

Research Briefing

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The BRICS group: Overview and recent expansion



Summary

- 1 Origins of the organisation
- 2 Financial institutions
- 3 Purpose of the organisation and foreign policy priorities of five original members
- 4 2024 expansion and the 2024 Kazan summit
- 5 The future of the BRICS post-expansion

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Contents

Summary	4
1 Origins of the organisation	6
1.1 Origin of the terms ‘BRICS’ and the organisation	6
1.2 Structure	7
1.3 New criteria for membership	9
2 Financial institutions	12
2.1 New Development Bank (NDB)	12
2.2 Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA)	15
2.3 Other potential financial initiatives	16
3 Purpose of the organisation and foreign policy priorities of five original members	18
3.1 Purpose	18
3.2 Brazil’s priorities	19
3.3 China’s priorities	21
3.4 India’s priorities	24
3.5 Russia’s priorities	26
3.6 South Africa’s priorities	28
4 2024 expansion and the 2024 Kazan summit	34
4.1 Perspectives of the new BRICS members	34
4.2 Potential future members	41
4.3 The 2024 Kazan summit	43
5 The future of the BRICS post-expansion	48
5.1 Does expansion mean more influence or less cohesion?	48
5.2 Are the BRICS becoming an ‘anti-US’ organisation?	49

Summary

What is the BRICS and who are the members?

'The BRICS' standing for Brazil, Russia, India and China was first used as a term in economic writing, but later developed into an intergovernmental organization created by those four countries, which held the first BRIC summit in 2009.

It was then expanded to include South Africa in 2010, becoming known as the BRICS.

Four further countries joined the group in 2024: Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates. Argentina and Saudi Arabia were both invited to join, Argentina later declined the invitation, and Saudi Arabia has yet to formally accept.

The expanded group is sometimes referred to as the 'BRICS+'.

The BRICS+ represent [around 45 percent of the world's population and 35 percent of global GDP](#) (based on purchasing power parity).

How does the BRICS work?

The BRICS is an informal grouping, it has no founding treaty, secretariat supporting it or headquarters. The Chair of the group, which rotates every year through the different members, manages the agenda and focus for that year, and organises the annual leaders' summit which is the centrepiece of the BRICS' efforts.

The BRICS founded a New Development Bank (NDB) in 2014, to provide developmental funds to countries, as a rival to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, [of which the BRICS members are critical](#). The NDB is often assessed as one of the most significant achievements of the BRICS.

What do BRICS members have in common?

While BRICS members have diverse interests, and independent foreign policies, there are [shared values and aims](#) that they frequently refer to in joint statements including:

- Increasing their economic development
- Emphasising multilateralism and opposing non-UN-sanctions

- Advocating for global governance reform – particularly of the UN Security Council, and global financial institutions, such as the World Bank and IMF.

There has been a [more recent emphasis](#) on creating alternative global finance systems and in particular reducing reliance on the US dollar.

In 2023 the BRICS [adopted new criteria for membership](#). While these contained a few specific requirements such as not having imposed non-UN sanctions on another member state and supporting reform of the UN Security Council, most of the criteria are flexible enough to mean that they don't provide a meaningful filter for new applicants. The biggest bar to new entrants is a positive consensus among all existing members.

What was agreed at the 2024 Kazan summit?

The most significant outcome of the 2024 Kazan summit, hosted by Russia, was the agreement to create a new category of BRICS partner countries. 13 countries were reported to have been offered this status. There has been no official confirmation of the country's offered this new relationship, but [they were named in the press](#) as Algeria, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

How will the recent expansion affect the BRICS?

Some analysts studying the expansion of the BRICS since 2023, have [emphasised the significance of the size and influence of the BRICS+](#) arguing that it is “certain to expedite the rebalancing of global power away from the West”.

Others have stated that the already existing diversity of views among members on key issues has now increased further post-expansion, and this [will make it even more difficult for the BRICS to take coordinated action](#). They also [note significant tensions](#) among original members China and India, as well as newer members like Ethiopia and Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia (though the latter has only been invited to join).

The inclusion of Iran in the 2023 expansion have led [some observers to argue](#) that Russia and China will have another ally to try and move the BRICS in the direction of becoming an ‘anti-West’ grouping.

Others have noted that existing members like India and Brazil want to continue having meaningful relations with the US, as do newer members like Ethiopia and Egypt. While the BRICS members [want to challenge the global order](#) that they see as “made by the West, for the West”, Stewart Patrick predicts rather than “a frontal assault on the existing global order, the ultimate impact of BRICS+ is likely to be more measured and incremental”.

1 Origins of the organisation

1.1 Origin of the terms ‘BRICS’ and the organisation

‘The BRICS’ standing for Brazil, Russia, India and China, was first used as a term in economic writing, but later developed into an intergovernmental organization created by those four countries.

The acronym was coined by Jim O’Neill, chief economist for Goldman Sachs, in 2001, when he forecast that the BRICs would come dominate the global economy by the 2050s.¹

By the end of the 2000s, the countries concerned adopted the term and turned it into an international organisation.

Key dates in the development of the group include:²

- 2003: foreign ministers from Russia, India and China (RIC) started meeting informally at the sidelines of United Nations (UN) General Assemblies.
- 2005: The three RIC foreign ministers met for the first time for a standalone summit in Vladivostok, Russia.
- 2006: A meeting of foreign and defence ministers of the four BRIC countries took place on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session in New York.
- 2008: Russia hosted the first standalone meeting of BRIC foreign ministers in Yekaterinburg.
- In 2009, the first BRICs leaders’ summit was [held also in Yekaterinburg](#). A joint communiqué was published: Key messages included the reform of global financial institutions, and calling for sustainable development, a “more democratic and just multi-polar world order”, and a “strong

¹ Goldman Sachs research, [Building Better Global Economic BRICs](#), 30 November 2001.

² This section is sourced from: Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada, [BRICS 6th Academic Forum, 18-19 March 2014](#), accessed 24 October 2024, Learn about BRICS, Valdai Club, [Opinions: Russia-India-China: Trilateral Cooperation and Prospects](#), 14 May 2012, Institute of Development Studies, [The BRICS in International Development: The New Landscape](#) (PDF), Richard Carey and Xiaoyun Li, April 2016.

commitment to multilateral diplomacy with the United Nations playing the central role in dealing with global challenges and threats”.³

- In 2010, South Africa joined the group. The group became known as ‘the BRICS’.
- In 2014, new financial institutions were created, including the New Development Bank.
- In 2023, at the leaders’ summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, six new members were formally invited to join: Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- In January 2024, four of those members join: Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the (UAE). Argentina declines to join under its new President Milei, and Saudi Arabia says it is still considering membership.

Key statistics

According to Statista, the BRICS+ represent around 45 percent of the world’s population and 35 percent of global GDP measured using purchasing power parity.⁴

The expanded group accounts for almost 30 percent of global oil output, and 22 percent of global merchandise exports. Exports are heavily dominated by China, which accounts for nearly two thirds of them.⁵

1.2

Structure

Overview

The BRICS is not regulated by an international treaty or set of treaties like the European Union or NATO. Nor is it supported by a permanent secretariat or office. Instead, the Chair of the BRICS rotates annually between the members of the bloc, in alphabetical order of the acronym (this was before the 2023 expansion, it is not clear how it will operate with the new members).⁶

The BRICS structure is similar to the Group of Seven (G7) and Group of Twenty (G20) organisations, neither of which have permanent secretariats, and have rotating chairs.⁷

³ University of Toronto, BRICS Information Centre, [Joint Statement of the BRIC Countries’ Leaders Yekaterinburg, Russia, June 16, 2009](#), accessed 24 October 2024.

⁴ Statista, [The Global Clout of the New BRICS](#), 22 October 2024.

⁵ Statista, [The Global Clout of the New BRICS](#), 22 October 2024.

⁶ BRICS 2023 South Africa, [BRICS Architecture](#), accessed 24 October 2024.

⁷ See: Atlantic Council, [The G7 needs a permanent secretariat. The 2024 elections cycle demonstrates why](#), 28 March 2024; and India G20 Presidency website, [About G20](#), accessed 18 October 2024.

The Chair hosts that year's summit and other related meetings, and "sets the priorities and calendar of events for the year".⁸ These priorities are developed "in close consultation with other BRICS members" and are "based on the Chair's agenda as well as previously agreed decisions in the interests of continuity of BRICS cooperation".⁹

Non-member countries have frequently been invited to attend the annual leaders' summits. For example, at the October 2024 summit in Kazan, Russia, leaders from Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Bolivia, the Republic of Congo, and Laos were reported to have attended, as well as UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.¹⁰

The BRICS have also established several groups to convene business leaders, academics and think tanks to feed into the BRICS' summits:

- BRICS Business Council
- BRICS Think Tanks Council
- BRICS Women's Business Alliance
- The BRICS Business Forum
- The BRICS Academic Forum¹¹

'Three pillars' of cooperation

Both the declarations published at the end of the 2023 Johannesburg and 2024 Kazan summits made reference to strengthening cooperation among the BRICS under 'three pillars':

- political and security
- economic and financial
- people-to-people.¹²

What sort of organisation is the BRICS?

Writing in 2023, Bhaso Ndzendze of the University of Johannesburg observed that the BRICS has "at various points [...] has referred to itself as a [forum](#), a [platform](#), a [mechanism](#), a [partnership](#), or a [strategic partnership](#), to name

⁸ BRICS 2023 South Africa, [BRICS Architecture](#), accessed 24 October 2024.

⁹ BRICS 2023 South Africa, [BRICS Architecture](#), accessed 24 October 2024.

¹⁰ "[Who is going to Putin-hosted Brics summit in Russia – and why has Brazil's Lula dropped out?](#)", The Independent 23 October 2024.

¹¹ BRICS 2023 South Africa, [BRICS Architecture](#), accessed 24 October 2024.

¹² See India Ministry of External Affairs, [15th BRICS Summit: Johannesburg II Declaration](#), 24 August 2023; India Ministry of External Affairs, [Kazan Declaration: "Strengthening Multilateralism For Just Global Development And Security"](#) 23 October 2024

a few”. Professor Ndzendze notes it has been labelled by others as “an alliance or a bloc”.¹³

He argues it is neither an alliance or a bloc, as strictly, at least in the field of international relations, “the term ‘alliance’ refers to a mutual defence pact and implies military cooperation”, and “a ‘bloc’ refers to ideological consistency (political bloc) or a free trade agreement (trade bloc)”. For him the “BRICS has none of these characteristics”.¹⁴

1.3 New criteria for membership

During the 15th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, in August 2023, the organisation articulated for the first time its approach to expansion by publishing three sets of guidance:

- ‘Guiding principles’ for BRICS membership expansion
- Standards and criteria for BRICS membership expansion
- A procedure for BRICS membership expansion¹⁵

This was at the same time that the BRICS announced it was extending an invitation to six new countries to join (Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE).

According to the Stimson Center: “in the months leading up to the Summit, the issue surrounding the criteria, principles, and normative framework around the BRICS’ expansion proved difficult to find consensus on”.¹⁶

While the standards and criteria for membership (which are set out in full in the box below) have some specific criteria such as “supporting comprehensive reform” of the UN Security Council and “not impose non-United Nations Security Council authorised sanctions on existing BRICS member states”, most are sufficiently flexible to give wide latitude to the current BRICS members as to who to expand membership to.

As the BRICS must work on consensus, increasing the size of the group may mean that coming to common agreement on who will join the group next becomes more difficult with time.

¹³ The Conversation, Bhaso Ndzendze, [Brics expansion: six more nations are set to join – what they’re buying into](#), 24 August 2023.

¹⁴ The Conversation, Bhaso Ndzendze, [Brics expansion: six more nations are set to join – what they’re buying into](#), 24 August 2023.

¹⁵ University of Toronto: BRICS Information Centre, [BRICS Membership Expansion: Guiding Principles, Standards, Criteria and Procedures](#) (PDF), accessed 21 October 2024.

¹⁶ Stimson Center, [The Future of BRICS: Between Objectives and Challenges](#), 9 November 2023.

At the 2024 BRICS leaders' summit in Kazan, it was reported that 13 countries were to be given 'BRICS partner' status, but who these countries are is yet to be officially announced.¹⁷ This new status will perhaps forestall difficult decisions on who should join the group on a permanent basis, while also making sure the expanded organisation can continue to build on the momentum from growing interest in joining the group. See section 4.3 for more on this new status.

1 Full standards and criteria for BRICS membership expansion¹⁸

A new BRICS member state should:

- align with the guiding principles of BRICS
- contribute to the strengthening of BRICS
- be an emerging or developing country with regional and strategic global influence
- align with the founding values and principles of BRICS including the spirit of solidarity, equality, mutual respect and understanding, openness, inclusiveness, mutually beneficial cooperation and consensus
- have diplomatic and friendly relations with all existing BRICS member states and should not impose non-United Nations Security Council authorised sanctions on existing BRICS member states,
- be committed to promoting international and regional peace and security, social and economic sustainable development, and global economic growth through enhanced trade, commercial and investment linkages,
- be a member state of the United Nations supporting multilateralism, committed to global governance reform and upholding international law,
- “support comprehensive reform of the United Nations, including its Security Council, with a view to making 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”.

¹⁷ [“Thirteen countries receive BRICS partner status — Indian Foreign Ministry”](#), TASS, 2 November 2024.

