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BRIC by BRIC:  
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Connected World



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# BRICS Expansion: Economic Cooperation and Implications

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Skeptics and critics have not eased their attacks on the BRICS over the past 15 years since the group's first summit in 2009. Detractors argued that the BRICS represented a China-led, anti-West bloc, yet was simultaneously toothless.<sup>1</sup> They denied the significance of the BRICS, for it lacked a clear vision or substantive actions, as members had divergent ideologies and interests. However, 2024 witnessed the expansion of the group, adding five more members: Egypt, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The BRICS Plus now represents 45% of the world's population, 25% of global trade, 40% of global oil production, and 28% of the global GDP (in nominal exchange terms, or more than one third of global GDP in PPP terms).<sup>2</sup> In addition, 40 countries expressed interest in joining the BRICS Plus and over 20 countries have actively applied to join the group.<sup>3</sup> That BRICS Plus has attracted broad interest from the Global South signifies its significance and potential. While the BRICS Plus is often portrayed as an anti-West (or anti-North) group that aims to challenge the Western world order, the collective group does not see itself as a rival to the West/North. Rather, the BRICS Plus positions itself as a contributor to a more inclusive and multilateral global system that addresses the needs, interests, and aspirations of the Global South. Indeed, the BRICS Plus group actively engages with G7 countries, but the bloc also advocates for a more inclusive governance system where the Global South's interests are better served.

- <sup>1</sup> Howard Chua-Eoan, "China Wants to Expand the BRICS but the Group Is More and More Artificial," *Bloomberg*, August 18, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2023-08-18/china-wants-to-expand-the-brics-but-the-group-is-more-and-more-artificial-llgkx21o>.
- <sup>2</sup> "World Bank Open Data," World Bank, accessed January 27, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/>; Gregory Zerzan, "Ignoring BRICS Expansion Threatens America's Economic Security," *Newsweek*, January 12, 2024, <https://www.newsweek.com/ignoring-brics-expansion-threatens-americas-economic-security-opinion-1859634>.
- <sup>3</sup> "What Is BRICS, Which Countries Want to Join and Why?," *Reuters*, August 21, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/what-is-brics-who-are-its-members-2023-08-21/>; Ruxandra Iordache, "Emerging Economies Group BRICS Invites 6 New Members, Including Saudi Arabia and Iran," *CNBC*, August 24, 2023, <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/08/24/emerging-markets-group-brics-invites-6-new-members-including-saudi-arabia-and-iran.html>.

What unites the BRICS Plus members, who have diverse political and economic configurations, is a shared interest in stability, sustainable development, and the realization of a collaborative multilateral system. The areas where BRICS Plus countries can cooperate are multifaceted, and include economics, social and cultural exchanges, technology, sustainable development, and security. Amongst all these areas, economic cooperation will likely lay the foundation and generate the most direct and immediate benefits for all member countries.

Intra-BRICS trade increased by 56% between 2017 and 2022 to reach 614.8 billion USD as of 2022.<sup>4</sup> After the imposition of Western sanctions on Russia after the breakout of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Russia's trade with BRICS countries surged. China's exports of industrial machinery, consumer electronics, and automobiles have increased significantly while Russia's exports of oil and gas to China and India also grew noticeably. With the addition of major oil producing countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, and nations like Egypt that have a strategic geographic location as well as critical transport infrastructure, trade among BRICS Plus countries continued to grow. It is reasonable to project that, given the large population, growing middle class, and widening market within the bloc, intra-BRICS Plus trade will see further growth.

While currently there is no BRICS Plus free trade deal, members are working on establishing common standards for products, optimizing business methods, and removing barriers to market entry to facilitate trade. It is worth noting that BRICS Plus countries could leverage their connections with other free trade blocs they belong to. India plays a lead role in the South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA); Russia has common trade space within the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU); South Africa participates in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA); Brazil is a member of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR); and China takes part in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). It is conceivable that the BRICS Plus might capitalize on these various connections to synergize trade deals and arrangements.

In tandem with trade growth, intra-BRICS investment has increased steadily since the 2010s. Total inward foreign direct investment (FDI) stock between BRICS countries grew from 27 billion USD in 2010 to 167 billion USD in 2020, a six-fold increase.<sup>5</sup> Much of this investment

4 Samantha Arias, "Intra-BRICS Trade Increased by 56% in 2017-2022: Media," *Sputnik Africa*, November 4, 2023, <https://en.sputniknews.africa/20231104/intra-brics-trade-increased-by-56-in-2017-2022-reports-1063305496.html>; "Gross Trade Flows within BRICS Countries and Other Selected Countries 2022," Statista, accessed August 31, 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1404108/brics-trade-turnover-by-country/#statisticContainer>.

5 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *BRICS Investment Report*, April 4, 2023, <https://unctad.org/publication/brics-investment-report>.

flowed to important sectors, including natural resources, infrastructure, energy, technology, and manufacturing. These investments aimed to enhance economic ties, foster development, and improve cooperation among the member nations. As the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) pointed out, within BRICS, investment in manufacturing could be further strengthened, especially in processing activities to increase value added amongst member countries, as well as in complementary segments along the value chains of sectors such as renewable energy.<sup>6</sup> Further, BRICS established a Task Force on Public-Private Partnerships and Infrastructure to promote investment in infrastructure. BRICS countries have actively coordinated their policies to provide a more favorable environment for foreign investment. They have also adopted several policy initiatives to strengthen cooperation promoting intra-group investment, which covered some key policy areas including investment facilitation, climate change, and sustainable development. From the Outlines for BRICS Investment Facilitation in 2017 to the most recent BRICS Initiative on Trade and Investment for Sustainable Development passed in 2022, the BRICS countries had kept on taking collective moves to strengthen investment cooperation to build infrastructure, promote digital economy, and improve the resilience and stability of global and regional supply chains.

The construction of an alternative financing and payment system looms at the forefront of the BRICS agenda. The current Bretton Woods financial system is dominated by the US dollar and operated by the Western-led International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. For decades, the World Bank had neglected infrastructure funding in favor of poverty relief and "good governance," whilst the IMF provided emerging market lending, but demanded counterproductive, one-size-fits-all structural adjustments for recipient countries. The BRICS Bank, or the New Development Bank (NDB) was established in 2015 to bridge the gap in infrastructure and development financing. It has approved more than 30 billion USD of loans for projects like water and transport infrastructure since its launch.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the five founding members, the NDB welcomed four new members in 2021, including Bangladesh, Uruguay, Egypt, and the UAE.

The NDB provides much-needed infrastructure and development financing and makes several contributions to the current multilateral development bank (MDB) system. First, the NDB has issued local

6 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *BRICS*.

7 Rachel Savage and Brenda Goh, "'BRICS Bank' Looks to Local Currencies as Russia Sanctions Bite," *Reuters*, August 10, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/brics-bank-looks-local-currencies-russia-sanctions-bite-2023-08-10/>.

currency bonds on behalf of their member states. The first Chinese RMB bond worth 3 billion CNY (450 million USD) was issued in China's onshore interbank bond market in 2016.<sup>8</sup> The NDB issued another 8.5 billion CNY worth of Panda bonds in May 2023, the largest CNY bond issuance to date.<sup>9</sup> In August 2023, the NDB issued 1.5 billion ZAR bonds, which are oversubscribed, attracting 2.67 billion South African rand worth of bids. The NDB aims to increase local currency lending to 30% of total lending by 2026. As of Q1 2023, local currency lending accounted for 22% of its total lending. It should not be understated how important it was to boost local currency financing.<sup>10</sup> For decades, developing countries have suffered from the "original sin," that is, they were not able to borrow in their local currencies on reasonable terms, as their currencies have been deemed less trustworthy by international investors. This resulted in 70-85% of the debt of the emerging and low-income countries being foreign currency debt.<sup>11</sup> Having to borrow foreign currency significantly hamstrung developing nations' capacity to take on and service debt, and exposed them to liquidity and credit risks. The NDB's lending has helped enhance member countries' external financing capacity and dilute the dollar dominance in international lending.

8 Hongying Wang, "The New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank: China's Ambiguous Approach to Global Financial Governance," *Development and Change* 50, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 221-44, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12473>.

9 "New Development Bank Issues 8.5 Billion Yuan Bonds at China Interbank Bond Market," *Global Times*, May 30, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202305/1291620.shtml>.

10 Rachel Savage, "BRICS Bank' Issues First South African Rand Bonds," *Reuters*, August 16, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/brics-bank-issues-first-south-african-rand-bonds-2023-08-16/>.

11 Ruurd Brouwer, "It's the Currency, Stupid," *Financial Times*, January 18, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/ef56e83b-4e6c-41b9-b404-ab84da34776f>.

12 Wang, "The New Development Bank."

13 Nils Adler, "Can BRICS Create a New World Order?," *Al Jazeera*, August 22, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/8/22/can-brics-create-a-new-world-order>; David Lawder, "US Faces Pushback on Plan to Bolster IMF Funding Without Shareholding Changes," *Reuters*, October 6, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-faces-pushback-plan-bolster-imf-funding-without-shareholding-changes-2023-10-06/>.

