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BRICS IN THE EVOLVING GLOBAL ORDER: GEOPOLITICAL CHALLENGES AND ADOPTING NEW STRATEGIES IN THE TRUMP ERA

**Dr D Dhanuraj
Aleena T Sabu
Adithyan P V**

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Authors

Dr D Dhanuraj (Founder-Chairman, CPPR)
Aleena T Sabu (Associate, Research, CPPR)
Adithyan P V (Consultant, Research, CPPR)

Editor

Dr. Bipin Ghimire

Regional Political Analyst
Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, South Asia

Contact

Phone +91 11 41688149, 41688150

Email southasia@freiheit.org

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Executive Summary

The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) coalition has emerged as a powerful bloc in the global economic and geopolitical landscape. The group remained largely off the radar of successive U.S. administrations until the return of Donald Trump to the White House in 2025. Until 2023, even under the Biden administration, there was little active engagement or concern regarding the economic strategies and broader geopolitical positioning of BRICS. However, with President Trump's re-election, countering the bloc's de-dollarization efforts has become a central focus of his foreign policy agenda. He has explicitly threatened BRICS nations with tariffs of up to 100% if they continue pursuing alternatives to the U.S. dollar in trade settlements. This renewed American pushback indicates a major change in the global relevance of BRICS. This paper will analyse the evolution of BRICS, the shifting geopolitical dynamics under Trump's leadership, the implications of the de-dollarization agenda, and how India is navigating its strategic and economic interests within the bloc, while also examining the broader future trajectory of the BRICS+ configuration.

After Brazil, India will be taking over the rotating presidency of the BRICS in 2026, and as the BRICS expands and gains momentum, this paper briefly touches on the priorities for India and the way forward.

1

Introduction

In 2001, British economist Jim O'Neill published a report titled *Build Better Global Economic BRICs*, which was part of Goldman Sachs' research into the growing economies in the world. This report looked into four growing economies of the world in 2001: Brazil, Russia, India, and China. The report mentioned how these countries were shaping the world economy. Around the same time, the report was gaining widespread attention, emerging economies began to outpace developed ones, highlighting the report's relevance to the study of economic development. The report underscored an important economic observation, predicting the growth of these economies' GDP in the upcoming years. The report compared the BRIC nations to the G7 countries and stated that the BRIC nations have the potential to pose a challenge to the G7 countries in the next ten years (With GS Research Report, BRICs Are Born, 2024).

In 2009, BRICS was officially recognised as a formal bloc at their first summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia, where they came together to improve their global economic influence and bring forth the voices of emerging economies. The founding members of the alliance were Brazil, Russia, India, and China, and South Africa joined in 2010, leading to the current acronym, BRICS. It primarily focused on coordinating economic and diplomatic efforts around a shared objective. The BRICS nations sought to build an alternative to the prevailing Western influence in major multilateral groupings such as the World Bank, the Group of Seven (G7) and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (Ferragamo 2025).

In 2024, the group had expanded to include new members such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, and the UAE. Saudi Arabia is considering joining the grouping (Magid, Dahan, and Saini 2025). The group's expansion was associated with a range of geopolitical implications. It highlighted the economic and demographic weightage of the alliance, comprising more than a quarter of the global economy and nearly half of the world's population. Over the last 12 months, Indonesia became a BRICS

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member and Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda, Uzbekistan and Vietnam became partner countries of the group. They were invited to the annual BRICS Summit which took place in early July in Rio de Janeiro to join discussions within the forum.

With the addition of new countries to BRICS, the alliance has culminated in BRICS+ (Vanleeuw, 2024). The expansion of BRICS has been an ongoing process. The BRICS+ framework represents an expansion of economic and political collaboration beyond the original BRICS membership. It aims to establish a more inclusive platform that welcomes engagement with countries, regions, and blocs across the global economy. The BRICS+ concept was first put into practice by China, with the country's Foreign Minister Wang Yi declaring in March 2017, "We will widen the circle of friends of the BRICS and turn it into the most influential platform for south-south cooperation in the world" (BRICS+ Analytics, 2017).

A comparative analysis of global GDP distribution highlights the growing economic prominence of the BRICS+ bloc, with their collective share rising from 16.7% in 1992 to approximately 37.4% in 2024. Meanwhile, the G7's share of global GDP has declined significantly, from 45.5% in 1992 to 29.3% in 2024, highlighting the growing disparity in economic influence between the G7 and BRICS, as emphasized by Russian President Putin at the 2024 BRICS Summit (*BRICS Countries Drive Global Economic Growth, Exceed GDP of G7 Nations: Putin, 2024*)

The Russian President Vladimir Putin reiterated that BRICS nations account for 25% of the world's exports and spoke about the dominance of BRICS countries in essential markets of energy, food and metals, which are important for sustainable economic development (*BRICS Countries Drive Global Economic Growth, Exceed GDP of G7 Nations: Putin, 2024*). Over the past decades, the BRICS nations have experienced substantial economic development.

