The Relevance of BRICS in International Relations

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Future of Diplomacy: The Increasing Relevance of BRICS in International Relations

It is no secret that the international order is in a state of change. The US hegemony is, and has been for years, in decline. With this, we have experienced turbulent times with a growing amount of both inter-state and intra-state conflicts, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Israeli war in Gaza and with Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the conflict in Sudan. The international system's status quo is being challenged and it will

most likely undergo change in the coming years. The question is then, how will this new international order be shaped?

We are most likely moving towards a multipolar system. In this new multipolar international order, there is an intergovernmental organisation to look out for as a key player; The BRICS. The BRICS consists of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates. The bloc was founded as a way of challenging the western dominated world order. In 2014, the organisation set up the "New Development Bank" (NDB) which lends money for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in developing countries. By 2022, it had provided $32 billion to emerging nations. With a combined population of 45% of the world's population and a combined economy of 28% of the global economy, the BRICS has a key role to play in a new international system.

The BRICS is also expanding. Many countries have expressed a will to join the organisation. This summer, Turkey issued a formal application to join the BRICS bloc, making it the first NATO-member to apply for membership in the Russian- and China-led organisation. Also Saudi Arabia has a membership under consideration. If Saudi Arabia accepts the invitation to join the BRICS, this would mean that the BRICS-countries would produce 44% of the world's crude oil. Other countries willing to join the bloc include Algeria, Mexico, and Thailand. The potential power and influence of BRICS should not be underestimated.

Western scholars and policymakers have far too long dismissed the BRICS as a loosely tied together group of countries without a defining purpose. While it is true that the group is a heterogenous group whose members have vastly different political systems, economies, and geopolitical positions, the continuing expansion of the bloc shows that it is not as fragile and unimportant as once thought. What binds the BRICS-countries together, and what makes the organisation attractive to many countries of the Global South, is the opposition of the western-dominated world order.

The truth is that for many countries in the Global South, the West is no longer as attractive and prestigious as it once was. Many are tired of what they view as Western hypocrisy and double standards. The European Union has been criticised for having contrasting policies towards Ukraine and Gaza, and many countries are frustrated over the West's "inability to underline the respect of international law in a consistent manner". For these countries, the BRICS has become an attractive alternative. It provides an alternative to the western-dominated IMF and World Bank with the NDB, but it also provides a forum to channel dissatisfaction and frustration against the West and the current state of the international system.

A confrontation between the Global south and the Global north seems imminent. The international system, and many institutions within it, is in need of reform, for example the previously mentioned IMF and World Bank. In this future confrontation between the south and the north, the BRICS has the potential of being a leading actor and to act as a voice of

the Global south. While not there yet, the ongoing expansion of the bloc gives us reason to believe that it can become a serious and well-established organisation for the countries of the south. Therefore is it time for western policymakers to stop viewing the BRICS as a simple “talking shop” for a loosely tied together group of disgruntled countries. Instead, they need to start seeing it as a serious actor in international relations that will only grow bigger and stronger the more frustrated and dissatisfied the countries of the Global south grow.

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