

RESEARCH ARTICLE

‘A plethora of ad hoc arrangements, like the BRICS’: India and the BRICS expansion

Adam Burakowski

Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warsaw, Masovian Voivodeship, Poland

Abstract

The article examines India’s position towards the BRICS expansion. India is one of the pillars of BRICS; without New Delhi, this organization almost loses its *raison d’être*. For India, BRICS is just one of many tools of international politics, one of many multilateral formats, certainly not a key one. Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar named BRICS one of the “plethora of ad hoc arrangements”. To examine India’s position on BRICS expansion is crucial to understand any further development of this group. The article is a study on international relations and it is using qualitative research methodology, reviewing official statements, media news and more in-depth policy descriptive texts, published by leading Indian think-tanks to understand the meaning of the actions taken by the Government of India – the key actor in this context – in reference to BRICS expansion. The study finds that for New Delhi, it is very important that this group does not transform into an organization supporting the People’s Republic of China or an openly anti-Western caucus. More and more countries express their will to join BRICS. In 2023 at the Johannesburg Summit six countries were invited to join. The following year, at the Kazan Summit, a group of states were invited as “partner countries”. These two decisions to expand BRICS aroused mixed feelings in New Delhi, despite its officially declared openness. India, under Narendra Modi, is trying to pursue an increasingly assertive foreign policy. It is using various formats, including the G20, to emphasize its national interests. One of them is the reform of the UN in order for India to get a permanent seat in the Security Council. In this context, BRICS can sometimes be useful for New Delhi.

Keywords

BRICS, India, UN, People’s Republic of China, Russia, South Africa, Brazil

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Introduction

The objective of this paper is to analyze the India's position towards the BRICS group expansion that happened quite recently. As BRICS existed for almost 15 years in its initial composition (plus South Africa), in 2023 it welcomed new members, one year later a bunch of partner countries and then next members. India's position towards the expansion and BRICS in general is one of the most important questions when speaking about this group; without New Delhi, it almost loses its *raison d'être*. On the other hand, India is less involved in its activities than it was in the past. The question of India's role in BRICS is also a question about the future of this group and about the further development of a multipolar world order. That is why it is so important to know India's position on BRICS expansion. The time frames of this article are from the beginning of BRICS till the end of 2024, with main focus on Johannesburg and Kazan summits.

The article will try to answer the following research questions:

1. What was India's position towards BRICS from the very beginning of this organization?
2. Has the coming to power of Narendra Modi and the BJP changed New Delhi's attitude towards this issue?
3. What have been the goals of India's presence and activities in BRICS?
4. What was India's attitude before the BRICS summits in Johannesburg and Kazan?
5. What is India's position regarding a possible further expansion of BRICS?
6. What is India's general view on BRICS?

The growth of BRICS goes hand in hand with the growth of India, which, thanks to its long-lasting economic boom and changes in the mentality of the ruling elite, is becoming an increasingly significant actor in international politics.

The organization is becoming more inclusive, but losing its previous elitism. In its original form, BRICS grouped regional leaders; after the expansion it becomes an increasingly mass association, which from New Delhi's point of view has both advantages and disadvantages. The year 2023 and the Johannesburg summit were a breakthrough in the history of BRICS; a whole group of new countries from different geographical areas were accepted at that time, which strengthened the organization and changed the balance of power within it. The following year, at the Kazan summit, another variant of the expansion was made: including entire group of "partner countries", whose status has not been fully defined, but it is certainly lower than the status of the original members.

Methods: The research is based on qualitative research methodology, reviewing official statements by India, BRICS as a group and other countries, media news and more in-depth policy descriptive texts of leading Indian think-tanks. The meaning is

to understand the meaning of the actions taken by the Government of India – the key actor in this context – in reference to BRICS expansion.

The literature on BRICS is quite extensive; analysts from each of the member countries have published a lot about the group. However, most of these are studies written some time ago, when there was no discussion of a potential BRICS expansion. The enlargement of this group is something new, so it is worth to examine how India has positioned itself on this issue. In analyzing India's foreign policy in recent years, we rely on studies by leading Indian authors and policy makers, such as Samir Saran, Shashi Tharoor¹ and Shivshankar Menon.² Reports from important Indian think tanks, including ORF, IDSA and ICWA, also constitute the source base for this article. Two books published by the current Indian Minister of Foreign Affairs, S. Jaishankar,³ are important. In addition, official statements by Indian foreign policy makers and press articles describing the process of accepting new BRICS members were analyzed.

My working hypothesis: India is not interested in strengthening the BRICS; it is satisfied with the shape of this group until 2023. For India, it is one of many international formats. New Delhi uses BRICS exclusively for their own purposes, which can be defined as: strengthening its voice in international organizations (primarily in the UN), strengthening the role of the Global South and Indian position within the Global South. Another goal of Indian policy is to balance the influence of the PRC; New Delhi's activities in BRICS should also be considered in this context. For this reason, India cannot officially oppose the enlargement of this group, although it does not show enthusiasm in this regard. India is not against enlargement as such; it is against further strengthening of this group, it is against losing its elite character and it is against transforming it into a "club" supporting China.

