

The BRICS+ and the *Genesis* of the 'New Cold War'

The Multilateralism of Interests within an Economic Group¹

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Resumo

O trabalho tem por objetivo analisar a origem e o desenvolvimento recente dos BRICS, bem como a progressiva descaracterização e ruptura dos seus princípios fundacionais, agravada com a deflagração da Guerra da Ucrânia e o ingresso dos novos países membros. A capacidade que a Rússia e a China têm de manipular os BRICS, colocando-os como apoiadores passivos no cenário internacional, e a entrada majoritária dos países do Oriente Médio, deixa claro que os BRICS deliberadamente caminham para alterar a natureza do grupo, com uma formação mais combativa ao Ocidente nos âmbitos retórico/ideológico, geopolítico, econômico, jurídico e militar, consolidando o que denominamos de “*Nova Guerra Fria*”.

Palavras-chave: BRICS+; Multilateralismo; Guerra da Ucrânia; Nova Guerra Fria.

Resumen:

Este trabajo tiene como objetivo analizar el origen y el desarrollo reciente de los BRICS, así como la progresiva descaracterización y ruptura de sus principios fundacionales, agravada por el estallido de la Guerra de Ucrania y la entrada de nuevos países miembros. La capacidad de Rusia y China para manipular a los BRICS, posicionándolos como partidarios pasivos en el escenario internacional, y la entrada mayoritaria de países del Medio Oriente, deja claro que los BRICS están deliberadamente avanzando hacia la alteración de la naturaleza del grupo, con una formación más combativa contra Occidente en aspectos retóricos/ideológicos, geopolíticos, económicos, jurídicos y militares, consolidando lo que llamamos la "Nueva Guerra Fría".

Palabras clave: BRICS+; Multilateralismo; Guerra de Ucrania; Nueva Guerra Fría.

Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the origin and recent development of the BRICS, as well as the progressive erosion and rupture of its founding principles, exacerbated by the outbreak of the Ukraine War and the admission of new member countries. The ability of Russia and China to manipulate the BRICS, positioning them as passive supporters on the international stage, and the majority entry of Middle Eastern countries, make it clear that the BRICS are deliberately moving towards altering the nature of the group, with a more combative stance towards the West in rhetorical/ideological, geopolitical, economic, legal, and military realms, consolidating what we term the "New Cold War".

Keywords: BRICS+; Multilateralism; Ukraine War; New Cold War.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The BRICS are commonly associated with an economic bloc aimed at implementing the principles of multilateralism and democratizing global interaction among nations (Brosig, 2019; Hurrel *et al*, 2009; Stuenkel, 2017). However, observing the most recent political and military movements, there is a progressive departure from these initial propositions.

This alteration of principles speculated within the BRICS is not in itself a *sui generis* element, with various international organizations following a similar path of promoting small realignments and adjustments in time. On the other hand, it seems to be something deeper, with the BRICS increasingly moving towards a change in their founding principles on a scale that, in theory, contradicts their own existential composition, openly opposing the group's original agenda.

It is noted that until a few years ago, BRICS members were influenced by Russia and China to align with the respective positions and interests of these countries in economic² and military³ areas without openly disregarding the group's principles. However, this scenario changed in recent years, specifically after the outbreak of the Ukraine War in February 2022, which exposed and made undeniable this phenomenon, as it contradicts the principles of non-intervention, territorial integrity of states, promotion of pacifism in the international arena, and respect for international law.

The omission of member countries to these principles since the outbreak of the Ukraine War proved crucial in clearly demonstrating a blatant departure from the group's international *ethos*⁴, as postulated in its joint declarations. More than just a passive stance towards Russian belligerence, this movement has deepened, as evidenced by the

¹ Authors like Oliver Stuenkel posit that intra-bloc trade is still in an embryonic phase, but they observe China's primacy as a commercial nexus linking all BRICS members (Stuenkel, 2017).

³ Remarkable for the acceptance by the rest of the BRICS members of Russia's frequent interventions in international conflicts.

⁴ The "BRICS ethos," a term recurrently used in this paper, refers to the composition of values, objectives, and ideals that guide the member countries of the bloc, shaping the goals and ambitions in their international actions, that are outlined in the regimen. The original ethos of BRICS would thus be composed of the principles of international democratization, multilateralism, non-interventionism, territorial integrity, pacifism, defense of international law as a mechanism for dispute resolution, and other elements referring to 'good international practices' to be followed by nations.

characteristics of the new countries that have joined the bloc, whose position is clearly supportive of Russia in the war.

