainable growth of the Chinese economy. To successfully overcome these risks, state-owned companies need serious modernization—the dependence of the Chinese economy on loans. For several years, the Chinese government has been aiming to reduce the economy's dependence on credit and investment and move towards more sustainable growth based on consumption and services.

India is encountering high levels of poverty as the biggest problem. Analyses show that the situation has worsened with the uncontrolled growth of population and agriculture. Education is very poor, with a significant proportion of the population illiterate, and there is a need to expand the higher education system and improve its quality. The inefficiency of the national innovation system and the low level of investment in the R&D system require a significant increase in investment in education and innovation. On the one hand, India is the world leader in information technology services, accounting for \$60 billion in annual exports and employing more than 2.5 million people, while more than a third of India's population lives below the extreme poverty line.²

Conversely, Russia is facing trade and economic sanctions by the U.S. and its allies, as well as declining household incomes during the crisis years. The result is a decline in aggregate external and domestic demand. The economic sanctions imposed after the war in Ukraine have reduced Moscow's revenues. The balance of exports and imports has deteriorated. Socio-economic problems have become more palpable for households. Against this backdrop, it is argued that the Russian economy finds itself

2) Carl Dahlman and Anuja Utz, "India and the Knowledge Economy," World Bank Institute (Washington, 2005). <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/375181468041958316/pdf/329240India0Knowledge01not0external1.pdf>

in a stagflation trap. The tight monetary policy of the Bank of Russia is partially helping to overcome the crisis.

Brazil, with the greatest economic potential among Latin American countries, has been experiencing a deep recession in recent years. Data shows that the country's economy continued to contract for the fifth consecutive quarter. They believe that the country is facing the longest recession in the last hundred years. Household incomes are falling, it is difficult to find an exit in the face of inflation. All these processes are leading to a change of governments in Brazil and more radical individuals coming to power. The unemployment rate and the poverty rate have recently emerged as serious problems. In the past, Brazil's economy relied on the crops of its fertile soil as well as the metals and ores of its rich rocks. Failure to make the right investments and attempts to correct structural problems with daily political moves have caused serious cracks in the country's economy. On the other hand, the deterioration in the level of education is also a factor to be considered.

South Africa is one of the largest and most economically developed countries on the African continent. Until 2008, the Republic of South Africa maintained steady growth, but the situation worsened with the impact of the 2008-2009 global financial and economic crisis. The fall in commodity prices has also caused considerable damage to the country's economy. The leading sector of the South African economy is the mining and export of raw materials from minerals. South Africa is one of the world leaders in the production of gold, diamonds, platinum group metals and coal. Unacceptably high chronic unemployment, lack of education, corruption and poverty are among the problems the country needs to address urgently and rigorously.

Conclusions

The politicization and radicalization of BRICS, which aims to create an alternative ecosystem, has begun to disrupt its founding philosophy. Member countries need to be systematic, educated, law-based, sensitive to rights and freedoms, and meticulously address their structural problems. These structural problems blur the future of BRICS. The positions of the new member countries on global issues, their adaptation to BRICS and common economic practices should be carefully monitored. Supporting and implementing a common currency or trade in the countries' currencies is very important. Deep structural economic reforms within the member countries need to be implemented urgently. If the BRICS countries can successfully resolve the above issues, they have a chance to move on a sustainable growth trajectory.

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This special issue offers a concise exploration of BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—highlighting its journey from an acronym to a significant entity in global economics and politics. It examines the coalition's evolution, achievements, and challenges, alongside its strategic future directions. Despite varied backgrounds, BRICS nations have united to seek a louder voice in international affairs, advocating for inclusivity and equity. Contributions from leading scholars provide insights into BRICS's impact on global governance and its potential paths forward. This issue aims to deepen understanding of BRICS's role in shaping a more equitable global order, presenting a comprehensive view of its past, present, and speculative future in a globalized world.



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