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BRICS expansion as a factor of increasing international tension

Abstract. In the context of the transformation of the world order and the growing influence of the countries of the Global South, it is particularly important to investigate the role and potential impact of the BRICS bloc on the contemporary system of international relations. The purpose of the study was to identify aspects of the functioning of the BRICS bloc in the 21st century in order to identify possible threats to international relations. Content analysis methods were used to analyse news items from Reuters, Deutsche Welle, the U.S. Department of State newsletter, an article from the World Economic Forum, and an analytical report from the Council on Foreign Relations. The opinions of politicians and experts on BRICS were studied using the method of discourse analysis. The results of the study showed that the idea of BRICS appeared in the early 2000s, and the final establishment of the block took place in 2006-2009. Further expansion of the bloc could further polarise international relations, especially given the withdrawal of developing countries from institutions such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank in favour of the New Development Bank, which was established in 2013. It was revealed that cooperation within the BRICS framework can set precedents for coordinating votes on international platforms, as is the case during voting at the United Nations General Assembly. A potential factor in increasing international tension is the ability of aggressive governments to avoid the effect of sanctions imposed on them through cooperation in the BRICS, in particular, through the use of other systems such as the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System, and not the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications. However, 11,000 banking institutions are involved in the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications, while only 1,300 institutions are involved in the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System. Thus, the expansion of the BRICS can become an element of increasing international tension, but only in the long term, since the BRICS countries do not have a clear vision of the development of the bloc and are in conflict with each other. The practical significance of the study is to assess the geopolitical implications of the BRICS expansion, which can be useful for governments, think tanks, or international organisations

Keywords: sanctions; geopolitics; local currencies; international trade; global governance; polarisation

Introduction

One of the significant factors contributing to the growth of international tension and changes in geopolitical processes in the 21st century is the weight gain of less influential actors in international relations to this day. In 2025, the BRICS expansion process (acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) took on a new meaning and relevance, due to changes in the global balance of power, increased competition between leading powers, and the gradual growth of the role of the Global South in comparison with the Global North. In addition, in the context of increasing multipolarity in the international system, BRICS seeks to strengthen its influence on alternative Western institutions and mechanisms, which adds new challenges to the global governance system. Another factor that makes it necessary to investigate this topic is the growing tension between the BRICS countries and traditional Western unions such as the G7 (Group of Seven). The expansion of BRICS by attracting new members contributes to the establishment of alternative political and economic relationships that can change the structure of international security and the global economy. However, the relevance of the topic is added by the uncertainty and difference in the strategic interests of BRICS members regarding the future of their own development. The security factor of BRICS expansion deserves special attention. Participants may have different geopolitical interests, their own regional challenges, border conflicts, economic sanctions, and instability in internal politics. This raises the question of whether there is a coherent common policy within the BRICS that would contribute to better understanding in the community. But better coordination of some geopolitically aggressive countries can cause serious international tension.

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According to B.T.F. Lee & J.P. Sims (2024), the gradual evolution and expansion of the BRICS, together with the strategic inclusion of countries from different regions, are driving changes in the global economic paradigm. The inclusion of African and Gulf countries in the BRICS, which creates a diversified composition of the organisation, strengthens the bloc's economic and political influence, and paves the way for a more interconnected global trade landscape. E. Moch (2024) also noted that joining more states to the BRICS and increasing its capacity could significantly strengthen its role in global governance, and undermine the influence of Western organisations of the same type. The expansion of BRICS also plays a role in controlling resources, as the inclusion of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, which have large oil and gas reserves, will increase the bloc's presence in the international energy sector. Thus, the expansion of the BRICS is considered by researchers as a key factor in the transformation of the global economic paradigm, strengthening the influence of the bloc in world politics, strengthening its role in the global governance system and strategic control over energy resources. M.B. Saaida (2023) wrote about the gradual de-dollarisation of the BRICS countries, which could have serious global consequences. For the BRICS countries themselves, this will create greater autonomy, reducing the susceptibility to sanctions. In addition, the creation or transition to new currencies can contribute to the creation of a new political bloc. However, the BRICS countries' withdrawal from the USD could lead to potentially even more hostility from the US government (United States of America), deterioration of interstate relations, and, in extreme cases, direct violent conflicts. In the context of the BRICS extension, the conclusions of M.B. Saaida help to understand not only diplomatic tensions in the world, but also financial and political ones.

