

## PROSPECTS OF PAKISTAN JOINING BRICS IN THE AGE OF MULTIPOLARITY

Talha Afzal\*<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Asiya Saif Alvi<sup>2</sup>, Suleman Ahmed<sup>3</sup>, Hasan Raza<sup>4</sup>, Neha Akbar<sup>5</sup>

<sup>\*1,3,4,5</sup>MPhil Scholar, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan

<sup>\*1</sup>[afzalmiantalha@gmail.com](mailto:afzalmiantalha@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*A multipolar structure with growing influence from developing economies is replacing the United States' unipolar system as the dominant global order. BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) has become a major economic force supporting the Global South and changing global economic governance in this regard. With projects like the New Development Bank, BRICS has emerged as a leading voice for fair development, with its members contributing around 29% of the world's GDP. It is imperative to examine Pakistan's possible admission as BRICS looks to grow. The BRICS markets' needs are well-served by Pakistan's advantageous location at the intersection of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, as well as its economic potential in various sectors. Membership may increase Pakistan's regional influence, connect it into international supply networks, and improve its access to development funding. Additionally, Pakistan's inclusion in BRICS offers a chance for foreign policy recalibration, which has been traditionally tied to Western alliances, and engage with India for dispute resolution. Nevertheless, Pakistan's hopes of joining BRICS face formidable obstacles. Geopolitical obstacles, economic uncertainty, and opinions of excessive dependence on China can hamper its candidacy. Opposition to de-dollarization, sanctions threats, and Western backlash further complicates the road. Notwithstanding these difficulties, Pakistan's strategic significance to BRICS is highlighted by its function as a regional center for commerce and energy. In an increasingly multipolar world, Pakistan's possible inclusion in BRICS provides substantial diplomatic and economic benefits; but overcoming the corresponding obstacles would call for astute diplomacy, economic reforms, and strategic planning.*

**Keywords:** *Multipolar, Developing Economies, Global Order, Foreign Policy Recalibration, De-Dollarization, Development Financing, Western Backlash*

### INTRODUCTION

The world is shifting away from the regime of single global hegemon led by the United States, towards a multipolar world where the weight of emerging economies is increasing. While BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) is an economic bloc that has established itself as a

cornerstone in advocating the case for the Global South and rebalancing global economic governance (Mugarura, 2023). These countries combined represent almost 29% of the global GDP and have established the New Development Bank, which works to meet the development

needs of emerging economies. With BRICS' growing prestige and search for new members, the involvement of Pakistan should be analyzed (Desai, 2024).

As a corridor to connect South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, and as a partner of China under the framework of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), there is a strong basis for Pakistan's membership. Nevertheless, it is an economy that remains vulnerable through economic problems, political crisis, and its spat with influential BRICS member India (S. Ahmad & Malik, 2017). Moreover, Pakistan's association with China may incite worry of overdependence demanding a delicate tuning of regional politics (Mitra, Schottli, & Pauli, 2023).

Inclusion of Pakistan in BRICS has massive opportunities to offer which includes special access to alternative financing, an enhanced role in regional matters, and diversification of trade markets. While it does this, it also necessitates strategic reforms, its robust diplomacy, and synchronization with the BRICS governing principles to boost South-South cooperation and multipolarity (Ghosh, 2023; Sheikh & Malik, 2021). This article reviews prospects for these possibilities based on recent data.

### The Evolution of BRICS and Its Role in Multipolarity

The acronym BRICS, for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, has witnessed evolution since its birth in 2001 as a platform of informal bloc of emerging economies. During the conception of the bloc by Goldman Sachs as BRIC, it served as a symbol of the rising economic potential that existed with these nations. These include South Africa who joined 2010 with broadened geographic and geopolitical scope (Hooijmaaijers, 2021). BRICS has come a long way as a major player in global governance, pushing Western led institutions like the IMF and the World Bank aside in recent years (Rodriguez-Triocci, 2024).

At its heart, BRICS is a group that espouses multipolarity—spreading global power away from Western control. Signifying this agenda is The New Development Bank (NDB) established in 2014, which extends financing for infrastructure

projects in member and nonmember countries without the political conditions imposed by Western institutions (M. Ahmad, Ahmed, Alvarado, Hussain, & Khan, 2024). Alongside, BRICS nations have increased the discourse on ways to de-dollarise and lessen reliance on US Dollar in their trade (Siddiqui, 2024).