2

BRICS Nations in the Evolving Geopolitical World

The reconfiguration of global power structures signals a shift from Western-led dominance towards the increasing geopolitical and economic assertiveness of BRICS+ nations. The BRICS+ nations have emerged as influential players in the global order over the last decade, and their growing GDP and expanding intra-group trade have an increasing geopolitical influence. This is notable through their expansion, efforts at dedollarisation, China's increasing heft, and their advocacy for a multipolar order (Ferragamo, 2024).

BRICS, unlike the G7, has embraced new members and is growing. China has played a significant role in the recent expansion of the BRICS grouping, reflecting its long-standing strategy to counter the influence of the Global North (Sarpong, 2024). China's ambition to expand the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is one of the reasons why Egypt and Ethiopia were invited to join the bloc (BBC News, 2023). While China's interest in diversifying its energy supply has motivated it to invite the UAE as part of the grouping, all these points to a major idea that China has an upper hand in the decision-making in the grouping and has become an unofficial leader of the bloc over the years (Herraro, 2024).

China and Russia have been trying to turn the BRICS bloc into an anti-US grouping that aims to take over the position the US is enjoying in the world (Papa et al., 2023), which countries like India and Brazil have been against (Tellis, 2025). India and Brazil act as diplomatic bridges between the Global South and the West (Kaushik et al., 2024). However, the recent Trump attacks against Brazil and the Brazilian President could upend that. Trump has threatened to impose tariffs against Brazil for its high tariffs and political situation regarding former President Jair Bolsonaro

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China has been a major driver of infrastructural investments in various developing nations through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Kumafan & Nguevese, 2024). Russia and UAE has played the traditional role of the energy supplier (Umutlu & ÇALIŞKAN, 2024). At the same time this multipolar diplomacy allows the bloc to project both unity and diversity in its engagements.

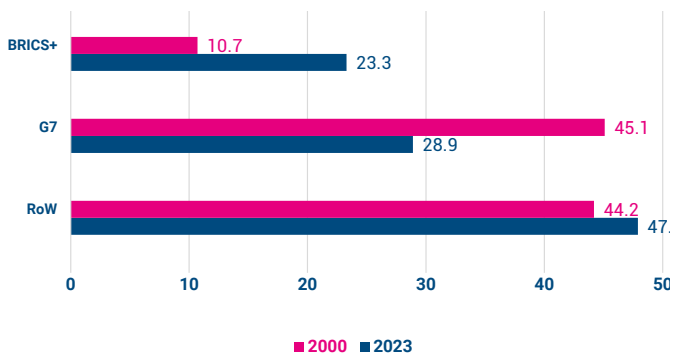
BRICS+ nations' strong advocacy for a more multipolar world can be seen in their recent expansion, and this has been supported by Russia and China, who have been playing a leading role in promoting the multipolarity objective. These additions diversify the bloc and enhance its influence in critical areas such as energy security, maritime trade, and regional diplomacy. For instance, the inclusion of major energy exporters like Russia, UAE and Iran bolsters the bloc's strategic leverage in global energy markets, while the UAE's financial hubs add economic depth (Siddiqui, 2023).

3

BRICS+ and the Global Economy

The BRICS+ nations have increased their share in the global merchandise export from 10.7% in 2000 to 23.3% in 2023, an increase of 12.6%. At the same time, G7 nations have seen their share of global exports fall by 16.2%, from 45.1% to 28.9% (Srivastava, 2024). To get a better understanding of the shifting economic landscape, Figure 1 depicts the change of global merchandise exports of BRICS+ nations, the G7 nations and the rest of the world from 2000 to 2023.

Figure 1: Global merchandise export of BRICS+ nations, G7 nations and the rest of the world



Sources: (basic data) : Direction of Trade Statistics, IMF, Retrieved from Ernst & Young Global Limited, 2024

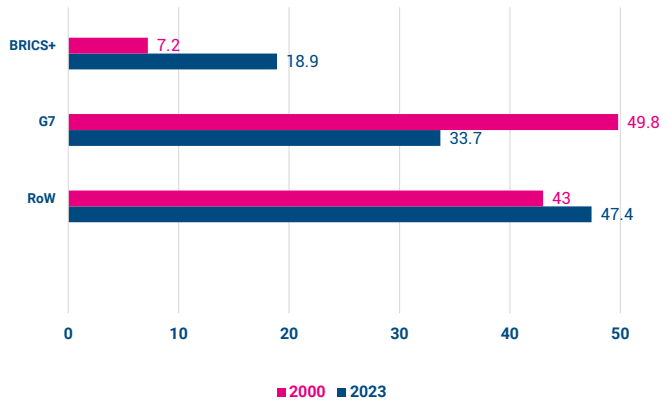
The data in Figure 1 highlights a significant increase in the global merchandise exports of the BRICS+ nations which rose from 10.7% in 2000 to 23.3% in 2023. During the same period, the share of the global merchandise exported by the rest of the world remained almost the same, with only a marginal increase of 44.2% to 47.9%, while the share of G7 fell to 29%, signalling the growth of the BRICS+ nations amidst a decline in the share of G7 nations. This trend can be attributed to the growing economies

