

BRICS Declares Support for Africa's Development, Africa Joins BRICS Against Western Dominance and Political Influence

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Global Research, August 18, 2023

Theme: [Global Economy](#)

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South Africa will host and presides over the 15th BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) Summit from August 22 to 24 at the Sandton Convention Centre (SCC) in Johannesburg, purposefully to deliberate on a broad range of important multiple issues, including new membership, common currency, various parameters of development and security and institutional architecture, on the discussion table.

More than 70 states will participate: 23 States have submitted formal applications to join the group which implies they will in principle contribute to the changing processes and further give potential force for substantial geopolitical shifts. South Africa will also continue its Outreach to leaders from Africa and the Global South. Today, BRICS relations with African States are on the upswing, which is in the fundamental interests of both sides, and this could be constructed and be pursued on the principles of equality, mutual respect and non-interference in the members' internal affairs.

Under the circumstances, the new African members will partly uphold strengthening the emerging multipolar world. There are noticeable signs that African States are now looking forward to shed off neo-colonial tendencies and exploitative attitudes by the United States and its Western and European allies, so they have expressed high conviction for creating a new high-quality friendship and engaging in more constructive sustainable development within the African Agenda 2063.

Professor Nyu Haibin, Director of the Institute for Foreign Policy Studies at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies told Russian media that the main expectations from this summit are related to the fact that it will once again be held on the African continent, recalling it was South Africa was the first that started the expansion of the association, thus letting it become more representative globally.

In his opinion, Africa is now increasingly attracting the attention of the international community in terms of its economic and political affairs. This concerns especially the debt problem of African countries, which is a matter of concern, Nyu pointed out. Since the BRICS are now the main trading partners of African States as well as a source of investment, they are more relevant to Africa's development. That is, the future lies with them. There are indications that Africa now relies more than before on the BRICS countries for sustainable development

Reports say there is no clear consensus within the BRICS itself on the issue of Brazil, India and South Africa being granted permanent seats on the UN Security Council. Moreover, despite the BRICS' attempts to promote reforms in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, decisions on key issues in these structures are still in the hands of the US and Europe.

South Africa believes that the bloc could be "transformative" in representing these nations, including those from Africa that wish to play a role in world affairs and ensure benefits to the Global South. "BRICS has acquired a very important stature in the world, with many across various continents of our world seeking to be part of it," South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said in Cape Town.

Now the basic question is what African States are here, what kind of a distinctive flavour these have for the BRICS future. First, as well-known the theme of the summit is 'BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development, and Inclusive Multilateralism' which portrays the first flavour.

South Africa's External Affairs Minister, Naledi Pandor, said while several more nations had shown interest, 23 had formally applied. These were Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Bahrain, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Egypt, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Morocco, Nigeria, State of Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela and Vietnam.

According to Pandor, general interest in joining BRICS has surged during the past few months and this number, in practical terms, indicated recognition of BRICS primarily championing the geopolitical dimension of the Global South, and the whatever benefits relating to membership.



Meeting of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) foreign ministers in New York City on 22 September 2022 (Licensed under PDM-owner)

In June 2023, Ambassador Mzuvukile Maqetuka, who has been in this current post since 2021 in the Russian Federation, highlighted several points about the emerging multipolar world in an insightful interview that South Africa is committed to the articles of the United Nations (UN) Charter, including the principle that all members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means. Since the dawn of democracy in South Africa almost 30 years ago, we have called for the reform of the United Nations and multilateral organisations to make such structures more representative, inclusive of African representation.

South Africa is a sovereign state, governed by a democratic constitution and committed to the consistent application of international law. It will continue to fulfil the obligations in terms of the various international agreements and treaties to which it has signatories, he seriously argued.

With an estimated 58 million population, South Africa is the 25th largest country in the world. South Africa welcomed and fully supported the adoption by African nations of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) which we believe will contribute tremendously in pursuit of economic integration of our continent towards the attainment of our vision: Agenda 2063, the Africa We Want.

The South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor, hosted the most recent Meeting of BRICS Ministers of Foreign Affairs and International Relations on 1 June 2023 in Cape Town. The mid-term meeting provided an opportunity for BRICS Foreign Ministers to reflect on regional and global developments. The ministerial meeting was preceded by the meeting of Sherpas and Sous-Sherpas from 29 - 30 May 2023 and the Russian delegation attended all these meetings in Cape Town, Minister Lavrov was leading the delegation.

As chair of BRICS, South Africa practices the policy of inclusive engagement and invited 15 Foreign Ministers from Africa and the global south to a “Friends of BRICS” meeting held previously on 2 June 2023.

