**BRICS & the future of Chinese influence**

[Dr. Taimur Shamil](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/dr-taimur-shamil)

August 30, 2023

[Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns)

 BRICS has taken a significant step in expanding its mem­bership to six influential countries in the Middle East, Africa, and South America. This includes Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The inclusion of these six countries is seen as a major win for BRICS, es­pecially China. It is generally believed that a new eco­nomic and political order is on the rise as influential Middle Eastern countries rally behind China’s led diplomatic and economic initiatives.

Theatrics and optics are important in today’s world. Narratives also play a key role in global poli­tics. There is a mixed narrative and debate on BRICS and the way China has asserted its influence. It depends on how one views the developments.

The criticism of BRICS is that it does not have any planned and well-elaborated membership criteria. Therefore, becom­ing part of BRICS does not actually mean much. It also does not have a well-chalked-out strategic direction for what the goal and ultimate aim of including these six countries in BRICS would be. It should also be kept in mind that there are limits to cooperation among rival states in the Middle East. Would new­ly evolved rivals like the UAE, KSA, and Iran merge their inter­ests in BRICS, or is it merely about securing a seat at the table? This is the developing criticism of BRICS and its expansion that might see new critical points in the coming weeks.

[Lawyers gird up their loins to press ECP to hold elections within 90 days](https://www.nation.com.pk/08-Sep-2023/lawyers-gird-up-their-loins-to-press-ecp-to-hold-elections-within-90-days)

There is also appreciation for BRICS. And it comes in abundance.

The general public in the global south celebrates the expan­sion. China is their new hero, at least in terms of optics. To them, China is the big country that is out there to build con­sensus, cooperation, and address issues like regional rivalry. Recent diplomatic developments like the Saudi-Iran détente are considered a Chinese masterstroke and a diplomatic win. A plethora of former diplomats in the region, experts, and academics have appreciated the rapprochement, which has added much value to the Chinese diplomatic narrative. The BRICS expansion and inclusion of six states is yet another feather in the cap for China.

As diplomatic developments take place rapidly, it is impor­tant to take stock of the future of Chinese influence.

Influence has many tools. At the moment, the Chinese strat­egy seems to be focused on creating an image that the world wants to see. The last two decades of ravaging wars, politi­cal upheavals, and changing alliances have created anxieties for the Middle Eastern states. During these periods, they have wished to extricate themselves from the quagmire of conflict that could end up toppling governments and kingdoms. The Middle East has been in the eye of the storm for too long. Con­sequently, it wants to see a world of certainty, predictability, and stability. China offers just that.

[Pak Army backs govt plans to curb all illegal activities hampering economic growth](https://www.nation.com.pk/08-Sep-2023/pak-army-backs-govt-plans-to-curb-all-illegal-activities-hampering-economic-growth)

China proposes to put an end to potential and anticipated cri­ses in the Middle East through diplomacy. This is a relief for many apprehensions that the region has had. How long that will last is yet to be seen. Its durability is not the issue in question. The real challenge is putting the fears to rest for the moment.

BRICS boasts to represent 40% of the global population and a quarter of global GDP. With six influential states join­ing the mechanism, the total wealth would be around 31 tril­lion dollars. However, where China lacks is a durable regional mechanism that can actually perform and bring about change at the grassroots level.

This requires cooperation and foolproof economic mecha­nisms outlined by the states. At the moment, the Middle East­ern countries have not outlined a proper mechanism for coop­eration. It is still in a nascent stage. The region is recovering from decades of wars, like Afghanistan, and is infested with ter­rorist organisations operating from the Far East to Africa.

[PM says nationwide crackdown against smuggling yielding positive results](https://www.nation.com.pk/08-Sep-2023/pm-says-nationwide-crackdown-against-smuggling-yielding-positive-results)

Economic stagnation, terrorism, and regional rivalries are some of the many issues that plague the regions of the Far East, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. China is probably not commit­ted to addressing all of that. For a ‘Chinese order’ to take off, it needs to offer something that would address these issues at the earliest. China has captured the imagination of many. The influ­ence has started to show some signs. However, sophistication and political finesse are still needed.