Second, the NDB adopts a different governance structure, where the initial subscribed capital and voting power is shared equally by members. The NDB's Articles of Agreement stipulate that ordinary matters are to be decided by a simple majority, while key decisions require "an affirmative vote by four of the founding members concurrent with two thirds of the total voting power."<sup>12</sup>

In such a framework, no single country has the veto power. This contrasts starkly with the IMF where the United States alone has a 16.5% share of the voting power and the right to veto, whereas BRICS countries combined have 15% of the voting share.<sup>13</sup>

Third, the IMF and the World Bank insist on Western-centric "best practices" and impose one-size-fits-all structural adjustment measures that feature privatization, liberalization, and austerity policies. These policies often worsen recipient countries' economies and cripple their public services and social programs without improving their ability to pay the debt, while ensuring international investors are first in line to receive payments or acquire fire-sale assets.

By contrast, the NDB brands itself as a borrower-led bank. It respects the sovereignty of borrowing countries and does not impose policy changes or attach political strings. It works with recipient governments and provides mostly sovereign and sovereign-guaranteed loans, which have the advantage of reducing default risks and giving borrower governments more influence in choosing which projects to fund. The NDB emphasizes the importance of using and strengthening existent country systems, the legal framework in the borrowing countries, for social and environmental protection. It also utilizes local financing resources and expertise by signing agreements and working with domestic development and commercial banks. These practices allow the NDB to address better the needs of the recipient countries and work more effectively with them. As NDB Vice President Leslie Maasdorp stated, soon after the founding of the NDB, "Beyond drawing on best practices, the NDB will aim, in a modest way, to build what is described in our founding principles as 'next practices.'"<sup>14</sup>

The rising influences of alternative MDBs, such as the NDB and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), have also led the Bretton Woods institutions to reexamine their own practices and emulate, to some degree, these alternative MDBs. The United States' Build Back Better (BBB) initiative and the European Union's Global Gateway initiative started to pick up the long-ignored infrastructure investment opportunity in the Global South. In addition, the US government recently pledged to bolster the financing capacity of the IMF and World Bank. As US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan claimed, "Our IMF and World Bank proposals will generate nearly 50 billion USD in lending for middle income and poor countries from the United States alone. And because our expectation is that our allies and partners will also contribute, we see these proposals ultimately leveraging over 200 billion USD."<sup>15</sup> The next step for the Bretton Woods institutions is to meaningfully increase the shares and voting powers of the developing South. A true multilateral system in today's world requires the inclusion of the Global South, not only as participants, but as partners.

The NDB has also established the BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism (BICM) with various national development banks to facilitate payments in local currencies within the bloc. BRICS Pay, a multi-currency digital payments system, enables payment clearing among local

<sup>14</sup> Wang, "The New Development Bank."

<sup>15</sup> "BRICS Is Doubling Its Membership. Is the Bloc a New Rival for the G7?," *Atlantic Council*, November 29, 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/experts-react/brics-is-doubling-its-membership-is-the-bloc-a-new-rival-for-the-g7/>.

currencies and eliminates the need for "vehicle currencies," such as the dollar or the euro, in transactions among member countries.

Lastly, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement provides liquidity support to member countries facing short-term balance-of-payment pressures or exchange rate volatilities. All this helps lay the foundation for an alternative regional financial architecture.

Some observers argue that building a true alternative financial system requires a common BRICS Plus currency to displace the US dollar, but they ridicule the possibility of dethroning the US dollar, which still accounts for 60% of international reserves and over 80% of international payments.<sup>16</sup> However, while dollar dominance will not disappear overnight, its status is gradually eroding. More importantly, the BRICS Plus group does not need a common currency, but could still take measured and effective steps to reduce their reliance on the US dollar. First, efforts have been made to increase local currency financing, like local currency lending and bond issuance by the NDB, as discussed above. Second, BRICS Plus members have been increasingly using local currencies for trade. Since 2018, the share of Russia's dollar-invoiced exports to the other BRICS economies has fallen from 85% to 36%.<sup>17</sup> Russia has accepted Chinese RMB and UAE dirhams in trades from India in some of its oil transactions. China and Brazil traded using the RMB for denomination, settlement, and financing, and directly exchanged RMB for reals. India and Saudi Arabia are mulling over rupee-riyal trade. The benefits of using local currencies in bilateral trade cannot be understated. It helps lower transaction costs and exchange rate volatility, eases the balance-of-payments constraint associated with dollar funding, and enables trade between countries who could be excluded from the dollar payment system.

There are limitations to the use of local currency when trade expands beyond the bilateral level, therefore developing a common vehicle currency for trade would be the next step for the BRICS Plus group. It would be entirely feasible to develop a common currency, parallel to but not substitutable for each country's own currency, for intra-group trade. The BRICS Plus currency could be created based on a basket of currencies from all member countries, weighted by their respective share of trade. Each country can convert its currencies at a certain

<sup>16</sup> Francesco Guerrera, "Why the Dollar Keeps Winning in the Global Economy," *Reuters*, March 1, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/breakingviews/global-markets-breakingviews-2023-02-28/>.

<sup>17</sup> Hippolyte Fofack, "Decolonizing Global Finance," *Project Syndicate*, February 17, 2023, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/making-global-monetary-system-work-for-global-south-by-hippolyte-fofack-2023-02>.



exchange rate to the BRICS Plus currency to settle trade balances. Only central banks would be allowed to trade the common currency for clearing purposes, to prevent manipulation of the common currency by private investors. For countries that run trade surpluses and accumulate the BRICS Plus currency, their exchange rates would be revaluated and they should be incentivized to increase their imports within a set period of time before penalty interest payments are imposed on their common currency reserves. Like Keynes' "bancor" plan,<sup>18</sup> this adjustment mechanism would help prevent significant trade imbalances and reserve buildup.

The expansion of the BRICS is a watershed for the global economy. The West/North-dominant international financial system has failed to provide sufficient financing to combat climate change and support sustainable development.<sup>19</sup> It has produced recurring financial crises, widened economic and social polarization, and intensified geopolitical tensions. The BRICS Plus emerged to advance South-South cooperation on trade, finance, investment, supply chain, financial safety, and development, and to engage with the Global North with greater agency and power. The addition of the five new members, with more likely to come, signals that the BRICS Plus is acquiring more resources, undertaking more cooperative programs, and accumulating more influence. There is no doubt that the group will continue to make meaningful contributions to rebalancing the global economic order and to promote Southern-led development in a sustainable and inclusive manner.

18 Massimo Amato and Luca Fantacci, "Back to Which Bretton Woods? Liquidity and Clearing as Alternative Principles for Reforming International Money," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 38, no. 6 (2014): 1431–52, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24694968>.

19 Fofack, "Decolonizing."

# The Red Sea Economic Belt Emerges from BRICS Plus

Digby James Wren



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The newly inaugurated BRICS Plus mechanism reflects not only the expansive attraction of multipolarity for developing economies,<sup>1</sup> but also the wisdom of the China-brokered rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the utility of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and Russian energy cooperation with OPEC+. While an unstable Argentina has reverted to the US camp and rejected BRICS Plus membership, the new BRICS Plus formulation consolidates regional connectivity across the Red Sea and provides new impetus to developing economies to wrest control from the destabilizing grip of a diminished US over regional security, diplomacy, and trade.

Washington's foreign policy elites have begun articulating the notion that the present and profound instability across the oceans and continents of the globe is directly attributable to the United States' attempt to regain global military predominance, political primacy, and economic pre-eminence in the wake of the disastrous "War on Terror."

Washington's profound involvement in Ukraine and Israel and its malicious narratives about China and Russia are glaringly at odds with the realities of Africa.<sup>2</sup> However, Washington's failures in the Red Sea region, which exacerbated factional frictions and ignited frequent regional conflicts, have further exposed US foreign policy biases, critically constraining its diplomatic influence and creating a power vacuum in the Red Sea region.

1 Joseph Nye, Liz Economy, and David Shambaugh, "Is China's Soft Power Strategy Working," *China Power*, February 27, 2016, <https://chinapower.csis.org/is-chinas-soft-power-strategy-working/>.

2 "The World Bank in Africa," World Bank, last modified October 5, 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/overview>.

In March 2023, the Biden administration exacerbated tensions in Sudan, ostensibly over a new Russian naval base on the Red Sea, and unleashed a civil conflict that joined the litany of regional conflicts in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen. Following the devastating US and NATO-led interventions, China has seized more opportunities for mediation in collaboration with the Arab League, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Russia, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel. The withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the siege of Gaza,<sup>3</sup> and the Saudi Arabia-Iran détente have made China gradually displace the US as the preferred mediator in Afro-Eurasia.

