



The BRICS Summit, 2023: An Alternative Course for the Middle East Conundrum?

By

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The 15th BRICS summit (22nd August- 24th August 2023) in South Africa was heralded as a ground-breaking event with the potential to determine the course of international relations. Some scholars have also contended that the BRICS can offer an alternate model of global oversight that is compatible with a multipolar world. This summit was the first physical meeting since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 and has an ambitious objective of achieving inclusive multilateralism.³

To mark its 15th summit, BRICS increased the number of its members from five to eleven, indicating a determined effort to raise its reputation internationally. With the addition of Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, and Argentina, the BRICS now has a larger presence in the Middle East, Africa, and South America.⁴

The world's most prominent developing economies—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—are together referred to as BRICS. The alliance BRIC which stands for Brazil, Russia, India, and China was formally established during the inaugural gathering of BRIC Foreign Ministers in 2006. In December 2010, South Africa was invited to join BRIC, which led to the name BRICS being used for the organization. Five of the major emerging nations in the world are represented by the BRICS, accounting for 16% of global commerce, 24% of global GDP, and 41% of the world's population.⁵ BRICS nations also assert certain global reforms. To ensure a fair, affordable, and sustainable transition to a low-carbon and low-emission economy, BRICS members intend to address the issues posed by climate change.⁶

³ “About the Summit-BRICS 2023,” BRICS 2023 South Africa: *BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism*, accessed September 4, 2023 <https://brics2023.gov.za/about-the-summit/>

⁴Drago Bosnic, “How BRICS+ Ensure Global peace,” *BRICS information portal*, accessed September 4, 2023 <https://infobrics.org/post/39225/>

⁵ “Evolution of BRICS,” BRICS 2023 South Africa: *BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism*, accessed September 4, 2023 <https://brics2023.gov.za/evolution-of-brics/>

⁶Corneliu Pivariu “The 15th BRICS summit- A new step towards a multipolar world?” *IFIMES*, accessed September 4, 2023. <https://mailchi.mp/15301a6df96b/analysis-general-rtd-corneliu-pivariu-the-15th-brics-summit-a-new-step-towards-a-multipolar-world?e=649c84a592>

Two characteristics of the initial BRIC members were their sizable economies and their high prospective growth rates. Some are of the view that the extended BRICS appears a less cohesive organization, with some countries experiencing difficulties and others succeeding. This can mean that the other issues might to some extent overshadow the economic main pillar. The summit seized on increased significance in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Some view the BRICS Summit as an essential tool for overcoming Russia's isolation on the global stage. In a broader sense, Russia and China both believe that the BRICS can provide alternatives to actions and alliances headed by the West.

It is possible for the BRICS+ to generate more than 50% of the world's oil. Additionally, the combined GDP of the BRICS+ states will be greater than 37% of the nominal total world GDP (outpacing the GDPs of the G7 nations), and they will account for more than 20% of global commerce. It is noteworthy that the combined population of the BRICS+ nations exceeds 46% of the global population. The likelihood of the group's membership increasing means that it will soon be a significant player in discussions for global political change.⁷

It's important to note that certain Western political experts continue to underplay the relevance of BRICS, especially BRICS+, arguing that the group is principally dysfunctional and cannot advance by simple extension. President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa delivered the summit's final declaration, which stated that the BRICS had pursued a strategic course with a distinct perspective, responding to the aspirations of a sizeable portion of the international community, acting in coordination on the basis of the equality of states, supporting one another as partners, and taking other people's interests into account when addressing urgent global and regional issues.

BRICS+: Paving Avenue for Geostategic Predictability in the Middle East

The BRICS is frequently criticized as an odd alliance that lacks political coherence and is heterogeneous, aside from their desire to change the existing global financial and governmental structure to one that is more open, diverse, and unrestrictive—and less dependent on American politics and the dollar's purchasing power. The BRICS group made a big drive to gain more

⁷ Ana Palacio, "For whom the BRICS toll," *Project Syndicate*, accessed September 4, 2023. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/brics-summit-divergent-interests-undermine-impact-by-ana-palacio-2023-08>.

political and economic clout in the Middle East after Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Egypt joined. China's president, Xi Jinping, said during the summit that the extension of the group's membership was historic and that it demonstrated the BRICS nations' commitment to working together for the benefit of the developing world as a whole.⁸