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of the BRICS+ nations. A huge part of the economic growth of some of the BRICS+, including China can be largely attributed to booming exports (Li & Li, 2024).

In addition to exports, imports also give us an insightful representation of economic activity happening in a state. Figure 2 shows the share of the global import merchandise of the BRICS+ nations relative to G7 and the rest of the world.

Figure 2: Global merchandise import of BRICS+ nations, G7 nations and the rest of the world

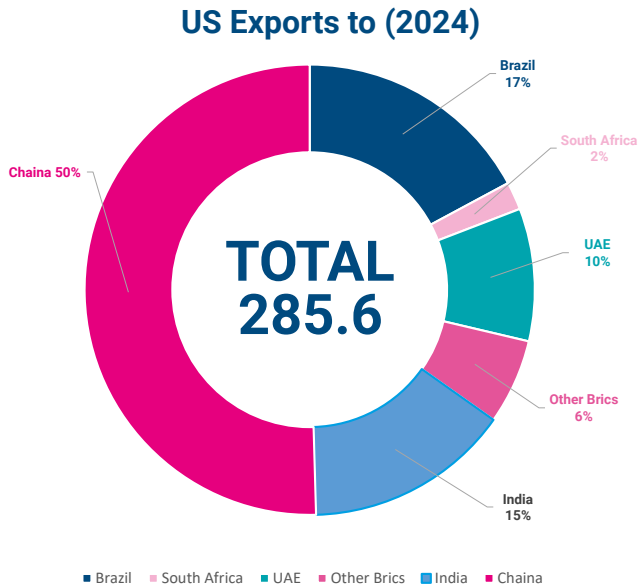


Sources: (basic data): Direction of Trade Statistics, IMF, Retrieved from Ernst & Young Global Limited, 2024

As the economies of BRICS+ Nations are expanding, so is the demand for imported goods. This is clearly visualised in Figure 2 where there has been a steep rise in imports to BRICS+ nations. This trend highlights a shift in the global trade dynamics, with BRICS+ emerging as the key player in the global economy. Figure 2 also emphasizes that the BRICS+ nations are gaining importance not only as global producers but also as major consumer hubs, challenging the traditional dominance of the G7 in international trade. Inspecting trade between BRICS+ nations and the United

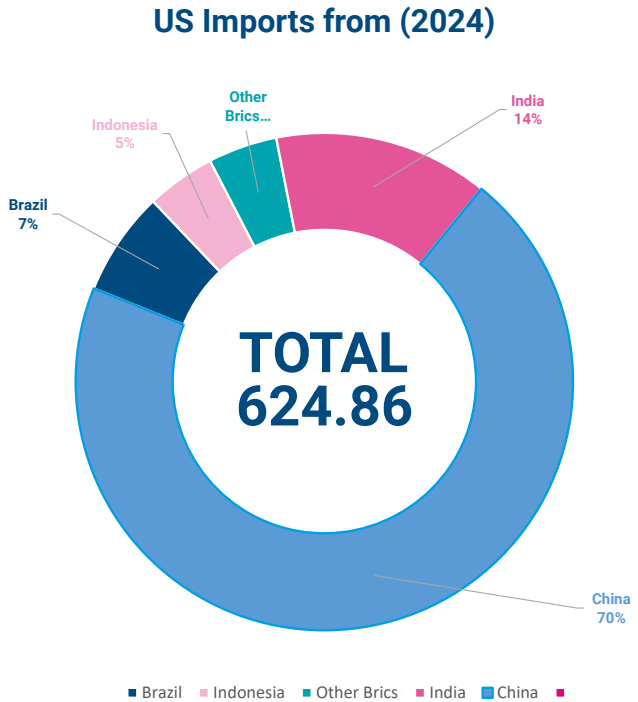
States, reflects a significant deficit for the U.S., which imported substantially more than it exported in 2024. Figure 3(A) shows the trade between the BRICS countries and the US, and how the flow of goods and services favours the BRICS nations

Figure 3(A): Trade between US and BRICS Countries in 2023 (in billion dollars)



Sources: (basic data): Direction of Trade Statistics, IMF, Retrieved from Ernst & Young Global Limited, 2024

Figure 3(B): Trade between US and BRICS Countries in 2023 (in billion dollars)



Sources: Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2025.
Available at <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions>

Figure 3(B) shows that the US imports more than it exports from BRICS+ nations. For reference, in 2024, U.S. exports to BRICS+ countries valued approximately US\$286 billion, while imports stood at US\$625 billion. The bulk of these imports consisted of machinery, electronics, household and miscellaneous goods, as well as plastics, steel, iron, and precious stones (Buchholz, 2025).

