

# BRICS+: The Awakening of the Non-Aligned States

Ofir Dayan and Jesse Weinberg | No. 1923 | December 2, 2024

**The summit of the leaders of BRICS member states held in October 2024 in Kazan, Russia, with the participation of the organization's new members—UAE, Egypt, Iran, and Ethiopia—highlighted a strategy characteristic of the Cold War era: non-alignment with a global superpower. This approach persists despite the aspirations of Russia and China to transform BRICS into an alternative to the Western-led global order. Thus, the organization is shaping itself as a mechanism for cooperation but not for coordination or the advancement of a unified policy among its members. The desire of many developing nations to join BRICS reflects their perception of the structural changes in the international system, which has gradually transitioned from a unipolar order led by the United States to a multipolar one. Some member states hedge their positions, striving to cooperate with powerful nations in both the West and the East. In relation to Israel, BRICS member states exhibit a critical and even one-sided attitude, as reflected in their joint statements. This is based on an understanding that such a policy will not disrupt their relations with the opposing sides in the international system since Israel is perceived as marginal, while at the same time, it serves as a tool for criticism of the West by China and Russia.**

On October 22, 2024, the leaders of nine self-defined emerging economies convened in Kazan, Russia. Five of them are long-standing BRICS members: Brazil, the incoming chair of the organization; Russia, the host and outgoing chair; India, China, and South Africa. They were joined by four new members—Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE—following an invitation by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa in August 2023. Two additional invited countries—Saudi Arabia and Argentina—did not join the organization by the time of the summit.

Although its foreign minister, Faisal bin Farhan, attended the conference, Saudi Arabia allowed its date of ascension of January 1, 2024, to elapse, leaving its intentions ambiguous, with its accession still being considered by Saudi authorities. This could be interpreted as a polite way of declining the invitation. In Argentina, general elections held just two months before its membership in BRICS

was due to take effect resulted in the election of pro-Western Javier Milei, who had committed to withdraw his country's application and informed member states two days before the membership was to take effect that Argentina would not be joining the organization. With four new members and 48 countries expressing interest in joining, the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan commenced.

The initial name of the organization, BRIC, was a term [coined](#) in 2001 by Sir Jim O'Neill, the then chief economist of Goldman Sachs, who identified Brazil, Russia, India, and China as potential drivers of global economic growth. In 2009, following high-level preliminary talks that took place since 2006, the first formal BRIC summit was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia. At this summit, Brazil, Russia, India, and China—the four original members—discussed reshaping the functioning of the global financial system and, by implication, moving away from the US dollar. This was due to what they perceived as inequality, exemplified by disparities in voting power among countries in the International Monetary Fund (IMF). South Africa joined the organization in 2010, turning it into BRICS, while complementary financial institutions were established by the member states. The first of these was the New Development Bank (NDB). All this took place against the backdrop of the financial crisis that began in the United States about two years earlier and the dissatisfaction among developing countries with the failures of the multilateral institutions built by the United States after World War II. The NDB was intended to complement the existing monetary system and include reserve financing for unforeseen events (Contingent Reserves Arrangements). However, it also suffered from imbalances among member countries, as some contributed more, such as China (\$41 billion), while others contributed less, such as South Africa (\$5 billion).

Despite its primarily economic purpose, geopolitical events have turned BRICS into an organization of political significance. Russia's invasion of Crimea and the Donbas region in 2014 and its subsequent expulsion from the Western-led G8 prompted Moscow to use BRICS as an alternative. About a year after the invasion, the BRICS summit was held in Ufa, Russia, providing Moscow further validation that the Western-imposed sanctions had not succeeded in isolating it. The same applies to the organization's 2024 summit, following the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Russia is under sanctions due to its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, adding to those imposed on it following its invasion of Crimea, making it the most sanctioned country in the world. Before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Iran held the record for having the most sanctions imposed on a single state, with several waves of sanctions over the years due to the American hostage crisis in Tehran (1979–

1981), its funding of terrorist organizations, and its nuclear program. Sanctions on China were imposed partly because of Western accusations that it has aided Russia and Iran's military efforts, as well as due to human rights violations and unfair trade practices.

The membership of countries under sanctions in BRICS necessitates addressing the issue. Indeed, in the Kazan Declaration, sanctions are presented as a threat to the global economy, a violation of the UN Charter, and even a danger to climate agreements. According to these countries, unilateral measures of this kind violate international law and the human rights of their citizens, as sanctions harm their right to development and symbolize the way the "hegemonic United States" imposes its dominance on the world.

This argument shifts the discussion about human rights, placing the blame for human rights violations on the Western world. This is how these countries seek to undermine the legitimacy of the sanctions imposed on them, using language sensitive to those nations imposing the sanctions. Practically speaking, the unified front presented by the BRICS countries against sanctions serves as a provocation to the West, even as member states such as India and the UAE maintain extensive relations with it, especially the United States. The solidarity demonstrated by holding the summit in Russia—whose leader is under an international arrest warrant—is that the West did not succeed in isolating Russia and Iran, but they are instead a part of a group of significant economies willing to maintain extensive relations with each other.