Moreover, the potential emergence of a "Red Sea Economic Belt," shaped by the new BRICS Plus formulation, consolidates the gains from China's development projects manifested in the BRI, such as railways, ports, and highways. This also supports the expansion of trade and investment ties within and between the African Union (AU), Arab League, Iran, Russia, Türkiye, and other regional actors, enhancing their collective access to global markets. The inclusion of Egypt and Ethiopia in BRICS Plus coincided with reduced friction over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile and the simmering tensions in Sudan. President Abdel Fattah al Sisi's recent electoral victory grants a six-year window for Egypt to leverage BRICS Plus in catalyzing economic development stakeholders to form a "Red Sea Economic Belt." It also coincides with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Ethiopia agreeing on a new investment deal as interest grows in the Horn of Africa, particularly in Sudan and Somalia's sea waters and ports.<sup>4</sup>

*"An important priority for BRICS interaction is the creation of new sustainable and safe transport routes... We believe that the time has come to establish within the framework of BRICS a permanent commission on transport, which would deal not only with the North-South project, but also, in a broader sense, with the development of logistics and transport corridors."<sup>5</sup>*

—Vladimir Putin.

3 "Chinese FM Expounds on China's Position on Palestinian-Israeli Conflict," *Xinhua*, May 16, 2021, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/16/c\\_139948339.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/16/c_139948339.htm).

4 Ismail Osman, "BRICS and Ethiopia: A New Frontier in Geopolitical Tug-of-War," *Modern Diplomacy*, August 29, 2023, <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2023/08/29/brics-and-ethiopia-a-new-frontier-in-geopolitical-tug-of-war/>.

5 Ekaterina Blinova, "BRICS Security to Be Achieved Through New Logistics Routes," *Sputnik*, August 26, 2023, <https://en.sputniknews.africa/20230826/1061637894.html>.

- 6 "Iraq Wants 'Orderly' Withdrawal of 'Destabilizing' US Troops: PM," *The Cradle*, January 24, 2024, <https://new.thecradle.co/articles-id/18236>.
- 7 Jan Yunul, "Arab League Readmits Syria," *China Daily*, May 9, 2023, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202305/09/WS6459a868a310b6054fad1dc1.html>.
- 8 "World Reacts to US, UK Attacks on Houthi Targets in Yemen," *Aljazeera*, January 12, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/12/world-reacts-to-us-uk-attacks-on-houthi-targets-in-yemen>.
- 9 Moosa Elayah and Fatima Al Majdoub, "Framing Conflict in the Middle East: Yemen and Syria in European Media," in *Europe and the MENA Region: Media Reporting, Humanitarianism, Conflict Resolution, and Peacebuilding* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 173-199.
- 10 "China Urges Two Sides of Sudan Conflict to Implement Cease-fire, Move Forward Political Transition," *Global Times*, April 16, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202304/1289215.shtml>.
- 11 "Before Niger, Several Recent Coups in the Sahel," *Africanews*, July 27, 2023, <https://www.africanews.com/2023/07/27/before-niger-several-recent-coups-in-the-sahel/>.
- 12 Owen Mulima, "Absolute Decolonisation of Africa: The Impossible Journey," *Kwame Nkrumah University Multi-Disciplinary Journal* 1, no. 1 (March 2023): 1-4, <https://accessjournal.nkrumah.edu.zm/index.php/knuj/article/view/7>.
- 13 Francesca Caruso and Francesca Lenzi, "The Sahel Region: A Litmus Test for EU-Africa Relations in a Changing," *IAI Istituto Affari Internazionali*, June 15, 2023, <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/sahel-region-litmus-test-eu-africa-relations-changing-global-order>.
- 14 Nabila Ramdani, "The Niger Crisis Shows France's Quasi-Empire in Africa Is Finally Crumbling," *The Guardian*, August 5, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/05/05/niger-crisis-france-empire-africa-coup-colony>.

The single remaining chokepoint for completion of the BRI land transport corridors that triangulate Africa, Asia, and Europe is the presence of remaining US troops along the Iraqi-Syrian border. The Iraqi government has set the withdrawal process for US troops (military/security advisers) in motion, which implies accelerated withdrawal from Syria.<sup>6</sup> However, the major recessionary trends in the US, the UK, and the European Union (EU), coupled with the post-pandemic regional power vacuum amid Russia's growing influence in Ukraine, have unleashed a flurry of political maneuvering to counterbalance US-induced instability. The Turks attacked US-backed, Syria-based Kurds, the Arab League readmitted Syria,<sup>7</sup> India expanded its footprint to compete with China across the Indian Ocean, and power transitions across the entire Sahel expelled French and EU forces, causing the US to renegotiate its force positioning under duress.

The Red Sea has become a focal point of a larger global strategy. The recent US-UK revenge attacks on Houthi positions, without United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorization, are perceived as illegal unilateral interventionism and further demonstrate to regional leaders that the so-called "rules-based order" does not apply to Anglo-America.<sup>8</sup> The war in Yemen, which was largely ignored by Western media,<sup>9</sup> was "frozen" after Riyadh and Tehran renewed diplomatic ties, but conflict immediately erupted on the African side of the Red Sea in Sudan,<sup>10</sup> and swept westward across the Sahel, engulfing the former French colonies of West Africa—Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.<sup>11</sup>

The dissolution of the French empire in Africa, thought by many as long overdue,<sup>12</sup> has accelerated the departure of EU, NATO, and US forces from the region. Moreover, future energy and mineral supplies to Europe and the nuclear energy security of France face critical restructuring.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, North African states like Morocco, Algeria, and Libya may follow Egypt into BRICS Plus, seeking greater sovereignty and territorial integrity, and strategically reconfiguring their engagement with continental Africa, Europe, and West Asia. More significantly, the US Africa Command faces partial, or potentially total, expulsion from the Sahel region stretching from the Red Sea to the Atlantic, replaced with a swath of unfriendly states, which favor the less interventionist policies of both Russia and China.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the Sahel region may transform into a vast containment barrier limiting EU, US, and NATO operations to the Mediterranean and loosening their grip over access to the Red Sea from the Indian Ocean.

For China, the completion of BRI infrastructure connectivity is the optimal means to revive the war-ravaged region. China has used its deep reservoir of diplomatic goodwill to position regional issues into multilateral networks buttressed by a complex web of bilateral and trilateral trade and cooperation agreements. As such, the BRICS Plus mechanism promotes consensus and compromise, aids political stabilization and economic development, reinforces sovereignty, and provides a strategic balance for the multipolar transition.

The Suez Crisis, or the Second Arab-Israeli War, was a British-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt in 1956, and an effort to maintain control of the Suez Canal and its critical energy supply. While Franco-British humiliation largely extinguished the British Empire and severely injured French colonialism, it also underscored the need to accelerate formation of what would later become the EU. Another fateful outcome was Western Europe's pursuit to access the vast oil and gas reserves of the USSR. This led to a long-term energy development program in collaboration with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, with pipelines built from East to West, re-establishing Russia as a reliable and inexpensive energy source. However, from the late 1950s onwards, the extraordinary economic synergy between Russia and Europe instilled fear in Anglo-America. The US would henceforth insist on joint EU and NATO expansion and eventually undermine the EU's "strategic autonomy" objectives, starting with Brexit.

Anglo-America's primary objective remains to control maritime chokepoints, maintain its 1 trillion US dollar services export surplus, and promote the economic interests of its global energy companies, and technology monopolies.<sup>15</sup> The US has consistently undermined OPEC and sanctioned all who offer more favorable prices than Anglo-American and EU energy firms. Placing a price cap on Russia has not worked because demand for cheap energy from China and India has risen. China is also the dominant global supplier of renewable energy, electric vehicles, batteries, and semiconductors produced by the world's most complete supply chains and most advanced manufacturing. Formalization of a "Red Sea Economic Belt" and the development of complete regional supply chains are the trend for regional development. The embrace of the Red Sea region by BRICS Plus provides ample impetus to deliver win-win solutions, countering the instability and turbulence generated by a deeply flawed US regional foreign policy.

15 "Trade Balance: Goods, Balance of Payments Basis," FERD, accessed January 13, 2024, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/BOPGTB>.

Ultimately, the nascent third front across the entire African Sahel, spanning from the Red Sea to the Atlantic, imposes great costs to the US, EU, and NATO. They struggle to finance and equip Ukraine to counter Russia, while also funding the militarization of the first island chain in the Western Pacific to contain China. The coterie of hawks directing the Biden administration is learning that the constraints imposed on the US by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans far exceed Washington's zero-sum machinations in containing Russia, China, Africa, or indeed the majority of the globe.

The United States faces a self-perpetuating maelstrom of economic, political, and military insecurity resulting from its preference for military solutions to almost all external challenges, weaponization of economic and legal instruments, trade protectionism, self-centered manipulation of interest rates and inflation, subversion of multilateral mechanisms such as the WTO, and inability to offer concrete alternatives to China's economic development model. As the US contends with its constraints, a more nuanced foreign policy approach to cooperation and diplomacy emerges and eclipses nostalgia for unilateral dominance. The inclusion of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE stabilizes and consolidates the Red Sea region as the mechanism evolves and grows, heralding the start of a new chapter in global diplomacy.

