

# Decoding Saudi Arabia's BRICS Invitation: A Shift in Global Alliance

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**Abstract:** Over the past two decades, Saudi Arabia has navigated a complex array of geopolitical and domestic challenges. These include socio-political upheavals such as the Arab Spring, deteriorating economic conditions due to falling oil prices, and emerging national security concerns, notably in relation to Yemen. Adding to this complexity is Saudi Arabia's evolving relationship with its long-standing ally, the United States, a partnership that has been a cornerstone of the Kingdom's security architecture. A pivotal change in Saudi policy and governance has been the ascendancy of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman since 2015, who has embarked on an ambitious program of domestic reforms and assertive foreign policy initiatives. This article aims to provide an analytical overview of Saudi Arabia's shifting domestic and international landscape, focusing on the interplay between the Crown Prince's reformist agenda and its multi-dimensional foreign policy challenges and opportunities. It critically examines the divergent reactions these reforms have elicited both within Saudi Arabia and in the international community, especially the strong support among the younger Saudi generations contrasted with reservations and criticisms from more conservative factions. A case in point is Saudi Arabia's ambiguous response to a recent invitation from the BRICS nations—countries oriented against 'Western hegemony'—to join their economic bloc. Drawing upon various policy actions and trends, this study synthesizes how these multi-faceted changes are interconnected and contribute to a nuanced understanding of Saudi Arabia's current and potential regional impact, particularly in the context of shifting global power dynamics.

**Keywords:** Saudi Arabia, BRICS, Changing politics in the Middle East, The Gulf politics.

## 1. Introduction

In a remarkable move that signals a geopolitical shift, leaders from the BRICS consortium—an acronym representing the emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—have extended invitations to six additional countries for potential membership in their bloc. This noteworthy development occurred during the 15th BRICS summit, hosted in Johannesburg, South Africa. The candidate nations for this expansion include Saudi Arabia, the world's foremost oil exporter, alongside the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Egypt, Argentina, and Ethiopia.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who presided over the summit, officially announced that these selected nations are slated for formal integration into the BRICS alliance, effective January 1, 2024. This announcement marks

a milestone as it represents the bloc's first organizational enlargement since its inception in 2010, and thus, warrants close analytical scrutiny (Euronews, 2023).

The inclusion of these new countries, especially oil-rich nations like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, raises pertinent questions about the economic and political ambitions of BRICS. Firstly, the expansion could potentially augment the consortium's collective bargaining power in global oil markets and geopolitics. Secondly, the inclusion of nations from diverse regions such as the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran, Egypt) and South America (Argentina), in addition to the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia), suggests a concerted effort to increase the bloc's geopolitical influence across different continents (Goldman Sachs, 2001).

This move also represents an opportunity for these candidate countries to align more closely with nations that have, in some respects, provided a counterpoint to Western hegemony. Given the historical contours of North-South relations, the prospective expansion may be indicative of a broader realignment or even a subtle recalibration in the prevailing international order.

It is imperative to conduct further empirical and theoretical studies to fully grasp the implications of this expansion for global governance, geopolitical stability, and economic partnerships. This enlargement may either serve to galvanize the bloc into a more cohesive unit capable of challenging existing global hierarchies or introduce new complexities that need to be managed cautiously to sustain its foundational objectives.

### A. BRICS

Since the beginning of the 21st century, countries that have achieved rapid economic growth, successfully attracted significant foreign investment, and rapidly increased their influence in the global economy have begun to be classified in various ways. Among these classifications, four countries have stood out that have achieved high growth rates due to the advantage of low labor costs and, consequently, low production costs. These countries also attract a high level of direct foreign investment, have been able to increase their export levels, foreign exchange reserves, and GDP at remarkable rates, and have been relatively less harmed by economic crises that have occurred. This group of countries, consisting of Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, and the People's Republic of China,

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was coined as the BRIC countries in 2001 by Jim O'Neill, Chairman of Goldman Sachs and economist (Moura, G. 2012). Key characteristics of these countries include their large populations, natural resource wealth, rapid increases in national income, and high numbers of domestic consumers. As of December 2010, with the addition of South Africa to this group, it has started to be referred to as the BRICS countries (Narin and Kutluay, 2013: 32).