¹⁸ University of Toronto: BRICS Information Centre, [BRICS Membership Expansion: Guiding Principles, Standards, Criteria and Procedures](#) (PDF), accessed 21 October 2024.

- be committed to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals,
- have strong economic standing and influence regionally as well as globally,
- have substantial trade relations with existing BRICS member states,
- support an open, transparent, inclusive, non-discriminatory and rules-based multilateral trading system, as embodied in the World Trade Organization,
- accept BRICS statements and declarations as an expression of the BRICS vision, principles and objectives,
- accept BRICS cooperation memoranda of understanding, frameworks, letters of intent, agreements, mechanisms and work cycles, and
- accept the working methods of BRICS as outlined in the Terms of Reference adopted by BRICS Sherpas [the personal representative of the head of state/government responsible for preparing the summit] and endorsed by BRICS Leaders.

2

Financial institutions

While the BRICS organisation is more informal in nature, there are formal treaty-based structures for its financial bodies.

Between 2014 and 2015 the BRICS established two new financial institutions: the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) each with a foundational treaty.¹⁹

There has also been calls by some BRICS members to lessen the power of the US Dollar in world finance, create new payment systems, and a BRICS currency.

2.1

New Development Bank (NDB)

Structure and membership

The NDB is headquartered in Shanghai and became fully operational in 2016.²⁰

The NDB's "highest decision-making authority" is its Board of Governors. Each member gets one seat on the board.²¹ The role of NDB President has a five-year term and the post rotates between the NDB Members.²² The current post-holder is former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff. Her term was due to end in July 2025, with the next post-holder coming from Russia, but Russian President Vladimir Putin has reportedly offered to allow Ms Rousseff to extend her NDB Presidency till 2030.²³ Mr Putin was reported to have noted that "given Russia's ongoing war with Ukraine, having a Russian leader at the

¹⁹ See University of Toronto: BRICS Information Centre, [Agreement on the New Development Bank July 15, 2014, Fortaleza, Brazil](#), accessed 24 October 2024; and University of Toronto: BRICS Information Centre, [Treaty for the Establishment of a BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement, July 15, 2014, Fortaleza, Brazil](#), accessed 24 October 2024. The treaties were both signed in 2014, but the inaugural meeting of the NDB Board of Governors, didn't take place until July 2015 (the NDB website [history section](#) has more)

²⁰ NDB, [About NDB: History](#), accessed 24 October 2024.

²¹ NDB, [Governance: Board of Governors](#), accessed 24 October 2024.

²² "[Marcos Troyjo to step down from NDB President's office by March 24 — press service](#)", TASS, 10 March 2023.

²³ Marcos Troyjo, who was nominated to serve as Brazil's nominee for its 2020-25 term by former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, was removed at the request of President Lula, and replaced by Dilma Rousseff. See [Dilma should be kept at the head of the BRICS bank](#) [VIA Factiva], CE Noticias Financieras English, 23 October 2024.

helm of the BRICS bank could create challenges for the institution's operation".²⁴

The NDB's founding treaty states under the bank's purposes and functions (Article 1) that it "shall mobilise resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging market economies and developing countries".²⁵

Membership of the bank is not restricted to BRICS members; they need only be "a member of the United Nations".²⁶ In 2021 three more countries: Bangladesh, UAE, and Egypt, joined the NDB, none of whom were BRICS members at the time.²⁷ Uruguay is a prospective member, it has been accepted by the NDB's Board of Governors and will officially join once it had deposited its instrument of accession.²⁸

At present, the NDB has only financed projects in the five original BRICS countries, as well as in the last few years Bangladesh and Egypt.²⁹ Its website states it has approved in total (since its creation) US\$32.8 billion of financing across 96 projects.³⁰

By contrast, in the fiscal year 2023 the World Bank (specifically the International Bank for Reconstruction, and the Development and The International Development Association) committed in the fiscal year 2024 alone \$117.5 billion in "loans, grants, equity investments, and guarantees to partner countries and private businesses".³¹

The NDB as an alternative to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund

The Bank was established as an alternative to existing international lending bodies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) of which the BRICS countries are critical.³² This is because, according to the European Parliament Research Service (EPRS) of their "outdated rules and inadequate representation [for developing countries]".³³ For example, the EPRS explains how the BRICS+ countries have less influence than Western

²⁴ Agencia Brasil, [Putin offers Brazil new term at BRICS bank](#), 25 October 2024.

²⁵ University of Toronto: BRICS Information Centre, [Agreement on the New Development Bank July 15, 2014, Fortaleza, Brazil](#), accessed 24 October 2024.

²⁶ University of Toronto: BRICS Information Centre, [Agreement on the New Development Bank July 15, 2014, Fortaleza, Brazil](#), Article 2, accessed 24 October 2024.

²⁷ NDB, [About NDB: Members](#), accessed 24 October 2024.

²⁸ NDB, [About NDB: Members](#), accessed 24 October 2024.

²⁹ NDB, [All Projects](#), accessed 24 October 2024.

³⁰ NDB, [Projects](#), accessed 24 October 2024.

³¹ World Bank Group, [A BETTER BANK FOR A BETTER WORLD ANNUAL REPORT 2024](#) (PDF), p12.

³² Boston University Global Development Policy Center, [Evaluating the BRICS Financing Mechanisms: Q&A with Paulo Nogueira Batista Jr.](#), 26 October 2021.

³³ EPRS, [Expansion of BRICS: A quest for greater global influence?](#) (PDF) March 2024.

nations at The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, one of five institutions that make up the World Bank:

Despite BRICS+ having a larger combined GDP than either the G7 or the EU, its capital share and subsequent voting influence within institutions such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) remain significantly smaller (as each member country's voting power is weighted on the basis of its financial contribution to the World Bank).³⁴

The Carnegie Foundation states that the “IMF’s responses to emerging markets’ economic difficulties have long been heavily criticized by some BRICS policymakers”.³⁵ The Foundation notes, for example, that in August 2023 Brazil’s president Lula criticised IMF programmes for “suffocating” Argentina. Also, in June 2023 “Chinese state media suggested that the IMF’s current structure advances US ‘financial hegemony’ and increases the debt burden of emerging market economies”.³⁶

Commentary

Professor Daniel Bradlow, at the University of Pretoria, has described the NDB as the “most prominent achievement” of the BRICS.³⁷

Analysis by Boston University’s Global Development Policy Center, states that in contrast to other multilateral development banks (MDBs) such as the World Bank, the NDB “stands out” as “one *created by, led by and for* emerging and developing countries; and where the founding emerging and developing members *also currently* have equal financial contributions and equal voice” [their emphasis].³⁸ It also points that “no member alone has a veto power, in contrast to legacy MDBs, such as the World Bank, where advanced economies usually hold majority decision-making power”.³⁹

Paulo Nogueira Batista, Brazilian economist and former Vice President of the NDB (2015–17), wrote in 2023 that the NDB “has achieved many things but has yet to make a difference”.⁴⁰ He attributes this partly to “the type of people we have sent to Shanghai since 2015 as presidents and vice presidents of the institution”, describing the Russian NDB vice president “remarkably unfit for the job” and says that “weak management has often led to the poor hiring of

³⁴ EPRS, [Expansion of BRICS: A quest for greater global influence?](#) (PDF) March 2024.

³⁵ Carnegie Endowment, [The Difficult Realities of the BRICS’ Dedollarization Efforts—and the Renminbi’s Role](#), 5 December 2023.

³⁶ Carnegie Endowment, [The Difficult Realities of the BRICS’ Dedollarization Efforts—and the Renminbi’s Role](#), 5 December 2023.

³⁷ “[40 More Countries Want to Join BRICS, Says South Africa](#)”, VOA News, 21 July 2023.

³⁸ Boston University’s Global Development Policy Center, [The ‘New’ New Development Bank: A Decade Plus in the Making](#), 9 July 2024.

³⁹ Boston University’s Global Development Policy Center, [The ‘New’ New Development Bank: A Decade Plus in the Making](#), 9 July 2024.

⁴⁰ Valdai Discussion Club, Paulo Nogueira Batista, [Opinion: BRICS Financial and Monetary Initiatives – the New Development Bank, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, and a Possible New Currency](#), 3 October 2024.

staff”. Mr Batista also says that the “Board is ineffective” and criticises the lack of transparency of its lending and projects.⁴¹

In terms of performance, he states that “disbursements have been strikingly slow, projects are approved, but are not transformed into contracts. When contracts are signed, actual project implementation is slow”, and that “results on the ground are meagre”. However, “despite all that”, he argues that the NDB “remains an institution with great potential”. Noting “it has a large capital base and support from five of the most important countries in the world”.⁴²

2.2 Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA)

The CRA is “an agreement among the BRICS’ central banks for mutual support during a sudden currency crisis”.⁴³ It comprises of a pool of US\$100 billion of currency swaps, “with China contributing US\$41 billion, Brazil, the Russian Federation, and India US\$18 billion each, and South Africa US\$5 billion”.⁴⁴

The facility has yet to be used. Paulo Nogueira Batista wrote in October 2023 that the CRA has some issues: “It remains small; it only has five members, and its work is hampered by numerous restrictions and safeguards”.⁴⁵ He states that while he worked at the NDB, the central banks of the BRICS member states, with the exception of China, put up “fierce resistance” to the creation of the CRA and developing it further, with Brazil being the most reluctant.⁴⁶

Another potential weakness of the CRA is that it relies on the US dollar. The Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum explains that “the \$100bn of swap lines linking the five countries’ monetary authorities can be activated only by trading through the dollar as the lynchpin of the system”.⁴⁷ This meant

⁴¹ Valdai Discussion Club, Paulo Nogueira Batista, [Opinion: BRICS Financial and Monetary Initiatives – the New Development Bank, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, and a Possible New Currency](#), 3 October 2024.

⁴² Valdai Discussion Club, Paulo Nogueira Batista, [Opinion: BRICS Financial and Monetary Initiatives – the New Development Bank, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, and a Possible New Currency](#), 3 October 2024

⁴³ European Parliament Research Service, [At a glance: The BRICS Bank and Reserve Arrangement: towards a new global financial framework?](#) (PDF)?, December 2014.

⁴⁴ European Parliament Research Service, [At a glance: The BRICS Bank and Reserve Arrangement: towards a new global financial framework?](#) (PDF)?, December 2014.

⁴⁵ Valdai Discussion Club, Paulo Nogueira Batista, [Opinion: BRICS Financial and Monetary Initiatives – the New Development Bank, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, and a Possible New Currency](#), 3 October 2024.

⁴⁶ Valdai Discussion Club, Paulo Nogueira Batista, [Opinion: BRICS Financial and Monetary Initiatives – the New Development Bank, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, and a Possible New Currency](#), 3 October 2024.

⁴⁷ OMFIF, [Russia frozen out of Brics countries’ reserve-sharing](#), 23 May 2022.

it couldn't be used to support Russia when the US imposed sanctions after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.⁴⁸

2.3 Other potential financial initiatives

The BRICS members have a longstanding interest in “reducing the dollar’s dominant role across emerging markets”, according to a December 2023 analysis by the Carnegie Endowment.⁴⁹ It also notes that these efforts have increased in “the past few years” which were “marked by significant efforts by BRICS policymakers—particularly in China—to meaningfully increase the use of non-dollar currencies”.⁵⁰

Russia, which took over the rotating BRICS Chair in January 2024, has also been particularly focused on promoting and developing “alternative financial instruments and clearing systems in order to minimise dependence on Western currencies, particularly the dollar, as well as the SWIFT system and the associated sanction risks” (see this [House of Lords Library briefing](#) for more on the SWIFT international payments system).⁵¹

In 2023, President Lula of Brazil also proposed a trading currency for BRICS members. However, according to Al Jazeera “experts have cautioned that any such initiative might be riddled with challenges” and in August 2024 India’s External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar “also expressed scepticism about how realistic a BRICS currency might be”.⁵² The German think tank the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, states that creation of a common BRICS currency has “so far proven to be unrealistic due to the very different economic and financial structures and monetary interests of the individual BRICS members”.⁵³

Al Jazeera reports that in 2024 “BRICS members are now working on using their national currencies more for bilateral trade to insulate them from currency fluctuations and cut their dependence on the dollar”.⁵⁴

Another key initiative according to the Friedrich Naumann Foundation is “the creation of payment and settlement systems (BRICS Pay) for the use of national currencies”. A BRICS Pay Consortium has been formed “to develop

⁴⁸ OMFIF, [Russia frozen out of Brics countries' reserve-sharing](#), 23 May 2022.

⁴⁹ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, [The Difficult Realities of the BRICS' Dedollarization Efforts—and the Renminbi's Role](#), 5 December 2023.

⁵⁰ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, [The Difficult Realities of the BRICS' Dedollarization Efforts—and the Renminbi's Role](#), 5 December 2023.

⁵¹ Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, [The BRICS Summit 2024 in Kazan - a world stage for Putin?](#), 21 October 2024.

⁵² “[Russia's BRICS summit: What's on the agenda and why it matters to Putin](#)”, Al Jazeera, 22 October 2024.

⁵³ Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, [The BRICS Summit 2024 in Kazan - a world stage for Putin?](#), 21 October 2024.