# Managing Waves of Change: The Recent BRICS Expansion

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The original BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) group has classically been perceived by analysts as a leading organization with the potential to diversify the global financial system and challenge the dominance of Western institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).<sup>1</sup> In this aim, the original BRICS has achieved some milestones, including the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB), which has financed development projects in its member states, including potable water in India, hydropower plants in Russia, and solar-powered lighting in Brazil. Nevertheless, the group's existence and ability to influence have not been without challenges, both internally due to differences amongst members, and externally due to the geopolitical and economic influence of other relevant actors, such as the G7.<sup>2</sup>

In this context, the recent BRICS expansion, which commenced in January 2024, may have a significant impact on the group's geopolitical role, especially as a platform that gives voice to the Global South.<sup>3</sup> To analyze this development, it is important to consider the motives behind this expansion amongst the BRICS members. For China, this expansion accomplishes what the nation has been pursuing for a significant period - the creation of a bloc acting as a counterweight to Western influence by aligning developing countries which have grown skeptical of the leadership exerted by G7 industrialized nations.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Russia may view this expansion as an opportunity to

- 1 Oliver Stuenkel, *The BRICS and the Future of Global Order* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington books, 2020).
- 2 Raul Gouvea and Margarida Gutierrez, "BRICS Plus': A New Global Economic Paradigm in the Making?," *Modern Economy* 14, no. 5 (May 2023): 539-550.
- 3 "BRICS Group Invites 6 New Members to Join Next Year," *DW*, August 24, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/brics-group-invites-6-new-members-to-join-next-year/a-66618967>.
- 4 Edith Mutethya, "BRICS Expansion to Bolster Global South Influence," *China Daily*, December 18, 2023, <http://epaper.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202312/18/WS657f833ca31036711cce4d01.html>.

overcome its current isolation resulting from the conflict with Ukraine, gaining new spheres of influence and more weight in decision-making. Nevertheless, differences amongst members could be pivotal in shaping the organization's future after the expansion. One intriguing case is that of India, for which the roles of BRICS Plus and G7 are not necessarily contradictory, at least in terms of interest. Despite playing a key role among BRICS Plus nations, India has considered that though the West may be experiencing a relative decline, it remains an important source of technology and capital, a resource India seeks to access. Therefore, India has remained open to other partnerships with the US, Japan, and Western Europe to support its own development agenda.

In addition to the internal motivations behind BRICS' recent expansion, it is also important to consider the new members. The possibility of integrating a wider range of perspectives and experiences coming from these developing nations serves a shared motivation to diversify and expand each nation's global influences.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the expansion may provide economic benefits through new collaborations with nations possessing substantial oil wealth or financial prowess. It could also create synergies with the infrastructure investments and technological sectors of China and India, respectively.

**Saudi Arabia** is a clear example of the benefits that Middle Eastern countries can reap from their involvement in BRICS Plus. Economically, the country seeks diversification to reduce dependence on oil. Saudi Arabia provides opportunities for improvement on infrastructures such as high-speed railroads, renewable energy projects, development of technological hubs, and collaboration to further expand its tourism promotion, all contributing to Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 plan. Geopolitically, BRICS Plus allows Saudi Arabia to counterbalance Western influence and exercise greater regional leadership through cooperation with other countries and economies in the region.

**The United Arab Emirates (UAE)** could benefit from BRICS Plus by accumulating support for its economic expansion, enabling collaboration with other countries in the Middle East in renewable energy generation, as well as the development of infrastructure and technology. Engaging with both BRICS Plus and Western nations provides diplomatic space for conflict negotiation and stability, along with a platform to diversify influence and markets to balance international connections.

5 Mark Katz, "The BRICS Come to the Middle East and North Africa," *Atlantic Council*, August 25, 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-brics-come-to-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/>; Alexandre Kateb and Abdullah Baabood, "How Might Middle Eastern and North African Countries Affect the BRICS Group?," (webinar, Carnegie Middle East Center, September 28, 2023), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/09/28/how-might-middle-eastern-and-north-african-countries-affect-brics-group-event-8162>.



For **Iran**, BRICS Plus membership could represent significant support for its economy through access to financial systems and investment opportunities, mitigating the impact of Western sanctions. BRICS Plus also provides an avenue to diversify trade and eventually acquire relevant technological transfers. Additionally, joining BRICS Plus may contribute to greater local stability through the revitalization of current infrastructure projects. Furthermore, BRICS Plus can provide a platform for dialogue with the West regarding nuclear programs.

**Egypt** could establish a platform to continue preserving its regional relevance by serving as a counterbalance to Western influence. Additionally, there is the potential for diversifying the Egyptian economy beyond tourism through industrial collaboration with other BRICS Plus members. This includes support for improved infrastructure and renewable energy projects, as well as an exchange of best practices with other countries in the region regarding expansion of the tourism market.

**Ethiopia**, on the other hand, requires significant support for its infrastructure development, for which BRICS Plus membership could be quite useful. Cooperation on hydroelectric projects, modernization of transportation and logistics systems for internal trade, and access to cutting-edge agricultural technology for improved production are essential for the country. BRICS Plus membership could also be crucial for elevating Ethiopia's role in East Africa, enabling collaboration with other members to enhance stability in the region and eventually expand its influence to other areas of Africa.

The evolution of BRICS Plus in 2024 may lead to a shift in the global order. The inclusion of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE makes the bloc now represent 45% of the total world population, and over a third of the global GDP (PPP).<sup>6</sup> The addition of four Middle Eastern states, boasting a combined oil production of around 21 million barrels per day,<sup>7</sup> suggests a potential eastward shift in BRICS Plus' economic focus.<sup>8</sup> This could lay the groundwork for an alternative energy bloc, challenging the established Western-dominated oil trade. Recent diplomatic initiatives, such as China's mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and India's adoption of Rupee-Dirham trade with the UAE, offer evidence of the future potential of this shift. The implications include the emergence of an alternative energy bloc

6 Gregory Zerzan, "Ignoring BRICS Expansion Threatens America's Economic Security," *Newsweek*, January 12, 2024, <https://www.newsweek.com/ignoring-brics-expansion-threatens-americas-economic-security-opinion-1859634>.

7 "Petroleum and Other Liquids," US Energy Information Administration, accessed January 26, 2024, <https://www.eia.gov/international/data/world/petroleum-and-other-liquids/annual-petroleum-and-other-liquids-production>.

8 Urooba Jamal, "Analysis: What Do BRICS Invitations Mean for the Middle East?," *Al Jazeera*, August 25, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/25/analysis-what-do-brics-invitations-mean-for-the-middle-east>.

capable of reshaping global trade patterns, establishing alternative currency corridors, and challenging the US dollar's hegemony in energy transactions. Nonetheless, as seen when analyzing the motivations of each country, establishing such a bloc will require substantial infrastructure investments, coordinated policy frameworks amongst multiple countries, and, perhaps most importantly, a willingness to overcome geopolitical differences within member states in favor of a cooperative future.<sup>9</sup>

In light of existing internal complexities, potential economic reorientation, the shifting role of BRICS Plus, and questions about the viability of an expansion system in the long term, analysts have been pondering what could come next. Questions arise as to whether the expansion will indeed yield more advantages for the group or introduce complexities and problems. Amid the potential advantages of the expansion, a challenge for BRICS Plus and its subsequent expansion framework lies in the changes to its internal composition. While current member states undoubtedly share common interests, there are also key differences in specific areas - historical relationships, and even economic models. Navigating these differences is crucial to avoiding potential conflicts. Effective leadership and a commitment to bridging historical or ideological differences will be of paramount importance to prevent fragmentation and ensure cohesion. Otherwise, a lack of consensus could be detrimental to the group's influence in promoting a multipolar world and affect its internal functioning. In this context, the case of Argentina serves as a cautionary tale, illustrating how national political shifts could impact the group in the future.

When **Argentina** had its initial push to be included among the BRICS Plus, fostered by former President Alberto Fernandez, the nation sought significant financial support through collaborations with Brazil and China, amid its economic problems.<sup>10</sup> The previous administration aimed to secure loans to restructure local debt, reduce dependence on Western lenders, and diversify trade to other markets interested in Argentine agricultural and manufactured products. Moreover, Argentina's potential role in the group alongside Brazil was previously forecast as a key representative of South America, promoting more explicit South-South cooperation, and enhancing the continent's global image and diplomatic relations. However, once Javier Milei came to power, things changed significantly. Its current Foreign Minister Diana Mondino stated

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9 Stuenkel, *The BRICS*.