First years of BRICS

The idea of strengthening economic cooperation and increasing the intensity of consultations between the largest countries not belonging to the West – however defined⁴ – originated at the beginning of the 21st century among financial analysts. It seemed then that the ongoing globalization should lead to the elimination of barriers and the blurring of political, cultural and social differences between all or at least most countries in the world. In 2001, British economist Jim O'Neil published an article entitled "Building Better Global Economic BRICs" in the "Global Economic Paper" by Goldman Sach, where he was working at the time. It was O'Neil

¹ S. Tharoor and S. Saran, *The New World Disorder and the Indian imperative* (Aleph, 2020).

² S. Menon, *India and Asian Geopolitics. The Past, Present* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2021).

³ S. Jaishankar, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (HarperCollins India, 2021); S. Jaishankar, *Why Bharat Matters* (Rupa Publications, 2024).

⁴ The term "Collective West", promoted mainly by Russia, is not very popular in India.

who first coined the acronym BRIC, as an abbreviation of the names of the countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China.⁵

The first meeting in this format, at the level of foreign ministers, took place in September 2006 on the sidelines of the annual UN General Assembly in New York. This began a series of meetings at various levels, culminating in a summit of the heads of state/heads of government⁶ in Yekaterinburg on June 16, 2009. During this meeting, some topics emerged that would later dominate BRICS rhetoric: the issue of developing countries and the “reform of international financial institutions”, as well as the UN.⁷ It was also agreed then that a summit at the level of heads of state/government would be held every year. The next one was held in Brasilia in April 2010, also combined with a business forum in Rio de Janeiro; at this summit, South Africa was formally invited to participate in the organization.⁸ South Africa joined in December 2010. The group changed its name to BRICS, S for South Africa. This abbreviation is still used today.⁹

The first years of BRICS were marked by tightening of cooperation. The largest role in the organization’s current activities has been played by the rotating annual presidency. The country holding the presidency organizes an annual summit at the level of heads of state/heads of government and a number of meetings at lower levels. The presidency lasts from January 1 to December 31.

In 2012, at the BRICS summit in New Delhi, an initiative was put forward to establish the first common institution – a bank that would support the development of member states.¹⁰ After quite a long negotiation, the bank’s establishment was approved at a summit in Fortaleza, Brazil, in 2014. An agreement was signed at that time to create the New Development Bank (NDB), headquartered in Shanghai. The first president was Indian citizen K.V. Kamath, former president of India’s largest IT company Infosys; he remained at that position until 2020. The bank began operating in 2015. Within a few years, regional branches of the bank were established – in Johannesburg, Sao Paulo, Moscow and Gandhinagar.¹¹ In 2021, two more countries joined: Bangladesh and the United Arab Emirates, and in February 2023, Egypt.¹² The NDB is to this day the only BRICS institution.

⁵ *The BRICS in Africa Promoting Development?*, eds. F.Y. April *et al.* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2023), 83.

⁶ In India, the head of state, the president, has limited powers. All real power rests with the prime minister.

⁷ Joint Statement of the BRIC countries leaders, June 16, 2009, Yekaterinburg, Russia, accessed January 7, 2025, https://www.brics-ysf.org/sites/default/files/2nd_Summit.pdf.

⁸ O. Stuenkel, *The BRICS and the Future of the Global Order* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 34, 35.

⁹ Theoretically, after the 2023 enlargement, the name BRICS+ was created, but the original name BRICS remains in common use.

¹⁰ *The BRICS in Africa Promoting Development?*, 86.

¹¹ New Development Bank Contact, accessed January 7, 2025, <https://www.ndb.int/contact/>.

¹² New Development Bank Members, accessed January 7, 2025, <https://www.ndb.int/about-ndb/members/>.

From the very beginning, three key issues were discussed within BRICS: the political message of the organization, the advisability (or lack thereof) of deeper economic integration of the member states, and the gradual phasing out of the US dollar as a means of payment.¹³ The political message was usually more or less anti-Western; depending on the period, there was a greater emphasis on independent economic development or a more confrontational tone. In addition to these main topics, each summit also addressed other aspects of cooperation, such as the fight against corruption or sectoral cooperation.

The founding members¹⁴ include three democratic countries: Brazil, India and South Africa, and two non-democratic countries: Russia and the People's Republic of China. This, however, has never been a problem in cooperation. None of the countries has ever tried to impose their domestic political solutions on other members. Despite this, differences of opinion on both fundamental and more specific issues are often so significant that it is difficult to speak of a common position of BRICS on most international issues. The issue of differences in the regimes prevailing in given countries has not hindered cooperation between the governments and government institutions of the member countries.¹⁵

The differences of opinion within BRICS took on a special dimension after the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Although none of the BRICS countries criticized Russia directly, it was clear that each country placed different emphasis in its statements on the subject. Russia failed to create a group of countries supporting its aggression from the BRICS members, which was certainly what Moscow was secretly counting on.¹⁶

BRICS is sometimes described as the "voice of the Global South",¹⁷ even though it includes Russia, definitively "northern" country, not only geographically but also politically; some question also China being "southern", but from 2023 Chairman Xi Jinping uses this term in official speeches.¹⁸ The term "Global South" has become

¹³ *The BRICS in Africa*, 98, 99.