From the above, this paper aims to demonstrate that there is a progressive blurring of the foundational principles of the BRICS, correlating their deterioration with the events of the Ukraine War and the expansion of the group, with the majority entry of Asian countries into the bloc, notably from the Middle East, leading to a new characterization of the group.⁵

To achieve the objective, in addition to this introduction, the paper is structured into three sections. The second section presents a literature review on the origin and progressive departure of the BRICS from their original propositions. Following that, attention is turned to the role of the BRICS in the Ukraine War and the genesis of the New Cold War. In the fourth section, an analysis of the new face of the BRICS and the pillars of the New Cold War is developed. Finally, the concluding remarks will be presented.

2. ORIGIN AND RECENT EVOLUTION OF THE BRICS

The BRICS, unlike other relevant economic associations of countries on the international stage, is not a formal bloc as it lacks a constitutive treaty, internal secretariat, and legal personality, thus diverging from the traditional terms of operation of cooperation and economic integration organizations (Hurrel et al, 2009; Junior, 2013; Stuenkel, 2017). However, in light of the progressive consolidation of the group since its formation, with the maintenance of internal cohesion and increasing institutionalization, evidenced by the establishment of the New Development Bank in 2015, it is moving towards de facto formalization, albeit not following traditional precepts concerning this matter. This situation, which certainly creates obstacles in the categorization and definition of the BRICS, does not diminish its global importance and still allows for greater flexibility in dealing with complex international dynamics.

Since their first joint declaration in 2009 in Yekaterinburg, the BRICS, have valued and advocated for the need for countries to act in the global arena focusing on the principles of multilateralism, pacifism, and respect for international law (Baumann et al, 2015). These elements, which underpin all joint declarations of these countries since their

⁵ BRICS+ refers to the original formation with Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) plus Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Ethiopia.

inception, have characterized an essential element of the group's international role, defining goals and objectives through these principles (Baumann et al, 2015).

Initially, these elements were able to accommodate the heterogeneity of the group's positions in *prol* of a common goal, driven by the quest for modernization and restructuring of international political and economic environments⁶, aiming to create greater opportunities and means of global insertion for emerging countries. However, the same principles that resulted in successful actions to achieve some brief reforms in the distribution of international power also proved extremely limited when confronted with situations of conflict in the international arena (Stuenkel, 2017).

Among the adversities faced by the group regarding defense and security issues, the most striking ones were the issues of Libya, Syria, and South Sudan. In these cases, the member countries, despite some divergence, extracted joint positions in declarations and defended them in global forums⁷ (Brosig, 2019; Stuenkel, 2017).

However, there is often a dissonant stance from Russia. Shortly after the issues in Libya, Syria, and South Sudan, the country began to make unilateral interventions in these regions, actions that were actively ignored by the BRICS and suppressed under the justification that they were internal matters of Russia. This issue, which initially seemed irrelevant, even though it was a contravention of BRICS principles, set the tone for future phenomena regarding the positions and omissions of the bloc's member states in condemning this interventionist and belligerent stances of Moscow.⁸

This type of behavior by Moscow and the BRICS became more evident from the movements that occurred in 2014, with the invasion of Crimea and, more recently, in Ukraine in 2022, a clear infringement of the group's foundational values, without any reprimand from Brazil, India, China, and South Africa (Brosig, 2019; Stuenkel, 2017).

Even with the blatant contravention of the BRICS' foundational principles regarding the defense of territorial integrity, the principle of non-intervention, and the promotion of pacifism, there is a tacit defense of Russia under the justification, at that time, of there not being an open war between countries. Some authors, like Brosig (2019),

⁶ Notably, here it refers to institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

⁷ Essentially, the declarations were based on resolving conflicts through dialogue and supporting international cooperation to combat terrorism.

⁸ Brosig, 2019

observe this phenomenon as a passive support⁹ from the BRICS to Russia, demonstrating that the highest priority was to defend themselves collectively on the international stage, at the expense of the bloc's fundamental principles.

Initially, according to Brosig (2019), it was still possible to maintain ambiguity in discourse and defend Russian actions without contradicting BRICS principles. However, as events unfolded and the outbreak of the Ukraine War on February 24, 2022, this thesis ceased to make sense and completely lost its legitimacy, making it clear that political interests took precedence over the group's own ideals of international action.