In the paradigm shift of a changing geopolitical world, the bloc attests to the changes in that world, as emerging economies strive to be included and to play their part in shaping global decision making. BRICS with its challenges (internal disagreements) represents the aspirations of the Global South in the age of multipolarity (Wang & Long, 2024).

### Key Achievements of BRICS

- More than \$30 billion worth of projects which focus on renewable energy, infrastructure, and digital innovation have been approved by NDB (S. Ali, Zakir, Arif, & Hammad, 2023).
- BRICS nations urge replacing dollar as settlement currency for trade in their local currency (Ghosh, 2023).
- The bloc has served as a mere shuttlecock in international affairs, which has enhanced its soft power (Sheikh & Malik, 2021).

### Pakistan's Strategic and Economic Significance

#### Geostrategic Position

Geographically, this position at the junction between the larger markets of South Asia, Central Asia and Middle East constitutes Pakistan at a geostrategically pivotal position. In this unique placement, Pakistan plays the role of an important hub for regional connectivity and for energy corridors. In particular, the importance of the CPEC, a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is well highlighted by its development. The strategic Gwadar Port of CPEC is connected by Gwadar Port with western China's Xinjiang region opening trade and energy routes of utmost importance for BRICS members, especially China and Russia (Z. Ali, 2023). As a result of belonging to the above, this corridor is also a possible conduit for landlocked Central Asian states enhancing Pakistan's significance in

Eurasian integration (Hussain, Malik, & Mahmood, 2024).

### **Economic Potential**

In textile, pharmaceutical and agricultural sectors, Pakistan has great economic potential to spur itself. Posed to service the BRICS market characterised by a very high demand of such goods, its textile sector is amongst the largest in the world (Iqbal, Ahmad, Nosheen, & Wohar, 2023). Moreover, pharmaceutical and agricultural exports conform to major BRICS economy's needs, making it possible for improved trade and the decreased reliance on western markets (Hussain et al., 2024). It could spur economic diversification and strengthen foreign exchange reserves, which will stabilise Pakistan's economy (Ishfaq & Rizwan, 2023).

### **(Zafar, Rahman, & Ammara, 2023) Access to Markets in Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia**

Pakistan's unique geo-graphical position enables it to serve as a gateway for linking diverse markets on Asia, Africa, Middle East and Central Asia. With growing economies under the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) and the latest extension, Africa, in particular, presents a huge export window for Pakistani products, particularly textiles, pharmaceuticals, and food relative sectors. Rapid Industrialization and Urbanization in the African countries have resulted in rising demand for affordable products, which can be satisfied by Pakistan given competitive manufacturing sectors. Additionally, by easing entry into these markets, trade barriers are reduced and development financing access for export related infrastructure made possible, making the BRICS a partnership to foster.

Other important market for export in the Middle East are the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries with their opportunities in energy trade and construction materials. Pakistan could take advantage of its Halal certification expertise and cultural affinities with the region to increase sell food products to the region (Z. Ali, 2023). And, in addition, deepening ties with countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE through BRICS mechanisms

could lead to investment Pakistan's energy and logistics sectors.

Another strategic market for Pakistan is Central Asia which, with its untapped natural resources — oil and gas — has a lot to offer. Projects like CPEC and Trans-Afghan Railway could improve access to these resources; that is, ensure energy security and regional trade (Raza, Alharthi, Shakeel, & Khan). As part of BRICS, Pakistan would make its involvement in regional initiatives much stronger, and thus help expand the country's economic growth as well as trade diversification.

### **Chance to Balance Foreign Policy Approaches**

The joining of BRICS provides Pakistan with a fresh opportunity to recalibrate its foreign policy. For historic reasons, Pakistan has traditionally been too economically and militarily shackled to Western alliances to enjoy any sort of strategic autonomy. However, by interacting with BRICS, Pakistan could improve its relationships with the major non Western powers of China and Russia, finding an equilibrium in its diplomatic policies (Malik & Sah, 2024). In the age of multipolarity, where regional powers are more and more important parts of how the world is globalized and how policies will be implemented, this diversification is crucial.