¹⁴ Although *de iure* South Africa was not a founding country, the presence of the letter "S" in the BRICS acronym and the need to represent the African continent mean that it is *de facto* recognized as such.

¹⁵ Stuenkel, *The BRICS and the Future*, 59.

¹⁶ The BRICS summit in Kazan in October 2024 also did not play such a role. The final communiqué contained formulations that did not follow the Russian narrative, including mentioning the UN Charter and resolving the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy, see XVI BRICS Summit, Kazan Declaration, accessed January 7, 2025, <https://dirco.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/XVI-BRICS-Summit-Kazan-Declaration-23-October-2024.pdf>.

¹⁷ A reference to this topic also appeared in the preamble to the communique summarizing the Kazan summit in 2024, XVI BRICS Summit, Kazan Declaration, accessed January 7, 2025.

¹⁸ "China will always be a member of the Global South" stated Xi Jinping in his speech at G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 2024, see Full Text: Address by Chinese President Xi Jinping at Session I of 19th G20 Summit, accessed January 7, 2025, https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202411/19/content_WS673b9965c6d0868f4e8ed256.html.

increasingly common in recent years. First used by an American journalist in 1969 in the context of the Vietnam War, the term lingered on the fringes of public debate for decades, before suddenly gaining popularity around 2020.¹⁹

It is also worth mentioning here a lesser known and less significant, although quite similar to BRICS, organization, namely MIKTA – Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey and Australia. It was established in 2013 and its main goal was to coordinate the activities of these countries in the G20. It operates mainly at the level of foreign ministers, and its goal is to “bridge divides between developed and developing nations and build consensus on issues which would be relevant to all regions”.²⁰ MIKTA is not an alternative to BRICS; it has different goals and is unlikely to be expanded. Nevertheless, it is based largely on similar assumptions to BRICS – connecting important countries from different continents and cultures.

BRICS should be seen as a form of multilateralism with global ambitions. The founding countries are active in various forms of multilateralism, from the obvious UN and its agencies to regional and supra-regional formats such as the SCO, CIS, SAARC, BIMSTEC, SADC or Mercosur, to name only the most important ones. Multilateralism has been an important aspect of BRICS activities from the very beginning, with references to this topic appearing even in the first communiqués after yearly leaders’ summits. The name of the declaration from Kazan is “Kazan Declaration. Strengthening multilateralism for just global development and security” and there are as many as six pages of this text devoted exclusively to multilateralism.²¹ The final goal of this form of multilateralism is “more just and democratic world order”.²² This goal – at least at the declarative level – does not differ much from the goals set by the Indian diplomacy.

The evolution of India’s position towards BRICS

The main principles of Indian foreign policy were developed at the time of the creation of the independent state, after the British withdrawal in 1947, and have not changed much to this day. These principles, called Pancha Shila (five principles), are: respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression (*ahimsa*), non-involvement in the internal affairs of other countries, equality and cooperation for mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.²³ Relations with Pakistan have always been an exception to this rule, but they are not relevant to this discussion.

¹⁹ S. Patrick and A. Huggins, “The Term “Global South” Is Surging. It Should Be Retired,” August 15, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2023/08/the-term-global-south-is-surging-it-should-be-retired?lang=en>.

²⁰ What is MIKTA, accessed January 8, 2025, <http://mikta.org/about/what-is-mikta/>.

²¹ XVI BRICS Summit, Kazan Declaration.

²² XVI BRICS Summit.

²³ K. Iwanek and A. Burakowski, *Od kolonii do mocarstwa. Historia Indii 1857–2013* (Wydawnictwo PWN, 2013), 233.

Independent India theoretically tried to maintain an equal distance from rival powers, but in practice it was much closer to Moscow than to Washington. It was one of the main creators of the Non-Aligned Movement. It avoided any criticism of the actions of the USSR and later Russia, while actively criticizing the United States (e.g. during the Iraq War). However, this policy did not mean signing up directly to the pro-Soviet or pro-Russian camp; New Delhi constantly took care of good or at least correct relations with Western countries.

Based on such principles, India naturally became involved in various multilateral formats. The most important of the multilateral organizations – the UN – was created without India's participation, which meant that New Delhi was not invited to the UN Security Council. This has been a problem for India from the very beginning to the present day. Changing this status and generally reforming the UN remains one of New Delhi's top priorities.²⁴ India also promotes other multilateral formats, the aforementioned Non-Aligned Movement, regional organizations, primarily BIMSTEC (SAARC is a difficult subject for India due to Pakistan's participation and behavior, and it usually does not participate in the highest-level meetings of this organization),²⁵ to organizations with a global reach, primarily the G20. New Delhi's participation in BRICS fits into this logic.

