

Weekly Commentary 35 – August 2023

BRICS and the End of Western Hegemony

Henry Kissinger once said, “Control oil and you control nations; control food and you control people.”

Over the last week, the BRICS group of nations succeeded in doing just that. Russia is the largest grain producer in the world and the Middle Eastern countries of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran and Russia control 80 percent of global energy supplies. They are, or will soon be, all members of BRICS.

Throw in the fact that China has the largest industrial sector, larger than those of the US and the EU combined, and we are no longer talking about a group of agricultural and mining countries still living in the 19th century trying to improve on their terms of trade with a dominant collective west. The enhanced BRICS will be a group of non-European/American countries which believe they have reached a level of development to run things according to their own preferences, rather than be forced to follow the dictates of a global hegemon’s “rules-based system”.

In short, the formation of the eleven-country BRICS is a declaration of independence from Pax Americana, the empire that took over from the British Empire. Not that there was any “pax” or peace in that structure throughout the period it was in existence. It was a tumultuous plutocracy in which rich countries dominated the rest with the irony that the plutocrats called it “democracy” or “liberal capitalism”. When the plutocrats, ie the collective west (especially the Americans), were not happy with the compliance of the weaker nations to their whims, they did not hesitate to use superior wealth (and quite often military power) to sanction and punish those who did not conform to the “rules-based system”. It was extremely hypocritical. The “democracy” practised by these so called “Atlanticists” or “Internationalists” were often considered to be a continuation of white domination over the rest of the non-white world. The Global South, ie the poor, has had enough of it.

BRICS now has representation from Asia, Africa, and South America and the membership claims nearly half the entire world’s population. Just those facts alone ensure that they will have clout in international affairs. And other than Slavic Russia, itself not considered a white nation, all the rest consists of brown, black and yellow folks. They are mostly poor, but the leaders of the group are now breaking out to exceed the collective west in GDP on purchasing power parity terms. China is now number 1, India is third, and Russia is fifth on

that scale. These countries obviously believe they are in a good place to challenge the Americans at number 2, Japan at number 4, Germany at number 6 and the UK pretty far away near the bottom of the top ten.

And they are gathering their friends who have been bullied for far too long to stand with them. This is the new BRICS, formed 15 years ago by the original five, and now over the last week, took in important new members

The joining of BRICS by the OPEC states is the beginning of the end of the petrodollar. That's probably the most important milestone in the development of the new BRICS – as Kissinger sees it, the control of oil means the control of nations. This is actually a simple formula. When Nixon agreed with Saudi Arabia to price oil in US Dollars, he hoisted the dollar into the status of a global reserve currency with benefits that have lasted half a century till today. Once the oil producers, ie the Saudis, Iran, the Emirates and Russia agree within the BRICS framework, to do oil business with other members, particularly China, in currencies that bypass the US Dollar, all the BRICS members will be a lot better off. The Americans will not be able to sanction them using the US dollar-based trading system to penalise their purported transgressions.

The new membership also includes Egypt, which enables BRICS to bracket the entire African continent from North to South as well as achieve proximity to the Persian Gulf (again an oil strategy) through Ethiopia. The Persian Gulf is now a BRICS lake. That is a brilliant configuration of a geopolitical position if the intention is to control the global oil trade. Then in South America, right in the shadow of the Monroe Doctrine, the two largest countries on that continent, Brazil and Argentina are now in the group, probably in a position to rescue both Argentina – the victim of a weak economy - and then Venezuela, now wrecked by American sanctions, to resume its position as a major oil exporter.

Some western analysts actually think that this expansion of BRICS, will bring the world a step closer to war. The argument is that the US will not accept losing its pole position in the global economy or of being usurped of its hegemony, by the powers that are leading the BRICS group, ie China and Russia. They will fight to retain their pre-eminence.

I don't agree with that assessment. I believe that there will be a peaceful rise of BRICS when it becomes evident to the collective west that China and Russia can hold their own militarily against any country that thinks it can still dominate the world with its military power. Yes, we are talking about the US here. We have already seen how the Ukraine war has thrown up a lot of evidence about the new geopolitical and military realities in the world, including:

- 1) The collective west will find it difficult to rely on its old behaviour - just “bomb” the hell out of countries that do not conform to the Americans’ will or their rules. It certainly cannot do that to the Russians, which has demonstrated solid military capabilities instead of being the bumbling idiots western propaganda have portrayed them to be. Their control of the battlefield in Ukraine, using slow attrition tactics, have killed 300-400,000 Ukrainian soldiers, wounding a lot more and have exhausted Ukrainian resources. It also showed that the claim of superior NATO weapons is self-aggrandisement when a good portion of the US\$100 billion of weapons furnished by the collective west so far have been turned to scrap metal abandoned on Donbass battlefields, or running out of ammunition.
- 2) While the BRICS countries cannot match the G7 in a global deployment of military power, not with the US having 800 military bases around the world, NATO is also not able to match Russian and Chinese power in local theatres. The Ukraine battles are a testimony to that. And in the western Pacific, the stretched reach of the US Seventh Fleet across the vast Pacific plus those of its allies are insufficient to allow the Americans to ensure its “freedom of navigation” up and down the Taiwan Straits as it used to do during the 1990’s. With the balance of military power in local theatres at least equalized along the borders of Russia and China, as well as the equality that has been achieved in nuclear arsenals and long range missiles, including space and satellite technology, there is no clear cut military superiority that America and its allies can bring to bear against China and Russia. And this is not counting the fact that China has the best hypersonic missile technology of all.
- 3) Importantly military power is based on the ability to organise the logistics for a country’s army. NATO has fallen completely flat on this score, and the western countries no longer possess the industrial capabilities it used to have thirty years ago. After three decades of fighting goatherds in slippers armed with only AK47s, NATO does not have the wherewithal to produce the advanced weapons to defeat Russia in a shock and awe campaign. NATO has been shown to be unable to fight anything more profound than Hollywood style wars that have little semblance with modern battle fields in which attrition can be bloody, and high tech defensive weapons by near-competitors can neutralize a lot of their tech driven weaponry. When asked to provide tanks to Ukraine, it takes a year to manufacture them; for the ammunition, they can only make in a year what the Ukrainians fire in a month. If they want to pick a fight with China over Taiwan, the PLA will be fighting in homecourt with full logistical support, while the Americans have to rely on Japan (even assuming they are amenable to join the fight) or the Philippines, both of which are not quite just 100 miles across from Fujian Province with 28 PLA airbases in the neighbourhood.

No, I am sorry, a war with Russia cannot succeed beyond using the last brave but blindsided Ukrainian and a war with China is not even remotely viable without body bags coming home in the tens of thousands. And there is zero political tolerance for that.

That is why I see that the conflicts in both Ukraine and the Taiwan Straits by the Americans and NATO are really just shouting, not shooting, matches. NATO, especially the US, will never put boots on the ground where there is no chance in hell of anybody fighting to win

without any loss of lives. And since they fear body-bags so much, the west will not pursue war to deter the progress of BRICS. With the parity in overall military strength and the superiority of logistics in local theatres, competition between the western bloc and the BRICS bloc cannot be based on a military contest or war.

No, there will not be a war to disrupt the continued advancement of BRICS.

With no possibility of military superiority in likely battlefields (around the Black Sea, the Taiwan Straits etc), the pursuit of hegemony by the collective west, especially by the Americans, has necessarily shifted over to a trade war, a technology war, and a desperate effort to gather allies. The last is sometimes done with incredible stupidity. I mean, to fight China, the US tries to make all Taiwanese take up arms against China when half of that place prefers to be part of China. Does that make sense? South Korea which fears China backing North Korea, run by the rocket man, would not be likely to join the Americans in provoking China. Japan? They have a pacifist mindset forced upon them by the very country – the US - that wants them to stay that way forever. Australia? That's a country with a 60,000-man army, 10,000 miles away but silly enough to spend \$300 billion to start a submarine force that will take 30 years to launch against its largest trade partner. And the most ridiculous idea of all is to sign up the impoverished Philippines to act as a counterforce to the PLA Navy – a demonstration of their naval strength is the beaching of a rusted out WW2 vintage ship on some corals with sailors stranded there, shouting, “this is our territory” across to a sparkling new Chinese warship. WTF? Is the mighty Seventh Fleet reduced to having a partner like that to share combat duties against the PLA Navy? Come on, man... these are clownish ideas forged in desperation and panic that have obviously not been thought through.

Actual combat aside, BRICS has certainly generated a propaganda war between Global North and Global South.

I suppose that is evident to everybody watching the confrontation...

Remember Josef Borrell, top diplomat in the EU who said in Oct 2022 that “only Europe is a garden; most of the rest of the world is a jungle”, remarks which sparked condemnation from many Middle Eastern countries. The Asians ignored him.

