ISSUE BRIEF

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BRICS IN BRAZIL: MULTIPOLAR ASPIRATIONS AND INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS AT THE CROSSROADS OF GLOBAL ORDER

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

The 17th BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro (6–7 July 2025) formally marked the transition of BRICS from a five-member group to BRICS-11, now representing 40% of the world's population and economy.[1] Under the Chairmanship of Brazil, leaders issued a 31-page Declaration calling for deep reforms in global governance institutions (UN, IMF, World Bank); stronger South-South cooperation; and greater climate finance commitments in the run-up to COP30.[2] A measured consensus was achieved, even as some leaders were unable to attend in-person. China's President Xi Jinping and Russia's President Vladimir Putin participated remotely, while the Presidents of Iran and Egypt were also absent, reportedly due to regional scheduling constraints and domestic considerations.[3] Pakistan, having formally applied for membership in late 2023, enjoys clear support from Russia and China, but its bid remains subject to consensus, particularly the recurring opposition of India.[4]

1 Jonathan Watts, "Brics summit in Brazil tries to reinvent collective approach to world's problems", The Guardian, published July 7, 2025. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/jul/07/brics-summit-brazil-president-lula

2 Stott, Pooler, Leahy & Reed, "Growing pains and absent leaders hang over Brics summit", Financial Times, published July 6, 2025. https://www.ft.com/content/8b83d73a-de7e-46df-8ca0-932808adfe61

3 Ibid.

4 "Russia backs Pakistan's BRICS bid", Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), published September 19, 2024. https://www.sifc.gov.pk/news/412

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BRICS was originally founded as BRIC in 2009, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, and China. South Africa formally joined the grouping in 2010, transforming it into BRICS. Initially established as an economic grouping, it has since evolved into a significant political platform representing reform-oriented emerging powers. The 2025 Summit was Brazil's fourth time as Chair, under the theme: "Strengthening Global South Cooperation for Inclusive and Sustainable Governance".[5] This came amid growing global U.S. retrenchment, trade and tariff wars, and an urgent climate agenda.

Key Developments relating to the Rio Summit

- **Expansion to BRICS-11**: New full members Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Indonesia, and UAE joined in early 2024, giving the bloc greater geographic breadth and demographic weight
- **Declaration and Institutional Reform Agenda**: The Rio Declaration reaffirmed multilateralism, commitments to climate finance, AI governance frameworks, and institutional reform but avoided naming the U.S., reflecting Brazil's preference for diplomatic caution[6]
- **Absentee Leaders**: While some key leaders, including President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin, participated virtually, others such as the Presidents of Iran and Egypt were unable to attend in-person denoting the logistical and political complexities involved in convening a diverse and expanding membership[7]
- **Climate Leadership**: Brazil used BRICS to bolster its climate diplomacy ahead of the COP30 to be held in Belem, Brazil, proposing the Tropical Forests Forever Facility with expected contributions from China and UAE[8]
- **Trade and Currency Strategy**: While not pursuing a common currency, BRICS agreed to explore bilateral trade settlement in national currencies to reduce dollar reliance but with measured language and emphasis on "process" rather than radical disruption[9]

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5 "17th BRICS Summit", Nature4Climate, published 6-7 July, 2025. https://nature4climate.org/event/17th-brics-summit/

6 Stott, Pooler, Leahy & Reed, "Growing pains and absent leaders hang over Brics summit", Financial Times, published July 6, 2025. https://www.ft.com/content/8b83d73a-de7e-46df-8ca0-932808adfe61

7 Manuela Andreoni & Lisandra Paraguassu, "BRICS demand wealthy nations fund global climate transition", Reuters, published July 7, 2025. https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/brics-demand-wealthy-nations-fund-global-climate-transition-2025-07-07/

8 "BRICS Summit signs historic commitment in Rio for more inclusive and sustainable governance", BRICS Brasil 2025, published July 6, 2025. https://brics.br/en/news/brics-summit-signs-historic-commitment-in-rio-for-more-inclusive-and-sustainable-governance

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Analytical Reflections on BRICS 2025

The 2025 BRICS Summit revealed both the growing strengths and the persistent contradictions within the newly expanded BRICS-11. On the one hand, the inclusion of new members such as Indonesia, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the UAE has significantly broadened the group's demographic and geopolitical footprint, enhancing its symbolic stature as a representative platform for the Global South. On the other hand, this very expansion has introduced sharper ideological, economic, and strategic fault-lines. Democratic states like Brazil and South Africa, each with relatively pluralistic and open political systems, now operate alongside more centralized governments, such as Iran and Ethiopia, whose domestic and foreign policy orientations diverge distinctly.

