

BRICS Is Mounting A Challenge To The US-Led World Order — But For Whom?



C.J. Polychroniou

10-25-2024 ~ Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa held a summit to counter the unipolar power of the US and Europe.

The recently concluded [2024 BRICS](#) (an acronym for the combined economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) [summit](#), hosted by Russian President Vladimir Putin in Kazan and attended by scores of Global South leaders, including Chinese President Xi Jinping, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, was the largest diplomatic forum in Russia since Putin ordered troops into Ukraine in 2022. With 36 countries attending, and more than 20 of them represented by heads of state, the three-day BRICS bloc of developing economies summit showed that Russia is anything but isolated on the global stage. The meeting highlighted the current geopolitical situation, the sanctions imposed by the United States on China, Russia and Iran, which all participants condemned as “unlawful,” and the need for an alternative payment system. The promotion and development of alternative financial instruments to gain greater independence from the dollar is perhaps the most important concern of the BRICS grouping. Yet no concrete resolutions were made at the 2024 BRICS summit.

Still, there is much more to be read into the 2024 BRICS summit than a big

diplomatic win for Putin over Russia's invasion into Ukraine, which is how most of the [mainstream corporate media](#) opted to frame the summit. First, since Putin's rise to power, multipolarity has been a central focus of Russia's foreign policy agenda, as it is seen as a counterweight to the global hegemony of the U.S. and its allies. Beijing's emphasis under the leadership of Xi Jinping is also on building a multipolar world. And more and more countries in the Global South are looking to geopolitical alliances to escape influence and economic dependence on the United States and Europe.

BRICS countries say they seek to provide an alternative to the Western-led world order as they believe it is unfair, inequitable and exploitative. And the grouping has been gaining in strength, size and significance. It is estimated that BRICS countries account for [35 percent of the world economy](#) and 45 percent of the population. In fact, not only have the BRICS countries' share in world GDP overtaken that of G7, but the world economy relies increasingly on the emerging economies to drive expansion, according to the [IMF](#).

At the present time, the BRICS includes 10 countries — Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Iran, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, United Arab Emirates — but more than 30 countries have expressed interest in joining, including NATO-member [Turkey](#).

This development speaks volumes of the rising Global South discontent with the U.S.-dominated international order and of the increasing realization on the part of so many people across the non-Western world that Washington has no interest in peace, fairness and justice, and that the U.S. is in fact edging back toward a unipolar world. That said, we need however to distinguish the discontent of the Global South population with the dominance of the United States from the grievances that the ruling classes of these nations express about the current world order, as their own self-preservation is what is of paramount importance to them.

There is little doubt that the Biden administration's hawkish line on Russia, waging a proxy war in Ukraine, seeking NATO's expansion, pursuing the strategic encirclement of China with the building of defense alliances in the Indo-Pacific (Japan, Australia, South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand) and backing Israel's constant use of brute force in the Middle East while "[shielding Netanyahu against the reach of international justice](#)," as historian Adam Tooze aptly put it in a recent

oped in the *Guardian*, are all part of a U.S. bid to reassert unipolar global hegemony.

The U.S. is on decline, but it won't go down without a fight. Too much has been invested in a Western-dominated world order, and the U.S. still possesses the world's top military. Revealing the mindset of political leaders in Washington D.C., from both parties, to be sure, [Kamala Harris](#) said during her keynote address at the Democratic National Convention that "as commander-in-chief, I will ensure that America always has the strongest, most lethal fighting force in the world."

The question here is whether BRICS can usurp the U.S.-led world order. To do so, the BRICS nations would have to overcome the challenges of economic integration and deepen financial cooperation. Undoubtedly, greater collaboration and stronger coordination among BRICS countries are both possible and have in fact seen significant progress over the years. The [share of global trade](#) among the group's current members more than doubled, to 40 percent, from 2002 through 2022.

However, becoming a global economic integration project, with a common currency, which is the kind of necessary step BRICS would have to take to truly go toe-to-toe with the U.S., is simply not in the cards at the present juncture or even in the foreseeable future.

Indicative of the difficulties surrounding the vision of a global economic integration project, so far only Brazilian President [Lula](#) has come out in open support for the creation of a common currency for trade and investment between BRICS economies. Putin, for example, is in favor of switching trade between member states away from the dollar to national currencies. But even if a common BRICS currency was to be created, there is no guarantee that it would replace the U.S. dollar. Even the euro has not succeeded in supplanting the dollar although a common BRICS currency would surely weaken the power of [U.S. sanctions](#), which, interestingly enough, have gained more prominence as a tool of U.S. foreign policy during the last couple of decades.

Finally, given the huge differences in the form of governance that exists among BRICS member states (China is a one-party state with a mixed economy; India is a competitive-authoritarian hybrid; Iran is a theocracy; United Arab Emirates is a

monarchy) there is no realistic prospect of BRICS turning into a political and security alliance against a U.S.-led NATO. Perhaps this explains the position of leaders like India's [Modi](#), who stated at the recently held summit of emerging economies that BRICS must not be seen as anti-West or even as an alternative to global organizations. A few days ahead of the summit, even [Putin](#) himself asserted that the BRICS grouping is not "anti-West," but just "non-West."

Be that as it may, Chinese President [Xi Jinping](#) is absolutely spot-on when he said at the 2024 BRICS summit that "[the world is undergoing a major change that has not been seen in a century and the international situation is changing and chaotic.](#)" Both Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin seem to be firm in their convictions that the world must shift toward multipolarity, although the belief that multipolarity in a capitalist universe will deliver a fairer and safer world is simply not true, as history has shown. At the same time, they appear to be fully aware of the ugly fact that the U.S. will try to remain at the top of the global power hierarchy by any means necessary.

Indeed, to take one very recent example, how could international law and justice prevail when the U.S. labels the charges of the International Criminal Court against Israeli leaders "shameful" and "outrageous" but justifies similar charges against Putin? It is such hypocrisy and the plundering of international order by Western states, with the U.S. at the helm, that have led many leaders in the Global South calling for a new form of multilateral cooperation. For many of those nations, creating an alternative world order may indeed be a necessary step for their very survival. Whether such a vision will materialize or not, only time will tell.

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C.J. Polychroniou is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic

integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout's* Public Intellectual Project. He has published scores of books and over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).