The BRICS grouping is often cited as a counterweight to the influence of Western countries and institutions. While it does not constitute a political alliance or a unified trading bloc, it serves as a platform for the member states to collaborate on mutual interests and engage in collective bargaining in international forums. The group aims to reform international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and it also seeks to diversify away from the U.S. dollar in international trade. In 2014, the group established the New Development Bank aimed at mobilizing resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies (Cheatham; Gallagher, 2023).

The concept of BRICS is significant not only for its economic implications but also for its ability to reshape international relations through the diffusion of global power. The alliance questions the existing global governance structures and offers an alternative model for international cooperation among states, thereby inviting scholarly debate on its future role and impact on the global stage.

### *B. Strategic Implications and Economic Reverberations*

Saudi Arabia's prospective membership in the BRICS alliance, an acronym that initially referred to the collective economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, signifies a pivotal moment in international economic relations. The BRICS association, whose member nations have historically represented emergent powers in the global economy, recently extended an invitation to Saudi Arabia, among other nations. Economists argue that this development is of paramount significance, especially given Saudi Arabia's stature as one of the world's preeminent oil exporters (Narin and Kutluay, 2013: 31).

Saudi Arabia's potential entry into BRICS is not only a geopolitical maneuver but also an ambitious economic strategy that aligns with the bloc's longstanding objective to challenge Western hegemony, particularly the United States-led petrodollar system. The petrodollar system, a series of arrangements where oil exporters hold their foreign exchange reserves primarily in U.S. dollars, has long buttressed American economic influence. Riyadh's participation could offer a viable pathway to dismantle this structure, thereby reconfiguring the axis of global economic power.

The prospective involvement of Saudi Arabia in the BRICS alliance also possesses the potential to bring about tectonic shifts in global trade practices. For instance, Saudi Arabia may likely transact its oil trade within the BRICS framework in the future. This move could catalyze a paradigm shift, facilitating multiple global actors—especially oil-dependent European

nations—to transition from the U.S. dollar to an alternative currency for oil and other commodity transactions. Such a shift would inevitably erode the dollar's global standing, thereby diluting the economic leverage traditionally wielded by Western powers.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia's entry into the BRICS alliance would grant the Kingdom unparalleled access to a burgeoning trade and economic network that accounts for a considerable percentage of the world's population and GDP. By leveraging this broad-based economic alliance, Saudi Arabia could significantly expand its diplomatic and negotiating capital in its interactions with Western powers. A stronger negotiating position could also enable Riyadh to navigate complex geopolitical landscapes more adeptly, balancing its relationships between the West and emergent powers.

Lastly, an expanded BRICS—potentially comprising Saudi Arabia and other newly invited nations—could shift the global economic center of gravity considerably by 2040. Economists postulate that such an expanded BRICS could account for as much as 44% of the world's economy, thereby surpassing the collective GDP share of the G-7 nations, currently at 21% (Cheatham; Gallagher, 2023). Such a dramatic rebalancing of global economic power could not only alter the modalities of international trade but also redefine the contours of global geopolitics.

In summary, Saudi Arabia's prospective membership in the BRICS alliance constitutes a potential inflection point in international economic relations, promising a more multipolar world, significant shifts in global trade practices, and a new equilibrium in geopolitical power dynamics.

## **2. The Geopolitical Orientations and Contestations in Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy Framework**

Saudi Arabia has often posited itself as the *de facto* geopolitical and spiritual leader in the Arab world, particularly within the confines of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This self-assigned role is not merely a matter of regional politics, but also entails religious dimensions, given that the Kingdom is the custodian of the two holiest sites in Islam—Mecca and Medina.

However, its regional preeminence has been continually contested, most notably by Iran—a state primarily shaped by its Shiite religious identity. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran are often on opposite ends of the geopolitical spectrum on myriad regional issues, from the Syrian conflict to the Yemeni civil war, each propounding divergent strategic and ideological frameworks.

In particular, Saudi Arabia has expressed consternation over Iran's expansionist ambitions, as evidenced by its military and political engagements in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, among other states. Iran's increasing influence, from the Kingdom's perspective, not only disrupts the balance of power but also poses theological challenges, given the Sunni-Shiite dichotomy that has long pervaded relations between the two nations.