H.J. Freddy & C.J. Thomas (2023) noted that the most important aspect of the functioning of the BRICS is the presence of competition in its three members, namely Russia, China, and India. In fact, because of this, while the BRICS has the potential to participate effectively in global governance, it will play only a secondary role in the liberal world order led by Western democracies. The latest "cold war" between the US and China, as emphasised by R. Gouvea & M. Gutierrez (2023), highlighted the importance of expanding the BRICS for participating countries, which is also accompanied by the expansion of NATO's influence in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition, numerous Western sanctions against China and Russia, and therefore even greater polarisation, will lead to drastic changes in global trade and supply chains in the future. The problems described by the researchers point to geopolitical rivalry as one of the consequences of the expansion of the BRICS, and the inefficiency of the BRICS due to the fragmented economy of the member countries, which weakens its influence. According to M.K. Özekin & E. Sune (2023), although the BRICS countries strive to jointly transform the world into a more inclusive and multipolar one, the bloc still has diversified social structures. In addition, the BRICS is not the only power bloc capable of shaping the norms, ideas, institutions, and rules of the new world order. This helps in evaluating the actual capabilities of BRICS compared to other blocs. The polarisation of foreign policy within the BRICS was investigated by A. Humeniuk & V. Boiko (2024). The researchers identified contradictions on the example of the ambiguous position of the Brazilian government regarding Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. On the one hand, according to the votes of Brazil in the UN (United Nations) in 2022-2023, the country supported the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and on the other hand, the Brazilian government took a neutral position and maintained close ties with the Russian government. Such contradictions directly affect the process of making consolidated decisions, and therefore do not contribute to the expansion of the bloc, and, accordingly, are a factor of international stability. However, Brazil, along with other BRICS members (China, India, and South Africa), as noted by S.V. Tolstov (2023), took advantage of lower prices for Russian commodities.

Thus, despite considerable attention to the activities of the BRICS, the scientific literature still does not sufficiently elaborate on the impact of its expansion on international security, and the potential escalation of tension in the global system. The findings demonstrated significant variability in approaches to the assessment of BRICS – from consideration of the bloc as a tool of global polarisation to criticism of its institutional weakness. Insufficient attention was also paid to the long-term impact of the bloc's expansion on global security. Considering the above, the purpose of the study was to analyse the activities of the BRICS during its expansion in order to understand possible threats to international relations. The objectives of the study were to explore the history of the bloc's establishment, analyse the criticism of experts and researchers regarding its expansion.

Materials and methods

The history of the BRICS bloc was investigated using content analysis of reports and analytical materials, which highlighted the advantages of joining the BRICS for new member countries. The results of the analytical report of the American investment bank Goldman Sachs (O'Neill, 2001), publications of the Brazilian research organisation Institute of Applied Economic Research (n.d.) and the World Economic Forum (Feingold, 2024). The specifics of Argentina's foreign policy course towards the BRICS were analysed by BBC News (Plummer, 2023). Indonesian politics was studied by news on the websites Aljazeera and Jakartaglobe (Llewellyn, 2023; Shofa, 2024). Some aspects of Indonesian and BRICS politics were explored in Deutsche Welle news (Rahn, 2025). The issue of Saudi Arabia's membership in the BRICS was analysed by Swissinfo news and the newsletter of U.S. Department of State (Saudi Arabia is..., 2025; U.S. Department of State, 2025b).

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the GDP levels of BRICS member countries based on data from the World Bank (2025). The BRICS expansion process was analysed based on the publication Council on Foreign Relations (Ferragamo, 2024). According to the website of New Development Bank (2025), the number of funded projects and organisational structure were analysed. Publications critical of BRICS were selected by experts based on the time indicator, namely for the last 3 years. The sample of experts included representatives from BRICS member countries, the United States, and the EU (European Union). When considering criticism, ethical standards for working with public sources and interviews were observed in accordance with the European Commission's guidelines on ethics and data protection (European Commission, 2021). The attitude of experts to the functioning of the BRICS was analysed according to the data of the online platform for dialogue on international politics and security IPG (International Politics and Society), including the opinions of the former British finance minister and leading politicians (O'Neill, 2024; Rahn, 2025). In particular, the IPG website used discourse analysis to analyse the attitude towards BRICS of B. Chellaney (2025), an expert in geostrategic studies at the Centre for Policy Analysis in New Delhi.

The attitude of US President Donald Trump was analysed based on a Reuters publication (Shakil, 2025). The Economic Times examined the attitude of the White House communications adviser on national security, J. Kirby regarding the BRICS extension based on the World Bank ("We don't view..., 2024). In addition to the above, the publication of the speech by UN Secretary-General A. Guterres during the 16th BRICS summit was analysed (United Nations Secretary-General, 2024). Additionally, a publication by Tasnim News Agency regarding the words of M. Rubio (US Politician..., 2024) was examined. M. Rubio's biographical information was analysed based on data from the U.S. Department of State website to reflect the attitude of U.S. government officials in 2025 towards attempts to manipulate the USD as an international trade currency (U.S. Department..., 2025a). Information on intra-BRICS trade was obtained from Deutsche Welle news (Martin, 2025).

In addition to the above, the Voanews website analysed the news about the establishment of a New Development Bank (Powell, 2013). The website of New Development Bank (2025a; 2025b) also analysed investment projects for BRICS member countries. As part of the content analysis of mass media, the aspect of trading in local currencies was studied (Betz, 2023; China, Brazil strike..., 2024; World Bank, 2025). To assess the possibilities for circumventing sanctions, an article from the Foreign Policy Research Institute was examined (Mooradian, 2024). News from RBC-Ukraine was also analysed (Dmytriieva, 2023). Additionally, information on SWIFT (2025) (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications) was investigated. The voting processes of BRICS member countries at the UN were studied on the official website of the United Nations Digital Library (United Nations General Assembly, 2022; 2023). The paper by the Atlantic Council was also analysed (Tran, 2024). Content analysis was used to determine the cooperation of BRICS countries on international platforms (UNFCCC, 2023; Ryding, 2024).