The growing contradiction between the operating principles of the BRICS and the Russian position, with the latter ultimately overshadowing the former, has been catalyzed by the successive expansions of the West beyond the former borders and areas of historical Russian/Soviet influence.¹⁰ The increase in Russian fear regarding its national security and foreign interference in its neighboring regions has fostered, and ultimately prompted, a more belligerent stance¹¹ in response to these movements, aimed at combating what was perceived as Western provocations and serious threats to its own existence. (Mearsheimer, 2014).

The echoes of these Russian fears, which would later find support in the national concerns of the other BRICS members regarding Western – notably U.S. – actions on the international stage, were first observed in the Russo-Georgian War in 2008. (Mearsheimer, 2014). Following this, the same phenomenon led to tensions that characterized Russian military movements in Eastern Europe, with the outbreak of conventional warfare in Ukraine being a crucial development. (Mearsheimer, 2014).

⁹ Passive support is defined as an approach that acts indirectly, through omission or by denying the relevance of some infringement of international principles, to benefit a nation in the global arena.

¹⁰ This can be evidenced by the creation of the European Union in 1993 and its expansion, as well as the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) into Eastern Europe and areas of historical Russian influence (European Union, 2024; NATO, 2024). As an illustration of this phenomenon, one can observe NATO, which since the Soviet collapse in 1991 until the invasion of Crimea, has added 12 more members, mostly from the former Soviet bloc (NATO, 2024). Currently, this situation continues to persist, with NATO in 2024, compared to 1991, having doubled in size, increasingly pressuring Russia in the region (NATO, 2024).

¹¹ It is noteworthy that before reinstating Russia's distrust with the West after the Soviet collapse, there were attempts during Boris Yeltsin's government and the early years of Vladimir Putin's administration to promote the country's entry into NATO and to strengthen ties with the West (Pautasso, 2011).

The so-called Special Military Operation by Russia¹², aimed to "liberate" Russian populations from Kiev's dominance and aggression, which supposedly threatened the very existence of these peoples in the region (Osborn; Nikolskaya, 2022).

This attempt by Russia to disguise its military aggression proved unpalatable to the international community and did not diminish the weight of its actions (United Nations Brazil, 2022). Indeed, despite efforts to justify the invasion as a just action, the facts showed that it was something unviable to be tolerated and accepted as reasonable, given the norms of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the BRICS themselves (Baumann et al, 2015; United Nations Brazil, 2022).

However, unlike the UN, of the BRICS, only Brazil¹³ Showed willingness to condemn Russia's actions, refraining from commenting on the matter in pejorative tones or even making a joint criticism of Russia and Ukraine's posture as responsible for the outbreak of the conflict. This stylized fact demonstrated the fragility of the founding principles and the absence of more robust impulses by BRICS members to defend the operational theses that founded them (Baumann et al, 2015).

In addition to the clear contradictions mentioned above, two other elements become apparent. Firstly, on more than one occasion, the BRICS refrained from strictly adhering to the postulates in their previous joint declarations to promote unity of discourse within the bloc and maintain political proximity with the rest of the members, notably with Russia and China. Secondly, it seems evident the ability of Russia to manipulate the BRICS, positioning them as passive supporters in the international arena to promote the legitimacy of its claims and resist international retaliation, as seen in the case of economic and political sanctions imposed by the West after the onset of the invasion.¹⁴

The BRICS, theoretically the guarantors of the good principles of the international order, have within their midst an active violator of these principles, making the bloc

¹² The Russian attempt to disguise the invasion as an act of aggression or a violation of international norms becomes evident in the use of the term "Special Military Operation" to characterize the conflict. Russia only acknowledged the state of war between the two countries on March 22, 2024, after more than two years of belligerence between the parties, attributing the emergence of a real war situation in the region to systematic Western intervention, notably by the United States, in Ukraine (Aljazeera, 2024).

¹³ This phenomenon did not change Brazil's stance toward Russia and was essentially used only as a means to mitigate some of the criticism the country had been facing internally and externally (Al Jazeera, 2023).

¹⁴ Brosig, 2019

complicit in such actions and fostering their continued reproduction within the bloc, gradually promoting a change in the very nature of the group.

The passive support of the BRICS for Russia can be demonstrated in various ways, with member countries playing a fundamental role in ensuring minimal legitimacy for Russia's rhetoric of war, which directly undermines the basic principles of the bloc.

3. THE ROLE OF BRICS IN THE UKRAINE WAR: THE GENESIS OF THE "NEW COLD WAR"

Faced with the outbreak of the war and the impossibility of condemning the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, as had been done in the past, the BRICS began to adopt a posture of selective neutrality and passive support with new elements, engaging more consistently and deeply than merely in rhetorical terms or in denying the gravity of this phenomenon on the international stage. This indirect support for Russia, instead of mitigating the group's involvement in this issue, actually resulted in a continuous increase in trade flows as a means of aiding the Russian economy during the conflict.

