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## THE UAE AND IRAN IN THE BRICS'S STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

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*The present research examines the strategic communication between Iran and the UAE within BRICS, revealing both potential and persistent challenges. It is shown that while both nations contribute significantly to energy, trade, and technological cooperation, their approaches differ markedly – Iran's scientific capabilities are constrained by sanctions and ideological policies, whereas the UAE's high-profile initiatives often lack substantive follow-through. The study demonstrates that their complementary strengths could enhance BRICS if properly aligned, but current strategic communication remains uneven. Key findings establish that Iran's partnerships with China, India, and Russia are hampered by geopolitical balancing acts, particularly with China's discreet engagement to avoid Western backlash and India's cautious stance due to the US ties. Meanwhile, the UAE navigates between its US alliance and BRICS commitments, particularly in AI and IT collaboration with China, though US pressure creates friction. The analysis confirms that Russia remains a critical partner for both, yet mutual perceptions are skewed – Iran's role is understated in Russian media, while UAE-Russia projects suffer from implementation gaps. The October 2023 Middle East crisis further complicated Iran's BRICS engagement, exposing vulnerabilities in its regional standing. Crucially, it is determined that strategic communication within BRICS is undermined by a persistent disconnect between rhetoric and action, as well as cultural-political tensions between Persian and Arab narratives. However, the research identifies emerging opportunities in tech co-development and alternative financial systems that could strengthen cohesion. Ultimately, the study proves that effective strategic communication requires institutionalized mechanisms to convert declarations into tangible outcomes, synchronized media strategies, and crisis management protocols. As the BRICS expands, the dynamics of relations between Iran and the UAE serve as an important example of the integration of different cultures into a multilateral framework. However, for the effective development of the BRICS, it is necessary to resolve the differences between the countries that arose against the background of the aggravation of the situation around Iran in February 2026.*

**Keywords:** *strategic communication, Iran, UAE, BRICS, world order, geopolitical tensions.*

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## Introduction

In recent years, the international system of relations has been undergoing serious structural transformations, driven by the struggle between regional and global players against the backdrop of multiple crises. This competition appears to be accelerating the transition to a new world order, which is set to finally dismantle the U.S.-led unipolar system of international relations (Grinin, Grinin and Korotayev 2024a, 2024b). This process is facilitated by formal and informal alliances between states, established through various treaties, confederative associations, international organizations, and similar frameworks. Many of these alliances serve as alternatives to Western integration models. One such association is BRICS, which has intensified its role and strengthened its position on the global stage in recent years. A key factor contributing to BRICS's rising status is the strategic communication built among its core members.

The term 'strategic communication' (SC) gained popularity in the United States during Barack Obama's presidency (2009–2017) and largely implied a primarily military synchronization of words and actions among allies within NATO (Aftergood 2010). The SC concept was also reflected in the official documents of the North Atlantic Alliance (Public Intelligence 2009). However, academic literature has already been using the term SC since the early 2000s, often in a narrow sense, referring to fields such as managerial communication, public relations, and marketing (Argenti, Howell and Beck 2005; Steyn 2003). The significance of this term and its conceptual framework was reinforced in 2007 with the establishment of a specialized academic journal in the USA, the *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, which focuses on theoretical and practical aspects of developing various forms of strategic communication worldwide. The journal's inaugural article, titled 'Defining Strategic Communication,' was authored by a research team from institutions in the U.S., the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Singapore (Hallahan *et al.* 2007). The authors identified six areas of academic and practical activity where the term SC could be applied, each with its own definitional nuances: management, marketing, public relations, technical fields, politics, and information technology (*Ibid.*).

Subsequently, the term SC was primarily used by foreign researchers to refer to one of the aforementioned fields (Zerfass and Huck 2007; US Joint Forces Command 2010; Kotler *et al.* 2013; Bi and Wang 2011; Rao 2016). In Russian academic literature, the term SC gained traction starting in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, though its application remains limited to this day. Most studies focus on applying the term to theoretical frameworks (Gavra 2015), geopolitics (Vinogradova 2012), public administration (Bogdanov 2017; Aliev and Sarkisov 2023), and information warfare (Vinogradova 2013; Kuzheleva-Sagan 2022). Only a small number of works by Russian scholars address the relevance of SC to BRICS (Lobanova 2014; Bazarkina and Pashentsev 2021).