Results

Prerequisites for the establishment and transformation of the BRICS bloc. The original idea of creating a state association BRICS was formulated by the British economist J. O'Neill (2001). The main theses of this paper were that in the coming years, real GDP (gross domestic product) indicators in large emerging market economies will be higher than in the G7 countries. At the end of 2000, GDP in USD in terms of purchasing power parity in countries such as Brazil, Russia, India, and China was approximately 23.3% of global GDP, and at the time of writing the paper by J. O'Neill, the share of the BRIC in global GDP was 8%. The researcher also added that in the next 10 years, the weight of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) and, in particular, China in global GDP will only grow, which will raise questions about the global economic impact of fiscal and monetary policy in the BRIC countries. In addition, the researcher noted that considering the prospects, it is necessary to reorganise world political forums and adjust the composition of the G7 to include representatives of the BRIC in it. According to a research organisation from Brazil, the Institute of Applied Economic Research (n.d.), as of 2003, the share of global GDP of the BRIC countries was 9%, and in 2009 this figure increased to 14%. Until 2006, the BRIC countries were not merged into one mechanism. However, this changed in 2006, when the BRIC foreign ministers met on the sidelines of the 61st UN General Assembly. Together with the establishment of the "BRIC" concept, a new group of countries appeared on the international arena, which jointly acted and made decisions, which was called BRIC. Later, in 2011, they were joined by the government of the Republic of South Africa, and the mechanism itself received a new name "BRICS".

The large-scale expansion of the BRICS took place after the 2023 summit, when the bloc officially invited six countries – Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE (United Arab Emirates) (Feingold, 2024). This list looked like this, since the governments in force at that time either supported the general foreign policy course of the BRICS countries, were neutral in relations with Western democracies, or even competed with them. This statement remained relevant for 2025, with the exception of Argentina. In December 2023, the newly elected President of Argentina, J. Milei, in a letter to BRICS leaders, said that the decisions of the previous government have been revised and changed (Plummer, 2023). This letter also noted that the foreign policy course of the new government differed from the previous one, and full membership of Argentina in the BRICS was not appropriate. A similar situation also occurred with Indonesia, when in 2023 President J. Widodo stated that he did not want to rush to the decision to join the BRICS (Llewellyn, 2023). However, at the end of 2024, the newly elected President P. Subianto changed the country's foreign policy course, and in January 2025, Indonesia became a full member of the BRICS (Shofa, 2024; Rahn, 2025). The Saudi government's assessment of the risks and benefits of joining the BRICS was still ongoing as of January 2025 (Saudi Arabia is..., 2025). This is not least due to Saudi Arabia's close cooperation with the United States in the field of security, as indicated on the website of U.S. Department of State (2025b). The very fact of BRICS expansion is one of the "fault lines" within the bloc. The governments of China and Russia, according to the publication of M. Ferragamo (2024), generally advocated the expansion of the bloc, while Brazil and India were less decisive because they had concerns that it would reduce their own influence. In addition, the growing competition between the governments of India and China also contributed to the reluctance of the former not to support the expansion of the bloc, in which China plays the main role in GDP (Fig. 1).

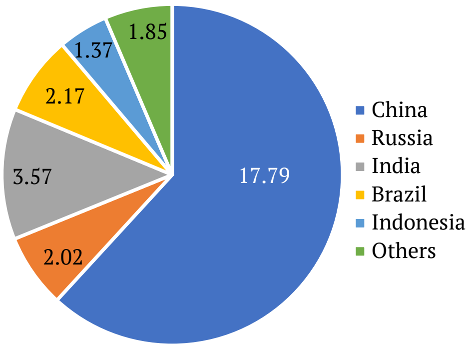

Figure 1. Distribution of BRICS countries by GDP (trillion USD)
Note: data from the World Bank (2025) reflects GDP only up to 2023 as of February 2025
Source: developed by the author based on statistics from the World Bank (2025)

According to the statistics (Fig. 1), more than half of the total GDP of BRICS countries is provided by China. This structure indicates a significant economic asymmetry within the association, in which China plays the role of a system-forming core**.** Other countries, despite their growing influence, only partially compensate for this imbalance, which affects decision-making processes. The dominance of the Chinese economy leads to an uneven distribution of influence within the BRICS and potentially calls into question the principle of equality between the members of the association. The accession of Egypt and Ethiopia to the BRICS has strengthened the representation of the African continent in a format that claims to be a global alternative to Western institutions. Egypt already had developed economic and political ties with key members of the bloc, in particular, China, India, and Russia (Ferragamo, 2024). Joining the BRICS opened up new instruments of financial cooperation for Cairo, and the potential to expand access to alternative sources of investment. Ethiopia, in turn, is one of the most dynamic economic centres in East Africa. As part of the "Belt and Road Initiative", the Chinese government has invested billions of USD in the country, in particular, in infrastructure and energy development (Lai & Lu, 2020). This makes it a strategic partner of China on the African continent and increases the interdependence between the new BRICS members and the old members of the association.