But the western media is very sore that there is an economic and political bloc that will challenge and possibly displace their own. Less than a month ago, here is what Reuters said about BRICS:

The BRICS are better off disbanding than expanding

By [Hugo Dixon](#)

July 31, 2023 9:18 AM GMT+8 Updated 25 days ago

Commentary By Hugo Dixon

TINOS, GREECE, July 31 (Reuters Breakingviews) - The BRICS are an acronym searching for a geopolitical role. When Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa get together for their annual summit in Johannesburg next month, a top issue for discussion will be whether to expand the club. Emerging economies might be better off if it disbands.

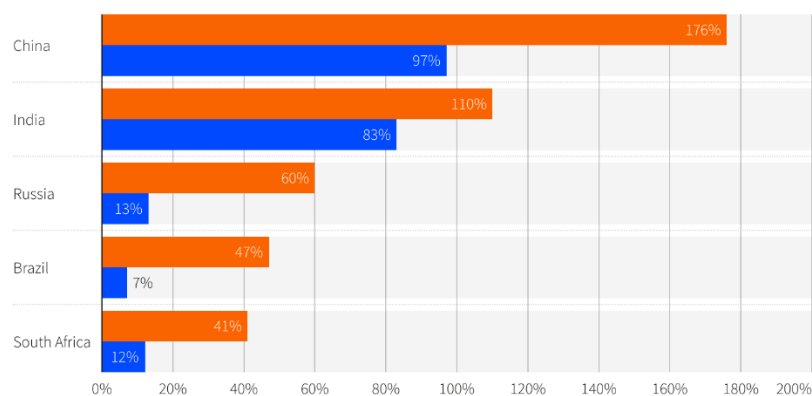
It's more than two decades since Jim O'Neill, a former chief economist at Goldman Sachs, invented the term to combine four large emerging economies with huge potential. (South Africa wasn't on his list.)

All four countries initially performed well. In the first decade, China's economy grew by 176%, India's by 110%, Russia's by 60%, Brazil's by 47% and South Africa's by 41%. They formed a club which held its first summit in 2008. O'Neill likes to tease the BRICS that their economic performance subsequently went downhill - particularly after the much smaller South Africa joined in 2011.

Since then, Russia, Brazil and South Africa have all struggled economically. In the decade to 2022 their total output grew by just 13%, 7% and 12%, respectively. China and India continued to power ahead, albeit at a slower rate. The result is that the group is now seriously lopsided. China's output of \$19 trillion this year will be 50 times South Africa's.

The BRICS' growth has slowed in the last decade

● 2002-2011 ● 2012-2022



Note: GDP growth in constant prices in domestic currency
Source: International Monetary Fund | A.F. Alias & H. Dixon | July 28, 2023

Undeterred, the BRICS are now talking about adding new letters. The summit's South African hosts say 22 countries have asked to join - and another 20 are interested. While no official list has been published, countries that have shown interest in the past range from Saudi Arabia, Argentina and Egypt to Iran, Cuba, and Kazakhstan.

Developing countries are understandably resentful that rich countries haven't addressed their needs. The United States and its allies have been guilty of breaking international norms, as in the invasion of Iraq, and of neglect, for example during the Covid-19 pandemic.

But the Global South won't get much from a club whose leading members are China, which is throwing its weight around in its region, and Russia, a near-pariah state. India and other emerging economies would do better to form their own non-aligned bloc.

FEW ACHIEVEMENTS

Despite their annual gatherings, the BRICS haven't achieved anything notable together. They created a multilateral lender, the New Development Bank, in 2015. But it has approved only \$33 billion of projects in its entire history. The World Bank, by contrast, committed \$104 billion in its 2022 fiscal year alone.

The fault line between India and China, which fought a small war in the Himalayas in 2020, is one reason the BRICS club has done so little. India sees the People's Republic as its most dangerous threat.

It is also hard to view China, now the world's second-largest economy, as a voice for the Global South. Besides, most developing countries don't want to be forced to choose sides in a showdown with the United States.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has further compromised the BRICS. Indeed, Vladimir Putin is not attending this year's summit because South Africa would be required to arrest him, as it is a member of the International Criminal Court which has issued a warrant against the Russian President.

China is keen to expand the club to new members. But it's not obvious what a bigger group would do. Given how hard it has been for even five nations to agree, it's fanciful to suppose a larger and more disparate gathering would achieve anything more than complain about American hegemony.

Take currencies. It's true that many developing countries want to wean themselves off their dependence on the U.S. dollar. The vagaries of Federal Reserve monetary policy whipsaw their economies. They would also like an alternative place to stash foreign exchange assets after the world's rich democracies froze Russia's reserves following the invasion of Ukraine.