Notably, the term does not appear in official documents of the Russian Federation, though it de facto functions as an element of public policy. Unfortunately, no direct studies have yet been published on SC in relation to new BRICS members such as the UAE and Iran, which underscores the urgency of the topic and opens a new avenue for research. For our purposes, we will use the definition of strategic communication (SC) by Ekaterina A. Vinogradova: '*strategically coordinated activity aimed at managing target audiences both inside and outside the country in order to enhance the reputation of their country at the international level, and in the event of a political conflict – with the aim of winning the information war*' (Vinogradova 2014).

This study analyzes the SC of the UAE and Iran within BRICS amid growing geopolitical tensions. Using historical-genetic methods, it examines their strategic alignment with core BRICS members across key areas: trade, energy cooperation, security narratives, and political coordination. The research draws on statistical data, official communications, academic literature, and policy analyses to assess how these new members employ SC mechanisms in multilateral frameworks. The theoretical approach builds on contemporary IR scholarship regarding state-driven strategic messaging in international institutions.

This study specifically examines the UAE and Iran as new BRICS members from the strategically vital Persian Gulf region, while excluding other new entrants (Egypt, Ethiopia) and Saudi Arabia (whose membership remains unconfirmed).

### **BRICS and Key Persian Gulf Countries: Mutual Interest**

The UAE and Iran, along with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, are key Persian Gulf states actively vying for regional leadership. This rivalry intensifies international dynamics in the Middle East, establishing the Gulf as an emerging power center (Moch 2024; Grinin, Grinin, and Korotayev 2024a). These four nations possess vast hydrocarbon reserves, with regional heavyweights Saudi Arabia and Iran additionally wielding substantial military-political influence. For BRICS, incorporating new members from this strategically vital region expands its reach beyond existing Eurasian, Indo-Pacific, Asia-Pacific, South/Southeast Asian, and partial Latin American/African presence. This consolidation elevates BRICS toward global alliance status, particularly through African expansion via Egypt and Ethiopia's accession, while creating new opportunities for economic, political, and military realignment (Grinin, Grinin, and Korotayev 2024b).

For the UAE and Iran, BRICS membership expands their strategic maneuvering space in addressing regional issues – particularly amid the observable decline of the US influence in the Middle East during the Biden administration. BRICS emerges as a novel cooperation model, enabling these states to reduce reliance on Western alliances while accessing new diplomatic initiatives and partnerships (Kowner, Evron, and Kumaraswamy 2023). This is evidenced by the rhetoric of Russian, Chinese, and South African leaders at major platforms like BRICS summits and the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum. Crucially, the grouping serves as an alternative to U.S.-centric economic and military-political frameworks for Gulf states (excluding Iran) (Glosny 2010). BRICS's growing presence in the Persian Gulf and wider Middle East – through ideational promotion and concrete projects – will accelerate the formation of a new world order and intensify geopolitical competition for regional influence.

For Gulf states, BRICS represents a conflict-free association promoting peaceful initiatives in interstate dialogue and SC, prioritizing stability and security in the Middle East through diplomatic engagement, economic cooperation, and conflict resolution (Paul 2020). The bloc's collective resources and diplomatic leverage enable it to address regional challenges like terrorism and political instability – particularly critical for Iran and the UAE in this volatile region marked by religious extremism (Mohammad and Haji-Yousefi 2022). BRICS's non-interference policy and multilateral approach offer an alternative to Western-led military interventions, as demonstrated by Russia's Syria mediation and China's 2023 Saudi-Iran reconciliation. Crucially, the group's SC aligns with its actions, while member states' counterextremism expertise could mutually benefit BRICS's security framework.

The rapid advancement of information technologies (IT) and artificial intelligence (AI) has rendered strategic technological cooperation between BRICS and key Persian Gulf states indispensable for achieving digital sovereignty and enhancing economic partnerships. The BRICS members possess substantial technological capabilities across critical sectors, including telecommunications, renewable energy, healthcare, and agriculture (Gu, Renwick, and Xue 2018), while the UAE stands as a globally recognized innovation hub with cutting-edge infrastructure in logistics, tourism, microelectronics, and aerospace – supported by world-class airports and strategic urban development initiatives. Future collaboration may encompass joint R&D projects, technology transfer agreements, capacity-building programs, and the establishment of shared innovation centers, fostering synergies that could redefine technological governance in the Global South.