⁵⁴ “[Russia's BRICS summit: What's on the agenda and why it matters to Putin](#)”, Al Jazeera, 22 October 2024.

solutions for private customers/retail (BRICS Pay QR), business customers (BRICS Pay B2B) and BRICS Clear (intergovernmental digital settlement system for cross-border securities transactions based on blockchain technology)".⁵⁵ These initiatives will be of particular interest to Russia and Iran, both subject to western sanctions, says the Foundation.⁵⁶

One point of leverage the BRICS has in terms of encouraging the use of its own currencies, is the NDB's lending practices. As Paulo Nogueira Batista observes, the Bank's "operations – funding and lending – are done mainly in US dollars, the currency which also serves as the Bank's unit of account".⁵⁷ The NDB currently has a target of 30% of its total financing to be in local currencies (by the end of 2022-26 strategy period).⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, [The BRICS Summit 2024 in Kazan - a world stage for Putin?](#), 21 October 2024.

⁵⁶ Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, [The BRICS Summit 2024 in Kazan - a world stage for Putin?](#), 21 October 2024.

⁵⁷ Valdai Discussion Club, Paulo Nogueira Batista, [Opinion: BRICS Financial and Monetary Initiatives – the New Development Bank, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, and a Possible New Currency](#), 3 October 2024.

⁵⁸ NDB, [About NDB: General Strategy](#), accessed 24 October 2024.

3 Purpose of the organisation and foreign policy priorities of five original members

3.1 Purpose

Analyses of the BRICS point to the fact that its informal structure, and the diversity of views and existing alliances among its members, make it difficult for the group to present clear, consistent viewpoints, and to take collective action.⁵⁹

However, there are common objectives shared by its members.

Bhaso Ndzendze, Associate Professor of international relations at the University of Johannesburg, has looked at the summit declarations from 2009 to the present day and identifies four fundamental values that underpin the BRICS:

- Economic development – this objective comes first, as the BRICS is “a collective of emerging economies eager to sustain and improve their economic trajectory”, and the groups “first, and so far only, notable establishment is the New Development Bank”.
- Multilateralism – members of the group, but particularly Russia, have expressed concerns on the use of entities outside of the UN – such as NATO – to pursue global objectives.
- Global governance reform – all members have expressed desires to reform global institutions such as the UN Security Council, but also particularly financial institutions, such as the World Bank and IMF.
- Solidarity - this may mean expressing it actively in joint declarations, providing mutual assistance, but also through silence or non-alignment as with the reaction of members to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.⁶⁰

Professor Ndzendze also identifies a feature of the BRICS that appeals to all members: that it is a “blank slate” – meaning the blocs’ informal nature mean

⁵⁹ See, for example, [Carnegie Endowment, BRICS Expansion, the G20, and the Future of World Order](#), 9 October 2024; Council on Foreign Relations, [What Is the BRICS Group and Why Is It Expanding?](#), 18 October 2024;

⁶⁰ The Conversation, [Brics expansion: six more nations are set to join – what they’re buying into](#), 24 August 2023.

those hosting the summits can set broad agendas for their own purposes, while still not upsetting other members.⁶¹

Other analyses also emphasise the importance of economic and financial policy areas. The Council on Foreign Relations, for example, identifies several thematic areas that are priorities for BRICS members:

- Advocate for greater representation in global organizations
- Coordinate economic policy
- Reduce reliance on the US dollar
- Create an alternative global finance system⁶²

Professor Oliver Stuenkel, at the Fundação Getulio Vargas in São Paulo, identifies some of the “tangible benefits” that BRICS membership brings in an article for the Economist in 2023:

- It remains a “globally recognised brand”, and is seen as “status enhancing” in international affairs by its members;
- it has “served as insurance against diplomatic isolation”; and
- BRICS members “share a profound unease about American leadership”, and they believe membership helps them “to adapt to and actively shape the transition towards a multipolar order capable of constraining America’s room for manoeuvre, and increasing that of emerging powers”.⁶³

3.2 Brazil’s priorities

Overview

Brazil’s President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, known as Lula, who was [re-elected in October 2022](#), has sought to mend ties with China that became severely strained during the tenure of his pro-US predecessor Jair Bolsonaro (2019-22).⁶⁴ Lula visited China in April 2023 at the head of a large group of businesspeople and political representatives with a focus on improving

⁶¹ The Conversation, [Brics expansion: six more nations are set to join – what they’re buying into](#), 24 August 2023.

⁶² Council on Foreign Relations, [What Is the BRICS Group and Why Is It Expanding?](#), 18 October 2024.

⁶³ “[BRICS expansion would be a sign of China’s growing influence, says Oliver Stuenkel](#)”, The Economist, 18 August 2023.

⁶⁴ See Brookings, [COMMENTARY: Testing the limits of China and Brazil’s partnership](#), 20 July 2020, and “[Brazil-China ties strained by social media war over coronavirus](#)”, Financial Times, 21 April 2020.

economic relations between the two countries. Fifteen agreements were signed during the visit.⁶⁵

However, Lula's administration has made clear it will not pursue closer relations with China at the expense of its relations with the US. Brazilian Finance Minister Fernando Haddad said he wanted to improve economic ties with both countries, and Lula visited Washington in February 2023, his first visit outside of South America since he returned to office.

Lia Valls Pereira, Associate Researcher at the Getulio Vargas Foundation, states that the "defence of multilateralism is a core characteristic of Brazilian foreign policy", and "In this context, the BRICS has always been understood as a constructive platform to contribute to the reform of multilateral institutions". Valls Pereira explains that the most controversial issue for Brazil and its relationship with the BRICS at present is the "defence of nonalignment and neutrality in tensions between the United States and China and in the war in Ukraine".⁶⁶

Views on expansion

Brazil was reported to initially be opposed to the expansion, fearing its influence would be diluted, and that it could "could transform the bloc into something else".⁶⁷ However, President Lula then came out in support before the August 2023 BRICS leaders' summit.⁶⁸

Now that the initial expansion has been agreed, Valls Pereira argues that it will be "difficult for Brazil, as a defender of strengthening democracy and human rights, to justify belonging to a group that includes Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates".⁶⁹

Kirk Randolph, in an analysis for the United States Institute for Peace, noted that Brazil's Lula publicly stated during the BRICS summit that the BRICS forum is not meant as "a counterpoint to the G7, G20 or the United States", and instead "characterizing the group as a means of organizing developing countries".⁷⁰

However, he notes that Chinese President Xi Jinping "articulated a much broader mission for the group in a speech to the [2023] forum read by Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao, laying out a vision in which BRICS works to reform global governance and expand political and security cooperation among members". Randolph argues that "this vision, as well as the inclusion

⁶⁵ Atlantic Council: New Atlanticist, [What the Lula-Xi partnership means for the world](#), 14 April 2023.

⁶⁶ Council on Foreign Relations, [The BRICS Summit 2023: Seeking an Alternate World Order?](#), 31 August 2023.

⁶⁷ "[Brazil now main holdout against BRICS expansion, sources say](#)", Reuters, 2 August 2023.

⁶⁸ "[Brazil's Lula voices support for more countries joining BRICS group](#)", AP News, 2 August 2023.

⁶⁹ Council on Foreign Relations, [The BRICS Summit 2023: Seeking an Alternate World Order?](#), 31 August 2023.

⁷⁰ Council on Foreign Relations, [The BRICS Summit 2023: Seeking an Alternate World Order?](#), 31 August 2023.

of Iran among the six new member states, belies President Lula's insistence that the group is not taking on an anti-West stance and places Brazil in a progressively more uncomfortable position in its relationship with the United States".⁷¹

He states that "Brazil is widely considered to have supported the expansion of BRICS in return for China's support of Brazil's addition to the UN Security Council as a permanent member, alongside fellow BRICS country India", but warns that this compromise is "lopsided" as China got immediate gains, and that Brazil received only "hollow promises" in return as reform of the Security Council looks unlikely anytime soon.⁷²

3.3 China's priorities

Overview

Writing for the Asia-focused Diplomat magazine, Thiago de Aragao, an adjunct professor at Marymount University, states that the rationale for China joining the BRICS was clear: "Then-leader Hu Jintao saw an opportunity to catapult China's global influence and still keep its main regional rival, India, close by". Professor de Aragao, like other analysts identifies China as the "leader of the group".⁷³

Alicia Garcia-Herrero, a Senior Fellow at Bruegel, writing for the East-Asia Forum, also emphasises China's dominant role in the BRICS, says "China's sheer economic size — five times greater than India's — and China's increasing assertiveness in foreign policy explain China's dominance of BRICS". A sign of this influence she argues is that "BRICS countries have increasingly similar positions to China at the United Nations".⁷⁴ She notes that China's dominance of the group also applies to trade "BRICS members are increasingly intertwined with China as far as trade is concerned, but the remaining members have very few ties among themselves. Bilateral trade between BRICS members other than China remains extremely low".⁷⁵

Analyses of China's interests in the BRICS often state that the organisation is part of its broader efforts to challenge the US's influence, and the current world order, which China sees, in common with other BRICS members, as unfairly skewed towards Western powers.⁷⁶ Adam Gallagher, Editor in Chief for the US Institute of Peace (USIP), talks of how China has been at the

⁷¹ Council on Foreign Relations, [The BRICS Summit 2023: Seeking an Alternate World Order?](#), 31 August 2023..

⁷² USIP, [What BRICS Expansion Means for the Bloc's Founding Members](#), 30 August 2023

⁷³ "BRICS: A China-Led Group Looking for Relevance", The Diplomat, 28 August 2023.

⁷⁴ East Asia Forum, [China continues to dominate an expanded BRICS](#), 12 April 2024.

⁷⁵ East Asia Forum, [China continues to dominate an expanded BRICS](#), 12 April 2024.

⁷⁶ See, for example: USIP, [What's Driving a Bigger BRICS and What Does it Mean for the U.S.?](#), 17 October 2024; and Carnegie Endowment, [BRICS Expansion, the G20, and the Future of World Order](#), 9 October 2024.

forefront of the BRICS ‘de-dollarisation’ efforts, and how for China (and Russia) “attenuating US influence over the global financial system is part and parcel with building an alternative to the broader US-led international order”.⁷⁷ He adds “It’s no surprise that US adversaries like Russia and China want an alternative international system”.

Writing in 2022, Jacob Mardell, a research fellow at the Mercator Institute of China Studies (Merics), wrote that the BRICS “is becoming increasingly important to Beijing’s global agenda”.⁷⁸ He argued that “the West has for a long time underestimated the importance of the Global South to China’s struggle for supremacy against the United States”, and “as the most prominent and established political grouping of non-G-7 countries, the BRICS will continue to be an important vehicle for China’s mission to increase its clout”.⁷⁹

However, there are some doubts that China’s influence over the BRICS, and that of the group as a whole, will continue, particularly in light of its recent expansion. Garcia-Herrero writes that the “future of the grouping is uncertain, given its heavy economic dependence on China and the deteriorating sentiment towards China among its members”, and “India’s fast growth and increasing geopolitical heft create additional challenges for the continuation of a China-centric BRICS”.⁸⁰ De Aragao states that China’s current President Xi Jinping “has considerably diluted the group’s purpose”, arguing that “BRICS is now one star in a constellation of China’s global leadership gambits, alongside the similarly expanding Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the direct funding China has given to developing countries”.⁸¹

President Xi Jinping, in his statement at the 2024 BRICS leaders’ summit in Kazan, set out his vision for the newly expanded group, stating that “We must work together to build BRICS into a primary channel for strengthening solidarity and cooperation among Global South nations and a vanguard for advancing global governance reform”.⁸²

Xi also called for the deepening of “fiscal and financial cooperation”, calling for the NDB to be “expanded and strengthened”, and said the BRICS “must ensure that the international financial system more effectively reflects the changes in the global economic landscape”.⁸³ He also discussed China’s initiatives to expand the areas on which BRICS cooperate, including a newly

⁷⁷ USIP, [What’s Driving a Bigger BRICS and What Does it Mean for the U.S.?](#), 17 October 2024.

⁷⁸ “[Can China Achieve Its BRICS Ambitions?](#)”, *The Diplomat*, 2 July 2022.

⁷⁹ “[Can China Achieve Its BRICS Ambitions?](#)”, *The Diplomat*, 2 July 2022.

⁸⁰ East Asia Forum, [China continues to dominate an expanded BRICS](#), 12 April 2024.

⁸¹ “[BRICS: A China-Led Group Looking for Relevance](#)”, *The Diplomat*, 28 August 2023.

⁸² People’s Republic of China Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Embracing a Broader View and Cutting Through the Fog of Challenges to Advance High-Quality Development of Greater BRICS Cooperation](#), 23 October 2024.