As a post-colonial state, India has been an advocate for states liberating themselves from Western European domination since independence. India was quick to recognize newly independent African and Asian states and establish diplomatic relations with them; it is one of the constants of Indian foreign policy to manifest friendship with post-colonial countries.

There was one exception to this rule (apart from Pakistan) – the People's Republic of China. While India had counted on good relations after the end of the civil war in China and when the communists took power, the PRC itself ruined the friendship by committing aggression in 1962. Since then, New Delhi's relations with Beijing have been characterized by distrust, often turning into hostility. There are still unresolved border disputes, and incidents have occurred there.

The year 1991 was a significant turning point in India's foreign policy. Firstly, a series of economic reforms were launched at that time, aimed at increasing the role of the free market, and secondly, the Soviet Union collapsed, which led to a certain reorientation of vectors – New Delhi began to turn more towards Western countries. The consequence of these decisions were the enormous, continuing economic growth of India and a radical increase in the level of competitiveness of the economy.

²⁴ About India's foreign policy see J. Zajączkowski, *Indie w stosunkach międzynarodowych* (Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2008); A. Jaskólska, *Rola partii regionalnych w kształtowaniu polityki zagranicznej Indii wobec państw sąsiedzkich po 1991 roku* (Elipsa, 2023); P. Kłodkowski, *Azjatycka Wielka Gra. Indie i Azja Południowa w sporze o regionalną i globalną dominację w XX i XXI wieku* (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2024).

²⁵ Jaskólska, *Rola partii*, 117.

At the same time, thanks to the acceleration of globalization processes and increased mobility, the number and importance of the Indian diaspora in the most developed countries increased. The most ambitious individuals were able to achieve the highest social position. Among the people of Indian origin we can name the Vice President of the USA (Kamala Harris), Prime Minister of Great Britain (Rishi Sunak), the CEO of Google (Sundar Pichai), and the CEO of Microsoft (Satya Nadella).

Taking all of this into consideration, India's accession to BRICS was a natural consequence of New Delhi's foreign policy for decades. The group was formed when the Indian National Congress was in power in India and the prime minister was Manmohan Singh, one of the main authors of free-market reforms and a supporter of economic cooperation with foreign countries. It was he who took part in the first BRIC summit in Yekaterinburg in 2009.

Prime Minister Singh emphasized the economic dimension of the group; initially, that was its main aspect. The Yekaterinburg meeting ended with a joint declaration by the leaders—the first 11 of those 16 points concerned the economy.²⁶ In 2010, in his opening speech at the BRIC plenary meeting in Brasília, Singh spoke almost exclusively about the economy; political themes appeared only in the form of condemnation of terrorism.²⁷ Despite this, the joint communiqué was more elaborate than the previous year and largely concerned political issues, including “long overdue reform of the Bretton Woods institutions” suffering from a “legitimacy deficit”.²⁸

The joining of South Africa to the group did not provoke much reflection or even comment in India. The decision was taken unanimously by the founding members. The political motives behind the decision were obvious: to expand the organization by including a member representing Africa.

In 2014 a very important turning point in Indian domestic and foreign policy took place –Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power. Two aspects of this change are crucial in the context of India's cooperation with BRICS. The first is that India began to pursue a generally more assertive foreign policy. The second is that the concepts of one of the founders of the Hindu nationalist movement, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966),²⁹ began to be implemented. He considered China to be India's main rival in the international

²⁶ Joint Statement of the BRIC Countries' Leaders, Yekaterinburg, Russia, June 16, 2009, accessed January 8, 2025, <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/090616-leaders.html>.

²⁷ Opening Statement by the Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh at the Plenary Session of the BRIC Summit, April 15, 2010, accessed January 8, 2025, https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/547/Opening_.

²⁸ 2nd BRIC Summit of Heads of State and Government: Joint Statement Brasília, April 15, 2010, accessed January 8, 2025, <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/100415-leaders.html>.

²⁹ Concerning Savarkar and his ideas see e.g. V. Sampath, *Savarkar: Echoes from a Forgotten Past* (India Viking, 2019).

arena, economically and, above all, culturally. Narendra Modi comes from circles in which Savarkar is considered a leading political thinker; his theses had a very strong influence on the activities of the Modi government. Over the next few years, India-China relations deteriorated significantly. There have been border incidents in disputed areas, and India has blocked access to Chinese apps on mobile devices. Imports from the PRC have also been restricted.

Modi's team has also changed its approach to Pakistan. It is still considered a problem, but it has been decided that the Pakistan issue must be treated separately from other issues of international politics. It has been recognized, probably rightly, that focusing on Pakistan and *de facto* insoluble problems in relations with that country is futile and constitute an obstacle to achieving larger goals in the international arena.³⁰

The second Modi cabinet (2019–2024) strengthened India's assertiveness. New Delhi began to reject criticism from other countries more boldly, while at the same time emphasizing its own interests. This was particularly visible after Russia began its full-scale aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. India refused to condemn or even name the aggressor, but pursued a policy of openness towards all sides, trying to present itself as a potential mediator between Moscow and Kyiv. At the same time, the issue of the need for reforms of the United Nations, including, above all, granting India the status of a permanent member of the Security Council, was increasingly sharpened.