Yet, the complexity of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy extends beyond its rivalry with Iran. The Kingdom also endeavors to foster relationships with other states in the Islamic world. A

testament to this effort is Riyadh's hosting of the headquarters of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), an intergovernmental body that aspires to be the collective voice of the Muslim World (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016).

However, it would be a misconception to assert that Saudi Arabia enjoys unequivocally stable relations with its Muslim-majority counterparts. While the Kingdom leverages its religious stewardship to gain soft power, tensions frequently emerge over diverging geopolitical interests and interpretations of Islamic governance. For instance, Saudi Arabia's relations with states like Turkey and Qatar have been marked by intermittent strains due to disagreements on issues ranging from the role of political Islam to regional power dynamics (Koruzhde and Cox, 2022;14)

Thus, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is far from monolithic; it is a multifaceted construct influenced by a confluence of religious obligations, geopolitical realities, and ideological divergences. These elements not only shape the Kingdom's interactions with regional adversaries like Iran but also define its complex, and sometimes volatile, relationships with other nations in the Islamic World.

1) The Conceptual Framework of Regional Powers and the Evolving Dynamics of Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy The term "regional powers" is a conceptual framework employed to understand the ways in which states assert and sustain their hegemonic roles within specific geographical locales (Adam, 2011;36). Although there is a paucity of consensual academic definitions for this term, it is predominantly utilized to refer to states that wield disproportionate military, economic, and scientific influence within a particular region. Such states invariably exert significant impacts on their immediate geopolitical environs, thereby shaping the regional balance of power.

#### a) *Saudi Arabia's Multifaceted Regional Role*

Saudi Arabia's foreign policy paradigm has historically been predicated upon engendering stability within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This objective manifests through a range of strategies aimed at conflict aversion and regional cooperation. However, the seismic shifts precipitated by the Arab Spring in 2011 have engendered a recalibration of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy objectives and tactics. Faced with emergent threats to its regional hegemony and internal stability, the Kingdom has increasingly resorted to a more assertive set of policy tools. These include, but are not limited to, the augmentation of military capabilities, the instigation of sectarian divides, and the imposition of economic sanctions and other restrictive measures against perceived adversaries (Adam, 2011;36).

#### b) *Institutional Mechanisms: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)*

Saudi Arabia has been an integral actor in the advancement of regional institutional mechanisms, most notably through its pivotal role within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Comprised of six Gulf Arab states—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—the

GCC serves as an essential conduit for enhancing regional security, fostering economic integration, and facilitating cultural exchange. Through the GCC, Saudi Arabia aims to cement its leadership role, thereby consolidating a bloc of nations that largely adhere to its geopolitical vision for the region.

#### c) *Military Interventions and Alliances: The Cases of Syria and Yemen*

Saudi Arabia's regional ambitions are further illustrated through its active involvement in ongoing conflicts in Syria and Yemen. The Kingdom has been a staunch supporter of the Syrian opposition, channeling considerable financial and military resources to insurgent groups. Similarly, in Yemen, Saudi Arabia spearheaded a coalition of Arab states to bolster the internationally recognized government against the Houthi rebels. These military interventions underscore the dual nature of Saudi Arabia's foreign policy, which combines hard power tactics with diplomatic efforts to sustain its regional influence (Hennigan, W.J. 2018).

#### d) *Countervailing Trends and Internal Contradictions*

Notwithstanding its regional power status, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is not without challenges and contradictions. For instance, during the Qatar blockade, Qatar demonstrated resilience and took counter-measures that questioned Saudi Arabia's hegemonic influence. Moreover, contemporary dynamics indicate that the UAE is increasingly adopting policy stances that run counter to Saudi objectives, thus presenting challenges to Saudi Arabia's traditional role as the uncontested regional hegemon.

In conclusion, while Saudi Arabia continues to occupy a preeminent position as a regional power in the MENA region, its role is increasingly subject to flux due to both external geopolitical shifts and internal policy contradictions. This calls for a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms through which regional powers like Saudi Arabia adapt and respond to evolving geopolitical landscapes.