But neither China nor India has a fully convertible currency - limiting the attractiveness of the yuan and the rupee. What's more, New Delhi doesn't want to be sucked into China's currency orbit. It has been trying to stop oil importers paying for Russian oil with yuan, albeit with limited success.

BEYOND BRICS

Developing nations have other options for joining forces. During the Cold War, India helped create the Non-Aligned Movement, which brought together countries that didn't want to be part of either the U.S. or Soviet Union sphere of influence. Today's large non-aligned nations could create a similar group.

They would, of course, first need to agree what they would stand for. Top of the list would be to stress their neutral status.

This is not just a matter of pride. Developing countries can benefit from playing one superpower off against the other. Both the United States and China have shown they are willing to offer so-called swing states inducements - from weapons to infrastructure and help in building green economies - to stop them falling into the other's camp.

Some countries won't want to be equidistant from the two superpowers. Countries which see China as a threat, including India and the Philippines, have recently tilted towards the United States. But almost all developing countries can agree on two issues. They don't want a new Cold War that would crush their growth opportunities. And they need help to decarbonise their economies rapidly and protect against the worst ravages of climate change. So they should be able to unite on keeping the global trading system open and ramping up flows of climate finance.

But to do any of this, the club would have to exclude China and Russia. There would also be little point in including rich fossil fuel states such as Saudi Arabia, which has a strong interest in delaying action on climate change.

Assume the group limited membership to neutral countries whose economic output is bigger than South Africa's \$400 billion. There would be nine new potential members: Mexico, Indonesia, Argentina, Thailand, Nigeria, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Bangladesh.

Including Brazil, India and South Africa, this new club of 12 would account for 36% of the world's population, 22% of its greenhouse gas emissions and 12% of its GDP. Six of them would also be members of the Group of 20 large economies.

Though the 12 letters would not fit easily into a snappy acronym, the new club would have a better chance than the BRICS of finding a useful role.

This article, written by a British commentator, is so typical of recent diatribe against the BRICS grouping. They stretch the analysis to form a pre-conceived conclusion. They see BRICS as a threat to the prosperity of their own economic grouping in the G7, and are very quick to condemn everything that Global South take their own initiative to pursue. It's like, if we, the collective west, are not behind it, why would it work?

Condescension, arrogance, hubris, denial and a lot of self-delusion. This attitude is the same as when they called the Russian army second best in Ukraine; in fact it has whacked the proxy Kyiv army into a state of near-collapse. Some independent analysts on social media say that whatever criticism the collective west makes about the Russian military, one has to substitute "Russia" with "Ukraine/NATO" in the sentences so that the meaning is reversed, and the comment would then be close to the truth. The same condescension is being applied to all things BRICS.

Well, in the media war as indicated in the Reuters article above, it seems that they often have to eat their words. The first Reuters article was written on 31 July. A second article was published a few days ago, just before the BRICS summit has been successfully organized in the face of 60 countries queuing to join.

Here is the second Reuters' article:

BRICS expansion hopefuls seek to rebalance world order **By [Joe Bavier](#)**

August 22, 2023 1:03 AM GMT+8 Updated 4 days ago

- [Summary](#)
- [BRICS seeks to be champion of 'Global South'](#)
- [Over 40 countries interested in joining bloc](#)
- [Many developing nations unhappy with Western dominance](#)

JOHANNESBURG, Aug 21 (Reuters) - An expansion of the BRICS bloc under consideration at a summit [this week](#) has attracted a motley crew of potential candidates - from Iran to Argentina - with one thing in common: a desire to level a global playing field many consider rigged against them.

The list of grievances is long. Abusive trade practices. Punishing sanctions regimes. Perceived neglect of the development needs of poorer nations. The wealthy West's domination of international bodies, such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank.

Amid widespread dissatisfaction with the prevailing world order, the pledge of BRICS nations - currently Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa - to make the grouping a [leading champion](#) of the "Global South" has, despite a dearth of concrete results, found resonance.

[Over 40 countries](#) have expressed interest in joining BRICS, say officials from South Africa, which is hosting the Aug. 22-24 summit. Of them, nearly two dozen have formally asked to be admitted.

"The objective necessity for a grouping like BRICS has never been larger," said Rob Davies, South Africa's former trade minister, who helped usher his country into the bloc in 2010.

"The multilateral bodies are not places where we can go and have an equitable, inclusive outcome."

Observers, however, point to an underwhelming track record they say does not bode well for BRICS's prospects of delivering on the lofty hopes of prospective members.