### **Iran in BRICS's Strategic Communication**

Iran's accession as a full BRICS member in January 2024 presents significant mutual opportunities for both the nation and the bloc. For BRICS, Iran represents a regional power with notable scientific-technological capabilities, ranking 16<sup>th</sup> globally in research output (over 50,000 or 2.1 % of world publications across STEM and humanities fields in 2021) despite comprising just 1 % of Earth's population (Sāburi 2022). The country demonstrates particular strength in innovative technologies and offers an expanding consumer market, with its population growing from 16 million in 1950 to 90 million in 2023. Tehran's resilience stems from adapting to prolonged sanctions through economic restructuring, achieving near-complete self-sufficiency in manufacturing basic goods, albeit of mediocre quality. However, Iran's SC remain underdeveloped due to weak governmental promotion of domestic innovations abroad and structural constraints including religiously-motivated restrictions on international cooperation, women's participation in STEM, and academic freedom – exemplified by the University of Tehran's paradoxical status as a top-30 global technical institution that frequently contradicts official narratives. Chronic underinvestment in research-industrial linkages and technology embargoes have degraded critical infrastructure in aerospace, energy and oil sectors, manifesting in frequent pipeline accidents and nationwide blackouts (Sadovnichy 2024). Effective SC mechanisms could simultaneously enhance BRICS's technological capacity while enabling Iran to modernize its obsolete industrial base through the bloc's collaborative frameworks.

One of Iran's key SC tools is the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), its largest state media organization encompassing radio and television. In October 2024, IRIB signed an agreement with the international TV BRICS network to amplify its outreach in the Middle East and disseminate curated narratives to target audiences (TV BRICS 2024a).

Iran's accession to BRICS was driven not only by Tehran's developmental potential but also by its existing framework for SC with the bloc's core members.

**China.** Iran plays a pivotal role in global oil and gas markets, occupying a strategic position in the energy sector. For BRICS members like China – facing substantial electricity demands – SC with Tehran is crucial. China views Iran as both a reliable energy exporter and a growing market for hydrocarbons. This partnership dates to 2004, when state-owned Zhuhai Zhenrong Corporation signed a 25-year contract to import 110 million metric tons of Iranian LNG, followed by subsequent agreements. Conversely, Iran –

constrained by international pressure – imported Chinese refined gasoline. A turning point came in 2015 when Iran's nuclear deal with UN Security Council members (including China) lifted sanctions, enabling a \$600 billion decade-long trade expansion agreement (Motevalli 2016). Post-deal, China emerged as the primary buyer of Iranian crude oil.

SC between Iran and China is further strengthened by their aligned trade and economic priorities. China's interests manifest through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aimed at reviving the New Silk Road trade corridor to Europe, which has received Iran's full political endorsement (Zreik 2024). Historically a crucial transit hub, Iran now seeks to circumvent Western sanctions and stimulate growth – especially after the 2018 U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal prompted European firms to exit, leaving China as Tehran's sole major investor (Shariatinia and Azizi 2020). The Chinese investments span Tehran's metro system, dams, fisheries, and cement plants, while Iran supplies critical minerals like coal, zinc, lead, and copper. As former IAEA representative Ali Akbar Salehi noted: 'These nations complement each other – China brings industry, we provide energy' (Wright 2004). Bilateral trade reached \$4.59 billion (Iran→China) and \$10 billion (China→Iran) in 2023. However, Iranian elites remain divided: reformists favoring Western ties distrust China as an 'undemocratic exploiter' that could undermine Iran's political evolution, while anti-Western conservatives view Beijing as a strategic ally against U.S. pressure (Shariatinia and Azizi 2020; Shirzad 2022). China, meanwhile, avoids overt publicity of its Iranian engagement to prevent further U.S. tensions, despite deepening covert cooperation (Glinkin and Gnezdilova 2023). Enhanced SC could mitigate these perceptual gaps and solidify the partnership.

A pivotal development for regional stability was the China-mediated restoration of Iran-Saudi diplomatic relations in March 2023, coinciding with waning U.S. influence. The 2016 rift between Riyadh and Tehran had indirectly fueled Yemen's war, obstructed Iraqi stabilization, exacerbated Lebanon's crisis, and created political deadlock in Syria. China's partnerships with both nations enabled its mediation – showcasing diplomatic prowess – though Western outlets framed this as opportunistic rather than strategic, emphasizing the U.S.'s sidelining (Baker 2023; Dadouch, Hudson and Parker 2023). Conversely, Arab and Iranian media portrayed it positively (Hamad 2023; Tasnim News Agency 2023). China's state-controlled media uniformly endorsed the deal, reflecting institutionalized narrative domestication.

The SC framework between Iran and China is formally institutionalized through bilateral treaties, most notably the 25-year cooperation agreement signed in March 2021 to enhance political and economic collaboration. As then Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated in Iranian state media: 'Our relations have reached strategic partnership level, with China committed to comprehensively upgrading ties with Iran' – a sentiment reciprocated by Iranian officials who expressed gratitude for Beijing's 'support during difficult times' (Reuters 2021). This pact has generated significant apprehension among U.S. policymakers.