But what today, what is South Africa’s investment in BRICS? How do we assess the level of development, food security if BRICS control that huge natural resources and the human capital? How has South Africa, these several years as the only African State in BRICS, used its membership to facilitate and promote investment from BRICS into the African continent. South Africa has been boastful of its membership with little impact, at least, on its southern African region.

Together, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa represent over 42% of the global population. That’s quite a significant proportion of the global population, but half of BRICS aggregate population is still impoverished and consistently live under poor conditions. BRICS has that 42% of the global population and huge territory, though.

South Africa was a late minor addition to the group, to add a “bridgehead to Africa” says Charles Robertson, Chief Economist at Renaissance Capital. BRICS is keenly aware of the importance of contributing to Africa’s development agenda. More African States express the sentiment of automatically attaining the highest development by joining BRICS. Pre-summit research shows that not all the six African States have formally applied. Further quick search has revealed that Algeria, Egypt and Ethiopia have submitted their membership requests, but Nigeria, Senegal and Morocco’s positions are still unclear.

Peter Fabricius, Consultant at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), an African non-profit organisation with offices in South Africa, Kenya, Ethiopia and Senegal, argued that Egypt would probably be among the first to join, especially as it’s already a member of BRICS’ New Development Bank. Cairo is particularly interested in BRICS’ plans to shift more trade from the US dollar into local currencies – and even perhaps to create its own currency.

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These views reveal common misconceptions about BRICS. The two poles Tebboune referred to – which are growing further apart due to the Ukraine war – are clearly the West on the one side and Russia and China on the other. So BRICS can hardly be called non-aligned.

And seeing BRICS as a useful trade booster misses the fact that it’s not a trade bloc at all. Pandor highlighted that BRICS countries have around 42% of the world’s population and 30% of its territory, 27% of global GDP and 20% of international trade. But only about 6% of the total trade of the five members is with each other.



BRICS is nonetheless a useful economic club – most concretely through its New Development Bank, which has already loaned US\$5.4 billion to South Africa for five projects. But viewed geopolitically, BRICS is less of a non-aligned ‘champion of the global south’ as Pandor put it, than an alternative to a Western-dominated world, as Tebboune says – or even, more pointedly, anti-Western.

This is a prickly point. Pandor said South Africa didn’t ‘see BRICS as being pro-Russia or anti-Western ... South Africa’s trading partners in the West are very, very important to South Africa’s economic progress.’ Games also didn’t think Nigeria would join BRICS to tip the global power balance against the West, as it valued all its main trading partners equally.

On the other side of the argument, Priyal Singh, Institute for Security Studies Senior Researcher, says the motivation for BRICS membership differs even among current members. ‘India, for example, has consistently pointed to its pursuit of “strategic autonomy” on the world stage; and a stronger (or enlarged) BRICS grouping aligns with this foreign policy objective. This is also a compelling narrative for Brazil and South Africa, with Pretoria leaning heavily into its pursuit of a more multipolar international order narrative.’

Questions about the future of BRICS are bound to be there especially when a new world order is being discussed. This geopolitical configuration is in exploratory phases, undoubtedly meant to bring a new axis, the process of searching for new models by the states dissatisfied with the United States policy and the Western, European world. Algeria, Egypt and Morocco in the North, and Ethiopia and Kenya from the East, Nigeria and Senegal in West Africa.

Comparatively, Ethiopia by all standards, is a reputable State located in East Africa. It gains popularity from different angles. In terms of politics, Ethiopia has been touted with an excellent model of democracy in Africa. For his efforts in ending the 20-year-long war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, President Abiy Ahmed was awarded with the Nobel prize for peace in 2019.

More crucially, research studies and several reports have documented additional worth of Ethiopia. It bears the flag of Africa, as its capital Addis Ababa represents the focal point for most of the regional and foreign organizations down the years. Ethiopia and many African States consider BRICS, to a large extent, acting as a driving force, a new emerging force, for global governance and for the reformation of the existing international order.

The African Union (AU) is headquartered in Addis Ababa. The primary task of this continental organization is mobilizing and coordinating available natural and human resources for solving existing and emerging multifaceted problems inside Africa. Some experts argue that the AU has within its mandate and further within the slogan “African problems, African solutions” to showcase the continent’s practical ultimate independence.

Ethiopia and Kenya, and many African States, More than half a century since it was declared politically independent from “colonialism” or whatever, Africa has been presented as a region engulfed with abject poverty, even in the past has benefited grossly from development aid and received substantial assistance from various external sources. Ethiopia and Kenya’s membership of BRICS might not be better than that of South Africa.