10 Jaime Rosemberg, "El Vertiginoso Giro Del Gobierno En Política Exterior [The Government's Rapid Shift in Foreign Policy]," *LA NACION*, December 18, 2023, <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/politica/el-vertiginoso-giro-del-gobierno-en-politica-exterior-nid18122023/>.

that the country would not be part of the BRICS expansion, citing a lack of perceived advantages.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the presence of Iran, which has been viewed by some Argentines as an actor in the attacks on the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association in 1994 and the Embassy of Israel in Argentina in 1992, may have influenced the country's position. Milei's statements to align with the United States and Israel represent the beliefs of some groups that, despite potential economic benefits, a BRICS Plus membership does not align adequately with the direction of the new Argentinian administration. Thus, the government officially renounced its intention to join the BRICS expansion at the end of 2023.<sup>12</sup> On the opposing side, there are groups that prioritize pragmatic choices over ideological decisions, arguing that BRICS Plus membership should not be rejected solely on political grounds. In any case, internal shifts in countries must be considered by BRICS Plus in the future, not only concerning new members, but also regarding its own internal organization and alignment. Building stronger relationships based on commonalities, despite differences, should be a priority.

The new members find themselves at a critical moment, possessing remarkable potential but also facing challenges. On the one hand, BRICS Plus could be pivotal in advocating for the Global South, reshaping trade patterns, promoting alternative energy models for climate change, and supporting food security. Nevertheless, internal differences among members, external skepticism from developed countries, and potential withdrawals due to political shifts, such as the case of Argentina, may pose significant threats. Thus, it is evident that BRICS Plus' success will rely on the group's ability to overcome internal complexities, develop a stable governance framework, foster trust, build cooperation among its members despite differences, and strategically leverage its political, economic, and diplomatic influence on external actors. If BRICS Plus successfully manages these challenges, the bloc could play a key role in creating a more balanced and inclusive global order.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the world watches with interest how this expansion will navigate the dynamic, and sometimes dangerous, waters of global geopolitics and economics, wondering to what degree this new group will succeed in leaving a lasting impact on the international stage.

11 Origlia, "Comercio y Política."

12 Cecilia Devanna, "El Gobierno de Javier Milei Oficializó Que La Argentina No Entrará a Los Brics [The Government of Javier Milei Officially Announces that Argentina Will Not Join the BRICS]," *LA NACION*, December 29, 2023, <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/politica/el-gobierno-de-javier-milei-oficializo-que-la-argentina-no-entrara-a-los-brics-nid29122023/>.

13 Stuenkel, *The BRICS*.

# Geopolitical & Geostrategic Imperatives of BRICS Expansion in the Evolving Multipolar World

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## Introduction

BRIC began as a meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in 2006.<sup>1</sup> It was made into a formal summit in 2009, evolved into BRICS with the addition of South Africa in 2010, and expanded to BRICS Plus as more nations joined. Since its inception, the bloc has gained a unique reputation as a voice for the Global South. The BRICS Plus coalition represents an alternative to the US-dominated unipolar world order, which has become polarized and marred with conflicts in recent years. Operating through a framework of consensus and dialogue, the original five BRICS countries account for more than 40% of the world population and a quarter of the global economy.<sup>2</sup> The 15<sup>th</sup> BRICS summit held at Johannesburg in August 2023 approved the expansion of the organization, with new members officially joining on January 1, 2024.

## An Inclusive Global Framework

Amidst global instability, the original BRICS nations - Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa - expressed a commitment toward strengthening multilateral collaboration and initiated the expansion process during the 15<sup>th</sup> BRICS summit.<sup>3</sup>

While addressing the 15<sup>th</sup> BRICS summit in Johannesburg, Chinese President Xi Jinping encouraged efforts to deepen business and financial

1 "Previous Summits," XIV BRICS SUMMIT, last modified February 22, 2022, <http://brics2022.mfa.gov.cn/eng/gyjzgj/ljldrhwjj/>.

2 "Xinhua Commentary: BRICS Gains Charm as Global Dynamics Shift," *Xinhua*, August 22, 2023, <https://english.news.cn/20230822/df661448e34b42edae5db6341b6d6124/c.html>.

3 BRICS, *XV BRICS Summit Johannesburg II Declaration*, August 23, 2023, <https://brics2023.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Jhb-II-Declaration-24-August-2023-1.pdf>.

cooperation, expand political and security cooperation, increase people-to-people exchanges, and improve global governance. He highlighted that development is "an inalienable right of all countries, not a privilege of a few." He also emphasized that BRICS countries should be peers in development, oppose "decoupling," supply chain disruption, and economic coercion, as well as focus on practical cooperation in areas including the digital economy, green development, and supply chains.<sup>4</sup>

Noting that the specter of Cold War mentality still haunts the world, Xi said that attempts to seek absolute security at the expense of others will eventually backfire. He further emphasized the need for BRICS countries to collaborate on hot spots, pushing for political settlement and cooperation.<sup>5</sup>

Emphasizing that international rules must be "written and upheld jointly by all countries... rather than dictated by those with the strongest muscles or the loudest voice," Xi advocated for inclusiveness, peaceful coexistence, harmony between civilizations, and respect for nations in regards to independently choosing their modernization paths.<sup>6</sup>

### Incentives to Join BRICS Plus

The recent expansion of the BRICS, which now encompasses Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, is widely seen as a momentous development for the global geopolitical and economic landscape. BRICS Plus is an amalgamation of developing economies that has subsequently emerged as a significant contributor to the global economy. Nevertheless, the inclusion of five additional emerging economies represents a noteworthy progression of the group's international significance.

The expansion of power in developing economies marks a shift from traditional G7 dominance and Western unipolarity. This transition has the potential to create a multipolar system built on international collaboration, resulting in a fairer and more diverse global framework. One possibility is that the expansion of BRICS could lead to the emergence of a new global financial system less reliant on the US dollar and Western financial institutions. Furthermore, the expansion could foster enhanced collaboration among BRICS Plus countries regarding energy, exerting significant influence on global energy prices and markets.

4 Xi Jinping, "Seeking Development Through Solidarity and Cooperation and Shouldering Our Responsibility for Peace," transcript of speech delivered at the 15<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit, Johannesburg, August 23, 2023, <https://english.news.cn/20230823/54dbd48e5e4f40f7bc2f15a1a7a3ab59/c.html>.

5 Xi, "Seeking Development."

6 Xi, "Seeking Development."

BRICS Plus members have begun aligning on matters concerning global governance. They created the New Development Bank and other financial entities, and advocated for the restructuring of the United Nations Security Council and other global organizations to grant just and equitable representation.<sup>7</sup> With the inclusion of new members, the bloc now represents 45% of the world's population and 33% of the global GDP.<sup>8</sup> Newcomers were potentially driven by the notion that joining the bloc would provide them with the opportunity to broaden their business prospects and reduce reliance on Western nations and institutions.

Some countries see the alternative payment systems of BRICS Plus as a highly advantageous opportunity. Joining BRICS Plus could potentially facilitate the establishment of alternative supply chains, stimulate economic growth, diversify economies, reduce expenses, foster e-commerce and market integration, and kindle collaboration with other BRICS Plus nations. Joining BRICS Plus creates opportunities for potential foreign direct investment (FDI), and an alternative to Western-focused financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The expansion of BRICS has significant ramifications for global energy dynamics, as it unites countries with substantial mineral and oil resources with fast-growing energy consumers. Now, the bloc collectively accounts for over 40% of global crude oil production.<sup>9</sup> This surpasses OPEC, which, based on recent estimates, controls 38% of global crude oil.<sup>10</sup> Following the inaugural BRIC Summit held in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in 2009, the now BRICS Plus has consistently emphasized collaboration in the energy sector. The Delhi Declaration of 2012 emphasized the necessity of multilateral energy collaboration within the BRICS framework.<sup>11</sup> BRICS Plus countries might work together to develop new energy technology, invest in renewable energy projects, and enhance energy efficiency. This has the potential to mitigate climate change and advance the development of renewable energy in the developing world.

### **BRICS Plus and Complex Interdependence in International Relations**

In international relations theories, complex interdependence refers to an economic transnationalist concept that recognizes the significance of actors beyond states. The term acknowledges that social welfare concerns are equally important as security issues and that cooperation

7 BRICS, *Johannesburg II Declaration*.

8 Gregory Zerzan, "Ignoring BRICS Expansion Threatens America's Economic Security," *Newsweek*, January 12, 2024, <https://www.newsweek.com/ignoring-brics-expansion-threatens-americas-economic-security-opinion-1859634>.

9 Zerzan, "Ignoring BRICS."

10 "OPEC - Statistics & Facts," Statista, accessed January 15, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/topics/1830/opec/#topicOverview>.

11 BRICS, *IV BRICS Summit Delhi Declaration*, March 29, 2012, [http://brics2022.mfa.gov.cn/eng/hywj/ODS/202203/t20220308\\_10649515.html](http://brics2022.mfa.gov.cn/eng/hywj/ODS/202203/t20220308_10649515.html).

is just as prevalent as conflict in international politics. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye employed the analytical framework of complex interdependence to criticize political realism.<sup>12</sup> According to them, the intricate and diverse transnational links and interdependence between states and cultures have grown, bringing profound transformation to international politics. The significance of military force and power balancing, though crucial, is shrinking.