**India.** Like China, India requires increasing energy supplies to sustain its rapid population growth and economic development. From the early 2000s until 2010, Iran remained India's second-largest energy supplier after Saudi Arabia, and oil diplomacy fostered close cooperation between the two countries (Suresh and Ramesh 2015). However, the collective West, led by the United States, imposed an embargo on transactions with Iran in 2011. The temporary lifting of sanctions under the 2015 nuclear deal, fol-

lowed by the U.S. withdrawal from the agreement in 2018 and the subsequent tightening of sanctions severely disrupted the supply chain of Iranian energy resources to India.

The U.S. refusal to extend India's waiver on Iranian sanctions led to the complete cessation of Iranian oil imports by India in 2019. Yet, the global GDP decline caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the easing of U.S. pressure during the Biden administration created a need for renewed dialogue. Notably, India views Iran as an important regional neighbor capable of influencing Pakistan and a reliable energy partner.

Recently, the number of ministerial and working-level meetings between Iran and India on trade, economic, and investment cooperation has increased. One of the latest high-level diplomatic engagements took place in New Delhi in May 2025, where the foreign ministers of Iran and India met to strengthen long-standing bilateral ties and address shared regional challenges. The primary focus of the talks was restoring energy, trade, and investment relations.

**Russia.** The development of SC between Iran and Russia is driven by their cooperation in ensuring regional security and combating religious terrorism and extremism. A prime example is their joint peacekeeping mission against international terrorism in Syria from 2015 to 2017, which enhanced geopolitical stability in the region. Media coverage by pan-Arab networks like Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, along with Iranian state media, played a crucial role in amplifying the military successes of Iran and Russia in Syria, solidifying their regional influence – particularly Russia's. The Arab street came to view Russia as a defender of Arab interests against hostile forces, a perception further reinforced by older generations' nostalgia for the USSR and its historical alliances with Arab states (Vasiliev 2018). In contrast, Western media largely downplayed these achievements, often portraying the actions of Assad's allies as targeting Syria's moderate opposition rather than terrorists (*Ibid.*). This disparity highlights the alignment of Iran and Russia's rhetoric and actions, contrasted with the divergent narratives and policies of Western nations, particularly the U.S., despite their shared stated interest in countering global terrorism.

Meanwhile, experts note that Russian society still underestimates the potential for deeper Iran-Russia relations, even as Persian language and cultural influence expand in Russia through academic collaborations, migration from Central Asia, and cultural events like festivals and public diplomacy initiatives (Fatkulin 2016).

Furthermore, the development of SC between Moscow and Tehran has been reinforced by the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement signed on 17 January 2025, comprising a preamble and 47 articles. The document establishes as its foundation bilateral military-technical cooperation, international security provisions, and 'strengthening peace and security in the Caspian region, Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and the Middle East' (Kremlin 2025). Of particular significance is Iran's inclusion into BRICS during Moscow's presidency of the organization.

Iran's tense relations with many Arab states and overtly hostile stance toward Western countries, led by the USA, create significant risks for its SC within BRICS. Western media consistently portray Iran as part of an 'axis of evil,' emphasizing its gradual but steady military and political consolidation in the region, which fuels considerable anxiety in the West. Tehran's persistent refusal to abandon its nuclear program has repeatedly provoked Western nations to tighten international sanctions, measures that often find public support in Western countries. A recent escalation was Israel's June 2025 missile strike targeting Iranian nuclear facilities, which triggered a 12-day exchange of attacks,

including U.S. Air Force strikes on Iran's nuclear sites. An even more powerful regional crisis was the US-Israeli aggression against Iran in February 2026. This confrontation extended the cycle of violence stemming from Israel's military operations in Gaza and southern Lebanon following the October 2023 Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Iran's accession to BRICS followed the March 2023 Saudi-Iranian reconciliation and occurred during the Biden administration, but the return of the unpredictable Trump presidency and Israel's aggressive actions have drastically reshaped regional geopolitics. Iran's active combat role as a BRICS member now poses several major risks for the bloc: reputational costs and economic disruptions. First, it undermines pre-strike U.S.-Iran nuclear talks, casts doubt on the Saudi-Iran détente, and contradicts BRICS's proclaimed values of peaceful conflict resolution. Second, further escalation could lead to a Hormuz Strait blockade, disrupting hydrocarbon supplies to BRICS members – especially China and India – though their state media ignore this threat. Western outlets highlight risks to European energy imports while noting Iran's economy would suffer most (Ambrose and O'Carroll 2025). Thirdly, the February aggression against Iran triggered a retaliatory missile counterattack by Tehran, including against the UAE. This led to an unprecedented deterioration in relations between the two countries and caused great reputational damage to the BRICS. At the UN, BRICS heavyweights China and Russia condemned Israel's actions, with China's envoy Fu Kong stating rising tensions 'serve no party's interests', contrasting sharply with U.S. and Israeli efforts to prove Iran's nuclear weapon capabilities and frame its regime as the region's primary destabilizing force.

