

## BRICS AND THE GREAT POWER POLITICS

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September 22, 2022

*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



Source: BRICS China 2022<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The 14<sup>th</sup> BRICS<sup>2</sup> Summit took place on June 23, 2022, in China (Beijing), virtually.<sup>3</sup> Chinese President Xi Jinping chaired the summit while South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the summit. The BRICS was formed on June 16, 2009, just after the financial crisis of 2007-08. Initially it was BRIC, and later South Africa joined in 2010. It was noted that the acronym BRIC was coined by Jim O'Neill in 2001.<sup>4</sup> However, now BRICS is one of the most important multilateral international organisations having a combined population of 3.22 billion people and a combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) amounting to almost 24.44 trillion USD (Figure 1 and 2).<sup>5</sup>

1 "XIV BRICS Summit," *BRICS 2022 China*, 2022, <http://brics2022.mfa.gov.cn/eng/>.

2 BRICS is a multilateral international organization which stands for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

3 "14th BRICS Summit to Review Current Global Issues, Reach Key Agreements," *Business Standard*, June 23, 2022, [https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/14th-brics-summit-to-review-current-global-issues-reach-key-agreements-122062300037\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/14th-brics-summit-to-review-current-global-issues-reach-key-agreements-122062300037_1.html).

4 Shashi Tharoor, "Is BRICS Going to Break Up?," *The Japan Times*, July 15, 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2022/07/15/commentary/world-commentary/brics-breakup/>.

5 Aaron O'Neill, "BRICS Countries - Statistics & Facts," *Statista*, November 26, 2021, [https://www.statista.com/topics/1393/bric-countries/#topicHeader\\_\\_wrapper](https://www.statista.com/topics/1393/bric-countries/#topicHeader__wrapper).

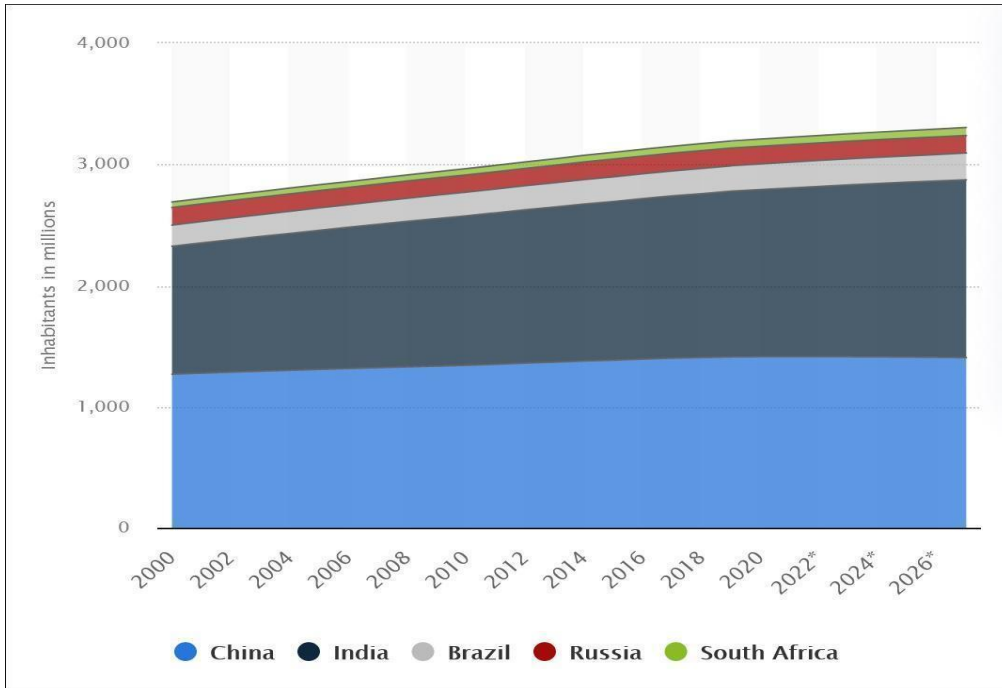


Figure 1: The combined population of BRICS countries is 3.22 billion people.<sup>6</sup>