### A. *The position of Saudi Arabia in International Politics and General Strategies*

Comprehending Saudi Arabia's geopolitical stance and overarching diplomatic strategies is pivotal for elucidating potential alterations in international dynamics should the country opt for membership in the BRICS alliance. Consequently, a succinct analysis of its diplomatic interactions with key global players, most notably the United States and Russia, would offer valuable insights into the possible ramifications of such a move.

#### 1) *Saudi Arabia and USA Relations:*

The relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States has been long-standing and complex, marked by a blend of economic, military, and political cooperation but also punctuated by tensions arising from geopolitical events and differing values. The relationship has predominantly revolved around oil, security, and counter-terrorism efforts.

##### 1. *Economic Interests*

The United States has a vested interest in Saudi Arabia primarily because of oil. Saudi Arabia is one of the largest oil

producers in the world, and the U.S. has historically been a significant consumer of Saudi oil. This economic relationship forms the bedrock of U.S.-Saudi ties, and it often shapes the U.S.'s policy responses toward the kingdom.

## 2. *Security and Military Cooperation*

The U.S. has been supplying Saudi Arabia with military equipment and training for decades, and the two countries have cooperated extensively on counter-terrorism efforts, particularly post-9/11. The U.S. sees Saudi Arabia as a strategic partner in the Middle East, given its influence over other Gulf states and its opposition to Iran, a major U.S. adversary in the region (Rachel, 2018).

## 3. *Political and Ideological Differences*

Despite the robust economic and military ties, there have been numerous points of tension, including the stark differences in governance models and human rights practices. Saudi Arabia's human rights record, its involvement in the Yemeni civil war, and issues like the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi have caused international uproar and have been points of contention in the relationship with the U.S (Hennigan, W.J. 2018).

## 4. *Changing Dynamics*

Under various U.S. administrations, the dynamics of the relationship have shifted. For example, under President Obama, there was a slight distancing due to the Iran Nuclear Deal, which Saudi Arabia opposed. President Trump, on the other hand, took a more lenient approach to Saudi controversies like the Khashoggi murder. The Biden administration has signaled a more balanced approach, emphasizing human rights and democratic values while recognizing Saudi Arabia's strategic importance (Potter, 2017;51).

## 5. *Future Outlook*

The future of the U.S.-Saudi relationship will likely continue to be characterized by this tension between economic and security interests on the one hand, and human rights and democratic values on the other. Developments such as the U.S.'s move toward energy independence and the Saudi Vision 2030 initiative aimed at economic diversification may affect the traditional dynamics of the relationship.

The relation is also heavily influenced by broader geopolitical concerns, including the U.S.'s relationships with other Middle Eastern countries, the ongoing conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and evolving U.S. strategies in the region.

In summary, while the U.S.-Saudi relationship is deeply rooted in economic and security concerns, it is not without its challenges and controversies. The balancing act between maintaining a strategic partnership and upholding democratic values will continue to define this complex relationship.

## 2) *Saudi Arabia and Russia Relations*

Saudi Arabia-Russia relations are complex and multifaceted, involving both cooperation and competition across various sectors. Below is a summary that touches upon some of the key aspects of their relationship:

### 1. *Energy Sector*

One of the most significant areas of cooperation between Russia and Saudi Arabia is in the energy sector. Both countries

are major oil producers and have coordinated their actions to stabilize global oil prices through the OPEC agreement. This has allowed them to exert significant influence over the global energy market, although it's also a space where their interests can compete.

### 2. *Geopolitical Interests*

In geopolitical terms, the two nations have differing interests, particularly in the Middle East. Russia has generally supported regimes like that of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, which Saudi Arabia opposes. Despite these disagreements, both nations value the strategic dialogue to manage conflicting interests in the region and possibly find areas where interests overlap, such as counterterrorism (Suchkov, 2016; 238).

### 3. *Arms Sales and Military Cooperation*

Russia has shown an interest in increasing arms sales to Saudi Arabia, especially as the latter's relationship with Western countries comes under scrutiny due to human rights concerns. However, the Saudi military has traditionally been equipped with Western-made hardware, which limits the scope for immediate, extensive military cooperation with Russia (Suchkov, 2016; 242).

### 4. *Economic Ties*

Beyond energy and arms, economic relations are relatively modest but growing. Both nations have shown interest in diversifying their economies and see potential mutual benefits in investment and technological exchange.