Though home to some 40% of the world's population and a quarter of global GDP, the bloc's ambitions of becoming a global political and economic player have long been thwarted by internal divisions and a lack of coherent vision.

Its once booming economies, notably heavyweight China, are slowing. Founding member, Russia, is facing isolation over the Ukraine war. President Vladimir Putin, wanted under an international arrest warrant for alleged war crimes, will not travel to Johannesburg and only join virtually.

"They may have over-inflated expectations of what BRICS membership will actually deliver in practice," said Steven Gruzd from the South African Institute of International Affairs.

DEVELOPING WORLD DISCONTENT

While BRICS has not divulged a full list of expansion candidates, a number of governments have publicly stated their interest.

Iran and Venezuela, punished and ostracised by sanctions, are seeking to reduce their isolation and hope the bloc can offer relief to their crippled economies.

"Other integration frameworks existing on a global level are blinded by the hegemonic vision pushed by the U.S. government," Ramón Lobo, the former finance minister and central bank governor of Venezuela, told Reuters.

Gulf states Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates see BRICS as a vehicle for a more prominent role within global bodies, analysts say.

African candidates Ethiopia and Nigeria are drawn by the bloc's commitment to reforms at the United Nations that would give the continent a more powerful voice. Others want changes at the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

"Argentina has insistently called for a reconfiguration of the international financial architecture," an Argentine government official involved in the negotiations to join BRICS told Reuters.

'MUCH TALK, LESS ACTION'

BRICS public positions already reflect many of these concerns.

And as it seeks to become a counterweight to the West, amid China's tensions with the United States and the fallout of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, growing its membership could lend the bloc and its global reform message more clout.

In the run-up to the summit, however, the grouping's shortcomings are in the spotlight.

While BRICS leaders at the summit are expected to discuss a framework for admitting new members with China and Russia keen to forge ahead with expansion, others, notably Brazil, are worried about rushing the process.

The tangible benefits to joining, meanwhile, are waning.

The bloc's most concrete achievement, the New Development Bank, or "BRICS bank", has seen its already sluggish pace of lending further hobbled by sanctions against founding member Russia.

Small countries hoping for an economic boost from BRICS membership might look to South Africa's experience.

Its BRICS trade has indeed increased steadily since it joined, according to an analysis by the country's Industrial Development Corporation.

But that growth is largely down to imports from China, and the bloc still accounts for just a fifth of South Africa's total two-way trade. Brazil and Russia together absorb a mere 0.6% of its exports and by last year, South Africa's trade deficit with its BRICS partners had ballooned four-fold to \$14.9 billion compared to 2010.

Such outcomes should give candidate nations pause, Gruzd said.

"Concrete achievements for BRICS are difficult to find. Lots of talk. Much less action."

The second Reuters article is a grudging acknowledgement that things are moving forward but is still pushing the claim that Borrell's garden is superior to the BRICS jungle. The last sentence in the article "Concrete achievements for BRICS are difficult to find. Lots of talk. Much less action." is not so different in tone of derision as the first article.

Really? Compare that with Biden's "Build Back Better" bombastically announced at the G7 meeting in his first appearance (Cornwall, UK, 2021) there. As it turns out, nothing happened on BBB. Lots of talk. Zero action. That's a G7 zilch...and talking about zilch – there is zilch coverage of the BRICS summit by both BBC and CNN. So much for their claim as top dogs of the global media. They were not even willing to acknowledge that a major international event has occurred, and one has to interpret that as envy descending into outright resentment because their leaders in the US and UK are not providing the solid reactions that the press can use to counter the story of BRICS. These journalists don't like it when BRICS make sense.

In this ongoing media war, the BRICS folks have their own, non-western interpretation, of their own progress. Here is what CGTN, a Chinese mouthpiece of the government, has to say about BRICS, and you can objectively compare their comments against those of Reuters and the complete absence of CNN and BBC in coverage. It's a direct affront to the "no achievement" narrative.

Achievements under the BRICS mechanism in the past 16 years

Updated 23:07, 20-Jun-2022

CGTN

It is 20 years since the chief economist of Goldman Sachs, Jim O'Neill, invented the BRIC economic grouping – Brazil, Russia, India and China – with South Africa added later making up the BRICS.

Right from its first communique in 2009, BRICS made it clear that in the face of the existing international structures, the five countries would offer its members a forum for "cooperation, leadership, and information-sharing."

Achievements of BRICS countries in global governance

In the past 16 years, BRICS cooperation has been driven by "the three wheels of economy and trade, political security and people-to-people exchanges" through China's initiatives, said Wang Lei, the director of the BRICS Cooperation Center at Beijing Normal University.

