**The bigger the better: Does BRICS expansion worry the West?**

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The BRICS is spreading its wings. In the latest BRICS summit, held in Johannesburg, South Africa six countries were invited to join the group. BRICS, a cluster of the world’s fastest emerging economies seems to be well on its path to become bigger and better after taking in new nations in a phase-wise fashion. According to officials, some 40 countries have expressed an interest in becoming bloc members soon which reflects a renewed momentum in the organisation’s evolution. Despite a sluggish start in 2009, the block has managed to break new horizons following the recent summit.
Despite analysts mixed commentary, the bloc’s recent expansion might be truly path-breaking. BRICS expansion endangers the West as it seeks to challenge the Western-led world order by projecting itself as its potential counter-weight, challenging US hegemony while striving for multipolarity in global financial and economic governance. It also represents the growing urge of the Global South to break free from the shackles of North’s ruthless neocolonialism and attain a position of autonomy, vis-à-vis determining its own fate. Moreover, BRICS expansion is also telling of the new emerging face of global politics that is hinged upon crafting an alternative world-order spearheaded by a rising China.
As BRICS continues to transition into a more concrete economic grouping, its potential to challenge the Western-led order further amplifies. At the heart of the group’s agenda has been to counter Western hegemony and its perils. Although the group lacks any coherent unanimous grand plan of action, there is still an overriding factor that glues the countries together and serves as the driving force behind the organisations newfound momentum. This one point agenda revolves around countering Western hegemony by distancing itself from the west-led rule-based world order and carve a world devoid of western domination.
BRICS expansion breeds geo-economic, geostrategic and geopolitical implications for the West. Geo-economically, the group harnesses the economic power of the emerging economies by providing them with a cohesive platform on world stage to demonstrate their rising economic wherewithal and autonomy outside of West-led order. The grouping has come to be perceived as a rival of G7, in fact even outperformed G7 in terms of purchasing power parity which accounted for 31.7% of global GDP (as compared to the G7’s 30%).
Similarly, its thrust for de-dollarisation campaign involves ditching the dollar and deepening trade settlements in local currencies. This move is imperative as it challenges the dollar hegemony in world trade and also allows for countries such as Russia and Iran to evade the trap of Western unilateral sanctions. The group’s attempt at de-dollarisation and according to some analysts, to devise its own currency have been fuelled by the weaponization of dollar at the hands the US, which uses it as a tool to arm-twist nations into accepting its own preferred foreign policy objectives as has been evident in the recent case of US-imposed sanctions on Russia after its annexation of Crimea and the Russia-Ukraine war.
Geostrategically and geopolitically, the group has expanded to take in the Persian Gulf countries and the African economic powerhouses. This represents a strategic breakthrough for BRICS, particularly for China as it was most enthusiastic country pushing for expansion project as a way to counter western influence. Through BRICS, China has found a way to get its teeth into two geostrategic continents. According to Sanusha Naidu, a senior research fellow at the Institute for Global Dialogue, this is a crucial development as it cements a new energy alliance, which should be dubbed as “BRICS plus OPEC”. The outcome has long-lasting geopolitical edge for China in its race to build an alternate world order.
BRICS expansion has furthered the prospects of global governance overhaul by empowering the Global South as a unified force led by the emerging powers such as China, Russia and India. Global South has long been going an extra mile to upend the West’s unjust economic and financial order which has origins in the West’s exploitative economic relations with the developing South. Their overriding concern has been to break free from the grueling patterns of neocolonialism and row their own boats of economic development independent of the North.
However, despite unified efforts undertaken in the past, such as G77 and Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), it has largely been falling short of the mark and continues to remain entangled in the West’s cobweb of unequal and exploitative trade relations. It is in this regard that the group’s expansion offers hope for the developing countries to remake history by flocking together and harnessing their collective interests and aspirations.
The role of China becomes extremely significant in this regard. First, China, undisputedly assumes the leadership of the Global South due to its rising soft power stature in world affairs, tremendously improved regionally as it was the key catalyst in making major diplomatic breakthroughs in the Middle East and Africa. Global South now has a strong leadership epicenter which it lacked in the previous phase. Secondly, China hopes to bring together developing countries in its ambit of economic destiny thus parting them away from Washington’s economic influence. This is reflected as most of the developing countries grow sick of the West’s conditional economic development agendas, termed as Washington Consensus, and become rather receptive of the Beijing’s consensus. In this way, China seeks to champion the development cause voiced by the Global South, ultimately reinforcing Beijing’s aspiration of resurrecting alternative world order. This development is deemed to cast a shadow over West-led world.
To conclude, the recent BRICS enlargement poses a considerable challenge to the West. The West is no longer in a position to dismiss BRICS as some loose grouping destined to achieve nothing substantial rather it has to admit that the bloc is getting bigger and stronger. Although the BRICS has a long way to go before it achieves a status of a counter-weight to the Western-led financial structure, the developments that the organisation is currently discussing and deliberating are truly groundbreaking.
These kinds of developments such as de-dollarisation, blocs own currency, a separate BRICS bank and the most important, the South’s relentless dream to pursue its long-lost agenda of economic development without risking its sovereignty, represent a growing challenge for the West. As more and more countries would seek to join the grouping, the more would be the chances of firming ground for the alternative world order, envisioned on the blueprints provided by Beijing. In other words, the group’s enlargement is expected to only augment worries for Washington.