The increasing interdependence amongst BRICS member countries, especially in regards to economic integration, and BRICS' overall contributions against the zero-sum game mentality, has earned respect and interest from prospective members. In contrast, Western-led organizations, irrespective of mandate and purpose, have become instruments of geopolitics, meddling in the affairs of other countries, coupled with economic and military coercion. BRICS Plus is expected to work towards ensuring global energy security, food security, and human security by way of common development, for which the organization is well-tuned.

### **BRICS Plus Represents a Voice for Global South**

In a contemporary context where power relations are undergoing reassessment, the expansion of BRICS is not contradictory. Rather, it signifies the concordance of a multipolar order. Embracing diverse viewpoints and fostering international partnerships is a necessity for establishing a more inclusive and resilient global society. In a time marked by interconnectedness, the growth of BRICS Plus presents a favorable outcome: a cohesive bloc that gives agency to the Global South and steers toward a future where cooperation prevails over conflict.

The expansion of BRICS is predicated on the acknowledgment that achieving a fairer global order necessitates proactive participation of governments beyond conventional power hubs. The expansion not only contributes to economic prowess but also introduces distinctive perspectives and vital expertise, enriching discourse on global governance. The essence of BRICS Plus is cooperation, the formation of consensus, and reciprocal respect, principles which serve as the basis for meaningful engagement. BRICS Plus seeks to establish a platform for communication and collaboration by broadening its membership, overcoming divisions, and fostering mutual comprehension in the presence of diversity.

12 Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, "Power and Interdependence," *Survival* 15, no. 4 (July 1, 1973): 158-165, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396337308441409>.

The BRICS Plus 2024 agenda places high importance on the ideals of inclusivity, mutual benefit, and collaborative efforts to advance fair and equitable global prosperity and security.<sup>13</sup> The expansion coincides with an urgent need for a comprehensive and resilient global framework. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the vulnerabilities of a global society marked by disparities in wealth and opportunity. Tackling hotspot issues and economic development of the Global South remains high on the agenda, as well as revitalizing the UN platform as an international body for tackling the evolving challenges of traditional and non-traditional security concerns. BRICS Plus, with its pragmatic focus on economic collaboration and progress, offers a promising opportunity for joint endeavors in addressing pressing issues such as healthcare, climate change, and sustainable development.

### **BRICS Plus and Geopolitics**

The expansion of BRICS is perceived to enhance collaboration amongst member nations and increase their impact on the international stage. The new members are strong emerging economies with substantial potential for economic expansion. Their membership in BRICS Plus is expected to enhance trade and investment amongst member nations and facilitate collective efforts to tackle shared non-traditional security threats.

The enlargement of BRICS has been embraced by certain nations and criticized by others. Detractors contended the expansion would undermine the primary objective of BRICS Plus, which was to unite the foremost emerging economies worldwide, as the newly added members lack the same level of economic development as the original BRICS countries, which will dilute the bloc's impact. Advocates of the expansion argued that it would facilitate the advancement of economic growth and development in the Global South, further facilitating the establishment of a more just multipolar global power structure, characterized by less influence from the West.

### **Conclusion**

International order is undergoing a profound transition. A host of global conflicts and political hot spots have exposed vulnerabilities in the legacy of the unipolar framework. In contrast, China has advocated

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<sup>13</sup> "Russia's BRICS Chairmanship to Focus on Strengthening Multilateralism — Putin," January 1, 2024, *Tass*, <https://tass.com/russia/1728605>.



inclusivity, tried to resolve hotspot issues through dialogue and peaceful means, and remained actively involved with global partners to address traditional and non-traditional security issues. The BRICS expansion represents a successful milestone for diplomacy and economic prowess, an effective voice for the Global South, and a will to resolve issues like poverty, underdevelopment, and an overcentralized international order.

# TIO Spotlight Talk



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# The Dynamic Future of BRICS Plus

## An Interview with Charles Liu Yangsheng

Charles Liu Yangsheng



- Senior Fellow of Taihe Institute
- Founding Director, Center for China and the World, City University of Macau, Macau, China

**TIO** Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iran, and Ethiopia joined BRICS on January 1, 2024, doubling its membership. What implications does this expansion hold for China?

**Liu** The expansion holds significant implications not just for China, but for the whole world. It marks a further development of China's vision for global affairs. For example, the expansion implies Global South countries are gaining more influence in global affairs. It represents a shift towards a new form of multilateralism, challenging the domination of a few major Western powers. Independent foreign policies are now being cohesively formed by multilateral institutions, such as BRICS Plus. So, in this case, what is good for the world is also good for China.

**TIO** The American unipolarity has lasted for decades, but the Western international institutions have to adapt to the emerging multilateralism. How do you think the West will react to the expansion?

**Liu** The Western reaction is certainly not enthusiastic, but there is nothing they can do. "BRIC" was a concept coined by Jim O'Neill, an economist at Goldman Sachs, in 2001. Now, BRICS Plus countries are cohesively united by their common interests. This shift challenges the traditional multilateralism seen in the G7 or G20, signaling the emergence of a counterforce of Global South and middle powers.

In terms of GDP, BRICS Plus now matches the G7. The landscape of international multilateralism is evolving.

**TIO** BRICS Plus represents a diverse grouping of cultures, economies, and agendas. This creates both opportunities and challenges. How can BRICS Plus countries maintain cohesion and harmony?

**Liu** The key lies in developing countries' common interests of stability, development, and improvement of living standards. These objectives transcend individual culture or social agendas. As long as the common interest remains the cohesive force, including resisting hegemony and improving living standards through economic development, trade, investment, and cross-border transactions, not only in terms of the trade of goods, but also the movement of people and ideas, unity will prevail.

**TIO** There's an interesting aspect of the expansion, which is the addition of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and UAE. As the Middle East is going through some changes, how will their participation impact the future of BRICS Plus?

**Liu** First, they are energy powerhouses. Second, they are Middle Eastern powers. It is worth noting that Russia is a major energy producer as well, and Petrobras, an oil giant, comes from Brazil. The inclusion of these energy powerhouses from the Middle East, alongside existent energy producers in BRICS Plus, expands the scope beyond energy to commodities. In the future, there will be major suppliers of other commodities, such as minerals, joining BRICS Plus.

This shift reflects a move away from the financial dominance of the US dollar to a new influence held by developing countries with tangible commodities. In Chinese, "currency" is translated as "Huo Bi" (货币). "Huo" (货) means goods, and "Bi" (币) means money. BRICS Plus is expanding its influence in "Huo," in this case, commodities and manufactured goods, versus "Bi," the US dollar.

In terms of the Middle East, there is no question that a major transformation has started. For example, Iran and Saudi Arabia have restored a peaceful bilateral relationship after years of tension. Now, the entire Middle East is seeking unity and economic development. I believe the Middle East will become a more influential force on the global stage, as, for example, ASEAN countries have become. In the last decade, the economy of ASEAN countries has grown rapidly, but the next round of economic growth will happen in member states of the Gulf Cooperation

Council (GCC), and possibly also in North African countries, which are also Islamic countries, such as Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia.

Therefore, the increasing unity and focus on economic development in the Middle East contributes to strengthening BRICS Plus. With potential additions from North Africa, the counterweight to former colonial powers will grow stronger.

**TIO** Argentina's withdrawal from the planned entry into BRICS Plus has emerged as a wildcard. Is there an influence from the US? What does the renege mean for Argentina, BRICS Plus, and the greater world?

**Liu** Argentina's withdrawal is an exceptional case. Unfortunately, this is nothing new to Argentina. Approximately a century ago, Argentina ranked among the top ten global economies, but it has downgraded itself to the lower echelons of the international economic hierarchy. Despite possessing abundant natural resources and highly fertile land for agriculture, the administration of Argentina has demonstrated shortcomings in effectively capitalizing on these assets.

Now, Argentina's new president, Javier Milei, adheres to an extreme form of governance, aligning with certain ideologies promoted by some US politicians. This is anticipated to guide the country towards an uncertain path. So Argentina is really an exception.

Despite this, it does not override the general trend of numerous countries expressing interest in joining BRICS Plus. There are over 30 countries waiting in line to join BRICS Plus, and more than a dozen countries have already submitted formal applications.

**TIO** As you said, there are over 30 countries waiting to join BRICS Plus. Looking forward, as you see it, what is the ambition of BRICS Plus, and what kind of an organization could it become?

**Liu** Well, BRICS Plus countries have already established the New Development Bank in Shanghai, focused on financing infrastructure, industrialization, and other forms of development. In the journey of seeking a fairer, better form of globalization, the commonality among member states in economic development is just the first step. Taking trade as an example, it starts with the movement of goods, then people, and finally ideas. Eventually, all of this will take place among BRICS Plus countries more effectively and in a more accelerated manner.