What place did the BRICS play in India's foreign policy after Narendra Modi came to power? The most important pointers to the direction of policy are two books by S. Jaishankar, India's external affairs minister since 2019: "The India Way. Strategies for an Uncertain World" published in 2020 and "Why Bharat Matters" published in 2024. In the first of them, BRICS is mentioned only a few times, as one of many international formats. Jaishankar pointed out that "India discovered the benefits of working with different powers on different issues. (...) (India could) consolidate ties with Russia while helping to fashion BRICS into a major forum".³¹ In his next book, published in January 2024, Jaishankar also lists BRICS as one of the many organizations to which India belongs, while devoting an entire chapter to the Quad, for example. Jaishankar states that there is "a plethora of ad hoc arrangements, like the BRICS, RIC, IBSA, Quad, I2U2".³²

Other voices from India are placing greater emphasis on BRICS cooperation. Shashi Tharoor, a leading politician of the opposition Indian National Congress, and Samir Saran, head of the think tank ORF, argued in a 2020 book that "it is fair to

³⁰ Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar compared Pakistan to a difficult, permanent problem, but one that does not prevent us from focusing on other aspects of life, see Jaishankar, *The India Way*, 59.

³¹ Jaishankar, *The India Way*, 73, 74.

³² Jaishankar, *Why Bharat Matters*, 106.

argue that New Delhi has evolved well beyond non-alignment to what may be dubbed ‘multi-alignment’. BRICS itself is a prime example of this”³³ and stressed that “BRICS serves as a functional vehicle to articulate demands for alternative models of governance and development – ones that are not tied to Atlantic narratives”.³⁴ Still both authors do not give any details of India’s actual or projected engagement in this group.

The place of BRICS in India’s foreign policy can therefore be described as follows: New Delhi has been participating in the group, but without any special involvement, using this format to strengthen its position, and within the group to neutralize China’s influence and block Beijing’s attempts to use it to achieve its own goals. At the same time, India participates in “plethora” of other multilateral formats.

In 2016 India held the BRICS presidency. New Delhi used the opportunity to promote its own country – the main summit was held in the tourist state of Goa. Countries participating in the regional format BIMSTEC, promoted by India, were also invited as guests. The summit was not groundbreaking, with discussions mainly on economic cooperation and current world political events.³⁵ India’s next BRICS presidency came in 2021, when most countries were under restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so it was decided to hold meetings exclusively online. Issues related to health care and the global fight against the pandemic dominated the deliberations. Nevertheless, the final communiqué included another call for UN reform.³⁶

In the early 2020s, India showed increasing ambitions to be a leader of non-Western countries. From New Delhi’s point of view, this is foremost natural, since India is the most populous country on Earth, and secondly, it is also necessary to contain China, which is also trying to lead the same countries. The idea of supra-continental alliances was the basis for the creation in 2003, long before the BRICS, of the IBSA group, which includes India, Brazil and South Africa. This group united the three largest democracies from Asia, Africa and South America. However, it did not show much activity apart from the annual meetings of the leaders. After the creation of BRICS, it became more of a democratic club within this group; currently, IBSA is not very active.

An initiative of greater importance for New Delhi than IBSA is the Voice of the Global South (VOGS). In January 2023, the first summit of this group took place online. Over 100 countries participated, including Belarus (!). The People’s Republic

³³ Tharoor and Saran, *The New World Disorder*, 226.

³⁴ Tharoor and Saran, *The New World*, 255.

³⁵ 8th BRICS Summit: Goa Declaration Goa, India, October 16, 2016, accessed January 8, 2025, <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/161016-go.html>.

³⁶ XIII BRICS Summit: New Delhi Declaration, September 9, 2021, accessed January 8, 2025, <http://brics.utoronto.ca/docs/210909-New-Delhi-Declaration.html>.

of China did not participate. The following VOGS summits were also held online in November 2023 and August 2024.³⁷ Voice of the Global South does not seem to be a significant project at the moment, even for the Indian government itself, but it is worth noting its existence in this context and the fact that - also thanks to the choice of a virtual formula that was not time- or logistically burdensome - over 100 countries participated in the deliberations of each summit.

Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 forced India to pursue a more active foreign policy. From the very beginning, India avoided describing Russia as an aggressor, but in many declarations it recognized Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. According to unofficial information, New Delhi was supposed to be pressuring Moscow to bring about peace talks, and during Modi's talks with Putin, this topic was also supposed to come up, with Modi trying to persuade his interlocutor to end the war.³⁸ At the same time, India was developing relations with Western countries, especially the United States, and in August 2024, Modi even visited Warsaw and Kyiv.³⁹ On the other hand, India helped Russia economically by becoming the main recipient of Russian oil, which was subject to sanctions by many countries.⁴⁰

In 2023, India held the presidency of the G20 Group. The official slogan of the Indian presidency was the Sanskrit phrase that Modi had been promoting in international relations for some time: "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (*The world is one family*) - this expression well reflects both India's thinking about the world and its *modus operandi*.⁴¹ During its presidency of the G20, India organized countless meetings in many places in the country, trying to show itself as a developed country and a global leader. The most important event of the Indian presidency was the admission to the organization - at India's initiative - of the African Union, which took place at the G20 leaders' summit in New Delhi in September 2023.