⁸³ People’s Republic of China Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Embracing a Broader View and Cutting Through the Fog of Challenges to Advance High-Quality Development of Greater BRICS Cooperation](#), 23 October 2024.

launched China-BRICS Artificial Intelligence Development and Cooperation Centre, and plans to establish a BRICS Deep-Sea Resources International Research Centre, as well as other economic initiatives.⁸⁴

Views on expansion

China has been identified as one of the biggest advocates, alongside Russia, for expanding the BRICS. Helena Legarda, lead analyst for Merics, has written that this “push” to expand the BRICS, as well as the [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation](#), shows Beijing “puts renewed importance on these multilateral fora amid worsening geopolitical competition with the United States. They form part of its drive to strengthen ties with nations in the Global South”.⁸⁵

Some analysts believe that in pushing to expand the BRICS in order to increase its influence and pursue its policy goals further, China may have actually turned it into a less useful tool. Henry Tugendhat, an economist, writing for USIP, states that some foreign policy analysts saw China as expanding the BRICS to establish a “counterpoint to the G7”; however, “China may have inadvertently created something far closer to the G20: a big grouping with no secretariat, no legal authority to their decisions and often no consensus”.⁸⁶

C. Raja Mohan, a columnist for Foreign Policy magazine, similarly writes “In pushing for BRICS enlargement, China merely bought itself a bigger talk shop”, and “if Beijing wants to build a bigger anti-Western tent, it can’t do it when the BRICS tent already has so many friends of the United States inside it”.⁸⁷

Tugendhat does note however, that China’s push to build up the NDB “may fare somewhat better”, but he adds “it is still unclear how much funding it may receive from existing or new members”.⁸⁸

Another motivation for China for expanding the BRICS, and in particular the new members chosen, is Beijing’s desire to increase its influence into parts of the globe like the Middle East, where previously its influence was limited. Hasan Alhasan, senior fellow for Middle East policy at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), writes “China’s outreach to the Middle East fits into a broader Chinese coalition-building strategy among countries of the global south”.⁸⁹ He adds that “the entry of key Middle Eastern powers into BRICS is a significant development for China as it seeks to translate its

⁸⁴ People’s Republic of China Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Embracing a Broader View and Cutting Through the Fog of Challenges to Advance High-Quality Development of Greater BRICS Cooperation](#), 23 October 2024.

⁸⁵ Merics, [MERICS China Security and Risk Tracker 03/2023, Focus Topic: China pushes to expand the SCO and BRICS](#), 24 August 2023.

⁸⁶ USIP, [What BRICS Expansion Means for the Bloc’s Founding Members](#), 30 August 2023.

⁸⁷ “[BRICS Expansion Is No Triumph for China](#)”, Foreign Policy, 29 August 2023.

⁸⁸ USIP, [What BRICS Expansion Means for the Bloc’s Founding Members](#), 30 August 2023.

⁸⁹ IISS, [With BRICS expansion, China and Middle Eastern powers draw closer](#), 31 August 2023.

economic clout into tangible regional political support for its global ambitions”.⁹⁰

Alhasan also notes the military dimension to China’s push for deeper relations with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. All three are US defence partners, and he says: “Although Chinese arms sales to the region remain small, China’s political push coincides with a desire among Middle Eastern states to rely less on the US”. China is viewed by these states “as an attractive partner” because “of its willingness to sell systems and share technology, such as armed uninhabited aerial vehicles and ballistic missiles, which they have not yet been able to source from Western partners”.⁹¹

For more on China’s changing role in the Middle East, see Commons Library briefing: [China and the US in the Middle East: Iran and the Arab Gulf](#), August 2022.

3.4

India’s priorities

Overview

The long-standing central plank of India’s foreign policy has been one of non-alignment and a resistance to choosing sides in global disputes. This policy is intended to give India manoeuvrability and an ability to always advance its own interests as much as possible.⁹²

India’s balancing of its relations with the US and China are an example of this principle in practice, particularly in the context of the international organisations it belongs to, including the BRICS. While India has in recent years strengthened its military relations with the US and regional democracies through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue formed of India, the US, Australia, and Japan (known as the Quad), it has also continued to engage with China through international forums, particularly the BRICS.⁹³

The BRICS has been an important forum for India and China to manage tensions and deepen relations, and both, according to the Atlantic Council, see it as a useful force to “change the current Western-led world order into a

⁹⁰ IISS, [With BRICS expansion, China and Middle Eastern powers draw closer](#), 31 August 2023.

⁹¹ IISS, [With BRICS expansion, China and Middle Eastern powers draw closer](#), 31 August 2023. Though missile sales between China and Saudi Arabia have been limited, with two reported sales from the 1980s to 2000s: US-Economic and Security Review Commission, [Staff report: China’ reported ballistic missile sale to Saudi Arabia](#) (PDF), 2014.

⁹² Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, [Non-Allied Forever: India’s Grand Strategy According to Subrahmanyam Jaishankar](#), 3 March 2021.

⁹³ Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, [Engagement, not Entanglement: India’s Relationship with the Quad](#), 1 May 2023.

multipolar system where developing countries have more influence, commensurate with their shares of the global economy”.⁹⁴

While they have some common interests, India and China have deep seated tensions, principally over their disputed border. This is why the BRICS informal nature allows for the two to work together. As Krzysztof Iwanek, an academic at the University of Bialystok notes, the BRICS is not an alliance, and while India would not want to be in an alliance with the US, it would “definitely not” want to be in alliance with China: “India’s largest rival”.⁹⁵

Shreya Upadhyay an Assistant Professor at Christ University, Bangalore, states that the BRICS supports “India’s regional leadership aspirations”. On the economic front she writes it “create[s] economic alternatives for countries in the global south” which is a “long-standing foreign-policy goal of New Delhi’s”. She also says the NDB supports projects that are priority areas for India such as clean energy, social safety and public health.⁹⁶

India is said to be cautious of ‘de-dollarisation’ efforts pushed by BRICS members, particularly Russia and China. Earlier this year, the Governor of India’s Reserve Bank, Shaktikanta Das, dismissed de-dollarisation as a “media creation”.⁹⁷

Views on expansion

Writing after the 2023 BRICS summit, when its plans to expand were confirmed, analysis by the Atlantic Council stated that the India was cautious about enlargement, and that “India has tried to resist China’s efforts to turn the BRICS group into a support organization for China’s geopolitical agenda, such as promoting Beijing’s Belt and Road Initiative, its [Global Development Initiative](#), and explicit anti-US rhetoric”. Instead, India “has focused BRICS discussions and activities on South-South economic and financial cooperation projects [...] and reforms of international financial institutions to give developing countries more voice and representation”.⁹⁸

It argues further that India was “concerned about losing its own influence if the BRICS group admits too many new members closely aligned with China’s agenda”, these concerns are motivated by its rivalry with Beijing for regional influence, and the two countries’ “persistently bitter border dispute”.⁹⁹

Analysis by Daniel Markey, senior advisor at USIP, in 2023 argued that the list of newly invited members “could have been worse” for India, noting it “enjoys increasingly warm relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE”, but also that Iran’s admission did create “minor headaches” for New Delhi “as it reinforces the group’s anti-Western reputation and saddles the bloc with another

⁹⁴ The Atlantic Council, [China and India are at odds over BRICS expansion](#), 8 August 2023.

⁹⁵ “[Many Separate BRICS, No Single Wall: India and an Expanding BRICS](#)”, The Diplomat, 1 June 2024.

⁹⁶ South Asian Voices, [BRICS, Quad, and India’s Multi-Alignment Strategy](#), 12 July 2022.

⁹⁷ USIP, [India’s BRICS Balancing Act](#), 17 October 2024.

⁹⁸ The Atlantic Council, [China and India are at odds over BRICS expansion](#), 8 August 2023.

⁹⁹ The Atlantic Council, [China and India are at odds over BRICS expansion](#), 8 August 2023.

prominent member facing US sanctions [Iran]”.¹⁰⁰ Markey notes that during the expansion process India “simultaneously sought to preserve its privileged stature as a founding member, advance its claim to leadership as a voice of the Global South, and resist moves by Beijing to dominate the group by packing it with overtly China-centric partners”.¹⁰¹

But the expansion is not just about defending India’s interest, it is also a tool for advancing them. Jagannath Panda, Senior Fellow at The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, writes that “India sees BRICS and its expansion as a multipolar base to expand its economic outreach in the Middle East and beyond”.¹⁰² He states that the country’s support for the new members “was rooted more in backing members that could add economic vigour to the grouping such as the UAE, its own strategic partnerships with the newly added countries, and a desire to see greater global representation”.¹⁰³

In terms of any future expansion, Panda predicts that India “is likely to support states, including those in Southeast Asia, with similar interest-based criteria, disregarding states with a clear “anti-India” agenda such as Pakistan”.¹⁰⁴

3.5

Russia’s priorities

Overview

As set out in section 1.1, Russia was the first country to call together and host the original four BRIC countries for a summit in 2008. The Council on Foreign Relations says this decision “was driven by Russian President Vladimir Putin’s growing desire to create a counterweight to the West”.¹⁰⁵

To some extent this goal is shared by all the original BRICS members. However, according to Fyodor Lukyanov, Chair of Council on Foreign and Defense Policy (Russia), while the others “are not interested in direct conflict with the West”, Russia is.¹⁰⁶

Russia, however, does not express such sentiments in the context of the BRICS. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, in a briefing in early October 2024, said the “BRICS framework is non-confrontational and

¹⁰⁰ USIP, [What BRICS Expansion Means for the Bloc’s Founding Members](#), 30 August 2023.

¹⁰¹ USIP, [What BRICS Expansion Means for the Bloc’s Founding Members](#), 30 August 2023.

¹⁰² USIP, [India’s BRICS Balancing Act](#), 17 October 2024.

¹⁰³ USIP, [India’s BRICS Balancing Act](#), 17 October 2024.

¹⁰⁴ USIP, [India’s BRICS Balancing Act](#), 17 October 2024.

¹⁰⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, [What Is the BRICS Group and Why Is It Expanding?](#) Updated 18 October 2024.

¹⁰⁶ Council on Foreign Relations, [Council of Councils: Global Perspectives: The BRICS Summit 2023: Seeking an Alternate World Order?](#), 31 August 2023.

constructive”, and that “it is a viable alternative to a world living by someone else’s, alien rules”.¹⁰⁷

The reference to these ‘alien rules’ is a nod to what Aslı Aydintaşbaş, a Visiting Fellow at Brookings, calls “growing resentment among middle powers toward the US-led world order”. She argues that “in the aftermath of the war in Gaza, Russia and China have more effectively harnessed this anti-Western sentiment, capitalizing on frustrations over Western double standards as well as the use of sanctions and economic coercion by the West”.¹⁰⁸

Since Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia’s priorities for the BRICS have changed. The reaction to the war from the other BRICS members also demonstrated to President Putin he could rely upon them for support. Oliver Stuenkel, an associate professor of international relations at the Getulio Vargas Foundation in São Paulo, characterised this support in analysis for Foreign Policy as: “explicit diplomatic and economic support (China), help circumvent sanctions (India), participate in military exercises (South Africa), or embrace his narratives about the war (Brazil)”. Stuenkel added “without BRICS support, Russia would find itself in a far more difficult situation today”.¹⁰⁹

A significant priority for Russia since the war in the Ukraine started is to create new financial institutions and processes to help it reduce the impact of [economic sanctions imposed by Western countries](#) in response to its invasion. In Vladimir Putin’s address when Russia took over as Chair of the BRICS in January 2024, he stated one focus for the year ahead would be “enhancing the role of BRICS in the international monetary system, expanding interbank cooperation and expanding the use of national currencies in mutual trade”.¹¹⁰ Politico reported at the start of the October 2024 Kazan summit that “Putin is expected to push for an alternative platform for international payments”.¹¹¹ This is of particular importance for Russia after many of its banks were banned from the [SWIFT international payments system](#) following its invasion of Ukraine.¹¹²

Views on expansion

The war in Ukraine has also meant Russia has been vocal in its support for expanding the organisation as it hopes it can “create a Russia-sympathetic

¹⁰⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, [Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, October 2, 2024](#), 2 October 2024.

¹⁰⁸ Brookings, [Commentary: What can we expect from the 2024 BRICS summit?](#), 21 October 2024.

¹⁰⁹ Foreign Policy, [BRICS Faces a Reckoning](#), 22 June 2023.

¹¹⁰ President of Russia, [Address by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on the start of Russia's BRICS Chairmanship](#), 1 January 2024.

¹¹¹ “[Putin tosses BRICS at the Old World order](#)”, Politico, 22 October 2024.

¹¹² For more on sanctions on Russia see Commons Library briefing [Sanctions against Russia](#), 27 September 2024.

bloc to counter Western attempts to isolate the country”. China supports this objective.¹¹³

President Putin has also, since the BRICS expansion was announced in 2023, started saying the group represents “the global majority”.¹¹⁴ This language has been echoed by others in his administration including his foreign policy aide Yury Ushakov, and Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova. Ushakov in an interview in March 2024, said that the 2024 expansion and the number of other countries expressing interest to join “clearly demonstrates that the principles on which our association operates are very close to a wide range of countries, in fact, to the global majority”.¹¹⁵ Zakharova in an October 2024 briefing similarly said that the BRICS expansion shows the organisation’s “international standing and positive influence on global politics, and its capacity to defend the interests of the [Global South](#) and East – or the Global Majority – became significantly stronger”.¹¹⁶

President Putin has been keen to use the October 2024 BRICS summit Russia is hosting in Kazan “to signal that Moscow is not alone on the world stage”, according to an analysis by Foreign Policy.¹¹⁷ The newly expanded grouping helps strengthen this image. It stands in contrast to the 2023 summit in Johannesburg, which he was forced to attend virtually, after the International Criminal Court [issued an arrest warrant against him](#) in March 2023 for alleged war crimes in Ukraine. South Africa, as a signatory to the Rome Statute that established the ICC, would have been under an obligation to arrest Mr Putin, had he come to the country.¹¹⁸

3.6

South Africa’s priorities

Overview

South Africa takes a non-aligned approach to foreign policy. Following the fifteenth BRICS summit in August 2023, which South Africa hosted, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa in an address on the outcomes of the summit, set out this approach in more detail:

From the advent of our democracy, we have always sought to develop ties of friendship, cooperation and respect with all countries.

¹¹³ Foreign Policy, [BRICS Faces a Reckoning](#), 22 June 2023.