Pakistan's closest ally and one of the key members of BRICS, China remains a key ally to Pakistan, giving it support under the BRI initiative. But heavy reliance on China has annoyed other partners, chiefly in the West. Building an energy project cooperation and defense collaboration with Russia could afford a counterweight to this even while remaining neutral in global rivalries. Moreover, elevation to BRICS membership will allow Pakistan to utilise channels to connect to states like Brazil and South Africa which would subsequently expand Pakistan's diplomatic outreach and economic relations.

Pakistan can achieve maximal strategic and economic potential through pragmatic, multipronged foreign policy crew that manages relations with BRICS nations as well as Western powers.

### **Possibility of Engaging with India for Peaceful Resolution of Disputes**

Perhaps one of the most transformative prospects in regard to possibility of Pakistan having membership in BRICS is the prospect of talking to India on neutral ground. For centuries, the poor relations between the two have prevented regional stability and economic integration. Meanwhile, an atmosphere for dialogue could be created in platforms such as BRICS, in which economic cooperation is emphasized, while political conflicts are ignored (Singh, 2021).

The economic interdependence within BRICS may encourage both the countries to raise trade and regional stability to a higher level than conflict. Similarly, the creation of improved relations regarding trade will incentivize both Pakistan and India to work together on technology, textiles and agriculture in order to benefit both economies. Moreover, BRICS mechanisms give them the opportunity to mediate third party roles through South Africa and Brazil as they enable discussions on problems such as Kashmir and cross border terrorism (S. Ahmad & Malik, 2017). BRICS could similarly bring on board engagement, including via confidence building measures. With a trust deficit, solutions ranging from cultural exchanges to joint research programs and people to people contacts could help. BRICS at present still faces huge challenges that hinder genuine cooperation such as domestic political pressures and historical grievances, but economic and geopolitical incentives for cooperation within BRICS can be a push for peaceful conflict resolution.

### **Existing Partnerships with BRICS Members**

#### **China:**

The Sino Pakistan partnership, as a cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy has made great strides under the BRI framework. More than \$25 billion in direct investments in CPEC have been attracted so far focused on energy, infrastructure and industrial cooperation. This collaboration improves not just Pakistan's infrastructure but links it with China's wider economic dream (Farooq & Qazi, 2023).

#### **Russia:**

In recent years, Pakistan has tried to expand ties to Russia on everything from energy to defense. A growing bilateral relationship is exhibited by agreements on the Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline and increased military cooperation (Khan, 2022). These partnerships reinforce Pakistan's position as a potential BRICS member by moving beyond the Western and Middle Eastern blocs and turn them into Western and Eastern blocs.

#### **South Africa:**

Trade historically has been restricted, but it is expanding, especially between the two countries' minerals and agricultural sectors. New agreements have started to emerge with the aim of increasing bilateral exchanges that afford Africa the opportunity to integrate its economy (Awan & Pervez, 2024).

### **Challenges to Pakistan's BRICS Aspirations**

#### **Economic Instability**

A major challenge in Pakistan's bid to join BRICS is its economic instability. A variety of structural problems such as high inflation, a widening fiscal deficit and falling foreign reserves are plaguing the country. For 2024, the IMF projects there will be a modest GDP growth of merely 2.5 percent, less than half the growth for the BRICS countries (Menéndez Caro, 2024). Pakistan's inability to bounce back from stagnation while growing its external debt and internal fiscal imbalances undermines its credibility as a reliable and sustainable partner to BRICS. Owing to its economic instability, Pakistan is not in a position to participate in major long term collaborative initiatives with the emerging economies in BRICS which are all looking forward for stable and steady growths (Hussain et al., 2024). The second problem, and one that holds even more weight in this regard due to the necessity of a member country having resources to lure foreign investors, is the fact that the nation has not been able to stabilize its financial system.

#### **Geopolitical Hurdles**

Pakistan's bid to join BRICS is also complicated by its difficult geopolitics with India. As a

founding member of BRICS India has much sway in the group, and its opposition to Pakistan is a sticking point. With the long drawn out Kashmir conflict and repeated cross border tensions, it seems highly unlikely that India will back Pakistan's entry into a platform like BRICS (Mitra et al., 2023). In addition, Pakistan's steadily improving relations with China, a CRIC member, are worrisome to India's security concerns, due to Pakistan's growing alignment with China. This deadlock is geo political and a situation that is likely to make BRICS' inclusion of Pakistan averse to India thus serving as a foolproof hindrance to any consensus within this group.