### 5. *Diplomatic Relations*

Diplomatically, the two countries have been engaging more frequently, as evidenced by high-level visits and talks. While this doesn't signify a full alignment of interests, it shows a mutual acknowledgment of each other's roles in global and regional politics.

### 6. *U.S. Factor*

The relationship between Russia and Saudi Arabia is also influenced by their respective relations with the United States. While Saudi Arabia is a traditional ally of the U.S., its relations have been strained due to various issues, including human rights. Russia, facing sanctions from the U.S. and the West, sees an opportunity in these strains to pull Riyadh into a closer relationship (Suchkov, 2016; 245).

### 7. *Future Outlook*

While Saudi Arabia and Russia are not natural allies and have several conflicting interests, the pragmatic aspects of their relationship are likely to continue. Both nations seem keen to maintain a working relationship to manage conflicts and explore mutual interests, particularly in stabilizing global energy markets and balancing American influence.

In summary, the Saudi Arabia-Russia relationship is characterized by a pragmatic approach that allows for significant cooperation in areas like energy, despite underlying geopolitical tensions and differing regional agendas.

## 3) *Saudi Arabia and China*

China's growing influence in the Middle East is motivated by a combination of economic, strategic, and political interests. With the end of the Cold War and China's ascending global profile, relations with the Middle East have intensified. A primary concern for China is energy security, given the Middle

East's vast oil and gas reserves and China's position as the world's largest energy consumer. China's "soft" foreign policy has led to increased influence in the region, surpassing the United States in some respects. Beijing, the leading foreign investor, maintains robust ties with most Gulf countries and has recently acted as a mediator between Iran and Saudi Arabia. These relationships reflect China's multifaceted interests, ranging from securing energy supplies to expanding economic reach and supporting regional stability.

China's rapid economic growth relies heavily on energy, and the Middle East serves as a critical market for energy resources and Chinese goods, investments, and infrastructure. China has invested \$177 billion in the region, including \$70 billion aimed at Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Batyuk and Morozov, 2022, p. 324). As of 2015, the Middle East is expected to supply 70% of China's total oil imports (Daher, 2009, pp. 20-22).

Economically, Saudi Arabia, one of the largest economies in the Middle East, is seen by China as a vital partner in its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Despite growing investments, China's trade and investments with the Middle East are still smaller compared to those with EU member states (Niblock, 2020, p.484). China is also funding infrastructure projects in Iran (Chaziza, 2020).

Strategically, Saudi Arabia's pivotal location at the intersection of key trade routes attracts Chinese investment in infrastructure. China has interests in regional stability to protect its citizens and investments, partly by enhancing its military presence there.

Diplomatically, China aims to strengthen oil import security through partnership with Saudi Arabia and combat extremism (Guzansky and Orion 2017). It seeks Riyadh's support against Muslim extremism and full Arab backing on issues like the "One China Policy," Taiwan, and human rights (Husain and Sahide, 2023).

When looking at China's investments and trade relations in Saudi Arabia, it is evident that over the last 10 years, China has entered into cooperation agreements in a variety of sectors including agriculture, energy, technology, and space. Additionally, the presence of two oil-rich countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran, along with China being the world's largest oil importer, has allowed for the development of special relations with these two nations. For example, Saudi Arabia continues to be China's largest supplier of oil this year, exporting 87.5 million tons of oil (Sağlam, 2023). While Saudi Arabia has long maintained this position, it initiated discussions in 2022 to sell a portion of its oil to China in Yuan. The relationship between the two countries is not limited to just oil; as Saudi Arabia seeks solutions to reduce its oil dependency within the framework of its 2030 Plan, China emerges as a potential investor country that could assist in this regard. Lastly, during the visit of Chinese leader Xi Jinping on December 7th, 34 agreements worth 30 billion dollars were signed between the two countries in areas ranging from green energy to transportation (Sağlam, 2023). Moreover, Beijing's investment talks are not limited to Riyadh alone.