¹¹⁴ “[Putin says BRICS works for 'global majority'](#)”, Reuters, 22 August 2023.

¹¹⁵ “[BRICS expresses interests of global majority, says Russian presidential aide Ushakov](#)”, TASS, 5 March 2024.

¹¹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, [Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, October 2, 2024](#), 2 October 2024. See this article for more discussion of the terms the Global South and Global East in the context of the BRICS: The Nation, [The Global South’s BRICS Play Should Not Be Dismissed](#), 17 August 2023.

¹¹⁷ Foreign Policy, [Russia Fights Western Isolation Efforts With BRICS Summit](#), 22 October 2024.

¹¹⁸ “[Putin defends invasion of Ukraine in Brics summit address](#)”, The Guardian, 23 August 2023.

We have never aligned ourselves with any one global power or bloc of countries.

We have consistently advanced the articles of the United Nations Charter, including the principle that all members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means.¹¹⁹

President Ramaphosa said further that “our non-aligned approach has enabled us to pursue an independent foreign policy and to forge our own developmental path”.¹²⁰ At the January 2024 summit of the [Non-Aligned Movement](#), President Ramaphosa urged fellow leaders to remain independent “when the world appears to be once again divided between east and west”.¹²¹

Christopher Vandome a senior research fellow at Chatham House, in a 2024 analysis, states that South Africa “is a big proponent of multilateralism”, explaining that “the country’s ability to project independently its influence overseas is constrained – it has limited military and diplomatic capabilities compared to other middle or emerging powers”.¹²² Multilateral initiatives such as the BRICS therefore “offer South Africa avenues for building relationships and finding consensus on its priorities such as global governance reform and the Global South”.¹²³

South Africa also sees the BRICS as providing economic opportunities. Dr Samuel Igba a research fellow at the University of Pretoria, states that South Africa views its membership as “an opportunity to diversify trade between Pretoria and other member states and to focus on manufacturing goods for exports as opposed to exporting raw materials”.¹²⁴ However, Dr Igba also states that there is a “lack of concrete economic benefits for South Africa” from its membership”.¹²⁵

Christopher Vandome agrees. In a 2023 article he argues while there has been growth in trade between members over the past 20 years: “this can be largely

¹¹⁹ BRICS 2023 Summit, [Address by President Cyril Ramaphosa on outcomes of the XV BRICS Summit, Union Buildings, Tshwane, 3 September 2023](#), 3 September 2023.

¹²⁰ BRICS 2023 Summit, [Address by President Cyril Ramaphosa on outcomes of the XV BRICS Summit, Union Buildings, Tshwane, 3 September 2023](#), 3 September 2023.

¹²¹ South African Department for International Relations and Cooperation, [Country Statement by President Cyril Ramaphosa during 19th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, Kampala, Republic of Uganda, 19 January 2024](#), 19 January 2024.

¹²² Chatham House, [South Africa’s foreign relations under a new government: consistent policy with a new style](#), 3 July 2024.

¹²³ Chatham House, [South Africa’s foreign relations under a new government: consistent policy with a new style](#), 3 July 2024.

¹²⁴ University of Pretoria, [News: UP EXPERT OPINION: The pros and the cons of South Africa’s BRICS-driven foreign policy and trade focus](#), 6 May 2024.

¹²⁵ University of Pretoria, [News: UP EXPERT OPINION: The pros and the cons of South Africa’s BRICS-driven foreign policy and trade focus](#), 6 May 2024.

accredited simply to their rapid economic growth, especially of China, rather than any specific BRICS mechanism”.¹²⁶

South Africa’s May 2024 election, which saw the ruling-African National Congress Party forced to share power for the first time, has focused attention on whether South Africa’s foreign policy priorities have shifted, particularly as the cabinet post of minister of international relations, has gone to Ronald Lamola of the pro-market Democratic Alliance (DA), who were until the election the country’s main opposition party.¹²⁷

Christopher Vandome writes that the “DA will be keen to moderate the pro-Russian stance of some ANC leaders and ensure a policy more rooted in the national economic interest”.¹²⁸ However, in an interview with Foreign Policy magazine, Mr Lamola, when asked about South Africa’s relationship with the BRICS, used similar language to his predecessors. Asked about perception that the BRICS not appearing nonaligned anymore, he responded:

We see BRICS as a developmental platform, which does not align us with any party but does give us a platform of development, continues our industrialization, and also continues our economic trade with the various players in that platform. It also develops our finance; the BRICS bank helps finance our infrastructure.¹²⁹

Views on expansion

When it was announced at the 2023 BRICS summit that six new countries were being invited to join, President Ramaphosa hailed the move as “a new chapter in its effort to build a world that is fair, a world that is just, a world that is also inclusive and prosperous”.¹³⁰

Ziyanda Stuurman, senior Africa analyst at Eurasia Group, told the Financial Times, that “Brazil, India and South Africa do not want their clout to diminish in an expanded group”, but added “nor, however, do they want to pay a political price for thwarting expansion given that China is strongly pushing for it and several countries hope to join the bloc”.¹³¹

Christopher Vandome wrote in 2023 that “South Africa has benefitted from being a small player in the club. Expanded membership will dilute its position

¹²⁶ Chatham House, [Symbolism over substance for South Africa as Ramaphosa announces BRICS 3.0](#), 25 August 2023.

¹²⁷ “[South Africa's new coalition government unveiled](#)”, BBC News, 1 July 2024.

¹²⁸ Chatham House, [South Africa's foreign relations under a new government: consistent policy with a new style](#), 3 July 2024.

¹²⁹ “[Q&A: What Is South Africa's Foreign Policy?](#)”, Foreign Policy, 26 September 2024.

¹³⁰ “[Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Argentina, Egypt and Ethiopia to join China and Russia in BRICS bloc](#)”, ABC News, 24 August 2023.

¹³¹ “[South Africa and China find common ground on Brics expansion](#)”, Financial Times, 22 August 2023.

– not least the inclusion of Ethiopia and Egypt as additional African members”.¹³²

Aly Verjee, a senior advisor at USIP, agreed, stating that the expansion “will diminish South Africa’s significance even further — the two African states joining, Egypt and Ethiopia, are both more populous than South Africa and are experiencing higher rates of economic growth, albeit in much smaller economies”.¹³³ Verjee, however, also notes that South Africa’s key relationship in the BRICS forum is with China, noting it was the “first African country to sign the Belt and Road cooperation document, and China is South Africa’s largest trading partner”. South Africa’s relations with the other BRICS countries “remain far less important”, therefore.¹³⁴

In his interview with Foreign Policy, Ronald Lamola was asked if there were contradictions between South Africa’s policy of non-alignment and the expansion of the BRICS to include countries like Iran, Mr Lamola responded “We don’t see any contradictions [...] On geopolitics, we still participate in various platforms, and we are not told by any BRICS member whom we can or cannot work with. Our sovereign independence remains”.¹³⁵

2 UK policy towards the BRICS

UK Governments have said little directly about the BRICS organisation.

The BRICS were not mentioned in either of the 2021 Integrated Review or 2023 Integrated Review Refresh that set out the long term national security and foreign policy objectives of the previous Conservative Government (though both Russia and China featured prominently).

That government’s 2023 international development aid white paper did acknowledge changing global alliances, including the BRICS, and said the UK would try to respond to its partners’ concerns:

Shifting power and alliances are a feature of the geopolitical context in which countries are choosing how they will achieve their development goals. International and multilateral settings are changing and membership of groups such as BRICS and Shanghai Co-operation Organisation are evolving. The UK will use its role in the G7 and the G20 to demonstrate we are responding to our partners’ concerns. Greater co-operation can help the benefits of global development to be more widely felt, through increased global action and resources focused on the development, climate and nature objectives most important to our partners.¹³⁶

¹³² Chatham House, [Symbolism over substance for South Africa as Ramaphosa announces BRICS 3.0](#), 25 August 2023.

¹³³ USIP, [What BRICS Expansion Means for the Bloc’s Founding Members](#), 30 August 2023.

¹³⁴ USIP, [What BRICS Expansion Means for the Bloc’s Founding Members](#), 30 August 2023.

¹³⁵ “[Q&A: What Is South Africa’s Foreign Policy?](#)”, Foreign Policy, 26 September 2024.

¹³⁶ FCDO, [International development in a contested world: ending extreme poverty and tackling climate change, a white paper on international development](#), p24, 20 November 2023.

The previous Conservative Government was asked in 2022 of their assessment of Argentina's then intention to join the BRICS, to which it responded, "The issue of BRICS membership is a matter for members of that group".¹³⁷

In February 2024, that government was asked what assessment it had made of the UK's relationship with South Africa "in light of the increasingly close links which that country has formed with Russia and with Iran". It responded that:

We encourage South Africa to use their available channels, including the BRICS and their G20 Presidency preparations, to urge Russia to end its unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine and to make clear to Iran that Hamas has no role in a long-term political solution which delivers security for both Palestine and Israel.¹³⁸

Views on BRICS priorities

It has been the long-standing policy of UK Governments to support reform of the UN Security Council, a priority for the BRICS and Brazil, India, and South Africa, in particular.

Specifically, the last Government said it supported the expansion of both the permanent and non-permanent categories of Security Council membership. This included: "permanent African representation on the Council as well as the creation of new permanent seats for India, Germany, Japan and Brazil".¹³⁹

Asked about the prospects for World Bank reform in January 2023, the then government responded:

We want the reform process to strengthen the Bank's offer to the world's poorest, make best use of the Bank's existing resources, including by implementing recommendations of the G20 Capital Adequacy Framework, and support countries through shocks and compounding crises.¹⁴⁰

Labour Government policy

The new Labour Government have not commented directly on the BRICS since coming into office, though they have made frequent references to [the Global South](#).

In their election manifesto Labour committed a Labour government to "rebuild Britain's reputation on international development with a new approach based on genuine respect and partnership with the Global South to support our common interests".¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ [PQ 5609 \[Argentina: BRICS Summit\]](#), 20 May 2022.

¹³⁸ [HL 2618 \[South Africa: Foreign Relations\]](#), 20 February 2024.

¹³⁹ [PQ 200102 \[UN Security Council\]](#), 16 October 2024.

¹⁴⁰ [PQ 118977 \[World Bank\]](#), 17 January 2023.

¹⁴¹ Labour Party, '[Labour Party manifesto 2024](#)' (PDF), 13 June 2024, p 124.

The Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, upon taking office promised a “reset” in the UK’s relations with the Global South also.¹⁴²

In a September 2024 speech focused on climate change, Mr Lammy said the UK would seek to build a Global Clean Power Alliance “reaching across the Global North and the Global South together”. The Alliance would need to “focus on scaling up global investment”, he noted that “emerging market and developing economies outside China account for just fifteen per cent of global clean energy investment” and so “We must unlock global finance on a far, far, larger scale, so we can back ambitious plans from those moving away from fossil fuels”.¹⁴³

The Foreign Secretary also said that he had “heard repeatedly our partners’ frustrations at the unfairness of the global system today – particularly how difficult it is for them to get international climate finance”.¹⁴⁴

In terms of relations with individual BRICS members, on China Labour stated in their manifesto that they would “bring a long-term and strategic approach to managing our relations [with China]”, and that “we will co-operate where we can, compete where we need to, and challenge where we must”.¹⁴⁵

They also committed to an audit of the bilateral relationship to “improve the UK’s capability to understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities China poses”.¹⁴⁶

In November 2024, David Lammy became the first Foreign Secretary to visit South Africa since 2013, and he and his counterpart agreed to develop a new UK-South Africa Growth Plan.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² FCDO, [Reconnecting Britain for our security and prosperity: Foreign Secretary David Lammy's statement](#), 6 July 2024.

¹⁴³ FCDO, [Speech: The Kew Lecture: Foreign Secretary's speech on the climate crisis](#), 17 September 2024.

¹⁴⁴ As above.

¹⁴⁵ Labour Party, [Change – Labour Party Manifesto 2024](#) (PDF), p120.

¹⁴⁶ As above.

¹⁴⁷ FCDO, [Press Release: Growth at the heart of Foreign Secretary's visit to Nigeria and South Africa](#), 3 November 2024.

4 2024 expansion and the 2024 Kazan summit

4.1 Perspectives of the new BRICS members

Overview

In January 2024 four new members: Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), joined the BRICS, though it was widely reported at the time that Saudi Arabia had also joined, it has now been established it has not yet a member (see below).

Argentina had applied to join the bloc in June 2022, under former President Alberto Fernández.¹⁴⁸ However, when Javier Milei became President in December 2023, he withdrew Argentina's application pointing to his different foreign policy approach to that of his predecessor.¹⁴⁹

The motivations of the four new members (as well as Saudi Arabia), what they may bring to the organisation and the challenges their membership might present are explored below.

Egypt

At the end of 2023 when it was announced Egypt was joining the bloc the country was “suffering from a severe economic crisis” according to the Middle East focused Fikra Forum. It identified the features of the crisis as: “heavy foreign debt, collapse of the Egyptian pound, unprecedented inflation, and a chronic trade balance deficit”. It has received several rounds of IMF support.¹⁵⁰

Reuters reported that Egypt hoped its membership “will help ease its shortage of foreign currency and attract new investment, but analysts say it may take time before any benefits appear”.¹⁵¹ In August 2023 to mark the announcement of its joining the BRICS, Egypt's Cabinet released a statement, in which it said “the group's aim of reducing dollar transactions will lower the

¹⁴⁸ [“BRICS invite is ‘great opportunity’ for Argentina, outgoing president says”](#), Al Jazeera, 24 August 2023.

