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Editorial

# BRICS in a world at crossroads?

Siphamandla Zondi , Norman Sempijja  & Thulisile Mphambukeli   
Editors

The cross-roads that have been crystallized by global positions on the war in Ukraine reignite the Cold War. The West is united in asserting, sometimes crudely, its geopolitical positions in international affairs. It has over the past decade and a half decided to bring Russia into West's fold in defence of a US - anchored western international order. Russia has also decided to fight back and assert its independence from this order. In the process, the west has threatened the strategic security of Russia and Russia has also flouted the national sovereignty of its western neighbours that the West tries to use to bring Russia into submission. The expansion of NATO westward, like its expansion south with the invasions of Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya is not an innocent expansion of a regional body but an extension of a highly problematic security complex in defence of Western dominance of the world order.

The Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) forum is one of the most significant developments of the post-Cold War era. This is so because it brought together some of the key emerging powers of this period to help define a new world order that may be in the making right now. They emerge as witnesses to the decline of the old order of bipolar (Cold War) to unipolar (post - Cold War) systems of global power. This is what has sometimes been called a uni-multipolar world to explain the dominance of the US on behalf of the West in the presence of other pillars emerging all over the world including in the global south.

The BRICS represent about half the world population and just under half of the world's gross domestic product. They account for a significant portion of world trade and investment volumes. In China and Russia, the BRICS include two of the current permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and major military powers. In Brazil, India and South Africa, it has three leading nations of the global south formations with a significant voice in changing international relations. Together BRICS countries have a major influence on what positions are taken by the non-Western world in global platforms. This applies to matters of social development, economic development, technology and innovation, and politics and security.

United in their intension to change the global power configuration by supporting the direction towards a multipolar order and determined to assert their independence from an American system of global power, the BRICS have a concerning development in Washington and other western capitals. The Russian military incursion in Ukraine in response to what it sees as imminent Ukraine

membership of NATO and the perception of Russians in Ukraine by Ukrainian nationalists has thrown BRICS into a sort of proverbial whirlwind.

In a climate where countries are being forced to support Russia or support the punishment of Russia, or the West's geopolitical position on Russia or Russia's posture on western moves towards its western border, all BRICS countries have chosen to choose neither option. They have rejected the us-against-them binary framework and decided to stand for an end to hostilities and a peaceful settlement of conflict.

The BRICS positions are a lot more united in this regard than we realize. But this unity is strategic and could be anticipated because of how the West handled the matter from the word go. The West basically told the world the options they had were Cold War-like instead of opening the possibility for countries to develop together what could be done first to prevent the war and later to end the war. They did not convene any international meeting to discuss the impending war and decide on ways to prevent it. Instead, the West wanted to lead the prevention on its own when it was conflicted as a party to the conflict. The US threatened military action if Russia invaded, France and Germany undertook a mediation with Russia whom they are fighting. They completely ignored that there are many other emerging powers not conflicted in the developments that could have mediated between Russia, the West and Ukraine. This is an astounding attitude from the West, this idea that it was the only actor that could prevent and now end the war. Kwasi Kwarteng describes how former colonial and imperial powers continue to display an audacity of self-belief that in the first place enabled them to invade, conquer and dominate large parts of the world for centuries. It is a sheer audacity that developing countries and BRICS into a non-alignment formation in this us-against-them atmosphere the West has created.

BRICS countries oppose the use of war to solve problems and want national sovereignty respected. This means they oppose the Russian incursion, but equally NATO expansion. The best way to end these is via a negotiated settlement. This dialogue will have huge implications for how a new world order is brought about. It will inevitably touch on redefining the role of superpowers in a more multipolar world. It will have to create conditions to discuss a shift from militarism to development and technological innovations as central motive forces for international relations. It will most likely set conditions for understanding a better configuration for managing world power in a manner that prevents future conflict and this could create conditions for greater regionalisation of global governance, stronger commitment to multilateral diplomacy and governance.

One can just hope that the BRICS will realise that their current position on Ukraine is of little consequence unless it is designed to catalyse a rethinking of world affairs in a manner that places the interests of peoples of the south and emerging world at the centre.

The *Journal of BRICS Studies* will dedicate itself to understanding the current and future directions of world orders and the role of BRICS as an institution and as countries in catalysing futures that make the realization of sustainable development goals more likely. This inaugural edition announces this journal and invites deliberations from all disciplines, beyond social Sciences. This edition has articles looking mainly at intra-BRICS matters including case studies on individual BRICS countries. The issues dealt with are various. There is a mixture of experienced and emerging scholars featured in this edition.

The process of getting the journal indexed in various scientific platforms is in progress. We wish to invite authors, reviewers and volunteers to help us build going forward.

On behalf of the editorial collective, I wish to thank editors, reviewers and support staff for making the launch of this journal project a success. We look forward to many productive years.

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