

The BRICS Summit. A Multipolar World Order? What's Russia's Role?

10th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg might be the best thing to ever happen to Africa

By [Andrew Korybko](#)

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The 10th BRICS Summit will take place in Johannesburg from 25-27 July and will see the most important figures from the emerging Multipolar World Order congregate together on the African continent. This is an historical moment in and of itself that's made all the more special by the invitations that the host country extended to Argentina, Egypt, Indonesia, Jamaica, and Turkey to participate in this event because of their roles in various international organizations of significance such as the G20 and other integrational platforms. Although a wide array of topics are expected to be discussed, it can be certain that South Africa will do its utmost to keep Africa as the subject of conversation whenever possible, knowing that the dozens of countries on the landmass collectively represent the verge of economic development this century that's made all the more promising by the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) that they're working to create.

Russian scholar and visionary thinker **Yaroslav Lissovlik** recently wrote an enlightening policy paper for the prestigious Valdai Club titled "[BEAMS Of The Sunrise: A Look At BRICS 5-Year Cycles](#)" that focuses on the many complementarities that BRICS has with other organizations. His thesis is that BRICS's evolution to BRICS+ (a concept that he first described in his June 2017 piece about "[The Mechanics Of BRICS+: A Tentative Blueprint](#)") has seen it expand its influence throughout the regional integrational blocs that its members are a part of, with the second step of BRICS++ (described in detail in his February 2017 work about "[Re-Thinking The BRICS: On The Concepts Of BRICS+ And BRICS++](#)") envisioned to connect each of these multilateral bodies together and even involve their partners. Per his first-mentioned article, he believes that relations between BIMSTEC, the Eurasian Economic Union, the African Union, Mercosur, and the SCO (BEAMS) will be the driving force behind this process.

In practice, the guiding strategy as proposed by Mr. Lissovlik is to have BRICS function as the ultimate platform for managing multipolarity as this organization gradually surmounts its Western counterparts in importance and eventually comes to involve almost the entirety of the non-Western world. The relevance that this has for Africa is that he thinks that the African Union component of BEAMS (which itself is the embodiment of BRICS+) could streamline more solid continental integration through its various sub-blocs like he wrote in his December 2017 article concerning "[A BRICS+ Framework For Africa: Targeting Regional Connectivity](#)". This proposal dovetails perfectly with the continental building blocks of the

CFTA, but this grand vision requires the crucial participation of BRICS members China, India, and Russia if it's to ultimately be successful. The first two are economic powerhouses with limitless potential for transforming the continent, but they might require their mutual Russian partner's managing efforts to cooperate in Africa.

Trust between these two Asian Great Powers is lacking after last summer's Dongleng/Doklam incident even though it's been on the rise lately following Prime Minister Modi's informal summit with President Xi in Wuhan and India's growing economic friction with the US over its newly implemented tariffs. Even so, India's own protectionist measures vis-à-vis Chinese products and its unflinching opposition to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that it regards as transiting through Pakistani-controlled territory that it claims as its own are serious obstacles that make any full-fledged economic - let alone strategic - rapprochement between the two unlikely no matter the high-sounding slogans that they and their media surrogates chant from time to time for domestic political reasons. As a case in point, the newly unveiled joint Indo-Japanese "Asia-Africa Growth Corridor" (AAGC) is poised to compete with China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) vision of New Silk Road connectivity instead of cooperate with it.

"Friendly competition" between these two developmental models concentrating mostly on soft and hard infrastructure respectively could end up being to Africa's advantage if its countries properly leverage this, though they're nowhere near as organized as they'd have to be in order to effect any positive influence on this process, nor is South Africa in any position to do so either. Therefore, the most realistic prospect is for Russia to take the lead in "balancing" between both of its privileged partners' transcontinental infrastructure projects by seeking to involve itself in each of their African operations, which could make Moscow the "glue" that connects the two together and manages their rivalry. This in turn could improve their complementarity with one another and enable Africa to reap the full advantages of being the object of China and India's economic competition, with Russia's participation giving the host countries an additional qualitative benefit to each model.

For this to happen, however, Russia must use the opportunity of the 10th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg to explore various avenues for multilateral economic cooperation with China and India in Africa, playing off of its silent return to the continent over the past year which the author described in detail in his May 2018 article about "[Russia's Grand Strategy In Afro-Eurasia \(And What Could Go Wrong\)](#)" and the more specific one a month later on how "[Russia's Making Some Smart Moves In The Central African Republic](#)". If Moscow can make its partners in Beijing and New Delhi appreciate its newfound influence in Africa, then it can make the case for them to involve it in their OBOR and AAGC projects there, which could in turn result in Russia most effectively managing their competition to the continent's supreme advantage. This would therefore make next week's summit the best thing to ever happen to Africa if Russia's creative "balancing" efforts succeed in unlocking its true BRICS+ potential.

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Andrew Korybko is an American Moscow-based political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One Road global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare. He is a frequent contributor to *Global Research*.

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About the author:

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