Moreover, Iran, Russia, and China, all operating under international sanctions, share a vested interest in weakening Western dominance led by the U.S. Iran's cooperation with India focuses on regional security in the Middle East and South Asia, though New Delhi shows less enthusiasm for creating new power centers, fearing it would cement Chinese leadership within BRICS and beyond (Grinin, Grinin, and Korotayev 2024b). South Africa and Brazil, while opposing U.S. hegemony and sharing some interests with other BRICS members, face internal divisions on strategic alignment. BRICS's SC in this context could theoretically foster healthy competition (*e.g.*, between Saudi Arabia and Iran) and dilute U.S. regional dominance, but implementation remains inconsistent.

Iran's strategic ties with China are deepening, though hampered by Beijing's cautious public diplomacy and muted media framing. Relations with India mirror this duality – Delhi emphasizes Iran's importance in select areas while maintaining its U.S. alliance. With Russia, Tehran enjoys tactical alignment but faces structural limits in scaling cooperation. Crucially, Iran's strategic outreach to other key BRICS states remains largely declaratory, with minimal practical traction despite shared anti-Western rhetoric.

### **The UAE in the BRICS's Strategic Communication**

The UAE's accession to BRICS represents, in our view, a pivotal development both for its own economic and political growth and for strengthening SC within the bloc. Currently, the Emirates are focused on consolidating their regional influence through peaceful diplomacy and financial leverage, often aligning efforts with Saudi Arabia to achieve these goals. However, recent divergences in foreign policy outlook between the two monarchies have compelled the UAE to pursue an independent course aimed at diversifying its partnerships (Korotayev, Khayrullin, and Shelkovnikov 2025). This

same principle applies to its relations with its strategic ally, the United States. By joining BRICS, the UAE has effectively demonstrated its pursuit of an autonomous foreign policy – one that no longer seeks approval from Washington or Riyadh.

The UAE's financial-economic and technological success stems from the effective leadership of the emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, coupled with attracting global investments. Following its BRICS accession, the UAE announced a new 'investment strategy' aimed at increasing foreign direct investment to \$600 billion by 2031, a move widely covered by Emirati and Chinese media, including the TV BRICS platform (TV BRICS 2024b). For the UAE, BRICS investments could enable critical infrastructure projects vital for economic diversification – notably reducing reliance on oil/gas through renewable energy adoption, transport development, real estate, and tourism. These investments aim to solidify the UAE's position as a global trade and logistics hub, leveraging its existing world-class airports and commercial centers. Demonstrating post-BRICS momentum, the UAE launched the annual Dubai BRICS Investment Forum, whose inaugural session on 7–8 March 2025 garnered positive feedback and media attention. The forum already showcased projects like *BRICS Media* – a planned social media platform targeting 100+ million users, reflecting the bloc's ambition to reshape digital narratives alongside economic ties.

BRICS investments offer the UAE an alternative to Western investors, thereby reducing dependence and hedging risks associated with global market fluctuations, including expanded opportunities for using the dirham as a settlement currency in international trade which could help decrease dollar reliance (Sadovnichy 2024). For BRICS, the UAE's investment inflows create new avenues to enhance the bloc's prestige, as investing in Emirati infrastructure projects provides member states direct access to key Middle Eastern markets while diversifying their portfolios globally (Kamel 2018). This alignment of mutual interests – from dedollarization to strategic positioning – strengthens BRICS's collective SC by merging Abu Dhabi's financial ambitions with the bloc's multipolar aspirations, particularly through high-visibility projects that reinforce geopolitical narratives while delivering tangible economic benefits to all participants.

The core BRICS nations bring technological expertise and opportunities for technology transfer to the UAE, while the Emirates offer their own advanced competencies in IT development, cybersecurity, and smart infrastructure implementation – assets that could significantly enhance BRICS's SC capabilities. A prime example is how artificial intelligence (AI) has enabled the UAE's Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) to boost efficiency, operational flexibility, growth stimulation, and productivity gains, demonstrating the transformative potential of such technologies that have become particularly crucial amid rapid global advancements in AI and IT solutions, positioning the UAE as both a beneficiary and contributor to BRICS's technological ambitions while creating synergies between energy sector innovation and digital transformation across emerging economies (Gudzenko 2021).