Nigeria currently has over 230 million, and can conveniently boost BRICS population. It is a regional power in Africa, doubtlessly a middle and emerging power in international stage. Nigeria’s economy is the largest in Africa. According various estimates its per capita is US\$9.148 (as of 2022), which is less than South Africa, Egypt or Morocco, but a little more than Ghana or Ivory Coast.

Nigeria is a leader in Africa as an energy power, financial market, in pharmaceuticals and in the entertainment industry. Next to petroleum, the second-largest source of foreign exchange earnings for Nigeria are remittances sent home by Nigerians living abroad. Nigeria has a lower-middle-income economy with an abundant supply of natural resources.

Despite all these economic credentials, Nigerian authorities say it is not their priority to seek BRICS membership at this time. Nigeria’s Ambassador to Russia, Professor Abdullahi Shehu, was recently quoted as saying accession talks hadn’t commenced, but he didn’t rule out future membership. However Nigeria’s Guardian cites several experts as saying Nigeria isn’t ready for BRICS membership. They say it lacks economic sophistication – including having little to export to other BRICS countries besides oil. Also, the new reformist Bola Tinubu administration has much on its plate.

Therefore the logical fact is that Senegal, also located in West Africa, and many other African States wishing to become BRICS will consequently not bring anything wealthy, rather expect benefits being a member of the organization. Professor Mohamed Chtatou argues that Africa is undoubtedly the continent best endowed with natural resources. With a surface area of approximately 30.3 million square kilometers, if one includes the island areas, the continent covers about a sixth of the surface of the globe and one-fifth of the world’s land mass. Today, it is home to approximately 1.4 billion people.

He explains that Africa’s wealth lies in its soil. The continent has 24 percent of the world’s arable land, yet it generates only 9 percent of agricultural production. It is incapable of ensuring its own food security. Strengthening African unity has long been a sought-after goal that has never been achieved.

As the need for regional integration and the reasons for past failures become better understood, new efforts are being made to strengthen economic and political ties among the continent’s many States. The main challenges to achieving integration are to expand trade among African countries, build more roads and other infrastructure, reform regional institutions, increase transparency and public participation, and coordinate private and public sector initiatives more closely.

According to Professor Mohamed Chtatou, integration has many benefits. Seeking to join international organizations as well as expressing desire to get representations in these international organization has benefits. But the primary challenge is that the record of regional integration in Africa is so far poor, and many regional alliances are characterized by uncoordinated initiatives, political conflicts, and little intra-regional trade. However, analysts note that some of the external and internal factors that have hindered Africa’s integration in

the past have abated somewhat in recent years, and there is therefore reason for cautious optimism.

Worth to note here that Africans have to learn from the failure of their previous initiatives. Many integration advocates are now taking a less ambitious and more practical approach. In their view, Africa needs to unite not only to strengthen its presence on the world stage but also to address the practical needs of its people. Africa is home to a growing population, abundant natural resources, and a rapidly expanding economy, so it certainly has the potential to play a significant role in shaping the future of the world. As a result, many great powers, including China, the United States, Europe and Russia, are interested in securing access to these resources.

If the global economic slowdown is confirmed, followed by major financial and macroeconomic disruptions, a large part of the solution would be to rely on the African continent. This is in fact what can be seen in the massive investments made by China, India, and Russia (BRICS), which have understood how important this is for their own future.

In a nutshell, Professor Fyodor Lukyanov, Chairman of the Presidium of the Russian Commission on Defense and Foreign Policy, Research Director at the Valdai Discussion Club, and Editor of Russia's Global Affairs journal, believes that there is absolutely no intention to build unified front against the United States and European Union. Simply, BRICS should not, absolutely not be seen as anti-Western organization. And that BRICS is by default not confrontational, there is no goal to counterwork the West, rather to bypass it.

In our analysis and from various perspectives, Africa as a big group of countries with interests which are both intertwining and contradicting can serve both as a model of the future global picture and a strong unit in this world. Notwithstanding all that, Africa has its own strengths and weaknesses based on history, but the balance is positive in this new world. Most of potential success depends on African countries themselves and their ability to build up relations with outside powers on rational and calculated basis in the current world.

In Africa, each BRICS member will have its own agenda, no coordination expected. But then, Africa is represented in BRICS by South Africa. And it would be natural task for South Africa to promote African agenda in this group. Of course, each BRICS member has its own hierarchy of interests, which is normal.

BRICS aspires for playing a greater international affairs and Africa is growing in significance as an essential part of the world, this combination holds the fact that there is a field for common interests. As far as confrontation with the West is concerned, there is indeed no such goal for BRICS. But a careful closer look at international trends and the speed with which the previous international system collapses and overall competition spreads, with the complexities and contradictions, it is really difficult to predict right away how international situation and stance of BRICS, together with its new members and Africa friends, will evolve in years to come.

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