The economic commonality can be extended to geopolitics. BRICS Plus countries will also start to form a cohesive line of defense against US dominance. Many BRICS Plus countries' top leaders have learned to say "no" to hegemony, and to consider the interests of their own countries, as well as the common interests of BRICS Plus and the Global South. All of this is moving in a direction to forge a new positive global force.

**TIO** In the future, what uncertainties should BRICS Plus anticipate, especially with India becoming closer to the US?

**Liu** India distinctly stands out as an aggressive participant utilizing every channel, every vehicle, and every opportunity to benefit itself, often at the expense of others. This situation is regrettable, as other BRICS Plus members exhibit less aggressive tendencies, displaying a greater consideration for the welfare of their partners. India, therefore, can also be viewed as an exception.

While its association with the US raises concerns, India remains heavily reliant on Russia in energy and military areas. This dependence balances and counterbalances the extent to which India can align with the US. Besides, it's increasingly evident that promises made by the US may not materialize, exemplified by the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). The initiative promoted by the US over the last year appears to have encountered obstacles and may never get off the ground. So, lining up with the US, India may find itself pursuing illusory objectives.

In contrast, participation in BRICS Plus partnerships offers India concrete and substantive benefits. If India recognizes these advantages, as well as pressures from partner nations, it might adopt a more positive role within the framework of BRICS Plus.

*This interview was conducted by Lizzie Yin Xiaohong and Ian Zheng Yizhe.*

In

Focus



# The Biggest Threat to World Economy Is to Decouple from China

Ding Yifan



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Hawkish political elites in the United States have reached a bipartisan consensus that China is the biggest threat to their national security, and are determined to decouple from China. However, after the COVID-19 pandemic, the US trade deficit with China has continued to increase, demonstrating that the United States' unilateral tariffs on Chinese goods have had little effect, indicating that various decoupling measures have failed. Realizing this, the US shifted its rhetoric, replacing the word "decoupling" with "de-risking."

## Rhetoric Shifts Demonstrate China's Importance to the Global Economy

The change from decoupling to de-risking illustrates China's role in the global supply chain. To counter China, the term de-risking was repurposed from niche financial sector language into a politically charged statement, aiming to dishonestly quantify China-US relations. Ironically, the reimagination of this word and its context serve only to illustrate the importance of modern China on the world stage.

As the United States and Europe advocate decoupling from China, the geopolitical game has made Western companies that invested in China feel uneasy. A few companies have decided to move components of their production lines to South and Southeast Asian countries, but this simply resulted in new difficulties. On the one hand, private enterprises



do not want to leave China completely, as the Chinese market is the largest (and still growing) single market in the world. On the other hand, companies still seek to build new supply chains outside China as a hedge bet. This double investment has increased production costs and decreased efficiency.

The risk of the world economy falling into long-term stagflation is rapidly increasing. Neither side of the war in Ukraine feels able to make concessions, leading to a grisly stalemate. Geopolitical games have exacerbated an economic recession, with energy crises and debt crises likely to follow. The Federal Reserve and European Central Bank face a dilemma; if they focus on curbing inflation, the debt problem will hamper the economic recovery; but if they reverse interest rate hikes, inflation may return, dragging the economic recovery into stagflation.

Though the United States and Europe have replaced "decoupling" with "de-risking," this rhetoric is simply a clumsy PR-centric euphemism for distancing themselves from China's supply chain. Given China's importance in the global supply chain, widening the distance from China will only increase the inflationary pressure on Western countries and increase the odds that the world will enter a period of long-term stagflation.

### **The Rise of the Global South**

Even though the world economy faces the looming threat of long-term stagflation, bright spots remain. Of note, the Middle East has become a rising hotspot for global development and investment. For many years, nations in the Middle East invested substantial capital in security, but with few definitive results. Embracing a paradigm shift, rival nations in the Middle East discovered that when development is prioritized, regional conflicts are not unsolvable. Under the coordination of China, Saudi Arabia and Iran reconciled, resolving a long-standing problem in the Middle East in favor of mutual interests. In this way, for the first time, the Middle East has seen a situation where development is prioritized over security.

China launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) a decade ago to strengthen infrastructure investment in many developing countries, promoting the rise of many developing countries around the world. The

stability of the Middle East has laid a foundation for the promotion of the BRI in the region. Nations in the Middle East now have an opportunity to use the BRI to develop and improve local infrastructure and connectivity, which will in turn provide more opportunities for Chinese companies to invest in these ventures, a win-win scenario.

Apart from the Middle East, the world economic situation is undergoing a sea change. The global ratio of growth between emerging economies and developed economies is reversing. When Western countries created the G7 in the 1970s, their economies accounted for nearly 70% of the global economy, but today this group represents only around 44% of it.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, emerging economies represented by the BRICS Plus have rapidly developed and become the main driving force of the world's economic growth. BRICS Plus nations now account for 31.5% of the world economy, more than the combined G7.<sup>2</sup> Measured by the purchasing power parity (PPP), the list of top ten economies is now evenly split between developing and developed nations. Apart from South Africa, all BRICS countries are in the top ten list, along with other up-and-coming developing nations, including Indonesia. Italy and Canada have already fallen out of the top ten list.<sup>3</sup>

Though the G7 still holds occasional summits, apart from some political hype, the group has made no recent decisions that tangibly affected the world economy. In contrast, cooperation amongst emerging economies far exceeds that amongst developed countries. Tangible examples include the admission of five new members to create BRICS Plus, establishment of the New Development Bank, and a bevy of Middle East nations with huge foreign exchange reserves and aspirations to join the New Development Bank. It is prudent to expect emerging economies to develop quicker, and for more emerging economies to join the top ten economies list, which developing countries perceive. An indicator of this are recent rebuttals to Western economic ultimatums from African leaders, whose countries tangibly benefit from cooperation with China, in sharp contrast to a troubled history of Western imperialism and colonialism on the continent.

### **BRI Sets the Tempo for Global Growth**

In recent years, under the guidance of the BRI, there have been many cooperative achievements between China and developing countries.

1 "What Does the G7 Do," *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 28, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-does-g7-do>.

2 Weili Heng, "BRICS' GDP, Potential Currency a Challenge to US Dollar Dominance," *China Daily*, April 14, 2023, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202304/14/WS6438c78ba31057c47eba230.html>.

3 "Economies by GDP Size," *World Economics*, accessed January 24, 2024, <https://www.worldeconomics.com/Rankings/Economies-By-Size.aspx>.

The rise of the Global South has increased the confidence of developing countries, and many have relinquished adherence to the Western model of development.

The new globalization advocated by China is demonstrated by the BRI. It will create a community with a shared future for mankind built on earnest partnerships rather than "alliances," and will lead to a new multipolar world order. Some Western countries are attempting a technological blockade strategy to delay the arrival of this new international order, but in a game between market and technology, the market will always win.

Although Western countries seem to be gearing up for increased competition with China, they forget that technological innovation cannot be sustained without market support. Semiconductors, of which China is the largest consumer, are a prime example. Banning the sale of chips and export of semiconductor manufacturing equipment to China will only harm manufacturers, leading to overcapacity, depreciating prices, and falling share valuations. With the rapid rise of China's independent semiconductor industry, competition with Western companies will intensify, and the West may eventually lose the lead in the semiconductor sector.

Meanwhile, China also relies on the BRI to connect with new markets and build industrial production capacity. Chinese enterprises can find untapped resources in new markets and provide new financial resources for technological innovation, which cannot be interrupted.

The West seeks to use the Ukraine crisis to isolate Russia and China, but it has not properly calculated the consequences of Sino-Russian cooperation. China is the world's largest industrial manufacturer, while Russia is the world's largest resources holder. The impact the cooperation between these two major economies will have on the world economy has been ignored by Western strategists. During the Cold War, the United States made a win-win choice to ease relations with China, creating a competitive advantage with China and the United States against the Soviet Union. Eventually, the Soviet Union collapsed. The "new Cold War" initiated by the United States has aligned China and Russia, this time, against the US.

**Youth**

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# The Evolving Role of BRICS Plus and Argentina's Pivot

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As the geopolitical terrain of 2024 unfolds, Argentina's redirection under President Javier Milei epitomizes the fluidity of international alliances. The nation's decision to diverge from the BRICS Plus trajectory is a microcosm for the shifting winds of the current world order. BRICS, embodying the collective clout of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, has expanded its global influence by welcoming nations including Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These additions diversify the consortium's geopolitical and economic vantage points, furthering a multipolar world vision.

The group's advocacy for development alternatives aligns with the specific needs of developing nations, proposing frameworks that contrast with Western-led models. As a counterpoint to established power circles such as the G7, BRICS Plus represents a new collective voice in the international order.

The significance of Argentina's choice to renege on joining BRICS Plus extends beyond its borders, signaling potential shifts in global paradigms and possibly recalibrating regional power dynamics and foreign policy directions. Economically, Argentina's pivot may reshape its trade and investment relationships, particularly with BRICS Plus nations like China and Brazil. Politically, this move illustrates the intricate dance between national interests and global alliances, underscoring the delicate equilibrium between domestic imperatives and international strategies.