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates would give the organization additional financial clout, particularly as it works to expand the scope and impact of its own modest development bank. With the inclusion of Egypt and Iran, the expansion might also assist BRICS in demonstrating expanding support for its goal despite alienating many industrialized nations with its "no-limits partnership" policy.⁹

Considering Tehran's close and somehow strategic relations with Russia and China and Riyadh's long-standing security cooperation with the United States, the inclusion of Iran beside Saudi Arabia was possibly the biggest surprise to the West. According to experts, Saudi Arabia continues to purchase the majority of its weapons from the United States.¹⁰ Saudi leaders, however, are dubious about Washington's sincerity in its support for the Middle East, therefore early this year, Saudi and Iran engaged in diplomatic negotiations in Beijing that improved China's standing in the Middle East. Tehran, which has never been a favourite of Washington, has also become more connected to Beijing, which has enabled it to circumvent US sanctions-by purchasing oil at very discounted prices. Iran's Vice President for Politics, Mohammad Jamshidi, described the country's acceptance to BRICS as a "historic accomplishment and a strategic success."¹¹

Saudi Arabia, which is already a regional powerhouse, yet aspires to become a global leader, a goal for which closer connections with China are similarly important. Saudi Arabia and the UAE

⁸ "Brics to Admit Six New Countries to Bloc Including Iran and Saudi Arabia," *BRICS Information Portal*, accessed September 4, 2023. <https://infobrics.org/post/39186>.

⁹ Gerald Imray, Mogomotsi Magome and Jon Gambrell, "Iran and Saudi Arabia are among 6 nations set to join China and Russia in the BRICS economic bloc," *Associate Press*, August 24, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/brics-russia-china-summit-b5900168d165cc78b36d5d5c068b7a50>

¹⁰ "How Brics is looking to challenge the western order in the Middle East," *Middle East Eye*, August 24, 2023. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/brics-challenge-western-order-middle-east-how>.

¹¹ Mark N. Katz, "The BRICS come to the Middle East and North Africa," *Atlantic Council: MENA Source*, August 25, 2023. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-brics-come-to-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/>.

may reconcile their objectives in strengthening their economic connections with China with their contacts with the United States by becoming members of the BRICS. Instead, it shows how distrustful these Western allies have grown of the West and how strongly they feel that the West no longer supports their security and interests in the Middle East. There is a perception that, given that the West no longer places a high priority on these allies, diversifying relationships and pursuing new poles, blocs, and orbits have evolved into a vital political and economic imperative. Iran, on the other hand, has used its invitation to the BRICS to assert that the US-led international system is disintegrating. Iran has backed BRICS's initiatives to wean itself off of the US dollar.¹²

As the Middle East has been going through a reckoning in building better bilateral relationships, considering historically strained relations, gaps still exist. It is now feasible to envision a situation in which all three nations are members of BRICS as a result of the UAE's restoration of diplomatic ties with Iran and Saudi Arabia's subsequent warming toward Iran. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran have long set aside their disagreements as OPEC members, and they will be equipped to do the same in the BRICS group.¹³

While the BRICS countries may have come together to oppose Western hegemony, their objectives nevertheless differ. The US is losing its capacity to serve as a gatekeeper as unipolarity in the globe and in the Middle East in particular, has weakened. With new performers that have a range of interests, the ensemble is traveling down unexplored territory but is determined to be credible, united, and successful. Building a new international order is far harder than criticizing the current one. Even if the present system is not overthrown, the BRICS meeting shows how many nations are eager to oppose the status quo of the West and eager to revise it.

As a matter of fact, the addition of the four key countries of the Middle East to BRICS is a historical breakthrough with expected positive impacts on security, enhancing economic cooperation leading to sustainable developments in this region.

¹² “Jack Dutton, “BRICS summit: which Middle East states could join powerful bloc?” *Al-Monitor*, August 21, 2023. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/08/brics-summit-which-middle-east-states-could-join-powerful-bloc>

¹³ Urooba Jamal, “Analysis: What do BRICS invitations mean for the Middle East,” *ALJAZEERA*, August 25, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/25/analysis-what-do-brics-invitations-mean-for-the-middle-east#:~:text=Four%20of%20the%20six%20BRICS,views%20as%20rigged%20against%20it.>

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