In the context of the expansion of the bloc with the participation of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, it is important to note that Saudi Arabia, as the largest economy among Arab countries and one of the world's leading oil producers, significantly strengthens the economic and energy potential of the association. The country also plays an important role in peace negotiations over the world's most critical events, such as Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. However, the BRICS has again been joined by countries that have radically different views on certain conflicts, which can also affect the functioning of the BRICS. Thus, both the creation and expansion of the BRICS was a consequence of the desire of individual governments to reduce the influence of Western democracies. BRICS is an informal organisation, so cooperation between member countries is regulated by declarations issued after summits and agreements on the establishment of financial institutions. However, all member states of the bloc define their vision of the world order as free from Western economies. This also applies to the attempts of member states to create some alternative to what they consider to be the dominance of the Western viewpoint in certain multilateral associations such as the G7 or the UN.

Critical assessment of BRICS by experts and researchers. British economist J. O'Neill (2024), former UK Finance Minister, former head of Goldman Sachs Asset Management, and current member of the World Health Organisation's pan-European Commission on health and sustainable development, noted that some states have not yet made a final decision on joining the BRICS. As an example, he cited the already mentioned Argentina, which after the election of a new president decided not to join the bloc, and Saudi Arabia, where the issue of membership remains open. According to J. O'Neill, a key reason for Saudi Arabia's hesitation is its strategic alliance with the United States in defence and security. However, it remains unclear what specific benefits potential new members, including Saudi Arabia, could benefit from joining the BRICS. One of the few real benefits of participating in the BRICS annual summits is the opportunity for member states to take a consolidated position and draw attention to the lack of representation of their interests in other global institutions. Additionally, J. O'Neill pointed out that he did not understand whether BRICS member countries ever had a real goal, because there are many areas in the world where they could act collectively both for the benefit of member countries and for the benefit of the rest of the world. Examples of such collective action could include the fight against infectious diseases, the facilitation and promotion of freer trade, and even the fight against climate change. In fact, one of the most important steps of the block was the creation of the international New Development Bank (n.d.), which aims to mobilise resources for infrastructure projects within emerging market economies. This is important given the possibility of financing projects in BRICS member countries, and therefore, increasing their role as actors in international relations on the world stage. However, even its creation was unclear, since the bank did not have a clear mandate and reference to certain goals. The BRICS will also not be able to succeed due to the fact that some of the most important member countries, namely India and China, remain historical rivals and are fighting in border areas. The main idea of J. O'Neill (2024) is that even if 20 countries join the BRICS, these will not be common goals or strategic goals of countries with which long-term development strategies can be built. These will be countries that have simply been "lured" into the bloc. J. O'Neill also added that when he coined the term BRIC in 2001, the world was entering a new era where some countries would not share common political, cultural, and social values, but everything would be fine as long as they were in the same group to coordinate joint actions. According to J. O'Neill, the BRICS as a bloc had a chance to become an alternative for the G7 or even the G20 (Group of Twenty), but the political desires of some of the bloc's leaders did not allow this to be implemented.

Another expert who has spoken about the functioning of BRICS is B. Chellaney (2024), an employee of the Centre for Political Analysis in New Delhi and a researcher at the Robert Bosch Foundation. His opinion begins with extremely opposite statements, namely, that the share of GDP of Western democracies in the global context is gradually decreasing, and developing countries claim to write new rules of the world order. The BRICS group, according to the expert, at its beginning was a certain class of investment assets and a symbol of the new world order, and moreover – a certain insurance against the actions of Western organisations in the most difficult geopolitical situation. As a success, B. Chellaney noted the rapid expansion of the organisation to 9 members as of the end of 2024, and some interest from the governments of Turkey, Thailand, and Mexico. However, as did J. O'Neill (2024), B. Chellaney (2024) agreed with the fact that the diversity of members and candidates for membership in the bloc, while confirming attractiveness, creates problems due to the different economic, political, and national goals of these member states. As an example, he also cited military operations between the governments of India and China in the Himalayas (2020). Actually, because of the disparity of interests within the bloc, the search for a single action plan and the acquisition of the status of a united force on the world stage was an extremely difficult task even when the bloc included only five countries, and given their growth to nine, according to the expert, it will take a lot of effort to develop joint programmes. Additionally, as described above, there have already been ten member countries of the bloc since January 2025. According to B. Chellaney, the fact that the BRICS still exists, reflects the failure of Western democracies to isolate Russia after a full-scale invasion in 2022. In addition, he added that most of the BRICS member countries are members of the Non-Aligned Movement, and some have observer status in it. This may indicate that within the bloc, despite the desire of the most autocratic Russian and Chinese governments to reshape the world order led by the United States, there will be pressure to choose a certain middle course that would be aimed not at fighting Western democracies, but at democratising the world order. As significant advantages and opportunities for global dominance of the BRICS member states, the expert highlights that the population of the bloc is 46% of the world population against only 8.8% in the G7, and the share of world GDP in the BRICS is 35% against 30% in the G7. Discourse analysis of statements of B. Chellaney helped to interpret his attitude to the BRICS expansion.