This ideological heterogeneity complicates the forging of unified positions on major international issues. For example, the enduring China–India border dispute, differing interpretations of the Israel-Palestine conflict, and contrasting responses to the Ukraine conflict or tensions in the Red Sea region underscore the limits of consensus within the group.

Although the Rio Declaration reaffirmed collective commitment to multilateralism, sustainable development, and the reform of global governance institutions such as the United Nations and Bretton Woods system, concrete progress remains elusive. The final communiqué[10] reflected calibrated language designed to preserve internal harmony, often at the expense of clarity and actionable reform proposals. Despite calls for a more inclusive international order, BRICS has yet to articulate a cohesive roadmap for translating this rhetoric into tangible institutional change.

The bloc positions itself as a premier voice of the 'Global South', yet the selective nature of its expansion process has raised legitimate concerns about consistency and principle. A notable example is Pakistan's pending membership bid, which, despite enjoying explicit support from China, Russia, and several other members has not progressed due to India's opposition to endorse it. While New Delhi's reservations may be rooted in bilateral dynamics, the inability of BRICS to transcend regional rivalries in pursuit of broader representation casts a shadow on its credibility as an objective and inclusive platform. This internal deadlock suggests that national interests of certain members,

9 Huma Siddiqui, "BRICS Summit 2025: Focus On Global South And Global Governance", StratNews Global, published July 5, 2025. https://stratnewsglobal.com/world-news/brics-summit-2025-focus-on-global-south-and-global-governance/

10 "Rio de Janeiro Declaration – Strengthening Global South Cooperation for a More Inclusive and Sustainable Governance", Joint Communiqué, Media Statement, Department of International Relations and Cooperation, Republic of South Africa. https://dirco.gov.za/rio-de-janeiro-declaration-strengthening-global-south-cooperation-for-a-more-inclusive-and-sustainable-governance-rio-de-janeiro-brazil-6-july-2025/

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rather than a collective strategic vision, appear to influence the bloc's political calculus, a dynamic that risks undermining the very multilateralism BRICS professes to promote.

Economically, the group renewed its emphasis on increasing the use of local currencies in trade and reducing reliance on the U.S. dollar. However, the move from aspiration to implementation remains constrained by considerable operational and institutional challenges. Divergent regulatory frameworks, technological disparities, and varying degrees of financial openness limit the scalability of initiatives like BRICS Pay or regional settlement mechanisms. The idea of a common BRICS currency, once floated as a bold alternative to dollar dominance, was notably absent from the Rio deliberations, reflecting a pragmatic decision to avoid politically and economically sensitive proposals that might provoke internal rifts or external resistance (primarily from the U.S. like the threat of extra 10% tariffs for the bloc having an anti-American policies[11]).

Diplomatically, the absence of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin (who joined virtually) contrasted with the active, in-person participation of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. This disparity in visibility hinted at an evolving balance of influence within the bloc. India leveraged its presence to project its role among emerging powers, while Brazil, serving as host, sought to portray BRICS as a cooperative platform anchored in dialogue, inclusivity, and sustainable development. Yet, such dynamics also suggest that leadership within BRICS is fluid and contingent, shaped less by institutional structures than by shifting national agendas, regional ambitions, and global positioning.

In sum, while the 2025 Rio Summit affirmed BRICS' relevance and its commitment to shaping a multipolar world, it also laid bare the complex realities of maintaining cohesion within an increasingly diverse and strategically dispersed group. The matter relating to the membership of Pakistan, an emerging economy with strong ties to multiple BRICS members, highlights how internal geopolitical dynamics can inhibit the bloc's broader claims to inclusivity and reformist credibility. If BRICS is to evolve into a meaningful counterweight to existing global institutions, it must not only expand in numbers but also demonstrate an ability to rise above bilateral politics and act as a genuinely principled coalition of emerging powers.