Within the BRICS+ bloc, intra-trade has been on the rise. China remains the largest trading partner for the BRICS countries and roughly accounts for half of all intra-BRICS trade (Danil Fliagin

⁴Saudi Arabia is still weighing in on joining BRICS

& Mutiu Abdulganiyu, 2025). In 2022, for example, India's trade with the BRICS countries topped US\$ 100 billion (India Briefing, n.d.). The BRICS+ countries face challenges in establishing an intra-bloc trade agreement because they lack formal free trade agreements and their geographical locations are distant from each other. The Eurozone for comparison is joined together by shared history and geography. They have a single market and a single currency. The BRICS+ countries span across different regions, which creates obstacles for establishing an intra-bloc trade agreement. Within BRICS+, each country has differing national regulations, together with different customs and standards. These create obstacles for achieving higher trade cooperation between countries.

There is also significant trade balance between some countries within the bloc. For example, since it started importing large quantities of Russian oil, India now has a substantial trade deficit with Russia. India also has trade deficits with China. This can result in currency pressure.

With an expanding BRICS+, it brings in new countries to the bloc. The new member states create additional possibilities for trade expansion and enhanced cooperation between bloc members. The potential is there, but to truly capitalise, the BRICS+ nations need to come together to draft a free trade agreement. Even with the current constraints, it is safe to assume that at least in the trade section, intra-bloc trade will continue to grow in the future and contribute to a growing economy of the BRICS+ countries.

A growing economy brings forward a positive outlook for the BRICS+ nations in terms of the economic weight they hold against the G7 nations. Yet, the impact that BRICS+ nations can make remains limited. Despite their efforts to secure better representation in the UNSC and despite the greater voting power in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, tangible changes have been minimal (Rached & Rodrigues de Sá, 2024). This ultimately points to a crucial factor: BRICS+ is not an institutionalised alliance like NATO or the EU and lacks a formal charter or binding agreement (Moch, 2024). This means that it does not have a strong collective decision-making power. Nevertheless, BRICS+ has demonstrated its potential by launching key initiatives such as the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA).

4

Key Initiatives and the Influence of BRICS

New Development Bank (NDB)

BRICS+ aims to coordinate economic and diplomatic policies within their members, reduce dependence on the dollar, and create new financial institutions that could counter the Bretton Woods system (Ferragamo, 2024). In this regard, an important initiative of the BRICS is the New Development Bank (NDB), formerly called the BRICS Development Bank, which became operational in 2015. The NDB was formed for achieving sustainable development projects and resource mobilisation in developing countries and emerging economies. Each of the five founding members contributed US\$50 billion to the initial capital, pointing out that each member yields equal influence in the overall development of the bank; the bank's authorised capital is US\$100 billion. The bank's initial subscribed capital amounts to US\$10 billion, with an additional callable capital of US\$40 billion. Until 2025, the NDB has approved 120 projects amounting to US\$39 billion (New Development Bank, n.d). In comparison to other multilateral financial institutes, the authorised capital of NDB is the same as Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, while that of Asian Development Bank is slightly higher at US\$142.7 billion. The NDB, established by BRICS, has an authorized capital comparable to that of modern institutions such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA)

Another key initiative taken by the BRICS nations is the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), which was also established in 2015. The idea behind the CRA is to create funds that can be utilised by the BRICS nations if they face short-term balance of payment issues. This system is designed to help the member countries to manage short-term liquidity pressures that arise through sudden outflows of capital or foreign exchange shortages. It is a financial safety net wherein all the countries have committed to a total amount over US\$100 billion. This initiative is important for the BRICS nations to stabilize their economies without seeking support from Western financial institutions, like the IMF. Although it is hard to measure the impact of the CRA, as no nation has yet withdrawn money from it, there have been talks to revamp the CRA system, as it has been inactive since its establishment (Lissovolik, 2024).

The BRICS nations strongly advocate for more equitable global governance and financial systems (Ferragamo, 2024). They emphasise the importance of multilateralism and economic cooperation. The group's agenda is to reform the existing international financial institutions so that they will include the emerging and developing economies and create more equitable representation (Ferragamo, 2024). One of the ways to reform the current financial environment would be to create a new payment messaging system which would be an alternative to the current payment system which is dominated by Western institutions.