**China.** The UAE already possesses experience in developing SC through its cooperation with China in artificial intelligence and high-tech modernization. The formation of strategic ties between Abu Dhabi and Beijing in this sphere began after the Biden administration took office in the USA, which strained relations with Gulf monarchies over oil production cuts and threatened to restrict advanced semiconductor exports if the UAE continued collaborating with China. Washington feared sanctioned China might gain access to cutting-edge technologies through UAE partnerships. Although

officially the UAE halted investments in Chinese tech firms, practical cooperation continued discreetly without media fanfare. Furthermore, Emirati leader Mohammed bin Zayed's visit to Beijing May 2024 reaffirmed both nations' intent to deepen collaboration in IT and AI, with the Chinese leader stating 'China supports the UAE's independent development path, helps safeguard its national sovereignty, security and development interests, and stands ready to enhance political mutual trust and expand cooperation' – demonstrating that despite U.S. pressure, the UAE views China as pivotal to the AI revolution (Ziwen 2024). While the UAE, alongside Saudi Arabia and Qatar, leads regionally in technology, maintaining this position remains uncertain due to AI talent shortages, making cooperation with Beijing strategically valuable given China's more affordable technologies and specialists compared to the West.

The development of numerous projects in the UAE is closely tied to Chinese investments exceeding \$6 billion over the past decade, making the Emirates China's primary investment destination in the region ahead of Saudi Arabia. This active SC proves effective as UAE residents directly witness tangible results from Sino-Emirati cooperation. The Emirates boldly pursue even high-risk projects across pharmaceuticals, healthcare, green technology, logistics, and agrotech. The UAE's economic and technological success stems from its dual-core structure: Dubai, historically renowned for its merchant clans that evolved into the nation's economic elite, contrasts with Abu Dhabi's dominance by military-administrative elites serving as the political and security nexus – a division reflected in leadership roles where Abu Dhabi's ruler holds the presidency while Dubai's serves as vice-president and prime minister. This symbiotic crisis-support mechanism between emirates has ensured the federation's prosperity (Khayrullin and Korotayev 2023). The UAE's proven execution of ambitious mega-projects builds confidence among major investors, particularly Chinese partners, with bilateral trade reaching over \$75 billion in 2024 (Gudzenko 2021). Strategically, the UAE serves as China's crucial logistics hub for Middle Eastern exports and Belt and Road connectivity, exemplified by the unique UAE-China Cooperative Demonstration Zone showcasing joint manufacturing exports – though this remains the sole such project under China's trade initiative, highlighting both its symbolic significance and untapped potential for replication across other BRI corridors.

Other areas of cooperation continue to develop without adequate media coverage, despite numerous official statements emphasizing the need for comprehensive collaboration, particularly in energy and military-technical fields. In spring 2025, Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) signed 15-year agreements to supply 1 million metric tons of liquefied natural gas (LNG) annually to Chinese firms ENN Natural Gas and Zhenhua Oil (PortNews 2025). In July 2024, the second joint China-UAE air force exercise *Falcon Shield* took place in China's Xinjiang province, following the UAE Defense Ministry's purchase of 12 Chinese L-15 light attack aircraft two years prior (Lucente 2024). Notably, the UAE faces US pressure in this domain; with Washington threatening to suspend deliveries of advanced American weaponry should Emirati-Chinese military ties deepen.

Strategically, this cooperation is institutionalized through the 2018 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement, marking a high point in diplomatic relations. The latest high-level meeting occurred in June 2025 in Beijing between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and the UAE President's Special Envoy to China, Khaldoon Khalifa Al Mubarak, where both sides reaffirmed their all-encompassing strategic partnership and

agreed to enhance collaboration in investments, trade, economy, energy, and education – demonstrating how pragmatic interests increasingly override traditional alliances amid shifting geopolitical fault lines.

**India.** India stands as the UAE's largest export destination and trading partner, with the two nations signing a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2022 aimed at boosting bilateral trade to \$100 billion within five years – a target already nearing realization with 2024 trade volumes exceeding \$80 billion (The Economic Times 2022). Beyond participating in China's trade initiatives, the UAE has joined projects like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, whose memorandum of understanding was signed during the 2023 G20 summit by the EU, India, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and the US. SC between the UAE and India is further strengthened by the Emirates' demographic landscape, where over 50 % of migrants originate from South Asia – about 40 % from India alone – spanning both low-skilled workers and major investors, making India pivotal to the UAE's economic development (Fatkulin 2016). This symbiotic relationship thrives on the UAE's accommodating policies, including unrestricted religious practice for Indian expatriates – a stark contrast to other Gulf monarchies – as part of its broader strategy to position itself as a global hub for modern industries by maintaining an ideologically neutral investment climate that would be compromised by emphasizing any single religion or ideology.

