

The Role of BRICS in Global Politics

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BRICS has evolved from an abstract format into an influential forum in the international arena. BRICS framework is a new experience of collective leadership that civilization develops within globalization environment. In this article we highlight the issues addressed by various stakeholders within and outside BRICS. This, in turn, will feed the overarching aim of creating a stable operating framework for BRICS for the coming decades and simultaneously lead to expected cooperation and collaboration which can be developed within the BRICS framework.

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BRIC, and now BRICS, has evolved from an abstract format into an influential forum in the international arena and it has become not just a manifestation of globalization, but increasingly a key control lever of global processes. The idea of uniting the world largest developing economies under the term BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) belongs to James O'Neill, a well-known analyst in the field of global economic research from the leading US investment bank Goldman Sachs. In 2001, O'Neill wrote an article, 'Building Better Global Economic BRICs', in which he introduced a grouping acronym BRIC (by taking similarity to the English word 'brick' – brick). Following the logic of the abbreviation, Kazakhstan that possesses a huge growth potential could become a new member of the BRICs 'to complete the whole picture'. But firstly the Republic of South Africa joined the alliance, giving the organization a transcontinental character.

During the years of existence and development, BRICS is in a constant process of transformation. However, we must emphasize the essence of the creation of this format – the consolidation of the countries which are projected by leading analysts of the world to become the world most powerful economies in the 21st century. This also brings the understanding of the critical role of the BRICS in global processes of building a new world order through the consolidation of international efforts. Such format fulfils the function of an 'architect of globalization', laying the foundation for a new global construction, made of 'bricks', whose strength will depend on how long our common planetary home will stand. Thus, the BRICS format cannot operate in the logic of isolation of the developing world from the developed Western countries. The power of the BRICS and its civilizational mission consists in bringing the consolidated global efforts to a new level of 'strong wave' of rapidly growing economies.

Collective leadership is a new experience that civilization realises within the BRICS framework in the face of globalization. The challenge for the BRICS consists in the development of a new global model of governance which should not be unipolar but consolidated and constructive. The goal is also to avoid a negative scenario of unfolding globalization and to start a complicated merging of the global growing economies without dis-

torting or breaking the single financial and economic continuum of the world. It is important to continue following this path, and not to hamper the growing potential of the BRICS by the pole confrontation with the West.

How can one characterize the contemporary world? In the recent decade there have been numerous debates in the international academic community about the contemporary world and current world order. Some experts believe that although the US power is declining the world order remains the same since the international order is a liberal one and is based on the US leadership which is still working well. It can assimilate the rising powers, such as China, India, and Brazil. Thus, the struggle among the existing and newly-rising powers is not for its fundamental principles but for more leadership advantages within its framework. Professor from Princeton John Ikenberry, one of the leading strategist in the West, is one of the major supporters of this idea (Ikenberry 2011).

But some others believe that the world is in chaos, and anarchy is coming to Eurasia. Thus, Robert D. Kaplan, a leading figure of geopolitics in the USA, published the paper where he advises the USA and the West to get tough on China and Russia, and to prepare to engage anarchy in Eurasia. Mr. Kaplan believes that both China and Russia are revisionist powers, and they show their muscles not because they are powerful but because they are weak. At the same time, the social situation in Central Asia may bring a kind of an Arabic Spring in the near future. Thus, the Eurasian continent is in danger! (Kaplan 2016: 3–4)

So what is actually happening in the world?

1. The collapse of regional order in the Middle East and spread of terrorism all over the World. The lasting Israeli-Palestinian conflict, unrest in Iraq and Syria, the rise of ISIS (an organization banned in Russia), the Middle East order is also collapsing and will be difficult to restore. There is no clear future over the longer term.

2. The European counties are in troubles resulting from their domestic and international policies. Europe has been the strong advocate of Arabic Spring but now is trapped in the refugee crisis. Besides, the Muslim population in Europe is growing and Europe suddenly turned the weakest region for terrorist attacks, which further worsens the economic recovery and challenges the European social system.

3. The slowdown of world economy continues while the way out has not been found yet. This slowdown has spread from the developed world to emerging economies, and brings about numerous social upheavals. There is no means to stop the increasing chaos around the world in the future.

4. Diverging of great powers' strategies for the world order. The USA has found that Europe is hardly the best partner, unlike Japan and others in Asia. The European countries have no will or ability to follow the USA who, in its turn, seems to have lost its grand strategy at the moment.

5. The coming of a turning point for BRICS in the current situation. BRICS is no more a group in the original meaning and it needs to redefine its identity and objectives.