The trajectory of BRICS shows that it has brought both functional and tangible benefits to its member states by providing the information-sharing platform and offering forum focusing on issues of mutual interest like the economy, national security and public health.

On June 9, 2022, two weeks before the 14th summit of 2022, to address issues close to poverty reduction and food security, the BRICS countries agreed to establish an annual mechanism, the BRICS Agriculture and Rural Development Forum, at the 12th Meeting of BRICS Ministers of Agriculture.

At BRICS Foreign Ministers' meeting on May 19, 2022, ministers have confirmed consensus over multiple issues related to security and expressed support for Russia-Ukraine negotiations, stressing the UN should continue to play a core coordinating role in combating terrorism in all its forms.

As for national and transnational security issues, BRICS have kept communication channels open, with national security advisors of each country meeting regularly since 2009. In 2016, prior to the BRICS summit, the heads of the member countries' anti-narcotics agencies met to discuss and adopt best practices and form an anti-drug working group.

It is the important mission of the BRICS countries to come up with ideas and plans for development and cooperation through the BRICS Summit, and economic cooperation is the foundation of the BRICS mechanism, Wang said.

BRICS made good on its 2012 promise at the Delhi summit to create new financial institutions and establish the New Development Bank (NDB).

According to the 2020 annual report of NDB, as the bank focused on assisting the member countries in dealing with the crisis and following economic recovery, reflected by its Board

of Governors approving an emergency line of up to \$10 billion to assist the BRICS states, the intra-BRICS cooperation during the COVID-19 pandemic has strengthened.

Cultural exchanges

Cooperation between BRICS countries is also achieved among government-affiliated institutions, civil society and people-to-people in areas of culture, education, and technology.

As a bioscope that would showcase distinct cultures and arts from the participating countries, BRICS Film Festivals helped to "explore areas of cooperation in the domain of arts, culture and cuisine," Venkaiah Naidu, Minister for Information & Broadcasting of India, said.

During the 2017 BRICS Film Festival held in Chengdu, China, some Indian films like "Baahubali: The Beginning" and "Turtle" won big, both critically and financially in the Chinese market.

In May 2022, the BRICS countries launched a joint committee on space cooperation, encouraging cooperation on the BRICS Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation.

A platform for "cooperation, leadership, and information-sharing"

Speaking highly of the BRICS mechanism, Argentine President Alberto Fernandez said in an open letter in May, 2022 that the group is a "cooperative alternative to a world order that has been working for the benefit of a few."

In the face of a century of changes and epidemics, the BRICS cooperation mechanism provides an opportunity and platform for member states and other emerging markets to work together to address risks and discuss concrete measures to address the risks, said Ren Lin, the director and researcher of the Global Governance Department of the Institute of World Economics and Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

"The world is never a binary confrontation between black and white. Instead, we should advocate a cooperation mechanism with tolerance, fairness and multilateralism. The BRICS cooperation mechanism is such a sound cooperative model featuring openness and inclusiveness and mutual benefit," said Chen Fengying, a researcher from the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations.

The other thing that has to be said about the new membership of BRICS is that with so many countries queueing up to join the organization, it demonstrates that whatever the west's opinion are on its achievements, the Global South countries are going to show them the middle finger. In a similar way that the narrative about Russia being the aggressor in Ukraine has been flatly rejected, the argument that BRICS has made no achievements is equally nonsensical. Instead, the response to the western narrative about the Ukrainian war is that two thirds of the world are happy to become partners with Russia. And that includes the old US allies in the OPEC bloc which were instrumental in allowing the US dollar to serve as the petrodollar and hence the global reserve currency.

“No achievements” at BRICS?? Come on, man. Former arch enemies, Iran and Saudi Arabia, are now members... China and India met on the sidelines of last week’s BRICS summit to agree to resolve their Himalayan border dispute. If those are not supernova achievements, I don’t know what would be...And there has been full expectation that the Iran Saudi joining of BRICS would happen, since China helped both countries iron out their differences and both were known to be applying for BRICS membership months ago. If that British analyst at Reuters is deficient in cognitive capabilities, it is not anybody’s fault but his own. This move is the foundation stone of de-dollarization, even if that will take a long time to play out. No achievements, indeed!

These morons in the western press just don’t see beyond their blinkers, or if they see it, they don’t know how to interpret it. What can I say? Or maybe they are just too scared to say it out loud...the good times may be over for them. These are acts of denial of frightened people.