### **Perception of Over-Reliance on China**

Squeezed between a formidable neighbour and an unlikely partner on the BRICS block, Pakistan's deep economic and strategic ties with China, especially through the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), have tended to serve as a double-edged sword. The importance of the China Pakistan partnership can be credited for the economic assistance and infrastructure development that Pakistan has received however, other BRICS members have reason to be concerned due to over dependency on Beijing (Desai, 2024). But critics fear Pakistan's economic dependence on China may limit its ability to diversify partnerships within BRICS. This dependence could create problems, because other BRICS members may see Pakistan as a satellite of China, jeopardising the unifying voice of the union and hurting the contributions Pakistan can make. Pakistan must take steps to engage with Brazil, Russia and South Africa within BRICS to overcome this challenge by diversifying its partnerships with BRICS away from its currently Chinese relationship.

### **Western Backlash**

Another big stopping point in Pakistan's dreams of becoming one of the BRICS is that such a move will likely infuriate Western powers, especially the US. Pakistan's foreign policy has been founded on its longstanding relationship with the U.S. around military and economic terms. However, linking up closer with BRICS could also be viewed as a geopolitical tilt towards the

East, which might tax relations with Washington (Hurrell, 2018). Pakistan's membership of the BRICS is likely to be seen by the U.S. and its allies as a departure of the Western dominated international order, particularly in the IMF and World Bank. Reducing Western aid and investment flows, and complicating Pakistan's economic outlook further could be the result. A delicate balancing act will confront Pakistan — missteps would derail its efforts at playing regional and global power politics simultaneously while jeopardizing its strategic and strategic interests with both the U.S. and BRICS.

### **Threats of Sanctions on Pakistan by the West**

With Pakistan moving closer to BRICS, and turning away from traditional Western partners, the threat of economic sanctions or reductions of US and other Western powers' support cannot be ruled out. The United States, and the nations of Western Europe, historically have been crucial to Pakistan's economic stability, through trade, development aid, and military assistance. The West perceived this strategic shift towards the BRICS and closeness to China and Russia as a geopolitical pivot, the retaliation may include the suspension of aid, reduction in trade privileges and direct sanctions (Hussain et al., 2024).

But such sanctions could have a severe impact on the economy of Pakistan, already suffering from high inflation, a dearth of foreign reserves and a fiscal deficit. For instance, for instance, limitations on financial transactions by means of Western banking systems will constrain Pakistan's ability to international markets and overseas investment.

### **De-Dollarization and IMF Backlash**

Decreasing reliance on U.S. dollars by developing intra BRICS trade in local currencies is both a boon and a bane for Pakistan. De-dollarization could pull reliance off dollar-denominated loans, but could alienate the Western financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund. Due to Pakistan's reliance on IMF loans to sustain the economy, any backlash like more stringent loan conditions or later disbursements like in recent times (Rehman, Sabir, Javed, &

Mahmood, 2024), will hold Pakistan tight in terms of payment.

Using alternative currencies for trade will make repaying the debt more tricky as a big chunk of Pakistan's external debt is in U.S. dollars. In addition, removing itself from dollar dependence would risk generating currency volatility that could act as a deterrent among the dollar utilizing investors to approach the country, especially isolating it from the traditional financial corridors (Siddiqui, 2024). As a result, Pakistan might be too economically dependent on BRICS countries, and more so with China, for financial aid.

It is possible for Pakistan's deepening ties with BRICS also to collide with the U.S. strategic intentions in South Asia. However, increasingly Pakistan is perceived by the United States as gravitating closer to China, and specifically regarding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (or CPEC), which enhances Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as a challenge to its influence in the region. Like that, that of Pakistan cooperating with Russia in energy and defense can inflame the policymakers of the U.S. and strain diplomatic routine and take economic countermeasures (Mitra et al., 2023).

Within the region the United States has backed India as a counterweight to China's sway. Greater Pakistan cooperation with BRICS may make Islamabad's perceived position as a strategic rival to New Delhi in the US' foreign policy frameworks even more difficult.