On the surface, the five BRICS nations, as a multilateral grouping, seem to have little in common. They are essentially different and this fact must be taken into account before making an attempt to converge. The five countries represent largely differing political systems: China is a one-party state; Russia's governance is highly centralized; Brazil, India, and South Africa are democracies with significant corruption levels and/or ethnic strife still to deal with. They have also reached different levels of economic development; thus, China outpaces the group in economic terms, including trade. Furthermore, the member

states differ in terms of available resources, absolute consumption, and energy intensity and have different demographic trends. Brazil has a predominantly urban population, while India is still largely rural. Russia has an ageing population while India is relatively young. Yet, in general, the five nations will greatly contribute to the growth of the world's middle class. BRICS members have essentially different statuses within the current global order. Thus, Russia and China are established global powers and have permanent membership on the UN Security Council, while India, Brazil, and South Africa only aspire to global influence and are currently qualified as regional powers.

With account of different power and national interest, a certain geopolitical divergence in a number of issues is not surprising. Thus, the broadly shared commitment of all BRICS members to the principle of non-interference has not translated into a uniform position on many international issues. For example, Russia and China oppose external intervention in Syria. On the other hand, Brazil and India have taken more nuanced positions, including voting to condemn the Syrian government's violent crackdowns on protesters.

BRICS possesses immense natural resources in some regions along with scarcity of resources in others, it also has diverse ecological environments, a large and young population base and faces myriad of socio-economic challenges. Taken together, these factors emphasize the necessity of a sustainable and inclusive growth trajectory which must be implemented through focused efforts both at the domestic and external arenas. In this context, two factors of particular relevance are globalization and climate change. Indeed, to effectively deal with both trends within the broader context of developmental challenges will require adequate and sustainable responses. At the Conference of Parties Summits, hosted by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), one can observe trends which point to the necessity to re-think the multilateral frameworks for coordination and collaboration on climate change, sustainable development and inclusive growth. In fact, every member of the BRICS must cooperate within the BRICS format and beyond it in multilateral fora in order to better articulate the fundamental current requirements to enable the domestic socio-economic transformations. These steps will help effectively cope with the critical interplay described above. In turn, equity must be central to the foundations of any new framework for change, rather than an afterthought.

In an increasingly globalizing world, it is difficult for any nation to stay isolated. Some developments have cross-border ripple effects, as recently seen in both Libya and Syria. The BRICS members tend to share a apprehension of interventionist or hegemonic tendencies. Political intricacy is aggravated by the emerging important non-state actors threatening international security. A number of organizations, groups and even individuals start to significantly impact the world, and BRICS countries must position themselves as anchors of political conversations at the global high-level meetings. The political significance of BRICS is reinforced by the active participation of its five members both in international organizations (including the UN, WTO, IMF and the World Bank), informal associations (like the Non-Aligned Movement, Group of 77, G20 and APEC), and in regional organizations in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Thus, there are objective opportunities for 'co-participation' with other countries in building a fair world order and exerting a systemic influence for setting the agenda on a wide range of issues – from global to regional, from the well-established to the relatively new.

The BRICS nations should provide a viable leadership alternative for developing nations. In order to move towards developing a meaningful role in world affairs and a more

active role in conflict resolution, BRICS should create a platform for appropriate policies and response mechanisms to address local, regional, and international political and social turbulence, as recently observed in the situation with the so called 'Arab Spring'. While the emerging multi-polar world may place the developing and 'Western' nations against each other, BRICS members do not intend to ascend to leadership of an oppositional bloc. BRICS represents a collective aspiration to influence and manage institutions of global political and economic governance, so that they reflect demographic and economic realities and not merely post World War II agreements. In the sphere of international relations, this preference translates into a fundamentally different way of operating. The Western construct of 'universal responsibility' is sometimes interpreted in a very different way in non-Western parts of the world. The BRICS nations can use their collective voice to help preserve a respect for international sovereignty in international affairs. The desire of the developed world to intervene in the domestic domain of other nations can be restrained by the creation and fostering of regional cooperative networks, which may reduce conflict and quell crises. The urgent UN Security Council reforms must be prioritized on the BRICS agenda.

In this article we highlight the issues addressed by various stakeholders within and outside BRICS which means that a substantial interest and momentum will be generated by the grouping. This, in turn, will feed the overarching aim of creating a stable operating framework for BRICS for the coming decades and simultaneously lead to expected cooperation and collaboration in other spheres of interest, which can be developed within the intra-BRICS cooperation. While these areas must not qualify the primary BRICS agenda, there must be an organically created momentum once the five focus areas as highlighted in the executive summary are addressed. Some of these spheres for cooperation are listed below.