Research on the impact of BRICS expansion on international relations was also carried out by M. Papa & Z. Han (2025). They pointed out that the idea of creating a coalition to rebuild the world order is not new, since other blocs have also tried to create a new and, in their opinion, more equitable economic system. But the key question for the BRICS remains whether the increase in member states can really strengthen it and improve cooperation, make the BRICS a new core in the global governance system. If new members strengthen the bloc and tensions between Western democracies and the BRICS continue to grow, a higher priority will be whether global collective action remains possible at all. The question of geopolitical influence was also investigated by L. Cochrane & E. Zaidan (2024). Researchers have suggested that the geopolitical role of the BRICS bloc will increase, the reason for which is distrust of the US and G7 governments on the part of most of the world's governments. In addition, a large number of sanctions and duties against the governments of Russia and China will increase the bifurcation of the global trading system. Such trends, according to researchers, may change, but there is already a transition to a multipolar world, the creation of a new form of parallel globalisation.

Thus, the statement of J. O'Neill (2024) and B. Chellaney (2024), although demonstrating different approaches to the consequences of the expansion of the BRICS, ultimately point to one problem – the heterogeneity of the bloc's members in terms of economic, social, and national goals, together with the inability to develop a consolidated and common goal to promote their ideas on the international stage. J. O'Neill emphasised the structural weaknesses of the BRICS and the lack of common goals, which prevents the block from acting as a single whole. The expansion of the BRICS is more like a formal expansion of the number of its participants, which only increases the blurring of the bloc, and does not increase its influence on solving global problems. B. Chellaney, on the other hand, viewed the BRICS bloc in a slightly different dimension and agreed that it could be attractive to developing countries that are seeking to find some alternative to Western democratic structures. However, the expert also stressed that optimism should be cautious, because the BRICS member countries are politically and economically disparate. The real effectiveness of the bloc cannot be achieved without clear structural documents and goals, and internal contradictions (as indicated in the statements of both experts) further complicate this process.

Critical assessment of the BRICS by politicians. One of the most pressing issues in the functioning of the BRICS is the idea of creating their own currency. This idea first appeared after the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 (Martin, 2025). However, at that time, this idea was not continued. However, already in 2023, at the next BRICS summit in the Republic of South Africa, the countries of the bloc at least agreed to explore the possibility of creating a common currency for the BRICS to minimise the risks associated with the use of USD. However, even so, within the bloc, leaders agreed that it would take years to create a new, common currency. Although such plans did not arouse much enthusiasm among BRICS members, they agreed that reducing dependence on the USD can be achieved by increasing trading in local currencies. Actually, because of this, in January 2025, the President of the United States D. Trump, after the official inauguration, reacted to the attempts of BRICS member countries to abandon the USD. He stated that replacing the USD as the main trading currency with any reserve currency will lead to the introduction of a 100% duty (Shakil, 2025). White House National Security Communications Advisor J. Kirby also commented on BRICS, noting that the United States does not view BRICS as a threat. These countries, in his opinion, have the right to determine with whom they want to be associated and be economically connected ("We don't view…, 2024).

More controversial was the speech of the UN Secretary-General A. Guterres, who attended the 16th BRICS summit in the fall of 2024. He stated that all members of the organisation should defend the values of the UN Charter, the rule of law, and the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of states (United Nations Secretary-General, 2024). However, it is the governments of the BRICS member countries, in particular Russia and China, as well as others, that support military aggression against Ukraine directly or indirectly. He also noted that this summit strengthened the course towards global development and security, in which the BRICS can play a significant role. American politician M. Rubio also commented on the expansion of BRICS in 2023. He noted that these trends may affect the ability of the US government to prevent international violence through sanctions (US Politician..., 2024). This phrase also referred not only to the expansion of the BRICS, but also to attempts to move away from the USD and introduce trading in local currencies. At the time of the above statement, M. Rubio held the position of senator and remained in office until 2025 (U.S. Department of State, 2025a). In January 2025, his candidacy was nominated by D. Trump for the post of US Secretary of State, and in the Senate vote, he received unanimous approval. Given this fact, and the sharp reaction of the current US president to any actions against the USD as a currency by the BRICS, in 2025, there was an increasing tension between major actors in international relations. Thus, against the background of the growing role of the BRICS in the global economy and discussions about creating a common currency, Western politicians express concern about the potential weakening of the USD's position and the threat to international stability. Despite the formal refusal to view the BRICS as a direct threat, statements by the leaders of the US, EU, and UN indicate growing concern about the geopolitical consequences of the bloc's expanding influence and its ties to states that violate international law.

The impact of BRICS expansion on the global economy and international politics. The expansion of the BRICS is taking place in the face of new challenges for the international security system – in particular, the growth of cyber threats, the activation of non-state actors and general militarisation. Conventional legal mechanisms established by the Hague Conventions no longer correspond to contemporary types of conflicts, which complicates the foreign policy positioning of new BRICS members and their ability to remain neutral in the face of growing geopolitical tensions (Romchuk, 2024). One of the main consequences of the existence of BRICS was the creation of a New Development Bank (n.d.). Although the political decision to create it was made in 2013, when the topic of expanding the BRICS was not very popular, but this bank, as of 2025, focused on infrastructure projects for new BRICS member countries (Powell, 2013). The bank's founders were active BRICS member countries as of 2013, namely Brazil, India, China, Russia, and the Republic of South Africa. At the time of the bank's establishment, its shares were distributed among the member countries (19% each), and with the addition of new members to the BRICS, the shares of all countries were equally reduced. The bank's member countries can be BRICS member countries and any UN member country. In total, since 2016, the bank has completed and is in the status of proposed or approved more than 130 projects (Africa Policy Research Institute, 2023).