BRICS Pay and De-Dollarisation

At the 2024 BRICS summit, member nations discussed the potential launch of the BRICS Cross-Border Payments Initiative (BCBPI), also known as BRICS Pay. This initiative is a planned decentralisation and independent payment messaging system that allows BRICS nations to trade with each other using their own currencies. BRICS Pay was initially proposed in 2018 as a mechanism to facilitate trade among developing countries and to bypass US-controlled financial systems (Macro Global, 2025). However, it wasn't until the 2022 summit that the initiative gained prominence as a potential alternative to the SWIFT network, the globally accepted system for international banking transactions. The proposal builds on the existing digital payment infrastructure within member countries, including Russia's Mir system, India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI), and China's WePay and Alipay platforms (Freidin, 2024). The payment methods in these countries can be used by the BRICS nations to adopt their own payment systems. The BRICS nations can collectively share information and knowledge on their digital payment systems to build a common framework. While BRICS Pay and the broader goal of de-dollarisation remain subjects of ongoing discussion, the actual implementation of such a system will depend on future consensus, technical integration, and geopolitical developments.

This is evident in the de-dollarisation agenda of the nations; since the dollar is being used widely, an alternative can be formed to better enhance trade between the BRICS nations. The 2024 summit in Kazan, Russia, highlighted the group's desire to reduce dependence on the US dollar and focus on using local currencies for trade or adopting the BRICS Pay system, a digital currency system to facilitate monetary transactions among the BRICS nations (Freidin, 2024).

Within the BRICS+ group, the US Dollar remains the dominant currency for trade. This could expose the bloc to fluctuations in the dollar and be influenced by US monetary policy. We have also seen the US dollar being used to target countries, thus leaving them vulnerable in the global economy. There is also a political risk of being dependent on the US monetary policy (Danil Fliagin & Mutiu Abdulganiyu, 2025). This is one of the reasons why

some of the BRICS+ countries are calling for de-dollarisation and utilization of an alternative currency. This could be a new common currency or the use of an existing currency.

One challenge facing the BRICS+ in efforts to de-dollarise is which common currency will replace the dollar as a reserve currency and for trade. The Chinese Yuan stands as the most powerful currency among the options. The US Dollar maintains a significant lead over the Chinese Yuan as a global reserve currency. The BRICS+ members India and Brazil show no willingness to adopt the Chinese currency as the reserve currency. The BRICS+ Summit in Kazan saw the common BRICS+ Currency concept gain support (Smith, 2025). Some model it around the Euro, which functions as a shared currency throughout most European Union member states.

The proposed BRICS+ currency faces numerous obstacles in its development process. Unlike the Euro which replaced the national currency, this currency would be used for just trade between the countries. The BRICS+ group lacks unity because its members share neither identical ambitions nor common desires. The rivalry between India and China would dominate the discussions, thus making the implementation of a common currency extremely difficult. (Smith, 2025). It should be noted that the talk of the currency is still in its infancy and it will be fascinating to observe its future development.

The implementation of sanctions against Russia since the beginning of the Ukraine war in 2022 has hastened the calls for de-dollarisation by Russia and its allies. The introduction of digital currencies and BRICS+ Central Bank Digital currencies (CBDCs) would be another tool to bypass sanctions and promote de-dollarisation. These digital currencies would facilitate smoother transactions between BRICS+ nations and reduce vulnerability to external pressures (FILIN, 2024).

All these steps are in pursuit of reshaping the global financial order. The expansion of BRICS nations to include five more members shows their growing role in reshaping the global economy, and it also signifies the collective efforts and aspirations of many countries to create a new system that is multipolar.

5

The United States and its Shifting Attitudes towards the BRICS Nations

Since the formalisation of BRICS in 2009, it has served as a counterweight to Western institutions. However, during the alliance's initial stage of formalisation, the US did not view it as a competitor. The United States views the BRICS nations as very different from each other politically and economically, with huge geopolitical fragmentation. All three factors led the USA to underestimate the effect these economies would have in the coming years (Papa, 2025).

Successive US administrations, including the Biden administration, did not foresee the growing influence of the BRICS in the geopolitical landscape (Papa, 2025). In 2023, Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor of the US, stated that they do not expect BRICS to turn into a geopolitical rival (Ferragamo, 2024 and Janet Yellen, the Treasury Secretary in December of 2024, stated that countries can try to diversify and move away from the but no currency can ultimately displace the power the dollar holds in the world (Mott, 2023).

