

South Africa Showed That BRICS Isn't What Many of Its Supporters Assumed

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For as much as the ruling African National Congress might sincerely want to host President Putin and accelerate financial multipolarity processes through close cooperation with Russia via BRICS, the "politically inconvenient" fact is that it ultimately chose to submit to Western pressure and not do so. Building upon this observation and the precedent established by the simple thought of sanctions enforcing compliance with foreign demands, BRICS clearly isn't what many of its supporters assumed.

The office of South African President Cyril Ramaphosa [just announced](#) that "By mutual agreement, President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation will not attend the Summit but the Russian Federation will be represented by Foreign Minister, Mr Sergey Lavrov." Last week, "[South Africa's Deputy President Spilled The Beans About His Country's BRICS-ICC Dilemma](#)", which in hindsight was meant to precondition the public into sympathizing with its plight after coming under immense Western pressure.

As a signatory to the Rome Statute, Pretoria is obligated to comply with the [ICC's arrest warrant](#) against President Putin. Even though it didn't detain and extradite former Sudanese President Bashir several years back, his international stature was never comparable to the Russian leader's, which is why the West declined to punish it at the time. Now, however, they have every reason to remind South Africa of its disproportionate dependence on them in order to avoid being humiliated during next month's summit.

[Bloomberg](#) reported on an economist's estimate in early June that "South Africa stands to lose as much as \$32.4 billion in export revenue, almost a 10th of its gross domestic product, should some of its main trading partners retaliate against its unwillingness to take a stance against Russia's war in Ukraine." Although no Western country conveyed an intent to impose sanctions against South Africa if it doesn't arrest President Putin, at least to the best of the public's knowledge, the threat still remains in theory.

Accordingly, that BRICS country's leadership decided to play it safe by not hosting the

Russian leader instead of risking that worst-case scenario, even though there was always the chance that the West wouldn't go through with that out of fear that China could eventually fill the void in their wake. What this goes to show is that multipolar rhetoric like that which is regularly espoused from some South African officials like Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor can sometimes disguise a lack of [actual sovereignty](#).

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After all, a lot of the group's supporters expected that its members would withstand whatever pressure the West puts on them due to what they were told by top influencers in the [Alt-Media Community](#), who described BRICS as a collection of truly sovereign countries that'll surely change the world. It was therefore wrongly assumed that each of them was so serious about this messianic goal that nothing could possibly prevent them from achieving it, not even the Damocles' sword of maximum sanctions.

This false perception was the result of those aforesaid influencers indulging in [wishful thinking](#) after the [NATO-Russian proxy war](#) in Ukraine broke out in early 2022. They appear to have subconsciously considered their misportrayal of BRICS as a means of counteracting Western "doom-and-gloom" propaganda claiming that the return of unipolarity was a fait accompli. Regardless of their intent, the outcome is that many among their audience were imbued with unrealistic expectations about the bloc.

No objective observer would ever have thought that Brazil and South Africa have the same level of actual sovereignty as BRICS' [Russia-India-China \(RIC\) core](#). The West had hitherto been reluctant to pressure those two since nothing that their group had done up to that point came close to crossing their red lines. It wasn't until there was a real possibility of South Africa hosting President Putin in spite of his ICC arrest warrant, however, that this de facto [New Cold War](#) bloc decided to show Pretoria who's boss.

The likelihood of them imposing an unforgettable punishment on that country is extremely high in the event that South Africa defies the West on this issue since the latter would be globally humiliated if that happened. One of its most sensitive red lines would have been crossed, which Pretoria realized and thus explains why it preferred to sacrifice its reputation across the Global South and inflict harm on BRICS' unity than risk the worst-case scenario of maximum sanctions crippling its already struggling economy.

ICC member South Africa consistently abstained from all [anti-Russian UNGA Resolutions](#), yet it still capitulated to the West's implied demands not to host President Putin at the simple thought of sanctions, which suggests that Brazil will certainly do the same when it holds the [2025 BRICS Summit](#). After all, unlike South Africa, Brazil voted to condemn Russia three times at the UNGA and newly re-elected President Lula da Silva even condemned his BRICS partner in a [joint statement](#) with Biden.

With South Africa having proven its political unreliability to BRICS in the face of Western pressure, and there being no doubt that Brazil will also capitulate in two years' time when

it's placed in the exact same position, the organization is revealed to mostly only be relevant right now with respect to RIC. Unlike Brazil, neither China nor India have ever voted in support of an anti-Russian UNGA Resolution, nor are they ICC members like that country and South Africa are.

Furthermore, each has already proven their resilience to Western pressure by refusing to distance themselves from Russia, which is [all the more important in India's case](#) considering that its ties with the US are much better than China's. The comprehensive improvement of those two's strategic relations with Russia also continues unimpeded in spite of their trade with the West being much greater. All of this proves that their level of actual sovereignty is far greater than Brazil's and South Africa's.

Even though BRICS can therefore be reconceptualized as a financially focused form of RIC+, this insight doesn't mean that those other two countries and whoever else these three partner with through this format in the future have no role to play in accelerating financial multipolarity processes. As was earlier explained, the West isn't likely to threaten punishment against BRICS countries for everything that they do, but only whenever something crosses their red lines or could come close to doing so.

For that reason, while the West might try to dissuade countries from participating in the BRICS+ framework, it probably won't sanction anyone just for that or for gradually diversifying their trade away from the dollar. Only major moves of substantive and/or symbolic significance like ICC members flouting their obligation to arrest President Putin have any credible chance of being met with serious consequences, but even then, it can't be known whether this will happen or might just be a bluff.

In any case, the point is that BRICS isn't a collection of truly sovereign countries that have the shared messianic goal of changing the world like many of this group's supporters wrongly assumed before Wednesday's news, but just a platform for moderately accelerating financial multipolarity processes. As long as the group slowly pursues its goals without challenging or humiliating the West, then no punishment is likely, otherwise the weakest links will be shown who's boss like South Africa just was.

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