



INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL FOR SECURITY FORCES RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION CENTER

INSIGHTS

N°19, September 2023

RISE OF BRICS: A RESURGE IN THE BIPOLARIZATION OF THE WORLD

The BRICS Summit (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), held from August 22 to 24, 2023 in Johannesburg, South Africa, is undoubtedly one of the most important international events of the year. It took place not only against the backdrop of the ongoing war in Ukraine and the stigmatization of Vladimir Putin through the international warrant issued against him, but also against a backdrop of growing mistrust of the French presence in Africa. Once the expression used by Jim O'Neill to describe a financial and economic reality, the BRICS group is now a political-diplomatic phenomenon. This group is part of what Bertrand Badie describes as "Club Diplomacy", and is currently shaping international relations. The institutionalization and expansion of the BRICS member countries appear to be due to a combination of structural and conjunctural factors. The structural factors relate to the general conduct of international relations since the end of the Cold War, and the marginal place they occupied within them.

Structural factors include the rise of China and the Ukrainian conflict, through which the BRICS in general, and Russia in particular, have become acutely aware of their diplomatic isolation. The aim of this Insight Note is to show that, through the expansion and structuring of the BRICS group, we are witnessing the resurgence of bipolarization in the world.

I- The Western bloc, an advocate of classical multilateralism

The end of the Second World War was a pivotal period in the history of international relations. It put an end to European domination of the world, and saw the rise of a new actor whose power would enable it to lead the world for a long time to come. To achieve this, the Americans, aided by their European allies, set up systems in all fields to better control the world. These arrangements are known as classical multilateralism, and have been better analysed by authors such as John Mearsheimer. In reality, it is officially a

multilateralism that promotes the interests of humanity. But, unofficially, it is a system put in place by the major powers, first and foremost the United States, to control the world and better satisfy their national interests. From this perspective, multilateralism is a geopolitical device for control and domination. Consequently, international organizations such as NATO ¹ in the military sphere, and the IMF, World Bank, WTO and OECD in the economic sphere, serve the countries of the Western bloc almost exclusively on the international stage. Each of these international institutions has a clear mandate to serve Western interests.

In addition to these geopolitical features, this group of countries has a virtually identical conception of international relations. In military terms, they are all, with a few exceptions, in favour of excessive militarism underpinned by the promotion of hegemonism. For Westerners, the solution to the world's problems lies in the use of the military tool. This is why, at least since the end of the Second World War, we have witnessed a series of debacles, notably in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. Similarly, in the political arena, they are convinced that democracy is the most appropriate system for all the world's countries and states, despite their various singularities. Hence the paradigm of democratic peace, whose ambition is to spread democracy throughout the world. Here again, the results have been meagre. In place of genuine

democracies, we are witnessing the birth of "Janus democracies", whose main ambition or social project is the perpetuation or eternalization of power (Owona Nguini), particularly on the African continent.

On the economic front, through the theory of modernization, Western countries are convinced that the way forward for the whole of humanity, including developing countries - another rather obscure and ambiguous notion - is development under the model of the liberal economy. In this sense, the countries of the West not only push the rest of humanity to open up their various markets, but also restrict their industrial strategies through numerous tricks, the aim being that the countries of the South cannot compete with them and can remain eternal consumers of the goods and products of Europe or the United States. In social terms, the West offers a pale image, notably through the promotion of counter-values in force in the Southern countries. One of these counter-values is the promotion of homosexuality. It is for all these reasons that we are likely to see a strong bipolarization in the world for a long time to come.

II- The BRICS: an alternative form of multilateralism in the world

One of the most recurrent concepts in the current discourse of the BRICS is undoubtedly the idea of an alternative multilateralism, a different kind of multilateralism that promotes the interests of all the peoples of the world. Alongside the realist rhetoric advocated by the West, the BRICS are cautious, preferring to use an idealistic,

¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, a military alliance created on 4 April 1949 to defend the Western bloc from Soviet military threats. Despite the break-up of the Warsaw Pact in 1991, NATO has survived and taken on new forms and new missions.

mobilizing rhetoric that is likely to attract other countries in the global South. This strategy in itself is not new, as it dates back at least to the late 1970s. Indeed, China's membership of the non-aligned group of countries enabled it to regain its place as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council in 1971. Since then, China has capitalized on this position to enhance its own influence and prestige. As a result, it stands both as an emerging and a developing country. Moreover, with the Ukrainian conflict, Russia, realizing that it could be side-lined from the international system due to the lack of allies that would enable it to compete with Western countries, has taken steps to remedy this situation. As such, Russia organized the second Russia-Africa Summit on July 27 and 28, 2023. For the Kremlin, the main aim of this major meeting was to break out of the diplomatic confinement imposed by the West.