## *B. Contemporary Developments in Geopolitical Contexts*

### *1) An Examination of the Socio-Economic and Political Landscape in Saudi Arabia*

In recent years, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has found itself navigating an intricate web of multifaceted challenges. Among the most prominent are the plummeting global oil prices, repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a persistent resistance emanating from conservative factions within its sociopolitical infrastructure. These challenges are not merely symptomatic of external factors but are also deeply rooted in systemic issues such as endemic corruption, questionable human rights practices, and an over-reliance on oil revenues, as elucidated by Esmail (2018).

Given this exigent landscape, a comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy aimed at diversifying economic input is imperative. The onus of operationalizing this falls squarely on the Crown Prince and the political elite. One salient avenue for diversification involves enhancing industrial productivity by adopting advanced technologies and practices. Another is capitalizing on Saudi Arabia's unique cultural and historical heritage to stimulate a burgeoning tourism sector. Furthermore, an integrated approach to fostering growth in banking, investment, and trade could present invaluable opportunities for increased income streams, thereby enabling the creation of alternative livelihoods. This includes a subtle paradigm shift from merely exporting oil as a raw material to engaging in value-added activities, which in turn elevates the country's competitive advantage. On a macroeconomic scale, the diversification in trade, manufacturing, and the service sector could reinforce the nation's standing among the world's top 20 economies, thereby contributing to its long-term economic resilience (Esmail, 2018, p. 192).

One cannot discuss the future of Saudi Arabia without acknowledging the seminal Vision 2030 project, a pivotal roadmap for the nation's socioeconomic transformation. This ambitious initiative aims to tackle the country's reliance on oil revenues head-on by focusing on a plethora of sectors, including but not limited to, education, healthcare, infrastructure, and renewable energy (Ismail, Baig, & Batool, 2022). Importantly, Vision 2030 stands as a critical juncture in shaping Saudi Arabia's relations with the Western world, particularly the United States. While the project offers the prospect of attracting foreign direct investment, it also raises significant ethical questions regarding its implications on human rights within the Kingdom. Hence, the successful implementation of Vision 2030 is not just an economic necessity but also a touchstone for future political stability and international relations (Ismail, Baig, & Batool, 2022, p. 1304).

Finally, the exigency of constructing an economy that is not solely tethered to oil and gas cannot be overstated. To actualize this, Saudi Arabia needs to make inroads into global markets by enticing foreign capital and human resources. This will inevitably necessitate a re-evaluation and possible recalibration of both domestic and foreign policies, tilting towards a more liberal and flexible spectrum. Such a recalibration is not merely a pragmatic economic strategy but also holds vast implications for Saudi Arabia's geopolitical posture and alignment.

## 2) *The Implications of Saudi Arabia's Prospective Membership in the BRICS Coalition: An Economic and Geopolitical Analysis*

The potential inclusion of Saudi Arabia into the BRICS alliance—comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—poses a pivotal transformation that stands to confer substantial economic advantages to both the Saudi economy and the coalition at large.

### a) *Economic Benefits: Enhancement of BRICS' Economic Output*

Empirical data suggests that Saudi Arabia's admittance would contribute an estimated increment of \$1.1 trillion to the BRICS' collective gross domestic product. This is a significant augmentation, particularly when considered within the context of the group's current economic landscape (Potter, 2017;55; Ismail, 2023)).

### b) *Energy Sector: Augmenting Capacity and Geopolitical Relevance*

Notably, Saudi Arabia's ascension would also bolster the energy capabilities of the BRICS conglomerate. As a dominant actor in global energy markets—often described as an 'energy bank'—Saudi Arabia's strategic role is underscored by its considerable reserves. The kingdom controls approximately 267 billion barrels of crude oil, constituting around 19% of global reserves. Additionally, it is responsible for 12% of worldwide oil production and commands a 20% share in global oil market sales (Ismail, 2023, Plessis, Miridzhanian and Acharya, 2023).

### c) *Refining Capabilities: A Strategic Asset*

In the context of refining capabilities, Saudi Arabia boasts a capacity that surpasses five million barrels per day, both within its national borders and internationally. This also includes a reserve refining capacity that could be operationalized as necessitated, thus providing an additional layer of strategic flexibility (Plessis, Miridzhanian and Acharya, 2023).

