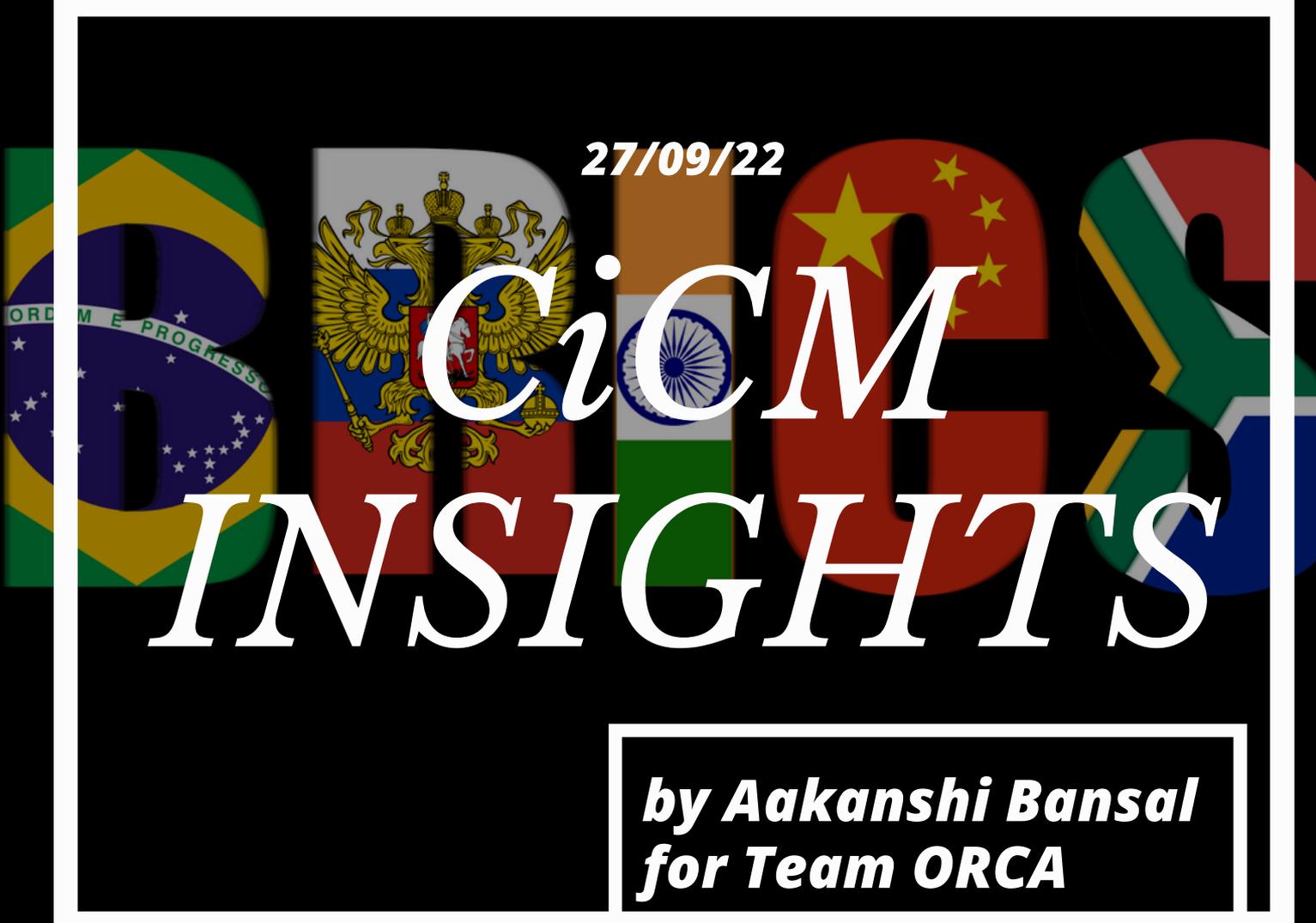


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*CiCM*  
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**Issue 7: Examining the Role of BRICS in China's Multilateral Diplomacy**

## Examining the Role of BRICS in China's Multilateral Diplomacy

- Chinese President Xi Jinping presided over the 14th BRICS leaders' summit via video link in Beijing on the evening of the 23rd June. BRICS was founded in 2009 by Brazil, Russia, India, and China and aimed at promoting peace, security, development and cooperation in the world. South Africa joined BRICS the next year.
- Looking back over the last year, Xi Jinping observed that the Covid-19 pandemic had adverse effects on the global economy, and the challenges to peace and security have gained greater attention. In light of the dire and complicated circumstances, President Xi said that China has consistently upheld the BRICS principles of inclusivity, openness, and win-win cooperation reinforcing our bonds of solidarity and collaborating to find solutions.
- One message stood out loud and clear at this recent BRICS summit that the alliance is ready to forge its own development path. The summit also left the world questioning and debating the motivations and realities behind the discussions during the summit which we will be focusing on further in this insight.
- Xi underlined China's position that a Cold War mindset, conflict, and unilateral sanctions were fruitless and not in the spirit of international cooperation and globalization without specifically mentioning the United States and its allies. Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, echoed his thoughts and criticized the West for inciting a crisis by implementing sanctions against his government. Both presidents called for deeper BRICS cooperation. Aiming to limit their growth and development through tariffs and the imposition of economic and diplomatic sanctions for alleged infractions and abuses, Washington has identified China and Russia as its two key adversaries.
- The members want to expand the multilateral system and reform it to make it more inclusive and representative. The meeting also made it clear that BRICS acts as a forum for discussing topics of importance for developing countries. Xi Jinping pointed out that both developing and developed countries should have the same rights, regulations, and opportunities without any discrimination.
- The combined market potential and trade possibilities within the BRICS countries would foster the ideal environment for further collaboration among them. The perception that the BRICS would revolutionize global trade is fueled by factors such as China's production capacity, South Africa's resources and location as a gateway to the rich and diverse mineral resources of the rest of Africa, Russia's energy dominance, and India's growing consumer base and technological prowess. It makes sense that these advantages are increasingly

used for protecting national interests through collective bargaining.