What western journalists think of BRICS is, at the end of the day, unimportant. Let’s look at what the BRICS decision makers say, starting with China’s Xi Jinping.

In a CGTN report, he declared, “BRICS is an important force in shaping the international landscape. We choose our development paths independently, jointly defend our right to development, and march in tandem toward modernization. This represents the direction of the advancement of human society, and will profoundly impact the development process of the world. Our track record shows that we have consistently acted on the BRICS spirit of openness, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation, and taken BRICS cooperation to new heights in support of our five countries' development. We have upheld fairness and justice in international affairs, stood up for what is right on major international and regional issues, and enhanced the voice and influence of emerging markets and developing countries. BRICS countries invariably advocate and practice independent foreign policies. We always address major international issues based on their merits, making fair remarks and taking fair actions. We do not barter away principles, succumb to external pressure, or act as vassals of others. We BRICS countries share extensive consensus and common goals. No matter how the international situation changes, our commitment to cooperation since the very beginning and our common aspiration will not change.

We gather at a crucial time to build on our past achievements and open up a new future for BRICS cooperation. We should navigate the trend of our times and stay in the forefront. We should always bear in mind our founding purpose of strengthening ourselves through unity, enhance cooperation across the board, and build a high-quality partnership. We should help reform global governance to make it more just and equitable, and bring to the world more certainty, stability and positive energy.

—**We should deepen business and financial cooperation to boost economic growth.** Development is an inalienable right of all countries, not a privilege reserved for a few. The world economic recovery remains shaky, with less than three percent of growth for

the year as estimated by some international institutions. Challenges for developing countries are even more formidable, hampering their efforts to realize the Sustainable Development Goals. We BRICS countries should be fellow companions on the journey of development and revitalization, and oppose decoupling and supply chains disruption, as well as economic coercion. We should focus on practical cooperation, particularly in such fields as digital economy, green development, and supply chain, and bolster economic, trade and financial exchanges.

China will set up a China-BRICS Science and Innovation Incubation Park for the New Era to support the deployment of innovation results. Under the BRICS Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation mechanism, we will explore the establishment of a BRICS Global Remote Sensing Satellite Data and Application Cooperation Platform to provide data support for agriculture, ecological conservation and disaster reduction in various countries. China will also work with all parties to jointly establish a BRICS Framework on Industrial Cooperation for Sustainable Development as a platform of industrial coordination and project cooperation in implementing the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

—**We should expand political and security cooperation to uphold peace and tranquility.** As a Chinese saying suggests, "Nothing is more beneficial than stability, and nothing is more detrimental than turmoil." The Cold War mentality is still haunting our world, and the geopolitical situation is getting tense. All nations long for a sound security environment. International security is indivisible. Attempts to seek absolute security at the expense of others will eventually backfire. The Ukraine crisis has evolved to where it is today because of complex reasons. What is pressing now is to encourage peace talks, promote de-escalation, end the fighting and realize peace. No one should add fuel to the fire to worsen the situation.

BRICS countries should keep to the direction of peaceful development and consolidate the BRICS strategic partnership. We need to make good use of the BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the Meeting of High Representatives on National Security and other mechanisms, support each other on issues concerning our respective core interests, and enhance coordination on major international and regional issues. We need to tender good offices on hotspot issues, pushing for political settlement and lowering the temperature. Artificial intelligence (AI) is a new area of development. BRICS countries have agreed to launch the AI Study Group of BRICS Institute of Future Networks at an early date. We need to enable the Study Group to play its full role, further expand cooperation on AI, and step up information exchange and technological cooperation. We need to jointly fend off risks, and develop AI governance frameworks and standards with broad-based consensus, so as to make AI technologies more secure, reliable, controllable and equitable.

—**We should increase people-to-people exchanges and promote mutual learning between civilizations.** There are many civilizations and development paths in the world, and this is how the world should be. Human history will not end with a particular civilization or system. BRICS countries need to champion the spirit of inclusiveness, advocate peaceful coexistence and harmony between civilizations, and promote respect of all countries in independently choosing their modernization paths. We need to make good use of such mechanisms as the BRICS seminar on governance, the BRICS forum on people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and the Women Innovation Contest to deepen people-to-people exchanges and strengthen the bond between our peoples.

China would like to propose that BRICS countries expand cooperation on education, enhance the role of the BRICS alliance for vocational education, explore and set up a cooperation mechanism on digital education, and foster a paradigm of all-round cooperation on education. In addition, we also need to strengthen exchanges on traditional cultures and promote the renewal of fine traditional cultures.