The UAE's strategic location in a highly volatile region has enabled strengthened security cooperation with India through counterterrorism efforts and joint military exercises since 2003, most recently demonstrated by the 'Desert Cyclone' drills in Rajasthan on January 4, 2024, while energy collaboration has grown steadily since diplomatic relations began in 1972 before accelerating significantly under Prime Minister Modi's leadership with Emirati oil exports surging 20.5 % to over \$65 billion in 2024 compared to \$54 billion in 2023 (TV BRICS 2025), driven by the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed in May 2022 that has transformed bilateral ties into a comprehensive strategic partnership following three official visits by the UAE leader to India between 2016–2023, creating a multifaceted alliance that combines security coordination with booming energy trade and mutual investments.

**Russia.** The UAE maintains a unique SC with Russia as it balances its role as a US strategic partner while supporting Moscow on key issues – being the only Gulf monarchy to back Russia's 2015 Syria peacekeeping mission against international terrorism and aligning with Moscow in supporting Libya's House of Representatives, coupled with its 2023 opposition to Western sanctions against Russia that triggered US sanctions against several Emirati companies, reflecting Abu Dhabi's calculated multi-vector diplomacy that leverages energy ties and shared regional security concerns with Moscow while carefully navigating its Washington alliance, particularly evident in its refusal to join Western energy price caps on Russian oil despite pressure, demonstrating how pragmatic national interests consistently override bloc loyalties in Emirati foreign policy calculus.

As two of the world's foremost hydrocarbon exporters, the United Arab Emirates and the Russian Federation have developed a complex, multifaceted relationship fundamentally anchored in their mutual interest in maintaining favorable oil market conditions, which was most recently exemplified by their synchronized positions within the OPEC+ framework during the 2023 production quota negotiations, where they collectively resisted substantial pressure from the United States administration to increase

output, thereby demonstrating a strategic alignment that transcends mere economic pragmatism and enters the realm of geopolitical coordination. This energy-based symbiosis became particularly conspicuous following the implementation of Western sanctions against Russian petroleum exports, when the UAE remarkably emerged as one of the top ten importers of Russian crude oil and refined products, a development that cannot be adequately explained through conventional market mechanisms alone but rather suggests the existence of carefully negotiated bilateral arrangements that serve both nations' strategic objectives (Likhachev and Shetivi 2023). The foundations of this relationship can be traced to a deliberate, two-decade-long effort by influential segments of Russia's policy-oriented intelligentsia and media establishment to cultivate a specific perception of the Emirates within Russian society, systematically constructing and reinforcing an image of the UAE as a multifaceted global hub encompassing four primary dimensions: first, as a preeminent destination for labor migration offering unparalleled employment opportunities; second, as an increasingly sophisticated financial center rivaling traditional Western capitals; third, as a luxury tourism destination catering to elite tastes; and fourth, as an emerging provider of high-quality educational services (Fatkulin 2016). For Russian citizens seeking employment abroad, the Emirates present a paradoxical combination of attractive professional prospects within its technologically advanced economy and restrictive immigration policies that create precarious residency conditions entirely contingent upon continuous employer sponsorship, while simultaneously maintaining a clearly discernible hierarchy among expatriate workers that systematically privileges Western professionals over their Asian counterparts in terms of compensation packages, living conditions, and career advancement opportunities. This environment poses particular challenges for graduates of Russian higher education institutions who secure positions with multinational corporations based in the UAE, as their prolonged exposure to this competitive, English-dominated professional milieu carries the inherent risk of gradual disconnection from Russia's national labor market and potential diminishment of their capacity to contribute effectively to their home country's developmental priorities. The Russian contribution to the UAE's international image has been particularly significant in the tourism sector, where since the early 2000s Russian visitors have played an instrumental role in shaping the Emirates' global reputation as a premium destination for luxury consumption and high-end retail experiences, although this very positioning has rendered the country financially inaccessible to substantial segments of Russian society. In the cultural domain, bilateral cooperation has failed to achieve meaningful depth or substance, primarily due to the overwhelming predominance of English as the principal medium of professional and social interaction in the UAE, which has effectively marginalized the potential for genuine cultural exchange based on mutual linguistic understanding and has consequently limited the development of people-to-people connections that might otherwise have complemented and strengthened the existing economic and political dimensions of the relationship.