The USA's attitudinal shift towards BRICS began post-Donald Trump's return to the White House in 2025. The US now views the BRICS as a geopolitical and economic counterweight. This is the part of a larger geopolitical shift visible through various aid cuts, tariff threats, and withdrawals from multiple international agencies. Trump's primary agenda for America has been to make an America First policy, to prioritise America. The goals include boosting domestic industries, decreasing the trade deficit, reshaping traditional economic partnerships, and withdrawing from various international institutions.

While initially considered a loosely aligned group of emerging economies in the early 2000s, BRICS gradually began challenging the existing global order, particularly through calls to reform institutions like the IMF and World Bank since the financial crisis in 2009 (Rached & Rodrigues de Sá, 2024). This shift became more pronounced in the 2020s as BRICS expanded its ambitions, including efforts to reduce dependence on the U.S. dollar and grow its geopolitical footprint. After Trump's administration took over, it quickly turned to confront the BRICS nations, declaring that he would impose a 100 percent tariff on member states if they pursued their de-dollarisation agenda (McKibbin, 2025). This marked a turning point in how the US views BRICS. Trump has taken an active stance against the bloc, signaling a broader transformation in the U.S. narrative regarding the rising power and influence of BRICS.

One of the most visible instruments of Trump's economic strategy has been his tariff centric trade policy. Trump has imposed import taxes on Canada, Mexico, and China as part of his border strategy to prioritise American trade. Trump began his tariff war by imposing a 25% tariff on all products coming into the United States from Mexico and Canada (Lawder & Shalal, 2025). Following this, Trump had also imposed tariffs on all countries around the globe, with the EU, China, Japan, South Korea, South Africa and India topping the list of countries that have more than 10% tariff rates, and Brazil stands at 10% as of now . He also wants to ensure that developing nations will end policies that aim to deter the dollar's supremacy. This imposition of tariffs on BRICS signals to other countries that standing in the way of America's dominance will harm their economic stability. These tariffs are likely to drive up consumer prices in the United States, particularly in essential and high-demand sectors such as electronics, groceries, and apparel, thereby placing an additional financial burden on American households and potentially fuelling inflationary pressures. These tariffs also lead to retaliatory measures and destabilising international markets.

Critics of Trump's tariff policy argue that these policies would eventually lead to supply chain disruptions and create rifts

between nations. These tariffs would impact the BRICS nations differently as follows; India, while vulnerable in sectors like IT and pharmaceuticals, is relatively insulated due to its diversified export base and strong domestic demand and may even benefit from shifting global supply chains. Brazil and South Africa, heavily reliant on commodity exports, risking declining revenues and currency instability. China, as the bloc's largest exporter to the U.S., faces the most immediate impact, with reduced competitiveness and potential GDP slowdowns.

Beginning with a 20% tariff on Chinese goods in March 2025, the US-China trade war gradually intensified through reciprocal measures (Clarke, 2025). China responded by levying counter-tariffs of 10–15% on U.S. agricultural imports, which was followed by a steep escalation on both sides (Race, 2025). Chinese tariffs on American products rose to 84%, while the U.S. imposed cumulative tariffs reaching 145% (Huld, 2025). On May 12, both sides agreed to reduce tariffs, culminating in a provisional truce. With the US reducing tariffs from 145% to 30%, in addition to existing sector-specific and Section 301 tariffs and lowering Chinese tariffs on US goods from 125% to 10% (Luck, 2025).

The broader implications of this standoff are significant, not only for global trade stability but also for the economic outlook of BRICS+ nations, particularly China. An expected outcome of this trade war on the BRICS economies is increased intra-trade between the BRICS countries in the longer run. Still, in the immediate run, it can potentially harm China's supply chain and affect global markets with the slowdown of China's economic growth. An ideal situation for China would be to move closer to the BRICS+ nations and expand trade with them.

²The situation is changing by the day and countries are working to reduce the tariffs.

³Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974 empowers the President to implement appropriate measures, including both tariff and non-tariff actions, in response to foreign trade practices that are deemed unfair, violate international trade agreements, or adversely affect U.S. commerce

6

Navigating and Adopting New Strategies in the Trump Era

The new Trump era brings forward fresh challenges for the BRICS+ nations. Trump remains critical of the BRICS+ plan to introduce a BRICS currency to challenge the hegemony of the US dollar. President Trump has proposed to impose tariffs of 100% on countries that seek to challenge or reduce the role of the US dollar (Mckibbin, 2025).