Clearly, then, many analysts expected the Johannesburg summit to result in a large number of new members joining the group. With the exception of Iran, which has maintained poor diplomatic relations with Washington ever since it denounced the country's 2015 nuclear treaty, the other states that have recently joined the organization (Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates) are more or less allies of Washington and, consequently, of the West. As a result, the expansion of the BRICS, if these signs continue, will contribute to the erosion of the West's power and influence in the world. Similarly, an analysis of the identity of

countries wishing to join the club², reveals that they are all part of the global South of the 3As (Latin America, Africa, Asia), the attractive power of the BRICS. This is not only a reconstruction of Bandoeng (Samir Amin), but also of what Ropivia refers to as "*Gondwanan tropical cooperation*", extended to include certain European countries.

The main creed of this group, as mentioned earlier, is to structure an alternative multilateralism on the international scene. That's why this issue is at the heart of the Johannesburg Declaration. The idea of alternative multilateralism, and the structural differences between the West and the BRICS, will undoubtedly be at the heart of world affairs in the decades ahead. In addition to diverging conceptions of international relations, the alternative multilateralism seemingly advocated by the BRICS is primarily an attack on the classical multilateralism instituted by Washington and its allies at the end of the Second World War. With this in mind, in their declaration published at the end of the Johannesburg summit, the BRICS countries take a stance against the use of unilateral military measures, in favour of greater representation of emerging and developing countries in global governance, for the reform of the UN, including the UN Security Council, and make an indictment of the international financial institutions (WTO, WB, IMF), whose functioning they wish to see largely called into question.

² These countries include Algeria, Bahrain, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Uruguay, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

In terms of their conception of international relations, unlike the West, the BRICS as a whole advocate sovereignty. Countries such as Russia, China and Brazil make a point of respecting this principle, and therefore oppose not only militarism but also the hegemony of Western powers. On the political and economic front, while the West proposes democracy and capitalism as models of governance and wealth allocation, the BRICS are opposed to these realities. They draw on the Chinese experience, which shows that it is possible to develop not only with an authoritarian political system, but also with a planned or even communist economy. The same is true on the social front, where the BRICS increasingly criticize the West for its degeneration in terms of respect for moral values. For all these reasons, the BRICS are convinced that pooling their demographic, economic and political strengths will enable them to promote alternative multilateralism on the international arena. This view seems to appeal to the countries of the Global South, given the historical disputes they have not yet been able to settle with the West. Indeed, there's every reason to believe that in the decades to come, the BRICS will undergo a further expansion, with the countries of the Global South in general, and African countries in particular, becoming more closely integrated. While South Africa, Egypt and Ethiopia are already full members of this organization, there is no doubt that Nigeria, one of the continent's largest economies, and Morocco will also join this political-diplomatic forum.

Conclusion

Basically, the latest BRICS summit, held in South Africa from 22 to 24 August 2023, seems to have dramatized the bipolarization of the world. No matter what could be said, a bipolar dynamic is taking shape on the international scene. This is the logic behind the frantic search for allies in the struggle for world governance. The BRICS seem to have taken the lead over the West, both in terms of their philosophy of international relations and the dynamic reforms they are promoting. This is why they are mobilizing the countries of the Global South. What's more, the BRICS summit is a marker of the place that States still occupy in the international system. Long decried and dismissed as an afterthought, we now realize that, even through various groupings, states still play an important role on the international stage. One of the last questions to be asked concerns the name of this grouping. Will the original name remain, with the addition of a number such as BRICS + 6 each time, or will a new name be given to the organization?

Technical and Scientific Team

General supervisor:

Brigadier General **André Patrice BITOTE**, Director General, assisted by Commissioner **THOM Cécile OYONO**, Deputy Director General.

Scientific Coordination:

Commissioner, **Dr. PASSO SONBANG Elie**, Head of the Research and Documentation Centre.

Technical Coordination:

Senior Superintendent, **TCHUENDEM SIMO Rosyne Arlette**, **Epse NOUNKOUA**, Head of the Research Laboratory of the Research and Documentation Centre.

Collaboration:

Dr NDONG ATOK Sylvain, Lecturer at the University of Dschang

Mr NJIFON Josué, Head of Translation and Interpretation Service.