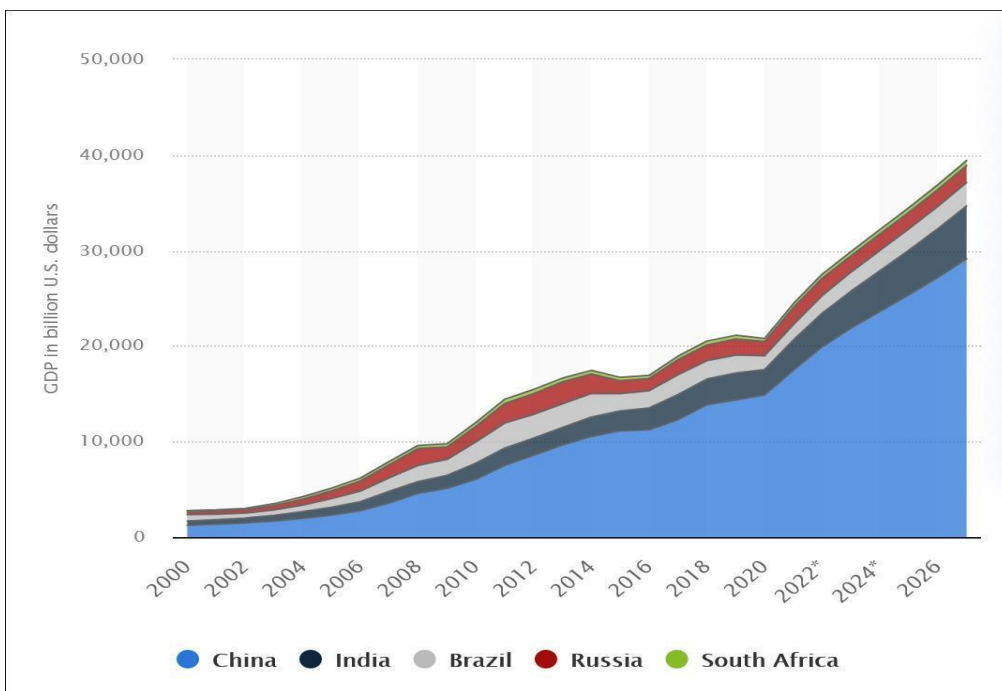


Figure 2: The combined GDP of BRICS countries is 24.44 trillion USD.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Aaron O’Neill, “Total Population of the BRICS Countries from 2000 to 2027,” *Statista*, June 29, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/254205/total-population-of-the-bric-countries/>.

<sup>7</sup> Aaron O’Neill, “Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the BRICS Countries from 2000 to 2027,” *Statista*, June 29, 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/254281/gdp-of-the-bric-countries/>.

### ***President Xi's Speech***

President Xi delivered a vital speech entitled “Fostering High Quality Partnership and Embarking on a New Journey of BRICS Cooperation.” President Xi Jinping appreciated the BRICS members’ adherence to the BRICS spirit of openness, win-win cooperation, and enhancing the coordination despite several complex circumstances.<sup>8</sup>

President Xi highlighted several factors for fostering a more comprehensive and inclusive partnership among BRICS members. Firstly, he stressed upon the need of upholding solidarity and safeguarding world peace. For him, this solidarity could only be possible if the world got rid of the Cold War mentality of power politics. Secondly, upholding the cooperation between BRICS members is necessary to tackle the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, notably the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing Ukraine Crisis. Thirdly, the BRICS members need to withstand the pioneering spirit and innovation to tap the potential of cooperation. Lastly, it was argued that it is necessary for the BRICS members to enhance openness and pool their collective wisdom and strengths.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Declaration of BRICS Summit***

The declaration makes it evident that the BRICS has refrained from taking any position regarding the Ukraine crisis. Instead it has affirmed its support for bilateral negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. Similarly, the statement has also shown its commitment regarding the provision of humanitarian assistance according to the UN principles of humanity and neutrality.