This offers challenges to the BRICS+ countries that seek to reduce the role of the US dollar as the reserve and trade currency. The US dollar as the official reserve currency in the world has come down to 58% in 2024 compared to 72% in 1999 (Mckibbin, 2025). With Trump championing the US dollar, his administration would prefer to stop this decline and to keep the US dollar as the main reserve currency. This move also has the possibility that the division among BRICS+ countries deepen because not every nation supports the proposal to adopt a new BRICS+ currency or the efforts to de-dollarise (Pasricha, 2025). The US remains a big market for the majority of the BRICS+ countries. In response to Trump's tariff threat, India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar responded in the Indian Parliament that the BRICS+ nations are a strong collective aimed at promoting South-South cooperation and promotion of a multipolar world that could be at stake if Trump threatens to move ahead with his tariff threat (Parashar, 2025). The situation remains very volatile and is changing by the day

Each challenge also brings forward new openings, and this could be turned into an opportunity for the BRICS+ Nations. This vulnerability and unpredictability could be turned into an opportunity that can be used to increase their intra-bloc trade

and investment. BRICS financial institutions such as the NDB and CRA can step up and take on a more prominent role, to mitigate economic risks and reduce dependence on Western financial institutions. Now countries like India and Brazil have more incentive to deepen their engagement with BRICS+ due to uncertainties from the US Administration (Tellis, 2025).

This could be an ideal opening for BRICS+ nations to explore BRICS Pay or the use of local currency for facilitating intra-bloc trade, which would gradually help them reduce dependence on the US Dollar in the long term. As the BRICS+ nations focus more on self-reliance and intragroup trade, the grouping can promote multilateralism at their summits and increase coordination on global issues such as technology regulations, climate change, and financial systems.

In the current geopolitical scenario with the trade wars between the USA and China, and the uncertainty of the US President's actions, the BRICS nations need to re-strategise their economic policies. The bloc will need to push forward for fair and open global trade in reaction to US protectionism. BRICS+ nations will likely emerge as a platform to shape alternative trade alliances, positioning itself as a counterweight to the US-dominated structures. Nations in the Global South want to move towards a multipolar world, and the BRICS nations provide the perfect platform for these nations to come together and advocate for their agenda. Increasing engagement in the multilateral forums like the G20, WTO and the UN is also on the agenda for the BRICS+ nations to push forward a path that will support a multipolar world. Engagement in these forums is key for the Global South nations to voice their concerns in a changing global scenario.

7

India's Strategic Positioning within the BRICS Bloc

India's engagement with BRICS reflects a combination of strategic autonomy, economic pragmatism, and geopolitical balancing (Kamalakar, 2024). As one of its founding members, India views BRICS as more than just an economic alliance; it is a platform to shape a multipolar global order and enhance the voice of the Global South. Strategically, it allows India to maintain critical channels of engagement with China and Russia despite bilateral tensions, while also affirming its independent foreign policy posture (Chaulia, 2021). The grouping enhances India's stature as a rising power with global ambitions, particularly by providing an alternative to Western-dominated forums.

The BRICS presents India a tough balancing act as the country tries to make sure that the gathering doesn't evolve to become explicitly an anti-West block, especially one that allies with Russia and China to confront the West. India has also been a bit sceptical of moves to de-dollarise or adopt a new BRICS currency (Tellis, 2025). India's role within the BRICS has become more delicate with Trump's return. His latest threat to impose 100% tariffs on BRICS+ nations that seeks to challenge the US Dollar has put India in a tough position. Yet, BRICS+ nations are a key pathway for India's in its long vision for a multipolar world, thus making it very crucial for India to navigate a middle ground.

BRICS offers India opportunities to advance South–South cooperation and secure development financing through the New Development Bank, where it plays an active role. Although Intra-BRICS trade is smaller than India's trade with the West, it is steadily expanding, particularly in sectors such as energy, pharmaceuticals, and technology (Badar Alam Iqbal et al., 2023). India also contributes to shaping BRICS' economic agenda, promoting reform of global financial institutions such as the IMF

and World Bank. At the same time, India carefully moderates China's influence within the bloc, ensuring decisions remain consensus-based and balanced in the interest of all members.

What countries like India can do is to continue trade with the EU and US in dollars but explore using local currencies for intra-trade with the BRICS nations, as it would help yield better prices and smoother access to the markets. India has to adopt an approach that maintains its strategic autonomy while advancing its national interests - a doctrine referred to as Non-Alignment 2.0 (Khilnani, Sunil et. al 2012). It calls for India to have leverage and maximum opportunities for its relationship with the world, thus giving it more options. According to this framework, India does not have to define its National interest based on the ideas of other countries. India should retain its autonomy to pursue its own developmental goals and use it to make a just and equitable global order (Khilnani, Sunil et.al 2012)

In this context, India's involvement in BRICS acts as a geopolitical leverage in its relations with the West. By having strong engagement with BRICS and, at the same time, reinforcing ties with the United States, European Union, and Indo-Pacific allies through forums such as the QUAD helps India establish itself as a significant player in both realms. This dual engagement allows India to explore its national interest in a negotiable manner without appearing too identified with either faction. While America views India as a democratic buffer against China, India leverages that image in order to fortify its universal role without challenging its BRICS+ obligations. Thus, India successfully manages rival interests and becomes a central player balancing between great power blocs in a multifaceted, changing world order.

