

BRICS and the Making of Alternative Global Orders

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The proliferation of intergovernmental institutions, particularly in the Global South, has called into question the relevance of these bodies with overlapping memberships. Most of these began as smaller groups with shared interests or even with the aim of fulfilling a particular goal and then expanded with the introduction of partner states, often reflecting their own agendas within the system. It was at this juncture that the aim of providing a collective response to common challenges took a backseat as transactional bilateral relationships prevailed over the understanding of 'common good'. While it is often argued that the Bandung spirit, with which the representation of the Global South for a just and equitable order began, remains alive in the normative resilience of the states that constitute these bodies, the extent to which it triumphs over the vicissitudes of global politics remains in question.

BRICS emerged from a market driven intellectual inspiration to bring together a group of states with diverse history, size, economic profiles, political systems, national preferences and strategic cultures for what was aspired to be a meeting of equitable partners for a just and fair management of the global community of nations. The anticipation of a 'just, fair and equitable order' still seems to be the abiding expectation from the group along with policy co-ordination that would restructure outmoded economic and political institutions and global governance structures in a world that seems to be rapidly moving towards de-globalization (particularly due to decisions from its most vocal proponents in the west). While commitment to 'enhancement of the voice and representation of BRICS economies in global economic governance' is duly articulated in each Summit, the intensifying competition over common strategic spaces, the drifting apart of long-term relationships and global political and economic instability has brought into question the significance of institutions like BRICS that work on a multilateral format and depend on consensus for decisions.

BRICS was created with the anticipation of a new matrix of global governance in politics, trade, energy and climate change. However, requirements for formulating a concerted strategy for negotiations with the 'North' has been reduced, due to deep contradictions within the states. On the other hand, the rhetorical character of the grouping has become ascendent with member states striking their own individual paths of development while negotiating their own 'crises'. Very often this meant that the vision of the global order that became acceptable within the group at a particular moment, determined which of the partner states would be able to fulfil their individual aspirations through the partnership. To a very large extent, this contradicted the purpose of reshaping global governance and allowing the Global South greater flexibility in pursuing its goals through the BRICS platform on issues like food security, clean energy, sustainable development and infrastructure. This meant that once again there has been rethinking either on limited but more effective multilateral forums like IBSA (India Brazil South Africa Dialogue Forum established in 2003) or larger visualisations of a world interconnected by trade and commerce, like the BRI. There have also been calls for revitalization of older forums like the Primakov Triangle, though this recent call by the Russian Foreign Minister was more a reflection of Moscow's diplomatic calculus in the face of shifting global alliances and a desire for greater engagement of states like India in Eurasian multilateral formats rather than those dominated by NATO. Comparable motivations called for an expanded Kazan BRICS Summit, which was projected as indicative of the continuing support for Russia within the global community, Russia's continued

relevance in Asia's strategic balance but also a broader vision of strengthening non-western institutions for an alliance among the states of the Global South and East.

While, in principle, BRICS has made significant progress in fostering a multipolar global order, its ability to deliver on its stated goals remains indeterminate. Whether through innovative financial mechanisms, expanded trade, or reformed global governance structures, BRICS must demonstrate its capacity to act as a transformative force for the Global South. The bloc must also address internal divisions, enhance cooperation, and ensure its initiatives translate into tangible outcomes. Rather than being positioned as anti-West, it would probably be best if the bloc is seen as an alternative where options to the G7 perspectives emerge from within the members of the bloc which then come together to seek a more equitable global order and alternative systems of global trading and governance. In this context the evolution of the BRICS+ format is significant, though, defining a set of criteria that accommodates the inclusion of a diverse range of members could be challenging particularly since decisions are taken by consensus.

While challenges in the making of an alternative world order cannot be ignored, the alternative that BRICS offers to the liberal world order that is seen to be in crisis, also should not be overlooked. Maria Lagutina, in her article "BRICS in a World of Regions" argues, for instance, that the BRICS idea of a non-Western world order based on pluralism and polycentricism could be realized based on the concept of what Amitav Acharya calls the 'regional world' that moves beyond a singular notion of universality and modernity and offers a pluralistic concept of the world order. Regions, according to Acharya are "sites for ideational and normative contestations, resistance and compromises, involving both states and civil societies which transcend regional boundaries and overlap into other regional and global spaces". Lagutina argues that where BRICS could be an effective 'bridge' between the global and regional worlds since each of the major BRICS members are also the leading economies in their respective regions allowing them the opportunity to develop as the fulcrum for regional integration. The alternative, that BRICS offers is therefore in terms of a polycentric world order that operates in a 'world of regions'.

In this background of multiple imaginings two questions have been identified as relevant for this study. The first is the consequences of the emergence of BRICS for the global distribution of economic and strategic power. And second, given that BRICS opens up new avenues of normative cleavages in international politics, given the multiple understandings of the member states about the appropriate functions of the international order, to what extent would its challenge of the present order be relevant? This research project will engage with these questions through an understanding of the following

1. Why is it important to re-evaluate the alternatives that BRICS offers at this juncture? What is transformative about global politics today that encourages this discussion? This is significant because the comparative movement from the Global South, the Non Aligned Movement emerged in the background of decolonization and the end of a World War. Given that there seems to be a tacit understanding among global powers about the redivision of the global space, could it be argued that rather than BRICS determining the contours of an alternative global space the emergence of an alternative global understanding may determine the nature of BRICS
2. Does BRICS signal a turn against or merely away from the West? Would the alternative be a complete break with the West or new forms of collaboration? This is significant because most BRICS members and aspirants have no desire to create a world of rigid blocs, have not moved out of the existing global economic forums and

in most cases have significant trade and economic ties with the west. Additionally, they may view the coalition as a useful platform and vehicle to pursue reformist aims, but they remain open to cooperation with Western countries (and other middle powers) on matters of common concern. In fact, a plurality of material interests in the domestic politics of the states also affects their foreign policy positions, which in turn reflects on their stance regarding institutional engagement.

3. How would an alternative 'Southern World Order' be defined and what would be its contribution to an alternative system? Would a pooling together of financial resources be its most significant contribution or would its political value as a discursive institution gain ascendance? While the heterogeneous economic performance of the BRICS countries will prove challenging for the creation of a coherent economic policy, a unified strategic stance on global political issues seems equally ambitious at the moment. It is probably through the possibilities inherent in both that the idea of a transformation would be viable.
4. Could an alternative global order emerge not from a tacit understanding among the Global South but the aspirations of a global power like China with its proposals for an interconnected world governed through trade and trade route in other words the BRI?
5. In which spheres would BRICS be expected to have the largest impact? Here various alternatives are a possibility. The hype about de-dollarisation and a common BRICS currency might be premature but trading in national currencies is becoming a reality. As BRICS+ starts to include the world's major commodity exporters like Russia, Brazil, South Africa, Saudi Arabia and UAE and importers like China, Egypt and India, they can try to reduce their dependence on the dollar by trading in national currencies. Or is it more useful to think in terms of Track II platforms like the BRICS Academic Forum that provides a space for knowledge sharing and policy recommendations