Furthermore, there were the making and the maintenance of political declarations minimizing the issue and supporting Russia's actions, opposing important international actors and institutions in *prol* of the Kremlin's positions (Heck, 2023). This specific element becomes relevant due to the open stance of the member states to the historical precepts of the BRICS and the individual actions of these countries on the global stage.

3.1. The BRICS: The Foundation of Russia in the Ukraine War

As an additional element of analysis, one of the most important facets of the BRICS' role in the Ukraine War was the strengthening of commercial ties with Russia, which emerged as an alternative to overcoming Western economic sanctions and promoting the country's economic growth. By leveraging BRICS member countries as a means to circumvent international financial systems¹⁵ and despite Western retaliations, Russia managed to maintain its political and economic stability and further its war effort.

¹⁵ Due to Russia's expulsion from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), the BRICS, led by Russia and China, have begun actively promoting the use of national

Considering the country's macroeconomic issues due to the war and the progressive transition of the Russian economy into a *de facto* war economy, the country managed to leverage its relationships with other bloc members to mitigate the aggravation of its trade deficits and maintain the dynamism of its economy, even in times of war (UN Comtrade Database, 2024).

Thus, it is possible to identify a significant growth in imports from Russia by these countries, which not only demonstrates a refusal to adopt international sanctions but also highlights the absence of reluctance among bloc members to maintain trade with Moscow. The furthest departure from the pattern of aiding Russia is shown by economic transactions with South Africa, which abstains from engaging more willingly in this supportive stance towards Russia due to the country's economic difficulties in recent years (International Monetary Fund, 2023).

In this context, some of these countries, whether pressured by Russia or not, have been willing to go beyond simply increasing commercial relations, attempting to circumvent international sanctions by selling dual-use (civil and military) equipment or actual weapons to Moscow, thereby enhancing Russia's military capability in the conflict with Kiev.¹⁶ (Aarup; Panov; Busvine, 2023; Eligon, 2023).

Despite occasional attempts to sell military equipment, these efforts are not systematized and are based more on the trade of dual-use equipment, which is difficult to control or sanction by the West (Aarup; Panov; Busvine, 2023; Eligon, 2023).

From the foregoing, it is evident how Russia managed to leverage its relationship with the BRICS to gain economic benefits and sustain its economy in an adverse scenario. However, Russia's gains became more notable due to the lack of proportional reciprocity from its bloc counterparts, even in a context of clear contradiction to the foreign policy principles of these countries and the foundational ideals of the group. This economic interaction, characterized by increased trade with Russia, can be seen in Tables 1 and 2 below.

currencies in international trade to evade Western sanctions. Additionally, since the Ukraine War, there has been speculation about the possibility of creating an internal currency for the BRICS, which, ultimately, would establish an alternative international financial system to the one currently used and, more importantly, controlled by the West.

¹⁶ Since the onset of the conflict, there have been accusations regarding the sale of arms from South Africa to Russia and the involvement of Chinese companies in supplying the Russian forces with dual-use materials and semiconductor chips for use in advanced weapons.

Table 1 - Percentage growth of Russian imports from BRICS countries

Country	2021	2022	2023
China	33,05%	12,41%	46,83%
India	29,94%	-12,46%	39,27%
South Africa	7,65%	-31,14%	-0,03%
Brazil	4,17%	23,44%	-31,44%

Fonte: ComexStat, 2024; Departament of commerce, 2024; General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China, 2024; UN Comtrade Database, 2024. Own elaboration.

Table 2 – Percentage growth of Russian exports to BRICS countries

Country	2021	2022	2023
China	37,98%	43,91%	12,90%
India	39,00%	312,06%	78,20%
South Africa	17,58%	-12,05%	-4,58%
Brazil	107,43%	37,80%	27,50%