8

BRICS 2025 and Rio Declaration

BRICS 2025 summit in Rio De Janeiro saw the absence of the Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese president Xi Jinping. The organization marks a significant milestone because what began with Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa but now welcomes Indonesia as its newest member. The summit was convened under the theme “Strengthening Global South Cooperation for More Inclusive and Sustainable Governance.”. The Theme was aimed at boosting sustainable development and fostering inclusion among the Global South nations

The summit led to the signing of the Rio Declaration. The document reaffirms the group's dedication to defend multilateralism and work toward establishing a fair and equitable global governance and order (D’Auria, 2025). The Rio declaration calls for increased involvement of developing nations and global south countries including African and Latin American nations in the IMF, United Nations and other decision-making multilateral forums. The threats issued by the US president were high on the agenda, but the joint declaration did not make any direct reference to the US president.

9

India's BRICS Presidency - 2026

Post Rio, India will assume the BRICS presidency and host the 18th BRICS presidency. The Indian prime minister has said that the forum will provide importance to the issues of the global South. There are also talks about India giving a new form to the grouping. High on the agenda will be fostering cooperation among global south countries, advancing climate justice, fostering the responsible use of AI, pushing for reforms in multilateral forums, securing supply chains and prioritising health.

The forum faces an uphill battle for India to prevent it from transforming into an anti-US gathering. The US president has already set his sights on the grouping and India will have to walk a tightrope to take the presidency and the grouping forward. The US president has continuously threatened to impose sanctions on countries cooperating with BRICS. The process of de-dollarization and new BRICS currency creation will remain as topics that will be difficult to reach consensus on. The Indian presidency will be critical and lay the foundation for BRICS in the years to come.

10 Strengthening BRICS Cooperation and the Way Forward

As BRICS continues to expand and evolve, the importance of increasing cooperation among member states is paramount, especially for tackling the challenges of the 21st century. The recent summit in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) underscored the role played by developing countries in shaping the economic and political landscape. The expansion of BRICS to BRICS+ introduces new challenges, as members, old and new come to the table with diverse priorities. This could create divisions within the group. Managing these diverse priorities and interests will be a challenge for the bloc moving forward.

Moving forward, the success of BRICS+ will depend on the ability of the bloc to enhance cooperation and trade between the member states and to take a unified stance on global issues.

11

Conclusion

The BRICS+ have been evolving as a significant force in the changing global order. The collective economic might of the group holds significant global influence and is aiding in the development of new financial systems that counter and challenge the existing ones which are dominated by the Western institutions. For Global South countries, initiatives like the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) offer alternatives to the Western-dominated financial institutions. However, lack of internal cohesion, fuelled by tensions between India and China, presents challenges that could upend unity and the bloc's effectiveness.

Trump's return to the white house and his concerns and efforts to stall de-dollarisation by imposing tariffs has divided the BRICS+ countries. Trade tensions between the US and BRICS+ nations and the general uncertainty regarding the trajectory of the US could be the catalyst that brings the BRICS+ Nations together to deepen engagement and increase intra- block trade.

While BRICS+ nations and its institutions have not been able to rival the West yet, its growing influence and ongoing expansion makes it play an important role in reshaping the global economy and existing balance of power.

The ability of BRICS+ to navigate challenges in the future will be the key determinant of the influence and its relevance in the future. If BRICS+ aims to promote a truly multipolar world, its members must be willing to compromise and find common ground.

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About the Authors

Dr D Dhanuraj



Dr D Dhanuraj is the Founder-Chairman of the Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR), a non-profit, independent public policy think-tank based in Kochi, Kerala, India. With two decades of experience in this sector, his interest areas lie at the intersection of research and policy analysis. He is a policy researcher and commentator on urbanisation, urban

mobility and infrastructure, education, retail, health, livelihood, law, public expenditure, defence and security, geo politics and election analysis, and has collaborated with state, national and international governments, organisations and institutions on several key research studies and policy recommendations.

Aleena T Sabu



Aleena T. Sabu was a Research Assistant at the Centre for Public Policy Research, and she works in the International Relations vertical. She achieved her BA (Hons) in Political Science from Delhi University and a Masters' degree in Politics and International Relations from Pondicherry University. She has research experience working at the

Indian Council of World Affairs, Raisina House, Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs, Mahatma Gandhi University and Mitkat Advisory.

Adithyan PV



Adithyan Puthen Veetil is a Consultant, Research in the International Relations vertical at Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR), Kochi, Kerala, India. He holds a Bachelor's in Economics from Azim Premji University, Bengaluru, and a Master's in Advanced International Studies from the Vienna School of International Studies.