- *Institutional flexibility*

While the BRICS nations may have different visions of the group's role and what it may mean to each of them, it stands to reason that any agreed upon agenda can best be realized if BRICS develops a coherent and sustained framework for continuous engagement. At the same time, the mechanisms of policy formulation should be dynamic and inclusive. It is crucial that flexibility should be maintained and kept central to the very idea of BRICS. The role of nodal research organizations and think tanks is essential in this respect.

- *Reviving traditional knowledge systems and practices*

Quite too often, the terms 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' are torn out of their strictly economic context and given an unjustifiably broad connotation. This bias is symptomatic of a larger gap between Western knowledge and cognitive systems and the complex realities of the developing world. It is critical for BRICS to focus on reviving indigenous knowledge and practices in a range of domains – such as traditional medicines, healthcare, agriculture and water management, and design and construction practices.

- *Sharing developmental knowledge and experience*

The knowledge and experience that BRICS accumulates in individual development journeys can be consolidated and better leveraged if actively shared and adapted throughout the whole grouping. Formal knowledge sharing institutions could be put in place. This could occur through structured knowledge banks or mutual scholarships and training programs. More pervasive channels of communication at all levels should be developed.

- *Sharing technologies and innovations*

BRICS should be more proactive in bolstering research and in, funding innovations and technology. Exchanging information on scientific and technological policies and programs, and formulating joint long-term problem oriented cooperation projects could be the first useful steps here. Joint research provide substantial opportunities in such priority fields as aeronautics and outer space research, high-speed vehicles, microelectronics and information technology, nanotechnologies, food security and sustainable agriculture, biotechnologies, medicine, finance and insurance for hedging risks, exploration of mineral resources, remote sensing, climate change, water resources and water purification technologies. BRICS must collectively foster better organizational, legal, financial, and personnel support for scientific, technical, and innovation cooperation. Starting with establishing high-tech areas/science parks and incubators, creating common technological platforms, stimulating joint investments in the development of high technologies, research and innovation centres, BRICS can create conditions to smooth the transfer of technologies to production of advanced industrial goods. At a minimum, the BRICS members can mutually benefit from documenting, standardizing, and sharing information regarding innovative practices. Similarly, members can benefit from learning the efficacy of varying financial and non-financial policy instruments now used to incentivise innovation activity. At the same time, there are already significant inward flows of technology and expertise occurring via the activities of multinational firms. The BRICS nations must collaborate in order to accelerate cross-border technology sharing and transfer. In addition to private R&D and innovation, BRICS nations can also share experiences of building links between industry and universities. They should exchange information regarding intellectual property laws, which protect IP and at the same time encourage the adoption and diffusion of new technologies. Apart from the economic benefits of such actions, BRICS can also leverage collaborative understanding and strength for shaping the TRIPS regime under the auspices of the WTO.

- *Relevant and bias-free benchmarks*

The BRICS nations need to contextualize the dominant benchmarking and ratings systems/agencies, which are Western in origin. These systems are geared towards products and services emanating from a particular context. The grouping needs to develop and popularize BRICS rating systems and benchmarks ranging from corporate governance performance assessments to capital market standards. Such benchmarks and normative guidelines could also be applied in other spheres – such as agricultural production, pharmaceuticals and corporate governance – in the context of developing economies.

- *Regional frameworks*

The BRICS nations are leaders within their own regions and surrounded by a cluster of smaller neighbours. At the geopolitical level, this discrepancy can sometimes lead to regional tensions. However, this also provides significant opportunities for the smaller neighbours to benefit from external growth and development. Synergistic regional economic and developmental frameworks should be developed, which accommodate sovereignty within a broader growth paradigm.

- *Cultural exchange*

It is now widely accepted that BRICS needs to move beyond an annual leaders meeting. This can be achieved by instituting a variety of events and people-to-people exchanges. These can be in the sphere of cultural exchanges and conducted either at the BRICS

platform or on larger international platforms, like UNESCO. In the slightly longer term, the BRICS nations need to collectively work towards a degree of standardization in educational programs and, if possible, to explore issues surrounding mutual recognition of each other's accreditation. The enhanced cooperation in sports could also provide avenues for improving cultural understanding. Formal engagement should be instituted with already existing leadership programs and bodies, like youth leadership programs and parliamentary teams. BRICS must support multilateral projects of member states' youth organizations and attempt to establish a Young Leaders Forum with regular exchanges between parliamentarians. A similar forum for media professionals and journalists could also be envisaged. Attention should be paid to travel and tourism between the member countries. Visa and travel processes could be made easier and quicker. Over time, such actions could build 'soft' links between the BRICS nations that will help bolster cooperation and collective attainment of the long-term vision.

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