The growing importance of cybersecurity amid rapid technological advancement has made this domain a key pillar of strategic cooperation between Moscow and Abu Dhabi. This collaboration materialized through the 2019 launch of a specialized educational program for protecting critical information infrastructure and ethical hacking training, implemented by InfoWatch Gulf – the Middle Eastern branch of Russia's InfoWatch Group. The initiative provides comprehensive cybersecurity training for Emirati professionals, including data protection courses for corporate leaders and cyber-literacy

programs for students. While demonstrating substantive technical cooperation, the partnership must navigate challenges of adapting Russian cybersecurity expertise to the UAE's unique digital environment and threat profile, particularly given the Emirates' complex position as both a frequent cyberattack target and a regional tech hub. The program represents a significant case of middle-power collaboration in sensitive technological domains despite differing geopolitical alignments in other areas (Shadrina 2019).

Another significant achievement in bilateral SC was the 2019 opening of the Russian Centre of Digital Innovation & ICT in Dubai Internet City, backed by Russia's Ministry of Digital Development as a platform for companies specializing in cybersecurity, AI and cloud technologies – though its operations were curtailed by the pandemic and geopolitical changes. A key milestone in this SC came with the June 2020 Russia-UAE Technology Day online conference organized by Tech Global with government support, followed by the June 2023 joint venture between Russia's Omega.Future and UAE's Sinaha to manufacture 3D printers and educational robots in Abu Dhabi (later put on hold) (Matveev 2024).

These developments reveal a persistent gap between declarative SC, evidenced by the 2018 Strategic Partnership Declaration and reaffirmed during the October 2024 Moscow summit, and its practical implementation, where ambitious projects consistently face operational challenges despite institutional support and media promotion, suggesting the need for revised approaches to transform diplomatic rhetoric into sustainable technological collaboration.

### **Conclusion**

The recent escalation of relations between the UAE and Iran following the US-Israeli aggression against Iran in February 2026 has seriously affected the BRICS. The association striving to become the architect of a new multipolar world order has become hostage to acute regional conflicts between its own members. To normalize the work of the BRICS, great efforts will be needed to improve relations between Abu Dhabi and Tehran. There are some prospects for this. The SC between Iran and the UAE within BRICS is grounded in multifaceted cooperation, though often inadequately supported by corresponding informational efforts. Nevertheless, this communication holds significant potential, as both nations lead in energy, trade, and scientific-technological spheres. Iran's scientific and technological expertise could greatly enrich BRICS, yet its informational outreach is hampered by religious policies and international sanctions. Conversely, the UAE has cultivated an image as a high-tech hub through forums and announcements, though actual project implementation often lags behind promises. Within BRICS, synergizing their efforts could help balance SC development.

Currently, Iran's SC is expanding with key BRICS members, particularly in trade and hydrocarbon exports to China and India. However, a clear imbalance exists between rhetoric and action. With China, Iran is deepening economic ties as an alternative to the West while remaining wary of China's growing influence. China, in turn, cooperates discreetly to avoid Western backlash. With India, engagement is active but constrained by New Delhi's alliance with the US. Iran's SC with Russia benefits from historical ties, reinforced by joint military operations in Syria, though Western narratives downplay their significance. Despite this alliance, Iran's role in Russia remains understated in media discourse. The Palestinian-Israeli crisis in October 2023 and the subse-

quent Israeli and then US strike on Iran further risk undermining Tehran's cooperation with the BRICS.

The UAE's SC is most active with China, India, and Russia. With China, collaboration in AI and IT is growing, though US pressure to limit Sino-Emirati ties poses challenges. The UAE, as a US ally, seeks to diversify partnerships without alienating Washington. Trade and investment cooperation with India thrives, bolstered by shared US alignment, though this risks diluting BRICS's alternative vision. UAE-Russia collaboration in energy, labor migration, and cybersecurity seems promising but suffers from gaps between announced and realized projects.

An effective SC requires aligning words with actions. While Iran and the UAE share overlapping BRICS engagements, cultural and geopolitical rivalries (Arab-Persian dynamics) could intensify competition for influence.

Cooperation is driven by shared goals: sustainable growth, reduced Western energy dependence, and diversified diplomacy amid rising global tensions. Most SC focuses on China, India, and Russia, with untapped potential among other members.

Emerging areas – advanced technologies and regional security – are gaining traction. Healthy BRICS-Western competition in IT and AI could accelerate technological progress, while collective crisis management may foster stability. Expanding collaboration underscores BRICS's growing global role in shaping a multipolar order amid heightened geopolitical rivalry.

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