Moreover, commitments were made in order to strengthening and reforming the global governance coupled with a keen focus on multilateralism. Covid-19 is considered an existential threat and the members reiterated their solidarity to combat the pandemic. Furthermore, safeguarding peace and security, promoting the economic recovery coupled with a focus on transnational connections also remained on the forefront agenda of the summit.<sup>10</sup> The summit concluded on the commitment towards multilateralism, working for greater democracy, and safeguarding justice coupled with maintaining stability in the turbulent international environment.

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<sup>8</sup> “The 14th BRICS Summit Is Held President Xi Jinping Chairs the Summit and Delivers Important Remarks,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, June 24, 2022, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/202206/t20220624\\_10709235.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202206/t20220624_10709235.html).

<sup>9</sup> “Full Text: Xi Jinping’s Speech at the 14th BRICS Summit,” *CGTN*, June 24, 2022, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2022-06-24/Full-text-Xi-Jinping-s-speech-at-the-14th-BRICS-Summit-1b6CYOtRtja/index.html>.

<sup>10</sup> “XIV BRICS Summit Beijing Declaration,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, June 23, 2022, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx\\_662805/202206/t20220623\\_10709037.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202206/t20220623_10709037.html).

### ***BRICS Summit and Great Power Politics***

Arguably, the rising China and the resurging Russia have been debated as an anti-thesis to the Atlantic world order led by the United States (U.S.). Apparently, both actors are continuously mounting a credible challenge to the world led by the U.S.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the 14<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit hosted by China is significant in the current conjecture of a shifting geopolitical landscape. The BRICS is mainly appraised at the forums of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and Boao Forum for Asia, which are considered as an alternative to the Western institutions.<sup>12</sup> In this context, it could be hypothesised that the BRICS Summit is becoming a challenge for the West in the ongoing scenario of bloc politics, increasing proxy wars, and unprecedented conflicts.<sup>13</sup>

China due to its dominance in the BRICS is undertaking assertive actions by positioning itself and Asia in the centre of the debate. Arguably Chinese actions and political rhetoric is aiming to make Beijing a powerful pole of the emerging multipolar world. Similarly, China is also aiming to weaken the Atlantic world order through the strategies of displacement adopted at the political, military and economic levels.<sup>14</sup>

The summit is of great significance to Russia which was interpreted as a challenge by the U.S. in its National Security Strategy and as a threat for their survival by the European nations. The political and economic sanctions imposed by the West have consequences for the crippling Russian economy. Nevertheless, the Russian policy of turning towards 'East' is also looking for an alternative market for its oil and gas products in China and India.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the summit presents an excellent opportunity for Russia to gain legitimacy and recognition through the BRICS platform.

Russian President Putin lauded the cooperation among the BRICS countries and argued that in the first half of the year 2022, Russia's trade with BRICS countries increased by 38 percent amounting to

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11 Chris Devonshire-Ellis, "China Has Urged The West To Read The New 14th BRICS Summit Declaration Carefully. This Is What It Says.," *Silk Road Briefing*, June 28, 2022, <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2022/06/28/china-has-urged-the-west-to-read-the-new-14th-brics-summit-declaration-carefully-this-is-what-it-says/>.

12 Devonshire-Ellis, "China Has Urged The West To Read The New 14th BRICS Summit Declaration Carefully. This Is What It Says."

13 Mustafa Cem Koyuncu, "The 14th BRICS Summit: Did Pandora's Box Open?," *Ankara Center for Crisis and Policy Studies*, July 4, 2022, <https://www.ankasam.org/the-14th-brics-summit-did-pandoras-box-open/?lang=en>.

14 Rush Doshi, "The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to displace American Order," *Brookings Institute*, August 2, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/the-long-game-chinas-grand-strategy-to-displace-american-order/>

15 Helge Blakkisrud and Elana Wilson Rowe, *Russia's Turn to the East: Domestic Policymaking and Regional Cooperation* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2018), 31–34.

almost 45 billion USD. The latter clearly indicated that Russia is heavily relying on BRICS for its trade and exports.

The summit also called for reform in the UN in order to enhance its representative power. It has appreciated the inclusion of India and Brazil as a member in UNSC which will increase the weightage of organization in the areas of mutual cooperation.<sup>16</sup> Northeast Asian stability and denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula also remained on the agenda of the summit. Nevertheless, the members have stressed on the resolution of all issues relating to the Korean Peninsula and have expressed their commitments to all bilateral and multilateral negotiations to resolve the issue.