Both of India's BRICS presidencies stand in shocking contrast to India's G20 presidency. While BRICS was treated as a limited promotion of tourism (2016) or a

³⁷ The 3rd Voice of Global South Summit 2024, August 14, 2024, accessed January 9, 2025, https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38161/The_3rd_Voice_of_Global_South_Summit_2024#:~:text=India will host the 3rd,India's philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.

³⁸ "Modi calls for peace in Ukraine as he meets Putin at BRICS summit," *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/shadow-ukraine-war-hangs-over-putins-brics-summit-russia-2024-10-21/>.

³⁹ About Modi's visit to Warsaw and Polish-Indian relations see M. Bonikowska, T. Łukaszuk and B. Surdel, *Indie i Polska. Czas na strategiczne partnerstwo* (Centrum Stosunków Międzynarodowych, 2024).

⁴⁰ "India surpasses China to become Russia's top oil buyer in July," *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/india-surpasses-china-become-russias-top-oil-buyer-july-2024-08-22/>.

⁴¹ "English translation of Prime Minister's remarks at the G20 Summit Session 1," September 9, 2023, accessed January 9, 2025, https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/37083/English_translation_of_Prime_Ministers_remarks_at_the_G20_Summit_Session_1.

series of unpublicized online events (2021), throughout 2023 the entire state apparatus worked on G20 meetings organized all over the country; one could say that every corner of India was involved in the G20. The aim was to present India as a modern country, one of the most important in the world.

The BRICS expansion in August 2023 – Johannesburg Summit

More and more countries were interested in joining BRICS, and the organization itself also began to send signals that the expansion was possible. Discussions on a possible enlargement existed both within BRICS and outside it from the very beginning. In 2017, PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi spoke openly about the possibility of BRICS expansion: “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”.⁴² These discussions intensified after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of those were media speculations and enigmatic statements by leaders of various countries, both BRICS members and potential candidates.

It is not entirely clear which countries applied to join BRICS before the Johannesburg summit. These were certainly the countries that were eventually accepted, although there was talk behind the scenes that the group was initially broader and could have included more than 40 countries.⁴³ Ultimately, the summit decided to accept the following countries: Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates.

Egypt lobbied the most, especially in India. New Delhi’s relations with Cairo have traditionally been good since the Non-Aligned Movement, but in the first two decades of the 21st century they hardly exceeded routine. In 2022 and 2023, Egypt put a lot of effort into raising the level of relations with India. In January 2023, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was the chief guest on Republic Day parade in New Delhi.⁴⁴ Modi returned the visit in June 2023.⁴⁵ An additional advantage for Egypt was the fact that it had been a member of the New Development Bank since 2021.⁴⁶

The United Arab Emirates has also been a member of the NDB since 2021, and its BRICS bid has not been widely controversial. Saudi Arabia and Argentina have been considered as potential members for some time. Ethiopia’s bid has been raising

⁴² “BRICS mechanism will shine more brightly: Chinese FM,” *Xinhua*, March 8, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-03/08/c_136112470.htm.

⁴³ “BRICS divisions re-emerge ahead of critical expansion debate,” *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/brics-leaders-meet-south-africa-bloc-weighs-expansion-2023-08-22/>.

⁴⁴ “A grand revival: On India-egypt ties,” *The Hindu*, June 26, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/a-grand-revival-on-india-egypt-ties/article67012330.ece>.

⁴⁵ “Egypt and India bolster ties as Modi makes first trip to Cairo,” *Al Jazeera*, June 25, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/25/egypt-and-india-bolster-ties-as-modi-makes-first-trip-to-cairo>.

⁴⁶ New Development Bank, “NDB admits Egypt as new member,” January 16, 2023, <https://www.ndb.int/news/ndb-admits-egypt-as-new-member/>.

doubts, including in India, as the country is not a strong economy and is embroiled in internal and regional conflicts.⁴⁷ India's relations with Iran are quite complex, but traditionally at least correct. Just before the Johannesburg summit, Iranian President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi called Narendra Modi and lobbied for his country's admission to BRICS.⁴⁸ A day before the Johannesburg summit, Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra said that India "has positive intent, open mind on BRICS expansion".⁴⁹

The Johannesburg Summit took place on August 22–24, 2023. In addition to the members, all African countries, Belarus, Palestine, and Bangladesh were invited to participate. The expansion of the group was one of the main points on the agenda. It is not clear how the decision was made, as there were no BRICS rules for accepting or rejecting the candidacy of a member country. There are also no criteria for member countries.

