



The BRICS+ Are Still Alive and Kicking



by Ernesto Gallo

- The BRICS+ are not in decline. Their divergencies, and especially India's, are part of usual international political dynamics.
- In the future, agility, flexibility and the pursuit of somewhat different interests will reinforce what was born as a fundamentally economy-oriented group.
- At the same time, a stronger political vision (ideally in the sense of peace and development) is needed. India, the current Chair, should start setting the example now.

We have long heard about the **decline** of the BRICS+ group of countries: they would be too different, too complex, too dominated by China, and fraught with tensions within and between them; they would also be increasingly divided. In January 2026, probably fearing US retaliation, India, a core BRICS member, **stayed away** from the group's military exercises off South Africa's coast. The Iran war has then been exposing further problems. Iran, a member since 2024, is clashing with another '2024 entry', the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which it has repeatedly attacked with drones and missiles. India's Prime Minister Modi even **met Netanyahu** in a state visit soon before the conflict, aimed at promoting India-Israel cooperation in technology and security. While India is looking 'West', China and especially Russia remain firmly in the 'East', with Russia still engaged in the Ukraine war.

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However, the BRICS+ group is not disintegrating. It can reconfigure, better calibrate its direction, and become more flexible; it needs a stronger vision. After all, China has no interest in confronting the West, while Brazil, South Africa and India intend to pursue a multidirectional, agile foreign policy. Russia risks isolation but will likely remain a pole of attraction because of its fossil fuel resources. Developments will also depend on political change in the West, particularly in the United States, and on the ability of the BRICS+ to represent the Global South.

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BRICS+ staying alive

The war on Iran has not fractured the BRICS+ as **claimed** by some Western commentators. **Russia** immediately condemned the Israel-US attacks as a violation of international law, but chose not to go beyond a merely diplomatic support to Tehran. After all, Russia has strong cultural links with Israel (which is home to more than a million Russian speakers) and is engaged in negotiations with the United States on the Ukraine front. **China**, despite condemning the attacks, is maintaining a moderate profile and pursuing stabilisation, also in light of its economic interests on the other bank of the Persian Gulf; Beijing has **pressured Iran** to accept a 14-days ceasefire with the United States and Pakistan to host negotiations between the conflicting parties. Lula's **Brazil** has also condemned the strikes; **South Africa** has limited itself to inviting restraint and compliance with international law, while simultaneously condemning any attack. In this sense, India's much-discussed position within the BRICS+ founding countries does not look exceptional.

Moreover, while the group has not produced any joint statement, significant divisions on the Iran

war have also emerged within the West. **Britain** declined to intervene in the conflict and later agreed to let the United States use UK military bases only for defensive purposes. **Spain** has fully rejected any support for the US-Israeli military action. Other countries have expressed strong support for it. If anything, divisions have been deeper among large Western states than among the BRICS founders.

Is India looking West?

Among the BRICS, India's position has become a particular source of controversies. New Delhi has not condemned the US-Israeli attacks and Modi's recent visit to Jerusalem has not been unnoticed.

Over the years, India has limited its engagement with Iran and strengthened its ties with Israel. Israel has become a supplier of intelligence and military technology, a supporter of India on anti-terrorism and even a **model of nationalism** – all aspects that Modi values. That said, at the same time New Delhi is also **one of the biggest trade partners** of those Arab countries hit by Iran, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which are home to millions of Indian migrants. Not by chance, the war is having a massive impact on India's energy supplies, environmental quality, economic growth and even food availability.

Yet, by contrast with Islamabad, New Delhi has so far not adopted a policy of active mediation or brokerage. This caution seems to suggest balancing and a multidirectional (or 'multialignment') foreign policy, rather than disengagement with the BRICS. In this sense it is also worth remembering the initiative of India's central bank, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), which in January **announced a proposal** to link BRICS digital currencies – a blow to the dollar's hegemony. While Modi's India has never looked with favour on initiatives aimed at creating a BRICS+ common or single currency, its sub-continental size and diverse political history suggest that policies may change in the future or sooner than we currently imagine.



As a Chair of the BRICS+ in 2026, India has to **somewhat balance** its recent (2025) issues with the United States, particularly linked to its oil trade with Russia, with a more accommodating policy. This, however, does not mean that it has chosen the West over the BRICS and the Global South; balancing is a complex act, and the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie pull in many directions. The United States and Israel matter, but the BRICS+ keeps mattering as well.

An economic group?

The BRICS+ started as a mostly economic endeavour; it is not promoting an alternative socio-economic model or a new ideology. In this sense, the difference with the socialist bloc of the past is significant. Additionally, the group does not have a significant strategic or military dimension. No Warsaw Pact is in sight. While the BRICS+ remains economically focused on the Global South, political dimensions have also emerged. On the one hand, the group aims at confronting the US-led West in key global institutions (the UN, the IMF, the World Bank) and at gaining more voice (and votes) in them, where countries such as China and India have been objectively penalised. On the other, it is a kind of political forum for the Global South, with **expanding aims** also in areas such as fighting corruption and terrorism.

Of course political cooperation is also complicated by significant divergencies, between more democratic (Brazil) and more authoritarian (China) countries, smaller (Ethiopia) and bigger (China) economies, poorer (Ethiopia) and wealthier (the UAE) ones. Yet the grouping will keep functioning especially if it remains agile, flexible and pragmatic; if it will consolidate a **'non-Western'** instead of an 'anti-Western' political direction; if it will work towards a pluriversal (and 'post-Western') world, in which each BRIC pursues different interests within a shared platform of respect for peace and push for the Global South's economic development. After all, sustainable development, growth of the digital economy and

of a regulated AI, inclusivity (also in the sense of gender), and more, are objectives common with Western-led international organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank.

Coordinating the BRICS+ is an immense challenge. Yet it is a crucial one, for the future of world politics

Which way forward?

The 'Global South' offers an immense cultural heritage and elements of formidable scientific and technological development, from South Africa's excellence in IT and biotechnology to Brazil's achievements in agribusiness and the energy industry and India's in IT and space research. Moreover, BRICS+ represents **almost 56 per cent** of the world's population. However, to fully express the potential of its diversity, the grouping needs a stronger long-term vision, with a special focus on development and peace. The fact that on 14-15 May the Foreign Ministers of conflicting Iran and UAE may meet (together with their other BRICS+ peers) in India is a source of embarrassment to the countries and to India as a Chair.

Significantly damaged by the war and challenged by Pakistan, which **attempts to play** a mediating role, India may have to chart a clear way forward, for both the Middle Eastern conflict and the BRICS+ as a group. Balancing will likely not be enough. New Delhi will need enlightened political vision, which in Modi's era of **democratic backsliding** seems to be problematic. Indian diplomats and citizens may want to remember the extraordinary legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru, who endorsed independent non-alignment while at the same time maintaining good relations with both the West and the USSR and promoting the pledge of decolonising countries.



Such a strong vision is indispensable if the BRICS+ wants to move beyond economic cooperation. BRICS+ politics will function better if a vision is added to the diversity of these countries' positions. This task is at the moment falling on India's shoulders.

Coordinating the BRICS+ is an immense challenge. Yet it is a crucial one, for the future of world politics and the planet itself. Talking about the BRICS+'s decline is a self-serving Western discourse. In one way or another, these countries represent a formidable voice, which can contribute to a more equitable and pluralistic Earth, if they speak the powerful language of peace and development.

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