

Is BRICS+ Heading Towards “Strategic Enlargement” and the “Consolidation of A Multipolar World”?

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The question yet stands: what potential countries with high aspirations are gearing to join BRICS+, an informal association of developing economies, during the forthcoming summit this October 22-24?

In the context of preparations for the BRICS+ summit, a number of significant issues, including the expansion of the association, were reviewed and considered at the sidelines of the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. Russian **Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov** reiterated “the creation of a category of partner states” for current association of BRICS+. Lavrov had already indicated the “suspension” of membership into BRICS+ and further emphasized that “the ministers reviewed the efforts to coordinate the modalities of the new category, BRICS partner countries” as far back in June 2024 during the BRICS Foreign Ministers Council in Russia’s **Nizhny Novgorod**.

In late September in New York, Lavrov told a news conference following his participation in the high-level week of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly that BRICS+ considered further expansion inappropriate for now, the current BRICS member-countries now considered it not feasible to admit new members, but countries expressing readiness would only become supporting partners and would maintain permanent contacts. These partner members could use BRICS+ to pursue the common goals of fighting United States dominance and Western hegemony. BRICS is also steadily working towards creating a multipolar world.

“As for the prospects for BRICS expansion, at this stage all affiliated countries consider it reasonable not to make new decisions for the time being and to adapt the organization, an association of like-minded members. There were five of us, now there are ten. Of course, this requires some kind of habituation and smooth entry of new members into the work in line with the traditions that the quintet has developed over years,” Lavrov said.

On the other hand, the transition towards a new economic architecture, characterized by de-dollarization and diversification of global financial frameworks, presents immense opportunities and challenges for the Global South. Russia’s engagements with mostly common geopolitical like-minded countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America regions underscore strategic importance for future development of BRICS+.

Meanwhile, BRICS+ rising against United States hegemony and dominance, ultimately helps create the situation or conditions for China to emerge as the global economic power. **The ultimate result - BRICS+ is rather driving China, with estimated population of 1.5**

billion, to establish global presence, Russia has been cooperating within the external economic parameters especially with China and India.

Under Russia's BRICS presidency which began January 2024, Ethiopia, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates became the second wave of the newest members to join BRICS.

South Africa ascended in 2011 under China's initiative. In 2015, BRICS established the New Development Bank (NDB), the only financial instrument to compete with other multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. While these operate worldwide, the NDB has limited scope of operations over the past decade. Nevertheless, NDB has made a significant headway, at least, for consolidating its position and has also taken a few steps in raising the possibility of forging sustainable economic cooperation and collaborating on investment partnerships among member states. According to media reports, NDB primarily intended to pursue a flexible financial framework to create a fairer, more equitable system, in contrast to IMF and the World Bank. By advocating for these essential reforms, NDB portrays itself as the main instrument for reshaping the financial landscape for the Global South.

As often emphasized, BRICS+ functions on the basis of consensus. The consensus principle primarily aims at finding agreements that reflect the mutual accord of all participants. BRICS+ is an informal association of emerging economies based on respectful attitude towards each other and on mutual consideration to promote collaboration based on a balance of interests and strictly adhere to the principle of the sovereign equality of states and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. Moreover, its transforming structure remains as an emerging force for a new global architecture.

In these previous years, BRICS+ has been emerging as a key player in this world, has the potential to drive significant economic growth and development but BRICS+ and the Global South collaboration face the challenges of diversity in politics, economy and culture. This is evidently noticeable in the dynamism of tackling complex issues such as economic development, trade, climate change, and global governance. The degree of variations significantly in terms of their level of economic development and political influence could complicate efforts to create a cohesive alliance, according to experts' interpretations.

Leaders will decide on BRICS membership expansion on the basis of full consultation and consensus. The following countries have either expressed interest in joining BRICS or have already applied for membership:

(i) AFRICA

Algeria: In terms of market size, Algeria has the tenth largest proven natural gas reserves globally, is the world's sixth-largest gas exporter, and has the world's third-largest untapped shale gas resources.

According to reports, Africa States have submitted applications: Angola, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, DR Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Libya, Mali Republic and Niger Republic.

Nigeria: Nigeria's Foreign Minister Yusuf Tuggar has announced that the country intends to become a member of the BRICS group of nations within the next two years. Nigeria has a

GDP of \$448 billion, a population of 213 million and a GDP per capita of \$2,500. It has the world's 9th largest gas reserves and significant oil reserves.

Senegal: It is a medium capacity gold mining and energy player, with reserves in gold, oil, and gas. The energy industry is at a growth stage as reserves have only recently been found. The energy-hungry BRICS nations will be keen to secure its supplies.

Sudan: Sudan's top five export markets are 100% BRICS – China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, India, and the UAE. Sudan also has regional clout. It is Africa's third-largest country by area, and is a member of the League of Arab States (LAS). Should Sudan join the BRICS it would give the group complete control of the Red Sea supply routes East Africa: South Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

(ii) AMERICAS

Bolivia: Asset-rich but relatively poor, Bolivia has the fastest GDP growth rate in Latin America.

There are also **Chile, Colombia and Costa Rica.**

Cuba: Cuba's sanctions defiance has long made it a favorite of China and Russia when wanting to annoy the United States. It also has significant agreements with China and Russia, is a member of the BRI and has significant Caribbean and LatAm influence.