¹⁴⁹ [“Argentina pulls out of plans to join Brics bloc”](#), BBC News, 29 December 2023.

¹⁵⁰ Fikra Forum, [Egyptian Media Reflections on Egypt's Accession to BRICS](#), 28 September 2023; Commons Library, [Egypt: introductory country profile](#).

¹⁵¹ [“Egypt hopes BRICS entry will lure foreign cash, but analysts counsel patience”](#), Reuters, 29 August 2023.

foreign currency pressure in Egypt”, and that they hoped the New Development Bank will provide concessional funding for development.¹⁵²

Charles Robertson, head of macro strategy at FIM Partners, told Reuters gaining access to cheap NDB funding would help Egypt and it made sense to keep close to China, a potential source of huge foreign direct investment in Egyptian manufacturing.¹⁵³

Nourhan ElSheikh, Professor of Political Science at Cairo University, wrote in an analysis for the Valdai Club that “Egypt’s geopolitical position represents an important addition to BRICS”. The analysis mentioned Egypt’s influential security role in the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea; its control of the Suez Canal, that it is a key hub for many industries and grain; Egypt’s position as a “gateway to the Middle East, Africa and the Mediterranean countries, by virtue of its geographical location and the economic blocks to which it belongs”; and finally its large market of 106 million people.¹⁵⁴

The Fika Forum looked at the Egyptian media’s reaction to the country’s entry to the BRICS. Pro-government media mentioned the positives of the deal, including potential economic benefits, the recognition of Egypt’s regional and international status, and hopes that the expansion of the bloc will “herald a shift in the international order that puts an end to the dominance of the West over the world economy”.¹⁵⁵ Critics of the government expressed scepticism that membership would create meaningful economic change, and pointed to the informal nature of the BRICS meaning it lacked capacity for action.¹⁵⁶

Analysis by the Forum stated that its membership “could very well cause a rift between Egypt and its Western counterparts, especially the United States. Hence, the success of Egypt joining the BRICS will rely on the extent of its ability not to be drawn into international polarization”.¹⁵⁷ The United States is currently the primary source of military aid to Egypt and Egypt is a significant mediator for the US on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.¹⁵⁸

Ethiopia

Dareskedar Taye, lead researcher at the Ethiopia-based Institute of Foreign Affairs, in an analysis for the Valdai Club, highlighted the potential economic benefits as well as the diplomatic ones.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² [“Egypt hopes BRICS entry will lure foreign cash, but analysts counsel patience”](#), Reuters, 29 August 2023.

¹⁵³ [“Egypt hopes BRICS entry will lure foreign cash, but analysts counsel patience”](#), Reuters, 29 August 2023.

¹⁵⁴ Valdai Group, Nourhan ElSheikh, [Opinions: Egypt and BRICS: Priorities for Engagement](#), 24 April 2024.

¹⁵⁵ Fikra Forum, [Egyptian Media Reflections on Egypt’s Accession to BRICS](#), 28 September 2023.

¹⁵⁶ Fikra Forum, [Egyptian Media Reflections on Egypt’s Accession to BRICS](#), 28 September 2023.

¹⁵⁷ Fikra Forum, [Egyptian Media Reflections on Egypt’s Accession to BRICS](#), 28 September 2023.

¹⁵⁸ Commons Library, [Egypt: introductory country profile](#).

¹⁵⁹ Valdai Group, Dareskedar Taye, [“Opinion: Ethiopia and BRICS: Regional and Global Dimensions”](#), 13 March 2024.

On the economy, Taye describes Ethiopia as a “developing nation in dire need of external financing for use in fully realising its development goals” and identifies the BRICS as a key sources of new financing, both from member states as well as the BRICS financial institutions such as the NDB.¹⁶⁰

On the diplomatic front, Taye describes how in the last few decades “Ethiopia has begun to exercise foreign policy independently in its relationship with the great powers”, and how during this period, “Ethiopia has maintained strong political, economic and security-related relations with the US and EU on the one hand and with China, Russia and India on the other hand”. He argues that Ethiopia has been trying to maintain “independence in the rapidly changing global order [...] over the past fifteen years”, that its accession to the BRICS “has provided impetus” to these efforts, and that “joining BRICS has meant a lot to Ethiopia”.¹⁶¹

In January 2024, the DW news website pointed to Ethiopia’s recent financial problems as part of the reasons for its BRICS application. At the end of 2023 Ethiopia failed to pay a Eurobond redemption instalment, which caused the rating agency Fitch to lower its credit rating, and it then sought to negotiate a financing package with the IMF¹⁶² – the IMF approved this in July 2024.¹⁶³

Lukas Kupfernagel, head of the Ethiopia office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, pointed to the potential of the BRICS NDB when it became “fully functional” to give Ethiopia access to new forms of funding. He argued this could free the country from being dependent on Western institutions such as the IMF, and having to meet their conditions, “that would change the situation completely”, Kupefernagel stated.¹⁶⁴

Susanne Stollreiter, head of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Addis Ababa, said Ethiopia’s inclusion in this wave of BRICS expansion came as a surprise to some, as other African countries such as Nigeria and Algeria were thought more likely candidates, given their geographical and economic size. She argued other factors played a more decisive role: “Ethiopia is very important from a geopolitical point of view. Owing to its large population, its economy has the potential to grow strongly in the future”.¹⁶⁵

Ethiopia’s Finance Minister Ahmed Shide told Chinese state broadcaster CGTN that his country’s accession was an important diplomatic gain for his country. He said that while “Ethiopia will continue to cooperate with its traditional partners [...] Ethiopia will also significantly improve its relations with new

¹⁶⁰ Valdai Group, Dareskedar Taye, “[Opinion: Ethiopia and BRICS: Regional and Global Dimensions](#)”, 13 March 2024.

¹⁶¹ Valdai Group, Dareskedar Taye, “[Opinion: Ethiopia and BRICS: Regional and Global Dimensions](#)”, 13 March 2024.

¹⁶² “[Ethiopia becomes BRICS member amid economic crisis](#)”, DW, 16 January 2024.

¹⁶³ IMF, [IMF Executive Board Approves Four-Year US\\$3.4 billion Extended Credit Facility Arrangement for Ethiopia](#), 29 July 2024.

¹⁶⁴ “[Ethiopia becomes BRICS member amid economic crisis](#)”, DW, 16 January 2024.

¹⁶⁵ “[Ethiopia becomes BRICS member amid economic crisis](#)”, DW, 16 January 2024.

partners, such as the BRICS countries, whose economies are growing quickly”.¹⁶⁶

Iran

Iran is subject to [substantial economic sanctions by the United States](#). The German think tank the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, states that Iran hopes that its membership “which it sees as a counterweight to the Western-dominated order, will shift the balance of power in its favour and thus reduce its international isolation”, while also “mitigat[ing] the economic impact of Western sanctions”. Iran is also seeking greater “investment and technological expertise, particularly in the areas of energy and infrastructure development”.¹⁶⁷

The foundation’s analysis said BRICS membership “could also give new impetus to the stalled [2023] rapprochement or understanding with Saudi Arabia, which has been supported, if not initiated, by China, and emphasise Iran’s role as an important regional power even more strongly”.¹⁶⁸ For more on Iran’s role in the region, see Library briefing [Iran’s influence in the Middle East](#).

Mahmood Sariolghalam, a non-resident scholar with the Middle East Institute’s Iran Program, writes that BRICS membership “underscores Tehran’s desire for political inclusion and its intention to dissuade those who argue Iran is an isolated country”. Sariolghalam is sceptical however that joining the bloc will result in significant improvements in Iran’s economic or diplomatic situation, saying it “cannot alter Tehran’s economic woes as US secondary sanctions place enormous limitations on Iran’s economic interactions with other states”. He adds further “without normal relations with the West” Iran’s BRICS membership “cannot deliver benefits in the form of trade, FDI, higher economic growth rates, or technology transfer in key areas like artificial intelligence”.¹⁶⁹

He argues that it “provides only psychological satisfaction for Iran’s leadership by enabling it to rub shoulders with great powers, providing photo-ops with leaders of other countries, and giving it a platform to project visibility and public relations in foreign policy”.¹⁷⁰

Cobus van Staden, a researcher with the China Global South Project, told the New York Times, that for some of the other BRICS members “Iran, obviously, is a complicated choice”, and he imagined that they “worry that it might

¹⁶⁶ “[Ethiopia becomes BRICS member amid economic crisis](#)”, DW, 16 January 2024.

¹⁶⁷ Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, [BRICS enlargement - a "non-event" or a stage victory against the West?](#), 27 March 2023.

¹⁶⁸ Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, [BRICS enlargement - a "non-event" or a stage victory against the West?](#), 27 March 2023.

¹⁶⁹ Middle East Institute, [Will BRICS membership recast Iran’s foreign policy?](#), 25 September 2023.

¹⁷⁰ Middle East Institute, [Will BRICS membership recast Iran’s foreign policy?](#), 25 September 2023.

increase geopolitical tensions with Western powers”.¹⁷¹ Trita Parsi of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft told the newspaper that Iranian membership would also “undermine leverage Washington held over Tehran as a kind of global gatekeeper”.¹⁷²

Ebrahim Raisi, then Iran’s President, during a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, at the sidelines of the August 2023 BRICS leaders’ summit, was quoted as saying “Iran’s membership in the bloc is opposition to American unilateralism”.¹⁷³ In the same month, Mohammad Jamshidi, Iran’s then vice president for political affairs called the invitation a “historic achievement and a strategic victory”.¹⁷⁴

However, Iran’s new President, Mr Pezeshkian, has said he considers sanctions a “serious detriment” to Iran and that his foreign policy aims are to “normalise relations with the world” and the implementation of the JCPOA.¹⁷⁵ Distancing itself from support for Russia is one likely prerequisite for the lessening of sanctions against Iran.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia was invited to join the BRICS along with the five other new members (and Argentina) in August 2023.¹⁷⁶ At that time, Saudi Arabia’s foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, said his country appreciated the invitation, but told Al Arabiya TV they would study the details before the proposed 1 January 2024 joining date and take “the appropriate decision”.¹⁷⁷

While the BBC reported in February 2024 that South Africa’s government had “confirmed” Saudi Arabia’s had joined the BRICS in January alongside the five other invited candidates,¹⁷⁸ Reuters reported in October 2024, it “has not yet taken up membership”.¹⁷⁹ Reuters reported further that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was not expected to attend the BRICS leaders October Kazan summit, and his foreign minister would attend in his place.¹⁸⁰

In January 2024, when Reuters reported that Saudi Arabia was still considering its prospective membership, it spoke to Hesham Alghannam, director general of the Security Research Center at Naif Arab University for

¹⁷¹ “Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt Invited to Join Emerging Nations Group”, New York Times, 24 August 2023 [[Through Factiva](#)].

¹⁷² “Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt Invited to Join Emerging Nations Group”, New York Times, 24 August 2023 [[Through Factiva](#)].

¹⁷³ The Stimson Center, [The Implications of Iran’s Inclusion in BRICS](#), 31 August 2023.

¹⁷⁴ “Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt Invited to Join Emerging Nations Group”, New York Times, 24 August 2023 [[Through Factiva](#)].

¹⁷⁵ USIP, Iran Primer, [Pezeshkian: On the Issues](#), 8 July 2024.

¹⁷⁶ [Saudi Arabia appreciates BRICS’ invitation, will take ‘appropriate decision’: FM](#), Al Arabiya, 24 August 2023.

¹⁷⁷ [Saudi Arabia appreciates BRICS’ invitation, will take ‘appropriate decision’: FM](#), Al Arabiya, 24 August 2023.

¹⁷⁸ [“Brics: What is the group and which countries have joined?”](#), BBC News, 1 February 2024.

¹⁷⁹ [“RPT Saudi’s MbS will not attend Russia’s BRICS summit”](#), Reuters, 14 October 2024.

¹⁸⁰ [“RPT Saudi’s MbS will not attend Russia’s BRICS summit”](#), Reuters, 14 October 2024.

Security Sciences. Alghannam said of the calculus behind the decision: “While officially joining the group is advantageous for the Kingdom’s economy, it must carefully consider the political implications it may have on its relations with other major powers”.¹⁸¹ He went on to say: “The Kingdom aims to maintain an equal distance from all major powers and, at present, it does not want to send any signals that could be misinterpreted by any party”.¹⁸²

Analysis by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, talked firstly of the economic considerations that meant Saudi Arabia was moving to closer cooperation with the BRICS saying it was seeking to “drive forward its economic diversification and reduce its dependence on oil”, as well as opening up new trade opportunities.¹⁸³ Secondly the foundation talked of the diplomatic advantages saying membership could “indirectly reactivate the rapprochement with its former major rival Iran, which had been put on ice, strengthen its own weight as a regional power and improve its standing on the international political stage”.¹⁸⁴

The article also said the prospective move would help the Kingdom meet its goal of becoming “less dependent on the USA, its long-standing close and strategic partner”, while also hoping membership might allow it to play a greater mediating role in the Arab world, supported by the UAE and Egypt.¹⁸⁵

United Arab Emirates

An article by the US-based Stimson Center, described the United Arab Emirates’ (UAE) decision to join the BRICS as a “complex one”. It identified opportunities including strengthening economic ties with its two largest trading partners China and India, while also giving the country a “larger role on the world stage”. However, the Stimson Center also identified potential challenges: that “the bloc will likely arouse opposition from the West”, and that the UAE “will have to balance its allegiance to BRICS with its established security and investment partnership with the US”.¹⁸⁶

Looking further at the potential geopolitical and diplomatic impacts, the Stimson Center notes that Iran and Saudi Arabia are also joining the organisation, and both are “former adversaries” of the UAE, and so “any relapse to regional conflict could jeopardize BRICS’ ability to engage in

¹⁸¹ [“Exclusive: Saudi Arabia still considering BRICS membership, sources say”](#), Reuters, 18 January 2024.