How were the new countries accepted? Perhaps S. Jaishankar described it best: "The commentary that accompanied the expansion of BRICS in South Africa in August 2023 merits some observation. Much of it suggested that the US specifically, and the West generally, were the elephants in the room. The truth, in fact, was very different. The outcomes were an intricate negotiations to find common ground among the powers that were actually there. Each one of them had their own reasons to chart and independent path and there were overlaps between them. The six invited countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia and Argentina) all have strong and established relationships with India, as indeed with other BRICS members. Their own inclinations are very much towards multipolarity".⁵⁰ The final decision was taken, it seems, unanimously. "India fully supports the expansion of BRICS membership and welcomes moving forward based on this consensus" Modi said at the Johannesburg summit.⁵¹

Six countries were invited to join from January 1, 2024. In December 2023, Argentina withdrew its candidacy after the change of government.⁵² Saudi Arabia

⁴⁷ G. Singh, "The changing face of Ethiopia," January 25, 2024, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-changing-face-of-ethiopia>; Analyses published by the Observer Research Foundation – currently the most important think tank in India – are usually very similar or even consistent with the opinion of the Indian government.

⁴⁸ S. Mattoo, "PM Modi speaks with Iranian president Raisi, discusses expansion of BRICS," *mint*, August 18, 2023, <https://www.livemint.com/politics/policy/pm-modi-speaks-to-iranian-president-raisi-discusses-expansion-of-brics-11692364551665.html>.

⁴⁹ "India has positive intent, Open mind on BRICS expansion, foreign secretary says," *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/india-has-positive-intent-open-mind-brics-expansion-foreign-secretary-says-2023-08-21/>.

⁵⁰ Jaishankar, *Why Bharat Matters*, 56.

⁵¹ "India "fully supports" BRICS expansion," *SANews*, August 23, 2023, <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/india-fully-supports-brics-expansion>.

⁵² R. Plummer, "Argentina pulls out of plans to join Brics Bloc," *BBC News*, December 29, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-67842992>.

did not officially accept the invitation to the group until the Kazan summit in October 2024. The remaining countries, i.e. Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the UAE, joined BRICS at the beginning of 2024. After accepting new members, the organization theoretically changed its name to BRICS+, but it seems that this name will not catch on and the already established name BRICS will remain in use.

Of the new member states, India was closest to the UAE, with which it maintains very close relations, also due to business ties and a large Indian diaspora in the Emirates. The UAE is not a democratic country, but it is a country for which good relations with both the Western world and Russia are very important. The previously mentioned Egypt can also be considered a country close to India. Relations with Ethiopia are not very intensive. Iran, on the other hand, as a member of BRICS, strengthens the anti-Western group there, of which New Delhi is certainly aware.

The BRICS Summit in Kazan in October 2024

Russia held its BRICS presidency in 2024. Moscow, under increasingly severe sanctions after the aggression against Ukraine, decided to use this opportunity to strengthen its position and, above all, to break the impression of its isolation. It was therefore in Russia's interest to invite as many countries as possible, as well as to further expand BRICS. The summit was attended by the member states: the first five, as well as Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia (represented by Foreign Minister), and the UAE. In addition, several dozen countries were invited as guests.

Even before the summit, many countries began to seek admission to the organization. Turkey's efforts in this regard were the most visible; the country submitted an official application for admission in September 2024.⁵³ Dozens of other countries from different continents expressed their desire to join BRICS in a more or less formal way. One of these countries was Pakistan. The formal application for admission to the organization was rejected due to India's objection.⁵⁴

BRICS leaders usually hold closed-door meetings, and Kazan was no exception. The course of the decision-making process was therefore not made public. Ultimately, however, they did not agree to expand BRICS on the same terms. Thirteen new countries were admitted, but not as full members, but as "partner countries". These were: Algeria, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam.⁵⁵ Rumors spread after the

⁵³ J. Heine and A.G. Levaggi, "Turkey's brics balancing act," *Foreign Policy*, 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/10/23/turkey-brics-application-summit-erdogan-gaza-ukraine-nonalignment/>.

⁵⁴ A. Hussain, "Pakistan seeks BRICS membership, despite India roadblock," *Al Jazeera*, November 24, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/24/pakistan-seeks-brics-membership-despite-india-roadblock>.

⁵⁵ "Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand become partner countries of BRICS," CNA, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/malaysia-indonesia-vietnam-thailand-brics-asean-global-south-russia-china-4699841>.

summit that India had tried to block Turkey's accession; however, this was denied by Turkish authorities.⁵⁶

In official statements about the Kazan summit, Prime Minister Modi emphasized the economic dimension of cooperation in BRICS and the fact that more and more transactions between member countries are made in local currencies.⁵⁷ "India values the close cooperation within BRICS which has emerged as an important platform for dialogue and discussion on issues concerning the global developmental agenda, reformed multilateralism, climate change, economic cooperation, building resilient supply chains, promoting cultural and people to people connect, among others," Modi said departing to Kazan.⁵⁸ He also said that "The [Johannesburg] expansion of BRICS with the addition of new members last year has added to its inclusivity and agenda for the global good".⁵⁹ Modi did not attend the entire summit; he left a day before it ended to attend a meeting with the German Chancellor in Delhi, which had been planned for a long time.⁶⁰

The Kazan Summit thus saw the expansion of BRICS to include a whole group of countries, including – importantly for India – several Asian countries, but only as "partner countries" whose status has not been defined. They will certainly not have any influence on the decision-making process, which is most important from India's point of view. It is difficult to say whether the status of "partner countries" was an Indian idea, but it was certainly welcomed by New Delhi.