The difference between New Development Bank (n.d.) and other financial institutions were that the former focused on infrastructure projects in BRICS member countries, while others (such as the World Bank) aimed to support development around the world. Therefore, it is the BRICS member countries that can receive numerous financing through the New Development Bank. Projects also apply to new member countries. For example, in 2024, it was proposed to raise USD 200 million for infrastructure projects in Egypt, but as of February 2025, this investment project was still in the status of "proposed" (New Development Bank, 2025b). Regarding investment projects in other BRICS member countries, such information is not available in the "All projects" section, with the exception of Bangladesh, as a separate member country of the New Development Bank (2025a). The consequences of the BRICS member countries' decision to intensify trade in local currencies were already noticeable in 2023. It was then that an agreement was concluded between the governments of Brazil and China, according to which local currencies, i.e., TRY and CNY, should be used in joint trading operations (Betz, 2023). Within a few months in 2023, the first trade transaction using local currencies was conducted (China, Brazil strike..., 2023). This fact highlights the rapid polarisation of international relations, where major players seek to gain more weight, internationalise their currencies to gain more influence on global governance and development. At the end of 2024, the governments of China and Brazil agreed to completely abandon the USD in bilateral trade (China, Brazil strike..., 2024). However, the main problem remains that trading in local currencies, and therefore, accumulating, for example, Ethiopian ETB in China, does not revive the economy, since this currency is popular only in Ethiopia and possibly in a number of countries around (Johnston, 2024).

In addition to the above, the accession of countries to the BRICS can serve as a mechanism for circumventing sanctions. The fact that Iran joined the BRICS leads to better cooperation with the Chinese government, because the latter have been developing an alternative to the SWIFT payment system since 2009, which was called CIPS (Cross-Border Interbank Payment System), as indicated in an paper from the Foreign Policy Research Institute (Mooradian, 2024). This system, although the numbers may fluctuate, involves about 1,300 banks in 100 countries around the world, which weakens the effect of sanctions against terrorist and non-democratic governments. However, more than 11,000 banks and corporations in more than 200 countries are involved in SWIFT (SWIFT, 2025). The CIPS system itself, and the BRICS block as a whole, faces the problem of insufficient representation in the international arena. In particular, although CIPS was created as a response to the established international financial system SWIFT, but for real competition, it is necessary to attract more countries and banking institutions, because the vast majority of them continue to use SWIFT for financial transactions. The share of the USD in international transactions is about 46.5%, the EUR – 24.4%, the GBP – 7.6%, the

JPY – 3.5% and the CNY – 3% (Dmytriieva, 2023). Another consequence of the expansion of the BRICS is a change in the rhetoric of governments regarding a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. In March 2022, the UN General Assembly voted on a resolution against Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Overall, 141 countries supported the decision, 35 abstained and did not support it (United Nations General Assembly, 2022). In February 2023, another vote was held at the UN General Assembly, which raised the issue of an immediate end to the war in Ukraine (United Nations General Assembly, 2023). However, the vote of the BRICS member countries is interesting in this context. For example, in the 2022 and 2023 votes, Brazil supported the resolutions, while India, China, the Republic of South Africa, and Egypt abstained both times. In both cases, it becomes clear that BRICS countries can coordinate their voting. As noted on the website of the American Analytical Centre Atlantic Council (Tran, 2024), the BRICS member countries have successfully developed common positions among the countries of the Global South at international forums at conferences in 2020. An example of this is the joint efforts of the countries of the Global South, in particular the BRICS, to create a "loss and damage fund" to support countries' resilience to climate change (UNFCCC, 2023). In addition, BRICS member countries collaborated with the countries of the Global South to work on the UN tax convention in August 2024 (Ryding, 2024). The content analysis of the above was important for understanding the cooperation of BRICS member countries in the international arena. In fact, some of the decisions taken jointly by the BRICS and the countries of the Global South could indeed be beneficial for the overall well-being. However, given the aggressive policies of both the Russian and Chinese governments, involving the countries of the Global South in the development of a new world order can undermine democratic values, and disrupt the voting system at the UN, if the majority of developing countries support the actions of the aggressive part of the world community. In general, the expansion of BRICS in the long run can lead to many negative consequences (Table 1).

Table 1. Possible threats as factors of increasing international tension due to the expansion of the BRICS

Threat	Description	Consequence
Abandoning the USD in international trade	Agreements between BRICS member countries on the use of local currencies	Weakening of US influence on international relations
Circumvention of sanctions	CIPS system instead of SWIFT, development of other systems	Reduction of the effectiveness of sanctions against aggressive governments
Common positions in international forums	Coordination of voting, in particular at the UN	Weakening of the principles of democracy in decision-making
Support for aggressive actions	Lack of a common position on Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine among BRICS countries	Legitimisation of other aggressive actions in the international arena against the sovereignty of states
US government conflict policy on BRICS	Introduction of 100% duties when trying to replace the USD with local currencies	Possible escalation of new trade conflicts between the US and BRICS
Investments in the New Development Bank	Infrastructure projects only in BRICS member countries	Subject to the bank's capital growth – infrastructure isolation of non-BRICS countries

Source: compiled by the author

Thus, the expansion of the BRICS remains a factor that transforms the system of international relations. Although the bloc was created as rather an economic one, China's growing influence on the world stage indicates a gradual change in the balance of power. In addition, the accession of new countries, and especially those that have strained relations with Western democracies, further increases the confrontation and polarisation between key actors in international relations.