### **Potential Benefits of BRICS Membership for Pakistan**

#### **Access to Development Financing**

The greatest prospective advantages for Pakistan of getting into BRICS would be the increase in access to development financing through the New Development Bank (NDB). Summit noted that the BRICS countries' NDB mainly funds infrastructure, energy and digital transformation projects. For Pakistan, which has a lot of problem in these areas, joining BRICS could provide much needed funding without any condition that IMF and World Bank places on them (Z. Ali, 2023). Specifically, this financial flexibility would be particularly useful in Pakistan as it tries to expand

its infrastructure base, an essential step in its long term economic development, and to enhance the energy sector.

#### **Integration into Global Supply Chains**

BRICS participation by Pakistan would further embed the country into the global value chains, more so in textiles, agriculture and manufacturing. As these countries with their huge and growing markets, are important destinations for Pakistan's exports. Not only would it provide Pakistan with preferential trade agreements, but also enhance market access, which would allow Pakistan to diversify its export base far more easily (Sheikh & Malik, 2021). The Pakistan textile industry, one of the most important sectors in Pakistan, will get more connected with the key players in global supply chain particularly in China and India, who are the key growth drivers of the sector in the region through such integration.

#### **Strengthening Regional Influence**

Such BRICS membership would also boost Pakistan's regional standing, by strengthening its voice in South South cooperation and a new multipolar world order. Membership in BRICS enables Pakistan to play a more proactive role in global governance and to change the rules of the game from a Western led form to one that includes emerging economies (S. Ahmad & Malik, 2017). This may result in more equitable representation for Pakistan in international institutions, to increase its impact at the table on climate change, economic development and trade. In addition to improving Pakistan's outward orientation, its increasing regional influence would make it a critical interconnector of other emerging regions, and thus an enabler of regional integration and cooperation.

#### **Discussion**

Pakistan's ability to join BRICS holds immense opportunities but a lot of challenges in the context of a fast emerging multi polar world order. From one side, both from Pakistan's strategic location at the crossroads of Asia converging on Pakistan, it is undeniable fact that it plays an important role in the connectivity of its region. An important partner for BRICS in facilitating cross border trade, energy routes and economic cooperation, it

occupies a vital position which connects South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East(Sultan & Mehmood, 2020).

Pakistan's economic prospects are premised firmly on the existing partnerships with China and Russia. This draws the attention of the members of BRICS, in spite of substantial Chinese investments in Pakistan through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), over Pakistan's economic dependency on China that may defy its proper and independent participation in the BRICS framework (Jha, 2023). The country's limited economic diversification, overweight on China and international organizations, and key reliance on external loans have also raised questions on the long term economic sustainability of the country(Akhter & Hassan, 2024). They present a great challenge to integrate it in a platform where economic stability and self sufficiency are the basic expectations.

Yet, the strategic benefits from BRICS membership shouldn't be ignored. By addressing them, Pakistan could also gain access to critical development financing by the BRICS to overcome infrastructure deficits and its connectivity with developing and developed worlds (Siddiqui, 2022). Moreover, it will strengthen Pakistan's economic resistivity together with the diversification of its trade away from Western economies and forging stronger linkages with emerging economies. Moreover, Pakistan's participation in the BRICS forum would also augur well for the country's regional standing and allow it to enter into the South South dialogue and cooperation more comfortably, which is very necessary for Pakistan at this stage in order to strengthen its diplomatic and economic power in the region(Heeks et al., 2024).

Pakistan's aspiration for membership is complicated by India's opposition on security grudges and regional elite, considering the country's need to skilfully tread through this geopolitical terrain. Nevertheless, Pakistan's relationship with China is, rather, a strategically advantageous one, but it also raises concern about over dependence from Pakistan's side, that might alienate some of the BRICS members, and might limit the ability of Pakistan to develop its foreign

policy approach from a diverse perspective(S. Ali et al., 2023).

### Conclusion

Prospect of Pakistan making it into BRICS is enticing, the course it will entail is fraught with economic and, indeed, geopolitical challenges. In order for Pakistan to demonstrate the credentials of making it into the BRICS club, it needs to resolve its domestic economic problems, and expand its diplomacy beyond India and China. That way, he can only leverage the BRICS opportunities when to strengthen India's place in the multipolar world order.

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