While the forum in Kazan recommended detailed courses of action for several countries with high levels of crime and terrorism, one of the bloodiest conflicts—the ongoing war in Ukraine—was mentioned only in a general statement about adherence to UN principles. This is because Russia, a founding member of the organization, flagrantly violates these principles. China, Russia's partner, has no interest in adopting a pro-Ukrainian position, while other members, including India—which imports considerable amounts of Russian oil and gas—and South Africa, whose ruling party, the ANC, traditionally supports Russia, have continued to maintain their non-aligned stance.

The message of unity among BRICS members received further reinforcement when UN Secretary-General António Guterres attended the conference, and even shook hands with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is accused of committing war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Guterres's participation is significant, particularly given that he chose not to attend a summit in Switzerland in the summer of 2024 that focused on promoting peace in Ukraine under Western

leadership. In some respects, his presence normalizes Russia's return to the international stage—a move that will draw less attention if the secretary-general chooses to participate in the BRICS summit next year in Brazil instead.

Although the members emphasized their intention to uphold the global order centered around the UN, an examination of the organization's history suggests their intent to significantly alter the current world order—even if not all members wish to do so in the same way. The intensifying competition between the great powers, particularly following the war between Russia and Ukraine, has led to the emergence of a bloc of countries that view themselves as “anti-hegemonic,” aiding and supporting Russia in the war. In addition to Russia, this bloc includes China, Iran, and North Korea—three of which are BRICS members—each with an interest in undermining Western dominance. Thus, the forum has become a platform for Russia to consolidate its position as the most outspoken opponent of what it defines as “American hegemony.”

Beyond being the economic engine of the organization, China's political influence within BRICS has grown significantly since President Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012. The escalation of tensions with the United States and China's deepening relations with Russia during his tenure—culminating in the declaration of a [no-limits partnership](#) days before the invasion of Ukraine—has pushed BRICS into an even more anti-Western stance. However, it is possible that Brazil and India, which maintain extensive relations with the West, would prefer to see themselves as “non-aligned” states leveraging their position in the organization to promote policies in that spirit. The new members—UAE, Egypt, and Ethiopia—also maintain significant relations with the West and are likely to support the Indian and Brazilian perspective on this matter.

### **Implications for Israel**

While the organization's first summit in 2009 produced two short documents focusing almost exclusively on economic issues, the declaration summarizing the 2024 summit addresses nearly every topic on the international agenda—from economics and money laundering to the climate crisis. The broad range of issues may seem self-evident given that this is a joint statement by leaders of some of the world's largest economies. However, this was not the case in the early summits, suggesting that, at the organization's inception, geopolitical issues not directly related to the member states, were not a top priority for the grouping.

Israel was first mentioned in the fourth summit in 2012, and even then, the tone was mild and avoided blaming it directly. In 2022, Israel [disappeared](#) entirely from the declaration, as the focus shifted almost exclusively to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A critical tone toward Israel first appeared in the Johannesburg Declaration of August 2023, even before the outbreak of the war on October 7th of that year, when the organization placed full responsibility on Israel for the Israeli–Arab conflict and its negative developments.

In practice, the forum identifies Israel as the clear culprit accusing it in the “unprecedented escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank as a result of [its] military offensive, which led to mass killing and injury of civilians, forced displacement, and widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure.” The terrorist organization Hamas and the October 7th massacre are not mentioned, even implicitly. However, the declaration calls for the release of all “hostages and detainees,” marking a positive shift in Chinese rhetoric, which spoke frequently on the topic, and until a few months ago avoided referring to Israelis held in Gaza as “hostages.”

The same pattern applies to the war in Gaza as well as to the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah: The forum condemned Israeli actions, but it did not mention Hezbollah and its attacks on Israel at all. Moreover, the declaration “strongly condemn attacks on UN personnel, threats to their safety, and call[s] upon Israel to immediately cease such activity.” Absent from the declaration was any reference to Hezbollah’s activities, including building military infrastructure adjacent to UNIFIL posts, which endangered the international organization’s personnel.

The organization’s member states also condemned Israel, in part, for its attacks on the Iranian embassy in Syria and its strikes against humanitarian convoys in Gaza. However, when these members emphasized the importance of safeguarding navigation rights and freedom of movement for vessels in the Red Sea and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, they failed to condemn the Houthis.

This approach should concern Israel not only for its one-sided and misleading approach but also because even countries that previously had condemned Hamas and expressed moderation toward Israel, such as Brazil and India, signed the declaration. These countries did not push for a more balanced approach toward Israel or for the condemnation of Hamas, Iran and its proxies.

## **Conclusion**

Despite Chinese and Russian ambitions to create an alternative to the US-led global order, BRICS appears more of a successor to the traditions of the Non-Aligned Movement during and after the Cold War. As a result, the organization has become a collection of countries—some maintaining extensive relations with the

West, while others, especially China and Russia, seek to undermine Western hegemony.

Moreover, during the Kazan summit, thirteen new “[partner countries](#)” were announced, including anti-Western nations like Algeria, Belarus, and Cuba, alongside countries like Indonesia, Nigeria, and Turkey, which prefer to benefit from relations with all sides. Although China and Russia view BRICS as a tool to enhance their influence, many countries use the organization to balance and hedge between East and West, undermining China and Russia’s aspiration to present themselves as an alternative to the United States and the West. As a result, BRICS has become a central playing field as the world has moved away from the unipolar dominance of the United States and toward a multipolar world.

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Editors of the series: Anat Kurtz, Eldad Shavit and Judith Rosen