Discussion

The results of the study indicated that initially the idea of the existence of a certain block with the name BRIC was the result of the work of the British financier J. O'Neill (2001), who proposed this acronym in the early 21st century. A similar opinion was also held by I. Nogueira (2023) and M. Megre & G.C. Ribeiro (2024), who wrote that the term was coined by J. O'Neill. Regarding the date of the official foundation of BRICS, researchers focused on different dates. For example, I. Ullah *et al*. (2024) highlighted the date of the first BRICS summit in 2009. B. Hooijmaajers (2021) indicated the beginning of the dialogue in 2006, but it was the establishment of BRICS with South Africa in 2011 that marked its establishment. In this regard, the conclusion of B. Hooijmaajers are consistent with the results of a study conducted on the creation of BRICS since 2006, because the bloc does not have a charter or other constituent documents, and therefore, it is not possible to specify a clear date of its foundation. Another important aspect in the approval of the BRIC bloc was that these countries were really developing rapidly. According to the results of the study, the share of global GDP of Russia, China, Brazil, and India in 2003 was 9%, and in 2009 – 14%. The results of the study differ from the figures provided by M. Agarwal *et al*. (2022). According to their data, BRIC countries accounted for 13.1% of global GDP in 2001-2007 and 16.7% in 2008-2010. In addition, the figure of 11.9% of BRICS countries in global GDP was indicated by M. Agarwal & S. Kumar (2023). Although the figures vary, they show an average increase of 13% of the world GDP of a group of countries at the beginning of the 21st century, although the main driver of this growth was China and, to a lesser extent, India.

As for the expansion of the BRICS, like the very idea of its creation, namely the departure from structures such as the G7 or the World Bank, its new members are characterised by either neutral or even confrontational relations with countries with a democratic political system and developed economies. This list looked like this, since the current governments either supported the general foreign policy course of the BRICS countries, or were neutral in relations with democracies, or competed with them. However, M. Shoba (2023), while agreed that Western democracies and BRICS countries may seem like opponents on a global level, argued that they are strategic partners at the interstate level. This thesis confirms the results of the conducted research that the BRICS does not have a charter or other constituent documents, and therefore, there is no common prescribed goal. The opinion about the expansion of the BRICS opponents of "Western dominance" was also put forward by P. Carmody (2024), however, the researcher added that this is the result of the Chinese government's desire to achieve global dominance, and therefore, the main goal of the BRICS' existence. However, the expansion of BRICS, as the results of the study showed, has certain obstacles. This is conditioned by the chosen foreign policy and domestic political course of the countries that received invitations to membership in the BRICS. The most striking examples are Argentina and Indonesia. In the first case, the application was considered, but with the arrival of the new government it was rejected, and in the second case, on the contrary, it was first rejected, and with the new government it was accepted. A. González Levaggi & T. Múgica (2023) pointed out the domestic political factor of Argentina's withdrawal from the BRICS, namely the importance of dollarisation of the economy as a mechanism for combating inflation.

However, the aspect of BRICS expansion remains ambiguous, primarily due to the fact that member countries have conflicts among themselves. The most striking example is the border disputes in the Himalayas between the governments of China and India, as demonstrated in the study. W. Bouras & S. Bekhouche (2025) also noted that in the 2020s, the bloc faced challenges and geopolitical tensions, especially due to the relationship between China and India. In addition, the results of the study showed that according to experts such as J. O'Neill (2024), the existence of the BRICS in the 2020s and in the future simply does not make sense, since the G20 has become a more effective block for setting common goals, and therefore, the very existence of the BRICS does not make sense.

One of the consequences of the creation and expansion of BRICS was the creation of New Development Bank (n.d.), as evidenced by the findings. Although the bank was established before the big expansion of the bloc, new member countries get the opportunity to finance infrastructure projects through this institution. This creates alternatives for potentially many countries in the Global South not to rely on Western financial institutions or blocs like the G7 or the World Bank. The above is consistent with the statement of S. Naumov (2024), who pointed out that New Development Bank has become an alternative to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank for developing countries. Accordingly, this course of action leads to even greater global polarisation within the Global South and Global North. A similar opinion was also expressed by J. Heine (2024), noting the growing role of a number of institutions, including the New Development Bank, as a mechanism for developing countries' independence from the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund. It should also be added that infrastructure projects, based on the results of the study, focus only on BRICS member countries, so the isolation of countries that do not join the BRICS in the field of investment in infrastructure projects may become an aspect of increasing international tension. However, M. Nach & R. Ncwadi (2023) used other information, namely that infrastructure projects are funded by the New Development Bank even outside the BRICS. However, the list of projects on the official website, as shown in the study, consists only of BRICS member countries and additionally Bangladesh, as a member country of the New Development Bank. Individual researchers, such as S. Kheloufi (2024) even wrote that potentially developing countries can get infrastructure development through BRICS membership.