—We should uphold fairness and justice and improve global governance. Strengthening global governance is the right choice if the international community intends to share development opportunities and tackle global challenges. International rules must be written and upheld jointly by all countries based on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, rather than dictated by those with the strongest muscles or the loudest voice. Ganging up to form exclusive groups and packaging their own rules as international norms are even more unacceptable. BRICS countries should practice true multilateralism, uphold the UN-centered international system, support and strengthen the WTO-centered multilateral trading system, and reject the attempt to create small circles or exclusive blocs. We need to fully leverage the role of the New Development Bank, push forward reform of the international financial and monetary systems, and increase the representation and voice of developing countries.

I am glad to see the growing enthusiasm of developing countries about BRICS cooperation, and quite a number of them have applied to join the BRICS cooperation mechanism. We need to act on the BRICS spirit of openness, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation to bring more countries into the BRICS family so as to pool our wisdom and strength to make global governance more just and equitable.

Colleagues,

The ancient African continent is a reservoir of simple yet profound wisdom. As an African proverb puts it, "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together." The philosophy of Ubuntu, which believes that "I am because we are," highlights the interdependence and interconnectedness of all peoples. Similarly, harmonious coexistence has been the aspiration of the Chinese nation for thousands of years. China is ready to work with BRICS partners to pursue the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind, enhance the strategic partnership, and deepen cooperation across the board. As fellow BRICS members, we should meet our common challenges with a shared sense of mission, shape a brighter future with a common purpose, and march together on the journey toward modernization."

The above is an example of statesmanship. And even if one were to disagree with that assessment and regard the speech as propaganda from a powerful dictator, it certainly reads a lot better than the other guy in Washington who berates people who ask tough questions with the one liner, "come on, man!" and wondered out aloud who would want to be like Xi Jinping. The answer for Mr Biden is loud and clear – everybody in the Global South wants to be like Xi, and are showing up to join BRICS. Come on, man, wake up!

At the next meeting to be held at Karan, Russia, in 2024, there will likely be another round of new members. Rumour is that ten more will be invited. There are a lot of choices, as pointed out in the first Reuters article. My favourite picks are:

- 1) Countries from Central Asia, such as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, so that BRICS will become the new silk road, a realization of McKinder's "world island", the most powerful geopolitical entity on planet earth and a replica of the highly successful land route to the African continent via Egypt. This is a geopolitical outcome that will make the Americans regret leaving Afghanistan in haste;
- 2) Countries from SEAsia, possibly including Indonesia and Thailand, to provide BRICS the southern silk road of the sea, connecting China with India, the Persian Gulf and then Africa; and
- 3) West Africa, so that BRICS will have representation from the North, South, East and West of the continent. The intention to combine Asia and Africa into one giant landmass is clear.
- 4) How about Cuba or Mexico, if only to taunt the Americans that courting Taiwan can cut both ways?

Another year is not so far away, and not only will the core 11 countries of BRICS match the G7, the enlarged BRICS will also match G20, with many countries having membership in both.

If this sets the path forward for BRICS, there is no question that it will be the organization for all Global South countries to look to as the place to be, to escape and avoid American hegemonism and the lingering effects of western imperialism that have held back their desire to become like China. BRICS is where they can develop without constraints and eradicate endemic poverty.

Geopolitical analysts have long predicted the rise of China to eventually overtake the United States. While BRICS is not a Chinese organization, there is no question that China will play a key role in leading its growth, because of the size of its economy (no. 1 in terms of purchasing power parity), its trading prowess (largest trading nation on earth), its infrastructure building capabilities (especially in high speed rail and ships) and its technological leadership (ev's, solar panels etc). It will actually take over a role that the Americans had almost attained, during the era when they promoted the WTO. But that version of a globalized planet was sidetracked when the US made the regrettable mistake of wanting to be the hegemon, demanding that all other nations follow its rules in a self-centered rules-based system, sanctioning/punishing those unwilling to follow its lead.

The BRICS system will have no such rules. It will be based on the Chinese principle of win-win pacts rather than the leadership of an America which claims to know better than you what's good for you.

There is no question that there is always the risk that China, Russia or India, the three giants in BRICS, may also turn predatory on the smaller members. But at this time, there is no such track record or indication of aggression, if you ignore the propaganda of the collective west. So let the party begin.

For the time being, there is definitely hope, among its members, that a China-led economic system is going to be fairer and less oppressive than the American-led one. Whether this will indeed turn out to be the case is not so important, at this time, to the countries of the Global South.

All they want is to have a choice. Away from the American option.

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Un-Influencer in a World full of Hubris