## **Pakistan was Blocked from Entering BRICS**

- India and China collaborated in a shrewd diplomatic maneuver to prevent Pakistan from attending the BRICS plus gathering last Friday. Pakistan attempted to participate in the BRICS outreach event for developing nations, which included other developing countries like Algeria, Argentina, Cambodia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Fiji, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Senegal, Uzbekistan, Malaysia, and Thailand.
- Interestingly, unlike other BRICS meet participants, Pakistan does not fall under the definition of a developing market, and its economy is currently facing a severe crisis similar to that of Sri Lanka.
- Islamabad was disappointed due to their exclusion, considering their alliance and growing relations with Beijing. However, the Chinese actions might be seen as a response to Pakistan's slow progress on the projects under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.
- India has time and again mentioned its displeasure with Pakistan's inclusion in the BRICS summit through declarations, whether on the issues of cross-border terrorism in 2016 or on the issue of providing a safe haven to terrorists in the 2017 summit. However, it had failed to get support from other BRICS nations. It also appears that China had not consulted India on the matter of BRICS expansion, prompting India to block Pakistan from joining BRICS and stop converting BRICS into a China-led bloc, filled with Chinese allies.
- Post this development, scholars are interested to see how the relationship between China and Pakistan will change and if the two Asian giants (India and China) will start collaborating more on improving their bilateral relations. However, the latter is unlikely as India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar recently said the two neighbors are going through an extremely tough phase. Beijing has emphasized that the 'Asian Century' will not materialize if the two neighbors cannot work together. One can speculate that Islamabad's blockade of entry into BRICS was only supported by China due to their vested interests.

## **The Era of Vertical Globalization**

- To strengthen communication and cooperation between BRICS nations and other emerging economies, to promote the establishment of broader partnerships and facilitate shared development and prosperity on a larger scale, the BRICS Plus was introduced during China's 2017 presidency. It was in

response to criticism that the BRICS was an exclusive club.

- Now that China occupies a leadership position in the grouping, the BRICS Plus is being widely promoted by China. Despite previous BRICS Plus outreach events done in conjunction with the Summit, this is the first time that non-BRICS nations were invited to both the BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting and the Leaders' Summit. This is made significant by the fact that neither the BRICS regional outreach nor the BRICS Plus meeting occurred since 2019.
- One of the most important aspects of BRICS plus summit is the scope for expansion to include Saudi Arabia and Argentina. This would expand the new era of "vertical globalization," that could further divide the world on a scale unseen since the Cold War. The West might ultimately come up short as initiatives like Contingent Reserve Agreement, aimed to assist participants whose currencies are adversely impacted by fluctuations in the global economy. During the summit, President Putin mentioned a new reserve currency that is being developed as an alternative to the Dollar-based system and is based on a basket of commodities.
- Russia and Saudi Arabia, two of the world's largest oil exporters, would be in a club with India and China, their two biggest customers. Oil exporters might start producing and setting energy prices based on BRICS+'s internal dynamics. That opens up the possibility that BRICS+ might supersede the OPEC.
- India is worried that the grouping's expansion will strengthen China's influence while potentially undermining that of the other members. While Russia is unlikely to welcome the inclusion of nations supportive of Ukraine and Western-imposed sanctions, Brazil is wary of having its UNSC reform proposal sidelined and role in the group being diminished.
- These countries are also aware that the BRICS growth could be a remedy for Russia's isolation from the rest of the world and the tense relations between China and India. In the end, it will come down to balancing advantages and disadvantages on a case-by-case basis.

## **China as the Leader of the Global South**

- China has leveraged BRICS summit to promote a coalition in opposition to the US-led liberal democratic international order, simultaneously enlarging its influence on the political and economic fronts. China dominates the BRICS grouping in terms of economic heft and wants to take the lead in defining its future course. Beijing recently introduced measures that alter the global consensus on development and security in the form of the Global Security

Initiative (GSI) and the Global Development Initiative (GDI). The Summit will determine how well these initiatives are received by developing nations and the extent of their alignment with Beijing on economic and security issues. Had these measures been introduced in the joint communique, China could have claimed leadership status in the Global South.

- Beijing's intention to counter the US's economic influence may have driven China's efforts to turn BRICS into an anti-West forum. Beijing would be naive to assume that other BRICS members would view the US as their main rival, particularly when it comes to trade. While Russia finds a willing and practical partner in China, other BRICS members would be unwilling and unlikely to allow transition of BRICS into an anti-west forum, considering its close relationship with the US. The US's improving relations with Brazil since 2019 will also limit Brazil from supporting this agenda. South Africa is a strategic partner of the United States in the areas of health, security and trade which makes the nation an unlikely ally of China in its Anti-West agenda.
- As the US and EU manage an energy crisis, the Beijing-Moscow axis' decision to reorient a trade organization into a security and strategic forum to counter the US-led West is an extension of the Cold War mindset. Echoing this approach, Xi Jinping cautioned the BRICS partners that the globe was under the shadow of the Cold War mindset and, without specifically mentioning the US, he urged members to unite against pressure to take sides and not to pursue unilateral dominance.