¹⁸² [“Exclusive: Saudi Arabia still considering BRICS membership, sources say”](#), Reuters, 18 January 2024.

¹⁸³ Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, [BRICS enlargement - a “non-event” or a stage victory against the West?](#), 27 March 2023.

¹⁸⁴ Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, [BRICS enlargement - a “non-event” or a stage victory against the West?](#), 27 March 2023.

¹⁸⁵ Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, [BRICS enlargement - a “non-event” or a stage victory against the West?](#), 27 March 2023.

¹⁸⁶ The Stimson Center, [UAE Entry into BRICS Increases its Diplomatic and Economic Options](#), 13 September 2023.

meaningful, cohesive decision-making”.¹⁸⁷ It says further that “pursuing the UAE’s own objectives may prove challenging, particularly if conflicts of interest arise”.¹⁸⁸ The Friedrich Naumann Foundation also highlights the potential regional impacts, noting the Middle East region is “characterised by numerous conflicts and tensions”. It suggests therefore “a policy of non-intervention or neutrality in these regional conflicts by the BRICS group could be at odds with the UAE’s interest in playing an active role in resolving regional issues”.¹⁸⁹

In terms of the economic impacts of the UAE membership of the BRICS the Stimson Center pointed to a 2023 agreement between the UAE and India, to “establish a mechanism that would further develop bilateral trade in their respective currencies, instead of the US dollar”. This agreement “could embolden other bloc members to follow suit and conduct cross-border trade in local currencies”. As explained in section 2.3 several BRICS members are key to displace the US dollar as the key global currency. The Friedrich Naumann Foundation, also identifies “de-dollarisation” as a potential boon for the UAE, possibly increasing its “resilience to economic sanctions and fluctuations on the foreign exchange markets”.¹⁹⁰

The foundation argues that the UAE’s motives for joining “are primarily economic in nature”, and that membership could “create new opportunities for bilateral trade agreements and investments and help the UAE to drive its economic diversification away from oil”.¹⁹¹

The Stimson Center analysis also identifies strengths the UAE can bring to the BRICS, including the potential to “inject much-needed liquidity into the NDB”, and leveraging its “substantial financial resources” that include its sovereign wealth fund, “to provide direct capital contributions”. The country’s expertise in finance and infrastructure development could also “be valuable in structuring and managing NDB projects efficiently, attracting more funding from both within and outside the BRICS alliance”.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ The Stimson Center, [UAE Entry into BRICS Increases its Diplomatic and Economic Options](#), 13 September 2023.

¹⁸⁸ The Stimson Center, [UAE Entry into BRICS Increases its Diplomatic and Economic Options](#), 13 September 2023.

¹⁸⁹ Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, [BRICS enlargement - a "non-event" or a stage victory against the West2](#), 27 March 2023.

¹⁹⁰ Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, [BRICS enlargement - a "non-event" or a stage victory against the West2](#), 27 March 2023.

¹⁹¹ Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, [BRICS enlargement - a "non-event" or a stage victory against the West2](#), 27 March 2023.

¹⁹² The Stimson Center, [UAE Entry into BRICS Increases its Diplomatic and Economic Options](#), 13 September 2023.

4.2

Potential future members

After the 2023 BRICS summit, when it was announced they had reached agreement on the expansion of the organisation, then BRICS Chair President Cyril Ramaphosa told the media that “further phases will follow”.¹⁹³

President Putin published a statement when Russia took on the BRICS chair in January 2024, in which he mentioned “about 30” countries that are “prepared to join the BRICS multidimensional agenda in one form or another”. He added “to this end, we will start working on the modalities of a new category of BRICS partner country”.¹⁹⁴

It was reported just before the October 2024 Kazan summit that this would be called a ‘partner status’, with the criteria and possible candidates for this status to be decided during the meeting.¹⁹⁵

As explained in section 2.1, membership of the New Development Bank was already open to non-BRICS member countries before the 2024 expansion.

At the June 2024 meeting of BRICS foreign ministers, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, stated that the BRICS had decided to “take a pause” in admitting new members while they worked on “categories of partner countries as stages ahead of a full-fledged membership”.¹⁹⁶

It was also reported in October 2024, by TASS (the Russian state-owned news agency), that Bahrain’s ambassador to Moscow, said in an interview that the BRICS had suspended the admission of new member states.¹⁹⁷

List of potential new members

The BRICS does not publish an official list of countries that have applied for membership.

Below is a list of countries that have, according to news reports, expressed a desire to join the BRICS or requested membership:

- Bahrain (requested membership)¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ BRICS 2023, [BRICS CHAIR President Cyril Ramaphosa’s Media Briefing Remarks Announcing the Outcomes of the XV BRICS Summit, 24 August 2023](#), 24 August 2023.

¹⁹⁴ The Kremlin, [Address by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on the start of Russia’s BRICS Chairmanship](#), 1 January 2024.

¹⁹⁵ Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, [The BRICS Summit 2024 in Kazan - a world stage for Putin?](#), 21 October 2024.

¹⁹⁶ “[BRICS to suspend admitting new members for a while — Lavrov](#)”, TASS, 25 June 2024.

¹⁹⁷ “[Bahrain applied to join BRICS at last summit — envoy](#)”, TASS, 15 October 2024.

¹⁹⁸ [Bahrain applied to join BRICS at last summit — envoy](#) TASS, 15 October 2024.

- Bangladesh (requested membership)¹⁹⁹
- Belarus (requested membership)²⁰⁰
- Bolivia (expressed interest)²⁰¹
- Cuba (requested membership)²⁰²
- Malaysia (expressed interest)²⁰³
- Nigeria (expressed interest)²⁰⁴
- Senegal (expressed interest)²⁰⁵
- Thailand (requested membership)²⁰⁶
- Turkey (requested membership)²⁰⁷
- Venezuela (requested membership)²⁰⁸

Algeria said it requested membership but was not chosen during the 2023 summit. In October 2024 it was reported that Algeria had now withdrawn its request and would not apply again, despite having been admitted into the BRICS New Development Bank in September 2024.²⁰⁹

Kazakhstan has been identified as having express interest in joining,²¹⁰ but in October 2024, a spokesperson for President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said the country “will refrain from submitting an application to BRICS [...] at present and likely in the foreseeable future”.²¹¹

Joko Widodo, then President of Indonesia said in 2023, that his government had decided not to submit a letter of interest to join, and his foreign minister in January 2024, said it was still weighing up the pros and cons of membership.²¹² In May 2024, a spokesperson for Vietnam’s foreign ministry

¹⁹⁹ [“BRICS expansion: Why Bangladesh could not make it this time”](#), Dhaka Tribune, 24 August 2023. NB this was under the Government of Sheikh Hasina, which is no longer in power.

²⁰⁰ TV Brics, [Which countries can join BRICS?](#) 25 April 2024.

²⁰¹ [“Bolivia sees joining BRICS as path towards prosperity — president”](#), TASS, 28 May 2024.

²⁰² [“Cuba to Putin: Let us join BRICS club”](#), Politico, 8 October 2024.

²⁰³ [“Russia’s BRICS summit: What’s on the agenda and why it matters to Putin”](#), Al Jazeera, 22 October 2024.

²⁰⁴ [“Nigeria Contemplates BRICS Membership”](#), Modern Diplomacy, 16 March 2024.

²⁰⁵ [“Why the BRICS Aren’t Crumbling in Africa”](#), Foreign Policy, 23 August 2023.

²⁰⁶ [“Why are Southeast Asian countries looking to join BRICS?”](#), DW, 4 July 2024.

²⁰⁷ [“Russia’s BRICS summit: What’s on the agenda and why it matters to Putin”](#), Al Jazeera, 22 October 2024.

²⁰⁸ TV Brics, [Which countries can join BRICS?](#) 25 April 2024.

²⁰⁹ [“Algeria ends bid to join BRICS, but stays in group’s Development Bank”](#), Middle East Monitor, 2 October 2024.

²¹⁰ TV Brics, [Which countries can join BRICS?](#) 25 April 2024.

²¹¹ [“Kazakhstan Outlines Position on Joining BRICS”](#), The Astana Times, 16 October 2024.

²¹² [“Why are Southeast Asian countries looking to join BRICS?”](#), DW, 4 July 2024.

told a press that “like many countries around the world, we are closely monitoring the process of BRICS membership expansion”.²¹³

4.3

The 2024 Kazan summit

Partner country status officially confirmed, but not the candidates

At the end of the Kazan summit, it was widely reported that the BRICS had established a new partner country status, and 13 countries had been initially selected.²¹⁴

The new partner status was confirmed in the end of summit declaration:

We welcome the considerable interest by countries of the Global South in BRICS and we endorse the Modalities of BRICS Partner Country Category. We strongly believe that extending the BRICS partnership with EMDCs [emerging markets and developing countries] will further contribute to strengthening the spirit of solidarity and true international cooperation for the benefit of all.²¹⁵

It is not clear however, what the criteria and procedures are for this new category.

The Brazilian news agency Brasil de Fato reported that the 13 new partner countries are: Algeria, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.²¹⁶

However, there has been no official confirmation of who the new 13 partner countries are.

TASS has reported that President Putin had confirmed the list of partner countries had been agreed on and explained that invitations will be sent to them first, “and once positive responses are received, the list will be announced”.²¹⁷

Brasil de Fato quoted Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira as saying during the Kazan summit “The discussion focused on the criteria and principles for future BRICS expansion. Currently, there are 10 member countries, but there will be more in the future. These principles and criteria have been discussed,

²¹³ “[Why are Southeast Asian countries looking to join BRICS?](#)”, DW, 4 July 2024.

²¹⁴ See “[BRICS approves Cuba, Bolivia, and 11 other countries as 'partner states'](#)”, Brasil de Fato, 24 October 2024; and “[Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand become partner countries of BRICS](#)”, Channel News Asia, 24 October 2024.

²¹⁵ India Ministry of External Affairs, [Kazan Declaration: "Strengthening Multilateralism For Just Global Development And Security"](#), 23 October 2024.

²¹⁶ “[BRICS approves Cuba, Bolivia, and 11 other countries as 'partner states'](#)”, Brasil de Fato, 24 October 2024.

²¹⁷ “[Thirteen countries receive BRICS partner status — Indian Foreign Ministry](#)”, TASS, 2 November 2024.

approved, and agreed upon”. On the timing of the process Mr Vieira said “we will announce the countries. If not by the end of the year, then next year, and the responsibility will pass to the Brazilian presidency”.²¹⁸

The news organisation also reported according to diplomatic sources from the Brazilian delegation in Kazan: “Venezuela was left off the list due to Brazil’s veto, which was presented during the preliminary negotiations of the summit”.²¹⁹

Calls for further progress on financial cooperation but few specifics agreed

The declaration called for, as per previous summit declarations, to “reform the current international financial architecture” to make it “more inclusive and just”.²²⁰ It also reiterated their “commitment to enhancing financial cooperation within BRICS”.²²¹

Despite Russia stating it was a priority for their Chair period, and false social media reports claiming that a BRICS currency had been created, there was no progress on a common currency at Kazan.²²²

The declaration did call for further discussions on the BRICS Cross-Border Payments Initiative (BCBPI), an alternative payment system that aims to allow member-states to run cross-border trades in local currencies. However, it noted that the BCPI is “is voluntary and non-binding”.²²³ It further tasked BRICS “Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (...) to continue consideration of the issue of local currencies, payment instruments and platforms and report back to us by the next Presidency”.²²⁴

The declaration called for the further expansion of the NDB membership and “expedited consideration of applications of BRICS countries”.²²⁵ This will be a matter for the Bank’s board, however.

Of note is the new Russian initiative of creating a new trading platform for grain called the ‘BRICS Grain Exchange’, which the declaration said it

²¹⁸ [BRICS approves Cuba, Bolivia, and 11 other countries as 'partner states'](#)”, Brasil de Fato, 24 October 2024.

²¹⁹ [BRICS approves Cuba, Bolivia, and 11 other countries as 'partner states'](#)”, Brasil de Fato, 24 October 2024.

²²⁰ India Ministry of External Affairs, [Kazan Declaration: "Strengthening Multilateralism For Just Global Development And Security"](#), Para 59, 23 October 2024.

²²¹ India Ministry of External Affairs, [Kazan Declaration: "Strengthening Multilateralism For Just Global Development And Security"](#), Para 65, 23 October 2024.

²²² ["Fact Check: Posts misleadingly claim Russian leader unveiled BRICS banknote to member countries in Kazan"](#), AFP, 1 November 2024.

²²³ India Ministry of External Affairs, [Kazan Declaration: "Strengthening Multilateralism For Just Global Development And Security"](#), Para 65, 23 October 2024.

²²⁴ India Ministry of External Affairs, [Kazan Declaration: "Strengthening Multilateralism For Just Global Development And Security"](#), Para 67, 23 October 2024.

