

The BRICS Format Makes Sense, But Only That Much - Pavel K. Baev



Russia had invested enormous effort into organizing the BRICS summit in Kazan, Tatarstan and promoting this grouping as a model of emerging world order free of Western dominance. After the avalanche of commentary on this event, there is hardly any need in reciting the [odd origin](#) of this group, its present composition and prospects for the forthcoming [Brazilian chairmanship](#). It is still useful to note that every possible [precaution](#) was taken to ensure the smooth proceedings on October 22-24, and only a few hiccups prevented the picture from becoming perfect. Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva found a [health reason](#) to avoid a long trip; Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman declined the invitation; and Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev decided [not to apply](#) for membership. These setbacks

notwithstanding, Moscow can be satisfied with the outcome of the pompous summit, but also disappointed with its output.

The main achievement that [mainstream commentators](#) now seek to claim is the proof positive that Russia cannot be isolated on the international arena. After the expulsion from the G8 club in 2024 and the fiasco of the chairmanship in the [Arctic Council](#) in 2022, this is indeed an essential task, and the marginalization in many world organizations, from the [International Olympic Committee](#) to the [International Civil Aviation Organization](#), makes it even more pressing. This accomplishment is, nevertheless, rather underwhelming for a state that aspires to play the role of a champion of the cause of demolishing the outdated unjust world order and establishing a new multipolar one.

Russia's goals for the long-planned summit indeed went much further than just greeting as many foreign dignitaries as possible and creating favourable photo-ops for President Vladimir Putin. Three [ambitions](#) had been cherished - to emphasise the anti-Western character of BRICS, to expand the channels of circumventing the sanctions regime, and to kick-start a new inter-state system of financial transactions - and the huge [propaganda machine](#) was instructed to make noise accordingly. Despite all the loud fanfare, neither ambition has come anywhere close to fruition.

Even China, which can pull many more strings inside the BRICS networks than Russia, prefers a more balanced discourse, while often resorting to sharp criticism of US "[hegemony](#)". India would certainly refrain from subscribing to Putin's vitriolic condemnations of Western attempts to inflict Russia a "[strategic defeat](#)", so the [final declaration](#) of the summit contains no language that can be interpreted as anti-Western invective. Iran, one of the four new BRICS members (alongside Egypt, Ethiopia, and the UAE), is the [only voice](#) supporting Moscow in excoriating the West in general and the sanctions regime in particular, but the majority of the grouping prevailed in making only a soft reference to enforced restrictions on trade. Many emerging economies are in fact profiting from Western sanctions against Russia, and India in particular benefits from buying [large volumes](#) of Russian oil at discount.

Russian [proposition](#) for abandoning the US dollar in financial transactions among the BRICS members seemed attractive to many populist politicians in developing states and worrisome to stake-holders in global money flows. The temptations and the concerns were, however, proven ephemeral as the idea of building the [BRICS Bridge](#) system of payments into an alternative to SWIFT was found [impractical](#) already on the initial round of examinations. Russia's urge to escape from the steadily tightening restrictions is too transparent, and if a big of tangible evidence was necessary, the advice from the organizers to bring [full wallets](#) of US dollars to Kazan because most credit cards didn't work provided exactly that. Any economic initiative coming from Moscow is inevitably taken by its partners with many grains of salt as the Russian Central Bank found it necessary to rise the interest rate to the [record-high mark](#) of 21 per cent.

Russian desire to transform BRICS from a loose grouping into an organization with a unity of purpose and a power to make decisions, [like the G7](#), is not only far-fetched, but also counter-productive. It is exactly the unstructured and non-binding character of the random group that has no clear criteria for membership that makes it attractive for many non-Western states and offers a platform for useful networking, like the [meeting](#) between the leaders of China and India in Kazan. Russian pundits are eager to expostulate at great length about multi-polarity, and this phenomenon of complex interactions between self-centred and fast-consolidating centres of power is indeed growing - in the so-called Global South, to which Russia most certainly doesn't belong.

In the global West, with which Russia has opted to engage in a rigid confrontation, a different phenomenon is developing - consolidation of unity underpinned by strengthening of various structures of cooperation. Russia has inadvertently produced a strong impulse for this dynamics by launching the aggression against Ukraine, which brought into existence a Western coalition that includes even such traditionally neutral states as Switzerland and Singapore. BRICS cannot find any way to relate to the long war that generates profound transformational impacts on the global system, and its organic multi-polarity makes a sharp contrast with Western solidarity.

The shadow of Ukraine war was hanging heavily over the Kazan summit, even if Kyiv refrained from disturbing the proceedings by delivering another spectacular strike on one of Russian arsenals or oil refineries, or indeed on the [drone-producing factory](#) in Yelabuga, Tatarstan. Putin, for his part, refrained from another surge in nuclear brinkmanship knowing that most BRICS member-states and partners, including even [China](#), disapprove of such posturing. The impression Putin sought to project to his high-level guests was that Russia controlled the strategic initiative in the battlefields, while the West was wavering and internalizing his [warning](#) regarding direct involvement in the long-distance strikes. The ambivalent signal he received back from the majority of BRICSers was about their preference for a quick end of the hostilities.

In the various “poles” of the Global South, there are mixed feelings about the unity of the West and different assessments of this work in progress that constantly hits high obstacles, particularly from domestic political turmoil, so evident these days in the USA. Western cohesion indeed cannot be taken for granted, but the divergence of interests and ambitions in the groupings like BRICS is rather pre-determined.



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