In the long run, along with the Chinese government's growing strength, the threat to international currency transactions and the mechanism for circumventing sanctions may become the CIPS system, developed as an alternative to the Western SWIFT system. However, the share of the USD, according to the study, still accounts for almost 50% of the total number of international currency transactions around the world. D. Ciuriak (2023) even noted a figure of 88% of currency transactions using the USD, but indicated that this applies to private sector players. In any case, these facts demonstrate a significant advantage of the USD over other currencies in international currency and trade operations, which is unlikely to change in the near future. However, as mentioned above, the use of CIPS is possible only if the CNY is more dominant in international trade operations, but its share almost does not exceed 3%. The use of CIPS instead of SWIFT was also mentioned by M. Pegu (2024), who came to a similar conclusion that its use can only provide minimal and short-term relief from the impact of sanctions. In general, sanctions pressure on aggressive governments determines the adaptation of these regimes, which even contributes to the stabilisation of the economic situation (Pacholczak, 2024). However, A. Valamontes (2024) suggested that de-dollarisation under the BRICS significantly reduced the influence of the USD in the bloc. The results of the study, on the contrary, showed that the use of local currencies can only be useful for bilateral operations, which neither stimulates the economy nor causes serious tension regarding the departure from the USD in international trade operations.

In addition, the close cooperation of the countries of the Global South, in particular the BRICS, is already noticeable in coordinating their votes on international platforms, such as the UN General Assembly or COP (Conference of the Parties), as evidenced by the findings. This reflects the importance for the Chinese government to have more friendly voices among the countries of the Global South. Moreover, as noted by A. García-Herrero *et al*. (2024), it is the BRICS countries that are constantly mentioned in Chinese UN structural documents along with Global Initiatives of the Chinese government, such as the Global Security Initiative, the Global Development Initiative and the global civilisation initiative. In addition to the above, China's dominance as the largest BRICS force and covert support for Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine may set precedents for legitimising other aggressive actions in the international arena, such as against Taiwan. Instead, BRICS countries and other countries in the Global South can support the aggressive actions of major regional players. A similar opinion, although indirectly, was confirmed by P.D. Beaumont *et al*. (2024). In particular, according to the researchers, more than 30 countries abstained from voting at the UN on the issue of condemning and calling for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine, and 50 countries voted against the exclusion of Russia from the human rights council. In general, the expansion of the BRICS somehow transforms international relations and adds to the factor of even greater polarisation in global relations. A similar opinion was also put forward by C.A. Naim & F. Hasanah (2024), writing about the changing global power structures and the struggle for influence on the world stage as part of the BRICS expansion. In addition, as the results of the study showed, the BRICS bloc is most important for China to establish its strength. Therefore, the construction of blocks, in particular BRICS, leads to polarisation, and also gives a greater advantage to existing centres of power than to those who seek to gain more weight in the international arena.

Conclusions

Thus, as the results of the study showed, the expansion of the BRICS bloc is a sign of the polarisation of international relations, which causes mixed assessments among both leading experts, such as J. O'Neill, and among political figures. The fact of joining new countries, Iran and the United Arab Emirates, adds new geopolitical opportunities for the BRICS, and therefore further exacerbates competition with Western democracies. First of all, this concerns attempts to create a new economic and trade system, because BRICS member countries are trying to introduce alternative mechanisms to weaken the USD in international trade. It was stated that during the BRICS summit in 2023, the member countries came to a common vision and opinion on the possible introduction of a common currency to minimise the risks of using the USD. However, despite the specifics regarding the timing of its implementation, the idea itself has already caused considerable concern and reaction from the US President D. Trump. In general, in January 2025, D. Trump announced the possibility of introducing 100% duties for BRICS member countries, and in addition to the president, the BRICS received sharp criticism of the expansion and activities from White House adviser J. Kirby and Secretary of State M. Rubio. Another possible factor in increasing international tension is the reformatting of international investment institutions, namely, the creation of the New Development Bank back in 2013. Since 2016, more than 130 infrastructure projects have been funded among BRICS member countries. The bank's page also indicated investments in projects in new member countries, in particular Egypt, although the projects remain under discussion. It becomes clear that developing countries can get opportunities to develop their own infrastructure not only through the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, which further contributes to polarisation and creates tension between actors in international relations.

In addition to the above, BRICS member countries can coordinate their votes on international platforms such as the UN General Assembly. And while the BRICS bloc is not too big as of early 2025, it promotes the idea of the Global South rising above the global north, and such policies could be a factor in shaping a new geopolitical order as an alternative to Western democratic values, led by the Chinese government. In addition, due to the close cooperation of BRICS member countries, aggressive and undemocratic regimes have more opportunities to circumvent sanctions, in particular, through the Chinese CIPS system, developed as an analogue of SWIFT. However, this fact, and attempts to trade in local currencies, is still not an indicator of a departure from the USD, because it is in it and other popular currencies that most international currency transactions are carried out. Future research on the topic may draw on the results of the BRICS summit, which was scheduled to take place in 2025, and an analysis of the new US administration's response to BRICS' actions.

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