BRICS Plus' growth is instrumental in championing a multipolar order, disrupting conventional power structures, and fostering equitable global governance. Conversely, Argentina's recalibration underlines the intricate challenges faced by nations in aligning with evolving global blocs, reflecting the complex tapestry of international politics.

### **The Domestic and International Interplay in Argentina's Strategic Recalibration**

Argentina's decision to pivot away from BRICS Plus is rooted in domestic politics and the influence of Western powers. Internally, Argentina's political landscape is characterized by deep divisions and conflicts among various political factions and interest groups. The two major political coalitions in Argentina, Union for the Homeland (Unión por la Patria, or UP) and Together for Change (Juntos por el Cambio, or JxC) have differing visions for the country's development and foreign policy. The UP is largely subsumed into the Justicialist Party (Partido Justicialista, or PJ), which advocates for greater state intervention and social welfare, and tends to favor closer ties with developing countries. In contrast, the Republican Proposal (Propuesta Republicana, or PRO), a main party within the JxC, advocates free market theories and economic reforms, aligning more closely with Western nations.

Mauricio Macri's victory in the 2015 presidential elections, representing the PRO, marked a significant shift in Argentina's politics and foreign policy direction. Macri implemented a series of economic and political reforms aimed at addressing legacy issues and revitalizing Argentina's economy and international standing. He lifted currency controls and export taxes, reduced subsidies and public spending, and reached agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and creditors to resolve long-standing debt disputes, reopening Argentina's market and investment environment.

Macri's tenure also saw a notable shift in Argentina's foreign policy. Strengthening ties with Western nations, particularly the United States and the European Union, Macri sought greater political and economic support and cooperation from Western blocs.

However, Macri's reforms and foreign policy direction faced opposition and criticism. The economic policies led to increased inflation, poverty,

and unemployment, sparking social discontent and protests. His foreign policy was scrutinized by different political factions and interest groups within Argentina. Critics argued that his approach catered to Western interests at the expense of Argentina's sovereignty and dignity, neglecting cooperation with developing countries and damaging Argentina's diversified foreign strategy.

Argentina's pivot away from BRICS Plus under President Javier Milei represents a "double down" on conservative principles in response to global changes. This move, contrasting with former President Alberto Fernandez's approach, raises questions about the cohesion of emerging global blocs. Simultaneously, the decision not to join BRICS Plus was seen as a missed opportunity for Argentina to gain international influence and development opportunities, as well as forsaking a valuable platform for collaboration with emerging economies. The Milei administration's decision not to join BRICS Plus was framed as a divergence from the group's ideals and goals, preferring collaboration with Western nations.

Milei's administration, facing economic challenges like high inflation, has implemented radical measures, including a significant peso devaluation. Argentina's foreign policy shift and economic strategy, aligning more closely with the United States, reflect Milei's attempt to stabilize the economy by leveraging the US dollar. This pivot is influenced by the United States' role in the IMF.

### **BRICS Plus' Growing Influence and Global Dynamics**

As Argentina reevaluates its association with BRICS Plus, the role of BRICS Plus in the grander scheme of global politics, particularly considering the China-US strategic competition, becomes increasingly salient. BRICS Plus is carving out a substantial niche in the global economy, offering an alternative paradigm to the US-dominated economic model. Its political stance champions a multipolar world, and while not a military bloc, the military prowess of its members adds a complex layer to global security narratives.

BRICS Plus' assertive presence in global markets, from commodities to technology, and its institutional ventures like the New Development Bank (NDB), affirms its commitment to inclusive economic progression.

The consortium's unified voice on pressing global issues offers a distinct counterbalance to Western perspectives, fortifying its collective diplomatic clout.

The strategic role of BRICS Plus and the current global dynamics represent a significant shift from the post-Cold War unipolarity to an increasingly multipolar world. The rise of BRICS Plus can be seen as an embodiment of the growing influence of emerging economies in global power dynamics.

### **Economic Dynamics**

BRICS Plus nations, with their significant share of the world's population and GDP, have become central to the global economy. Together, they account for 45% of the world population and around 33% of the global GDP.<sup>1</sup> China and India, with their massive growth trajectories, are forecast to be the world's largest and third-largest economies by 2030.<sup>2</sup> This economic heft gives BRICS Plus considerable influence over global economic trends, commodity markets, and supply chains.

The New Development Bank established by BRICS Plus is a testament to its commitment to shaping the global financial architecture. The Bank aims to mobilize resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS Plus and other emerging economies. By providing alternatives to the World Bank and IMF, where BRICS Plus nations have long felt underrepresented, the bloc is challenging the traditional Western-dominated financial institutions and norms.

Moreover, BRICS Plus countries are increasingly trading in local currencies, reducing reliance on the US dollar and the Euro, which could, in the long run, lessen the dollar's status as the global reserve currency. The creation of the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) also exemplifies their intent to shield themselves from global liquidity pressures and to build a financial safety net independent of Western influence.

### **Political Influence**

Politically, BRICS Plus has been advocating for a more representative and equitable global governance system. The bloc advocates for

1 Gregory Zerzan, "Ignoring BRICS Expansion Threatens America's Economic Security," *Newsweek*, January 12, 2024, <https://www.newsweek.com/ignoring-brics-expansion-threatens-americas-economic-security-opinion-1859634>.

2 "World Insights: Global South Treads Own Path to Weather Transforming Global Order," *Xinhua*, January 7, 2024, <https://english.news.cn/20240107/3064508376ef41a8848408e4ed7afe8d/c.html>.



reform in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to grant greater representation to emerging powers, which would realign the UN's power structure to more accurately reflect contemporary global realities.<sup>3</sup>

The BRICS Plus approach to global diplomacy is often characterized by a non-interventionist stance, respect for sovereign decision-making, and a call for dialogue over military interventions, which contrasts with the more interventionist policies of some Western powers. This philosophy resonates with many countries, particularly in the Global South, which are wary of foreign interference in their internal affairs.

### Security and Strategic Dimensions

While BRICS Plus is not a military alliance, its members have substantial individual military capabilities and are involved in various security alliances. China and Russia, both permanent members of the UNSC, wield significant influence in security matters, offering a counterbalance to the positions of the United States and its allies. India, with its strategic location and substantial military capacity, is a key player in South Asian security dynamics. Their combined strategic weight enables BRICS Plus to influence regional security outcomes and the global balance.

BRICS Plus countries also conduct joint military exercises, enhancing interoperability and demonstrating their capability to collaborate on security issues. Regular meetings between BRICS Plus defense ministers and joint Peace Mission exercises contribute to their security cooperation.

### Limitations and Internal Dynamics

However, the strategic role of BRICS Plus is not without limitations. Internal disparities—economic, political, and strategic—exist among the BRICS Plus nations, which can sometimes lead to a lack of coherent strategy and action. The inherent diversity of BRICS Plus nations ensures that some differences in opinion will always exist among the bloc members. Such divergences may impede the bloc's ability to present a unified stance on global issues.

Moreover, the economic interdependence of BRICS Plus nations with the West, particularly in terms of trade and investment flows, adds a layer of

<sup>3</sup> BRICS, *XV BRICS Summit Johannesburg II Declaration*, August 23, 2023, <https://brics2023.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Jhb-II-Declaration-24-August-2023-1.pdf>.

complexity to their strategic role. China, for example, is a crucial trading partner with the US and EU, yet also seen as a competitor by these nations. These interdependencies create a nuanced web of relationships where confrontation and collaboration blend in a messy spiral.

### **The Future of BRICS Plus in Global Power Dynamics**

Despite challenges, the strategic role of BRICS Plus will continue to evolve. The group is well-positioned to capitalize on its members' growth trajectories, which could help them exert substantial influence on global economic and political systems. Their continued push for reforms in global governance structures, pursuit of a more equitable international financial system, and their expanding influence in global policy discourse will be significant factors in global power dynamics.

The strategic role of BRICS Plus must be viewed through the lens of an evolving global order marked by a diffusion of power. While the group faces internal challenges and its collective action is sometimes constrained by the differing national interests of its members, BRICS Plus indisputably contributes to the reshaping of international relations. Through economic collaboration, political discourse, and security considerations, BRICS Plus nations are steadily crafting a world order that is less centralized, more diverse, and more reflective of the changing global economic and political landscape. The continued rise of BRICS Plus has the potential to redefine power dynamics in a world that is increasingly interconnected and craving multipolarity.

The year 2024 is a watershed in international relations, with BRICS Plus' evolution and Argentina's strategic realignment serving as indicators of the shifting tides in global power dynamics. As nations like Argentina navigate these changes, the actions of BRICS Plus will be significant in shaping the emerging multipolar world order. The consortium's promotion of diverse economic pathways, alternative political discourse, and its potential to influence the global governance framework emphasize the growing significance of multipolarity in shaping the future of international cooperation and stability.

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