Indian PM Narendra Modi also participated in the BRICS summit which is a careful balancing act between the East and West. PM Modi resorted towards a safe passage by praising BRICS without criticizing the West. He emphasized on the constructive role of BRICS regarding the economic recovery in the post-pandemic world. He conformed to the idea that the BRICS members hold similar views regarding the governance and the global economy.<sup>17</sup> He further added that the institutional reforms instigated in the BRICS have significantly impacted the efficacy of the organization. The initiatives taken by the organizations notably the Vaccine Research and Development Center and the establishment of the shared satellite constellation were appreciated by him.<sup>18</sup>

The recent developments in Afghanistan have also garnered the attention of the summit. The member states have expressed their sincere commitments in establishing a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan immune from the foreign interventions. In the wake of an increasingly turbulent environment in Afghanistan, instability in the region is not desired by any BRICS' member. Therefore, they have urged the Afghan Taliban to initiate dialogue and negotiations with all Afghan groups in order to pave the way for national reconciliation.

The summit has also paid attention to the contentious issue of the Iranian nuclear deal. The members have emphasized on the peaceful resolution of Iranian nuclear deal. Moreover, the

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<sup>16</sup> Chris Devonshire-Ellis, "China Has Urged The West To Read The New 14th BRICS Summit Declaration Carefully. This Is What It Says.," *Silk Road Briefing*, June 28, 2022, <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2022/06/28/china-has-urged-the-west-to-read-the-new-14th-brics-summit-declaration-carefully-this-is-what-it-says/>.

<sup>17</sup> "Western sanctions are 'weaponizing' world economy, China's Xi Jinping says ahead of BRICS summit," CNN, June 23, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/23/asia/xi-jinping-brics-summit-china-russiasanctions-economy-intl-hnk/index.html>

<sup>18</sup> "English Translation of the Opening Remarks by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi at XIV BRICS Summit 2022," Ministry of External Affairs- Government of India, June 23, 2022. [https://www.mea.gov.in/SpeechesStatements.htm?dtl/35434/English\\_Translation\\_of\\_the\\_Opening\\_Remarks\\_by\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_Shri\\_Narendra\\_Modi\\_at\\_XIV\\_BRICS\\_Summit\\_2022](https://www.mea.gov.in/SpeechesStatements.htm?dtl/35434/English_Translation_of_the_Opening_Remarks_by_Prime_Minister_Shri_Narendra_Modi_at_XIV_BRICS_Summit_2022)

summit has also stressed the significance of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) deal and the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2331 with the hope of diplomatic success through the resumption of JCPOA talks.

### **Conclusions**

The BRICS is an emerging multilateral platform fostering cooperation based on the non-Western styles. It is noteworthy that leaders of the BRICS states are having a certain distance from the US led liberal world order. It is evident as none of the leaders of the BRICS states have condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In the face of such a complex geopolitical landscape, the BRICS summit has provided China an opportunity to promote its vision of the international order. Similarly it also acts as a diplomatic platform for China in wake of the revival of NATO and the increased activities of the US in the Indo-Pacific.

The BRICS members have expressed their concerns regarding the governance structures of the UN which are viewed as unbalanced and representing the interests of the Western powers. China with its increasingly assertive and risk tolerant posture is pushing the organization as a counterweight to the Western institutions.<sup>19</sup> It is apparent from the assertive statements by the Chinese and Russian presidents which have shown a firm commitment towards the embracement of a multipolar world.

Thus, the 14<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit is a significant development amid heated geopolitical competition among the great powers. The BRICS' stance on international issues including the Iran nuclear deal, instability in Afghanistan, and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula shows that the organization is seeking an increasing role in international politics. The member nations are seeking to modify their roles in the contemporary international order.

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<sup>19</sup> "As BRICS Summit Kicks off, Calls Grow for Parallel Payment System to Counter US Hegemony," *Global Times*, June 22, 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202206/1268800.shtml>.

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