A very accurate summary of India's participation in the Kazan summit was published by the Indian government-related think tank ORF: "India has been shaping the BRICS agenda and outcome according to its priorities (...) It is because of their [India, Brasil and South Africa] balanced positions on global issues that they have dispelled misperceptions of BRICS being an anti-West organisation and have rather shifted the focus of the organisation towards amplifying the voices and interests of the Global South by focusing on issues such as the climate crisis, economic development and, social equity. (...) As India jostles for a greater say on the global stage,

⁵⁶ "Turkey dismisses reports that India opposed entry as BRICS Partner Nation," *The Economic Times*, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/turkey-dismisses-reports-that-india-opposed-entry-as-brics-partner-nation/articleshow/114596380.cms?from=mdr>.

⁵⁷ K. Bhattacharjee, "PM Modi for Financial Integration among BRICS countries," *The Hindu*, October 23, 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/pm-modi-for-financial-integration-among-brics-countries/article68788584.ece>.

⁵⁸ "BRICS emerged as important platform for dialogue, discussion on key global issues: PM modi," ETV Bharat News, <https://www.etvbharat.com/en/!bharat/prime-minister-narendra-modi-brics-summit-russia-kazan-en24102200804>.

⁵⁹ "BRICS emerged as important platform for dialogue, discussion on key global issues: PM modi."

⁶⁰ "Fact check: Modi wasn't snubbed for this BRICS group photo. he'd already left for India," *India Today*, <https://www.indiatoday.in/fact-check/story/fact-check-pm-modi-snubbed-brics-summit-group-photo-2623308-2024-10-25>.

platforms like BRICS allow New Delhi to amplify its profile and work with other nations on key issues”.⁶¹

The Kazan Summit clearly showed that India uses BRICS for its own ends, without taking into account the position of other countries, both Russia and China. Modi used the BRICS tool to present his own priorities and then left Kazan before the end of the meeting.

Conclusion

India perceives BRICS as a multilateral tool that can sometimes be useful in the largest form of multilateralism, the UN, but only if this organization maintains a certain exclusivity; multilateralism – yes, but only in an elite club. India’s main goal in the area of multilateralism remains the reform of the UN Security Council in such a way that India can join it, preferably alone, possibly with the African Union or with some countries that cannot threaten them and whose interests do not conflict with India’s.

BRICS is just one of the multitude of tools New Delhi uses to advance its interests. One of India’s top priorities in the organization is to ensure that it does not turn into a pro-China club. India-China relations remain tense, despite a noticeable détente ahead of the Kazan Summit;⁶² the conflict between the two countries is one of the most serious problems for BRICS as an organization.⁶³

India would like to lead the Global South, but it realizes that the problem is precisely the PRC, which has identical ambitions, and – as a burden – Russia. As we have noted, India does not support the sharp anti-Western course of BRICS imposed by Moscow, Tehran and, to some extent, Beijing. India’s ambitions have a global dimension, as best evidenced by the slogan of the Indian presidency of the G20: Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, “The World Is One Family”, implicitly of course under the leadership of India.

In this context, India is rather reserved towards BRICS expansion, despite its officially proclaimed optimism. It is no secret that the main force pushing for BRICS expansion is the People’s Republic of China, as well as Russia.⁶⁴ This direction is not beneficial for India. That is why India is cautious about further expansion of this organization. It cannot stop certain processes (apart from the aforementioned attempt to accept Pakistan), but it can shape them in accordance

⁶¹ H.V. Pant, “The BRICS imperative for India,” October 25, 2024, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-brics-imperative-for-india>.

⁶² M. Joshi, “India-china disengagement: Progress on the ground, doubts in the Air,” October 28, 2024, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/india-china-disengagement-progress-on-the-ground-doubts-in-the-air>.

⁶³ M.N. Katz, “The Geopolitical (In)Significance of BRICS Enlargement,” *EconPol Forum* 25, no. 1 (January, 2024): 11.

⁶⁴ A.G. Herrero, “Potential Goeconomic and Geopolitical Consequences of an Expanded BRICS,” *EconPol Forum* 25, no. 1 (January, 2024): 6.

with its own interests. Accepting a large group of countries at the Kazan summit in the formula of “partner states” without specific rights and obligations is not a problem for New Delhi, as long as it retains real influence on decisions made in the group. For India, BRICS remains one of many multilateral formats, used solely to pursue its own goals, promote its own views and impose its own agenda.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required.

Data availability statement

The data for this article consists of bibliographic references, which are included in the References section.