²²⁵ India Ministry of External Affairs, [Kazan Declaration: "Strengthening Multilateralism For Just Global Development And Security"](#), Para 62, 23 October 2024.

welcomed, and mentioned future plans to “subsequently develop it including expanding it to other agricultural sectors”.²²⁶

Other outcomes

Climate change

The Kazan declaration, like recent BRICS summit declarations, emphasised the importance of tackling climate change and support for the Paris Agreement, while also calling for “just energy transitions” that take into account:

national circumstances, including climate and natural conditions, the structure of national economy and energy mixes well as the specific circumstances of those developing countries whose economies heavily depend on income or consumption of fossil fuels and related energy-intensive products.²²⁷

A new development was the rejection of carbon border adjustment mechanisms, which the declaration called “unilateral, punitive and discriminatory protectionist measures, that are not in line with international law” made “under the pretext of environmental concerns”.²²⁸

Support for the G20

The declaration talked of the “key role of the G20”, which it called “the premier global forum for multilateral economic and financial cooperation” saying that it “provides a platform for dialogue of both developed and emerging economies on an equal and mutually beneficial footing for jointly seeking shared solutions to global challenges”.²²⁹ The G20 includes five BRICS countries among its membership (Brazil, China, India, Russia, South Africa, and invited member Saudi Arabia).

Enhanced dialogue on security issues

The Kazan declaration stated its members “strongly support enhanced BRICS dialogue on policy and security issues”. Politics and security cooperation is one of the three pillars of BRICS cooperation, however, the organisation’s work on security has been limited so far.

Global Times, the Chinese state run English-language newspaper, reported that during the summit President Xi called for the BRICS+ countries to “uphold peace and strive for common security, come forward together to form a

²²⁶ India Ministry of External Affairs, [Kazan Declaration: "Strengthening Multilateralism For Just Global Development And Security"](#), Para 73, 23 October 2024.

²²⁷ India Ministry of External Affairs, [Kazan Declaration: "Strengthening Multilateralism For Just Global Development And Security"](#), Para 81, 23 October 2024.

²²⁸ India Ministry of External Affairs, [Kazan Declaration: "Strengthening Multilateralism For Just Global Development And Security"](#), Para 83, 23 October 2024.

²²⁹ India Ministry of External Affairs, [Kazan Declaration: "Strengthening Multilateralism For Just Global Development And Security"](#), Para 14, 23 October 2024.

stabilizing force for peace, strengthen global security governance, and explore solutions to address both symptoms and roots of hotspot issues”.²³⁰ This may point to BRICS security cooperation being a priority for China.

Xi and Modi hold key meeting

The Kazan summit also gave an opportunity for India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping to further advance the recent thaw in India-China relations. On 21 October, a day before the summit started, the two countries announced they had reached an agreement on patrolling arrangements along their disputed border.²³¹ During the 2024 summit the two leaders met formally for the first time in four years, following the [June 2020 border clash](#) which resulted in the deaths of at least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers, (they had met informally at 2022 G20 summit in Bali, and at the 2023 BRICS Johannesburg summit).²³²

It was announced following the Kazan bilateral meeting that Xi and Modi had agreed that their special representatives on the border issue “Will meet at an early date to oversee the management of peace & tranquillity in border areas and to explore a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution to the boundary question”. They also agreed to further talks between their foreign ministers “to stabilize and rebuild bilateral relations”.²³³

Criticism of UN Secretary General’s attendance

There was some criticism of UN Secretary General António Guterres attending the Kazan summit. Ukraine’s Foreign Ministry said on X (formerly Twitter) that the decision “is a wrong choice that does not advance the cause of peace”, adding “it only damages the UN’s reputation”.²³⁴

Portuguese Foreign Minister Paulo Rangel also criticised the move (Mr Guterres is a former Portuguese Prime Minister). Mr Rangel said the Secretary General’s attendance is “not a happy formula”, noting that Mr Guterres had not attended the [June 2024 peace summit in Zurich](#) that was held at the request of Ukrainian President Zelenskyy.²³⁵

In response to the Ukrainian criticism of his attendance, Farhan Haq, deputy spokesman for Guterres, responded by saying that the visit is “a standard practice in attending meetings of organizations with large numbers of important member states, such as the G7 and the G20”. And that the meeting had “great importance for the work of the United Nations, with the BRICS

²³⁰ [“Xi urges ‘BRICS Plus’ to pursue common security, development, harmony”](#), Global Times, 25 October 2024.

²³¹ [“India and China agree to de-escalate border tensions”](#), BBC News, 21 October 2021.

²³² [“What led to Modi and Xi meeting and thaw in ties”](#), BBC News, 24 October 2024.

²³³ India Ministry of External Affairs, [Press Releases: Meeting of Prime Minister with Mr. Xi Jinping, President of the People’s Republic of China on the margins of the 16th BRICS Summit](#), 23 October 2024.

²³⁴ [“Putin ends BRICS summit that sought to expand Russia’s global clout but was shadowed by Ukraine”](#), AP News, 25 October 2024.

²³⁵ [“Portuguese FM slams UN chief for attending BRICS summit in Russia”](#), Euractiv, 6 November 2024.

countries representing about half the world's population". Mr Haq said that the Secretary General when meeting with Russian President Putin "will reaffirm his well-known positions on the war in Ukraine and the conditions for a just peace based on the UN Charter, international law, and the resolutions of the United Nations". He would also "continue to pursue his efforts to re-establish safe navigation in the Black Sea".²³⁶

BBC News reported that President Zelenskyy rejected a visit by Mr Guterres that he asked to Ukraine following the Kazan summit, with a presidential source saying it "would be somehow strange to host him" after "he shook hands with the war's instigator and spent [the] day on the territory of the aggressor country".²³⁷

²³⁶ ["Putin ends BRICS summit that sought to expand Russia's global clout but was shadowed by Ukraine"](#), AP News, 25 October 2024.

²³⁷ ["Zelensky snubs UN chief Guterres after his Russia trip"](#), BBC News, 25 October 2024.

5 The future of the BRICS post-expansion

The recent expansion of the BRICS has led to an increased focus on its purpose, and whether its increased size provides more influence and/or less cohesion.

5.1 Does expansion mean more influence or less cohesion?

More influence

Neil Melvin, Director of International Security at the thinktank RUSI, writes that “the decision on expansion and further progress on advancing the role of the members’ currencies were significant steps forward for the BRICS countries”. He notes that the expansion is “being presented as a major geopolitical step forward”.²³⁸

Krzysztof Iwanek, though sceptical of the ability of the BRICS’s ability to take coordinated action, stating it “lacks a common denominator”, does envisage it can take action in the economic sphere. Here, he says “the future seems to shine bright”, and “there seems to be a massive scope for economic cooperation within the group”. Particularly within the NDB, “given that it brings together countries that have huge capital to offer as loans (such as China and the UAE) with developing countries that are in dire need for funds for development projects (this applies to most of the other BRICS members)”.²³⁹

Navdeep Suri and Jhanvi Tripathi of the Observer Research Foundation (India), argue that the BRICS expansion and its adoption of new criteria for membership and standards “have potentially made the BRICS a more attractive institution for consensus-building and dialogue in the developing world”.²⁴⁰

Kyle Hiebert, a researcher at the Centre for International Governance Innovation think tank, says the enlarged BRICS is “certain to expedite the rebalancing of global power away from the West” and “this will be true even if BRICS ultimately doesn’t evolve into a true rival to the Group of Seven (G7) — still a strong possibility, given the shortcomings of its founding members”. He

²³⁸ RUSI, [Building Up the BRICS: An Emerging Counter-West Order?](#), 25 August 2023.

²³⁹ “[Many Separate BRICS, No Single Wall: India and an Expanding BRICS](#)”, *The Diplomat*, 1 June 2024.

²⁴⁰ Council on Foreign Relations, [Council of Councils: The BRICS Summit 2023: Seeking an Alternate World Order?](#), 31 August 2023.

argues that “the bloc’s expansion is important not because of its potential, which is uncertain, but because it confirms the growing agency of states in the Global South to hedge their bets in an increasingly chaotic and fragmented world”.²⁴¹

Less cohesion

Writing for Responsible Statecraft, Burak Elmalı a researcher at the TRT World Research Centre, states that “disparities among BRICS members reveal a group more defined by its differences than by any shared values or interests”. He says: “rather than a unified bloc, BRICS stands out for its diverse internal challenges and the complexities they bring”. Elmalı also points to the “fundamental limitations intrinsic to its structure”, meaning as “the group grows, the challenge of collective action—effectively coordinating among its disparate members—has become increasingly apparent”.²⁴²

Krzysztof Iwanek asks, “if [the] BRICS is a basis of a ‘new multipolar world’ when was the last time BRICS, as a group, involved itself in a military conflict? Solved a dispute? Saved a country from an economic crisis?”. He argues that “the more countries join, the less BRICS is united around common geopolitical goals”, and points to the communiqués that the summits produce, which he says are made up of “general statements and few concrete suggestions”.²⁴³

Gerald M. Feierstein, senior fellow at the Middle East Institute, writes that the BRICS expansion “could bring into the organization new challenges to its internal cohesion”. He points to long standing frictions between China and India, but also tensions between new members such “Iranian-Saudi differences as well as strains between Egypt and Ethiopia over sharing the Nile waters and the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam”. Though Feierstein notes it is an “open question”, as to whether the BRICS+ format can “provide a framework for mediating those issues”, pointing to China’s previous engagement with Iran and Saudi Arabia that helped facilitate their improved relations.²⁴⁴

5.2

Are the BRICS becoming an ‘anti-US’ organisation?

Anti-US/West?

Writing for the Council for Foreign Relations, Lia Valls Pereira, Associate Researcher at the Getulio Vargas Foundation, comments that post expansion,

²⁴¹ Centre for International Governance Innovation, [With BRICS Expansion, the Global South Takes Centre Stage](#), 31 August 2023.

²⁴² Responsible Statecraft, [Where expansion could hit a BRICS wall](#), 19 September 2024.

²⁴³ “[Many Separate BRICS, No Single Wall: India and an Expanding BRICS](#)”, *The Diplomat*, 1 June 2024.

²⁴⁴ Middle East Institute, [Monday Briefing: Will new members alter the strategic direction of BRICS?](#), 28 August 2023.

“Brazil, India, and South Africa, the oldest members, will have a difficult time ensuring that the new BRICS is not a platform for defending the geopolitical interests of China or Russia”.²⁴⁵

In a similar vein, Neil Melvin states that “for Russia and China, the inclusion of the fiercely anti-Western Iran is seen as a major victory in their efforts to forge a more coherent anti-West grouping to rival the US-led alliance system”.²⁴⁶

‘Non-West’ not ‘anti-West?’

Günther Maihold, Senior Fellow at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, states that the “the formation of BRICS+ is more than a mere political manoeuvre to advance China’s vision of international order”. He adds that “all the BRICS+ members and the future group of partner countries have their own agendas” and the organisation “is one of the various platforms on which member countries try to promote their vision of the world, especially for their participation with better conditions in the global economy”.²⁴⁷

Stewart Patrick, senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment, notes that “to some in the West” the emergence of BRICS+ “suggests something even more ominous—a world that is fragmenting into competing blocs, thanks to intensifying geopolitical rivalry between East and West and growing mutual alienation between North and South”. Patrick argues that “these risks are real, but they should be kept in perspective”.²⁴⁸

The BRICS expansion is a sign he argues of “a growing global dissatisfaction with and a determination to challenge the structural advantages that advanced market democracies continue to enjoy in a global order that was in many respects made by the West, for the West”. Patrick states “reducing those exorbitant privileges” is “the fundamental purpose of BRICS+”, but he adds that the diversity of view among the new members, “and the desire of important middle powers to retain diplomatic flexibility within the G20 and other multilateral venues—will likely forestall the emergence of rigid blocs reminiscent of the Cold War”.²⁴⁹

Irene Mia, senior fellow at the IISS, also argues that “While it is reasonable to assume Russia, Iran and China share a degree of animosity vis-à-vis the West and the US-centred geopolitical order”, it is important to remember “there are broader dynamics at play that must be considered in any strategic assessment of BRICS and Global South politics”. Mia writes that “most Global South countries do not necessarily see themselves as anti-West but rather as non-West”. Instead “they have distinct domestic and foreign-policy agendas

²⁴⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, [The BRICS Summit 2023: Seeking an Alternate World Order?](#), 31 August 2023.

²⁴⁶ RUSI, [Building Up the BRICS: An Emerging Counter-West Order?](#), 25 August 2023.

²⁴⁷ Council on Foreign Relations, [The BRICS Summit 2023: Seeking an Alternate World Order?](#), 31 August 2023.

²⁴⁸ Carnegie Endowment, [BRICS Expansion, the G20, and the Future of World Order](#), 9 October 2024.

²⁴⁹ Carnegie Endowment, [BRICS Expansion, the G20, and the Future of World Order](#), 9 October 2024.

and are increasingly adept at navigating geopolitical competition, engaging with powers like China and the US based on their own interests”.²⁵⁰

Stewart Patrick predicts that “rather than a frontal assault on the existing global order, the ultimate impact of BRICS+ is likely to be more measured and incremental”.²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ IISS, [Reshaping global governance: the Global South, BRICS and the West](#), 23 October 2024.

²⁵¹ Carnegie Endowment, [BRICS Expansion, the G20, and the Future of World Order](#), 9 October 2024.

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