Ecuador: Ecuador is negotiating Free Trade Agreements with both China and the Eurasian Economic Union. It would make sense to substitute these with a looser BRICS arrangement

El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

Nicaragua: Nicaragua is a mining play and the leading gold-producing country in Central America. It has a Free Trade Agreement with the ALBA bloc, and is an influential player in the Caribbean.

El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, Panama and Peru.

Uruguay : Uruguay has joined the BRICS New Development Bank – a sure sign that official BRICS membership is pending.

Venezuela: Another outlier, but its energy reserves and political stance fit well with China and Russia's needs.

(iii) ASIA

Afghanistan: : An outlier, but Afghanistan has significant resources and is a member of the BRI. Diplomatic changes are required, but China, India and Russia are all keen to see redevelopment in the country once political stability can be secured.

Azerbaijan and Bahrain.

Bangladesh: Bangladesh is one of the world's top five fastest growing economies and is undergoing significant infrastructure and trade development reforms. It shares a 4,100 km border with India.

Indonesia: One of Asia's leading economies, Indonesia's potential has again been raised to join BRICS. In July 2023, Jakarta accepted an invitation to participate in the 2023 BRICS summit.

Kazakhstan: Kazakhstan's economy is highly dependent on oil and related products. In addition to oil, its main export commodities include natural gas, ferrous metals, copper, aluminum, zinc and uranium.

Others include Iraq, Kuwait, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar.

Mongolia: Mongolia is both a problem and solution, while geographically attractive. It requires extensive investment in its energy sector; yet is resource-rich and a transit point between Russia, Kazakhstan and China. It is not a member of any trade bloc, with a looser BRICS arrangement better suited to maintaining its regional impartiality.

Pakistan: Pakistan has filed an application to join the BRICS group of nations in 2024 and is counting on Russia's assistance during the membership process, the country's newly appointed Ambassador to Russia Muhammad Khalid Jamali has stated.

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka isn't keen on opening up its markets yet has significant economic problems. China is interested in port and Indian Ocean access while Russian tourism investments are increasing. A BRICS agreement would be loose enough to satisfy all concerns, while India will want to keep an eye on it.

Turkiye: Turkiye's trade figures with the current and most of the upcoming BRICS members show significant growth. Getting access to BRICS NDB funding may also prove attractive for Ankara as talks are expected across a number of issues.

Thailand: Thailand is one of ASEAN's largest economies, via ASEAN it has additional Free Trade Agreements with Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, China, Hong Kong and India, and agreements with Chile, and Peru. Thailand is also a signatory to the RCEP FTA between ASEAN and Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea.

Uzbekistan: Uzbekistan is one of Central Asia's fastest growing economies, yet it is hampered by being double-landlocked. Membership of BRICS would give it market access to China, Europe, and the rest of Asia in a more protected manner.

These have also shown potential interest: Syria, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Vietnam and Yemen.

(iv) EUROPE

Azerbaijan and Belarus: In the former Soviet space, Belarus and Azerbaijan have recently expressed their anonymized interest to leverage onto BRICS platform. Based on the historical fact that Belarus and Russia have already formed a Union State, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko irreversibly promised Belarus' ascension into BRICS.

"Azerbaijan has filed an official application for joining BRICS," Azerbaijan's news agency quoted Foreign Ministry's spokesman, **Aykan Hajizada**.

Baku's intention to jump the bandwagon of BRICS reflected in the joint declaration on strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and China, which was signed on the sidelines of

the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Astana in early July.

That however, Belarus sees BRICS as a basis for economic development and is ready to join integration processes within the framework of the informal association.

“We are interested in getting involved in integration processes in that space. BRICS is another footing to help us maintain balance and economic stability,” BelTA agency quoted Lukashenko as emphatically asserted.

Notably, Azerbaijan and Belarus are former Soviet republics, with common historical background despite the stark indications of disparity in approach to current politics and economic development, much still remains uniquely common in cultural practice and in the society. Undoubtedly, both the older and current generations have comprehensive understanding of Soviet history and culture. Azerbaijan and Belarus becoming BRICS members will fortify the SCO operations in the region. Therefore, Azerbaijan and Belarus governments and their state institutions such as the cabinet, legislature and judiciary, would endorse aligning to BRICS, and its contribution towards shaping a new post-Soviet space within the framework of emerging new geopolitical reality.

Meanwhile, as Sergey Lavrov noted “the weight, prestige and role of an individual candidate country and, of course, its position in the international arena” would be taken into account in decision-making on accepting new members to expand, a bit later, BRICS. An updated list of candidate countries for BRICS membership, which was “suspension” for the time being, would still be prepared for consideration at October summit under Russia’s chairmanship.

Amid heightening of geopolitical changes, the forthcoming BRICS summit in Kazan on October 22-24 presents an opportunity, most possibly, to determine and review critical pending issues including the association’s structure, and membership. Ensuring qualitative geopolitical influence must be the key priority. Political and economic impact should be paramount instead of anti-western rhetoric and stringent confrontation. As the situation stands, the numerical strength of BRICS is equally important as well as creating the necessary instruments and taking step-by-step comprehensive measures for promoting global peace and future development-oriented aspirations. Despite positive achievements and future expectations, challenges remain. Perhaps, some of the new members with political divergences have already began to manipulate their national interest and therefore discrediting BRICS as demonstrated by Ethiopia and Egypt at the UN Generally Assembly in New York.

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