11 Manuela Andreoni & Lisandra Paraguassu, "BRICS demand wealthy nations fund global climate transition", Reuters, published July 7, 2025. https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/brics-demand-wealthy-nations-fund-global-climate-transition-2025-07-07/

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Implications for Pakistan and the 'Global South'

Pakistan's formal application for BRICS membership reflects its growing interest in engaging with emerging multilateral platforms that prioritize inclusive global governance, South-South cooperation, and economic resilience. As stated earlier, the bid has received encouraging signals from key member states: Russia has publicly expressed strong support; and China has consistently endorsed Pakistan's inclusion as a natural extension of its strategic partnerships in the region.[12] These endorsements underscore Pakistan's relevance within the broader geopolitical and economic configurations that BRICS seeks to shape.

As a Middle Power and an emerging economy with a pivotal geostrategic location, Pakistan offers considerable value to the BRICS framework, ranging from its connectivity potential under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to its active role in regional dialogue and development platforms. On the other hand, BRICS membership would offer Pakistan enhanced access to development financing, trade opportunities, and policy coordination mechanisms within a non-Western multilateral setting. It would also help further amplify Pakistan's voice in shaping global governance narratives alongside other leading countries of the 'Global South'.

While the consensus-based nature of BRICS enlargement means that all member states must align on new admissions, ongoing diplomatic engagement continues to play an important role in building understanding and fostering convergence. Pakistan remains committed to constructive dialogue with all stakeholders, including India, and looks forward to a time when the evolving spirit of regional cooperation within BRICS can accommodate broader inclusion. In this regard, Pakistan's bid represents not just a national aspiration but a symbol of the group's long-term potential to transcend historical divides and shape a more representative, multipolar world order.

Policy Recommendations

To evolve into a more coherent and impactful coalition, BRICS must prioritize institutional development and strategic coherence. Establishing a permanent secretariat and creating thematic working groups focused on areas like climate finance, digital innovation, and more trade in local currencies would enhance coordination and ensure continuity beyond annual summits. As the group expands, BRICS should adopt flexible consultation mechanisms that allow differentiated cooperation, preserving unity without requiring consensus on all issues.

12 Ayaz Gul, "Russia pledges to back Pakistan's BRICS membership", Voice of America (VOA), published September 18, 2024. https://www.voanews.com/a/russia-pledges-to-back-pakistan-s-brics-membership/7789762.html

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A transparent and principled approach to membership expansion is essential. Clear criteria—such as economic relevance, geographic balance, and commitment to multilateralism should guide future admissions, minimizing the influence of bilateral disputes. At the same time, BRICS should deepen engagement with regional and global institutions, strengthen the developmental role of the New Development Bank, and improve access for emerging economies.

Finally, BRICS is well-positioned to articulate a cohesive and forward-looking narrative that highlights its shared commitment to reform, equity, and inclusive development. Rather than defining itself in contrast to existing global structures, the group can emphasize its role as a constructive contributor to a more balanced and representative international order championing cooperation, sustainability, and the aspirations of the 'Global South' within a multipolarising world.

Conclusion

The 2025 BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro reaffirmed the bloc's growing significance in a rapidly shifting international landscape. With its expanded membership and increasing global visibility, BRICS is steadily positioning itself as a constructive force for reform and inclusivity in global governance. While internal diversity presents coordination challenges, the group's ability to convene a wide spectrum of emerging economies is itself a testament to its convening power and relevance. The reaffirmation of multilateralism, emphasis on sustainable development, and call for reforms in institutions like the UN and IMF reflect a shared desire to shape a more balanced international system. At the same time, the experience of aspirant members such as Pakistan, whose application continues to receive strong support from several core members highlights the importance of ensuring that bilateral cleavages do not undermine the principle of inclusivity and hinder the bloc's broader mission of equitable representation. As BRICS continues to evolve, its strength will lie in its ability to embrace diversity while advancing common goals, offering not merely an alternative to traditional, existing institutions, but articulating a proactive and principled vision for a more just and equitable multipolar global order.

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