### d) *Balancing Interests: A Pragmatic Approach to Global Partnerships*

The efficacy of Saudi Arabia's integration into the BRICS will be contingent upon a nuanced balancing act that navigates both the coalition's interests and Saudi Arabia's existing global economic and diplomatic partnerships. The kingdom has historically maintained robust economic relations across various geopolitical axes—be it Western, Eastern, Northern, or Southern nations—and has generally steered clear of conflict and economic discord.

In summation, Saudi Arabia's potential BRICS membership offers promising prospects for economic growth and geopolitical leverage. However, the success of this venture will inevitably depend on the adept management of a complex web of interests, both within the coalition and among Saudi Arabia's diverse array of international strategic partners.

The BRICS consortium, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, represents a potent economic collective, albeit one that has not yet actualized its full economic potential due largely to internal fissures, most notably between China and India. Accounting for approximately 42% of the global population, these nations collectively command

around 20% of global trade and 32.1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), thereby surpassing the economic output of the G7 nations. The bloc's foundational membership also includes three acknowledged nuclear powers, namely China, Russia, and India (Potter, 2017;60).

At the ideological core of the BRICS countries lies a shared perception of structural inequities within the extant international system. Specifically, they discern an asymmetry of power favoring the "Global North"—represented predominantly by the United States and the European Union—over the "Global South." This collective viewpoint harbors particular discontentment with the prevailing international financial architecture, which they argue is overwhelmingly dominated by Western interests. Consequently, the BRICS nations are committed to amplifying their collective influence in order to instigate substantive reforms in multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

## 3. Conclusion

These aims, situated within a broader framework of reforming global governance, underscore the bloc's ambition to recalibrate the balance of power in the international system and to renegotiate the rules that govern international economic relations.

In the formulation of strategies to address immediate, intermediate, and long-term national security imperatives, it is incumbent upon the United States to assiduously scrutinize the evolving dynamics within the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) consortium. While the burgeoning strategic competition with the People's Republic of China undeniably constitutes a central axis around which U.S. foreign policy revolves, it is equally critical to apprehend the escalating relative influence and potential geopolitical leverage exerted by other salient actors within the BRICS configuration.

It is imperative to cultivate and deepen diplomatic engagements with geopolitically consequential partners within BRICS, such as India and South Africa. This is especially salient given South Africa's observable gravitation toward a closer alignment with the Russian Federation. Fostering such bilateral relationships serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it fortifies a bulwark against the inclination of the BRICS coalition toward an orientation antithetical to Western liberal-democratic values. Secondly, it offers avenues for strategic counterbalancing, thereby mitigating the risk of a unified BRICS front that may pursue objectives inimical to U.S. interests.

However, it is crucial to caution against the over-reliance on "minilateralism" to the detriment of multilateral diplomatic initiatives. In the current global milieu, marked by an array of complex, interconnected challenges that defy unilateral solutions, the role of multilateral fora cannot be underestimated. Engagement with adversarial BRICS members through larger diplomatic platforms is not merely advisable; it is indispensable. Such multilateral interactions provide a conduit through which to collaboratively navigate the multifaceted challenges that characterize the contemporary international system.

In summary, a balanced approach that amalgamates focused bilateral engagements with multilateral initiatives is requisite for the U.S. in navigating the evolving complexities associated with the BRICS group, especially as it intersects with America's overarching national security imperatives.

In the current landscape of international relations, characterized by escalating Sino-American rivalry and Russia's unlawful military engagement in Ukraine, the recent BRICS summit serves as a diagnostic indicator of a paradigmatic shift. Notably, a growing sense of dissatisfaction prevails even among traditional allies with the prevailing liberal international order, originally architected by the United States in the post-World War II era. This order, while having ushered in an unparalleled epoch of global stability and economic growth, is not immutable.

The emerging multipolar reality and its corresponding grievances necessitate that Washington engage in a substantive reassessment of its multilateral commitments. Ignoring this palpable discontent may embolden alternative centers of global power to reframe the international order in ways antithetical to U.S. strategic interests. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the United States to actively collaborate with its allies and partners to reformulate, or at the very least, adapt the current multilateral frameworks to address contemporary geopolitical exigencies. Failure to do so risks ceding the initiative to other global actors, whose actions may diverge significantly from U.S. strategic objectives.

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