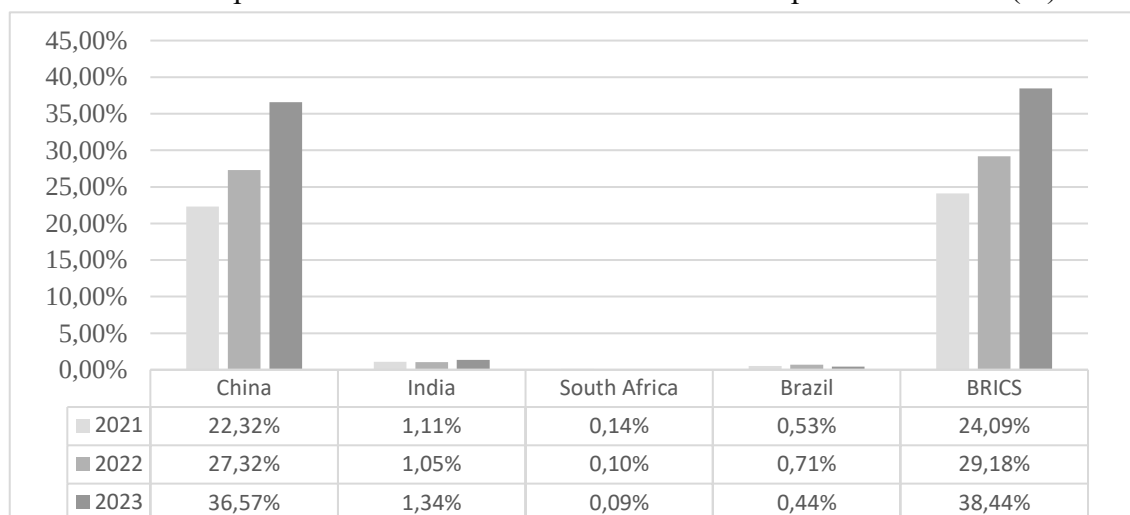
Fonte: ComexStat, 2024; Departament of commerce, 2024; General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China, 2024; UN Comtrade Database, 2024. Own elaboration.

The Ukraine War situation has shaken Russia's capacity to engage in promoting greater economic engagement with other bloc countries, given the need to limit trade deficits and focus on implementing the militarization of its economy. In other words, the bloc countries started to import more from Russia without proportional reciprocal gains in increased exports or even in medium or long run international agreements.

These data showed that Russia's exports to BRICS countries increased significantly, while the values imported by Russia grew at a proportionally smaller rate. Indeed, there is one exception: China, which is leveraging the war to significantly increase its commercial exports to Russia. In this regard, China has a clear economic incentive, stemming from exports and Russia's growing dependence on Beijing, to bypass Western sanctions and adopt selective neutrality regarding the war. However, the same cannot be said for the rest of the BRICS members, quite the opposite (Von Essen, 2023). This scenario is further exacerbated by Brazil, India, and South Africa's willingness to compromise their historical positions of neutrality and the foundational principles of the bloc without clear reciprocity.

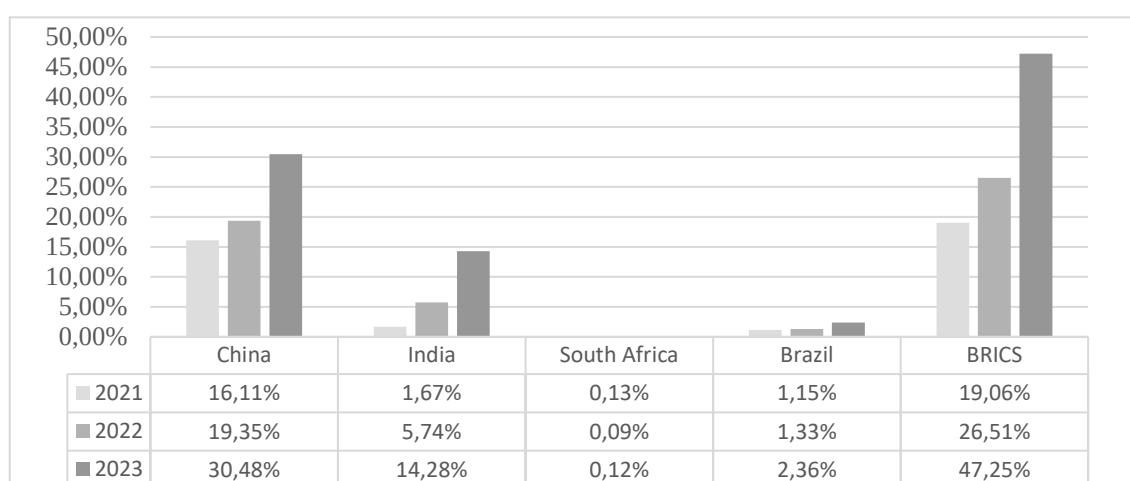
The data from Graphs 1 and 2 show that there has been an increase in the total participation of BRICS in Russia's overall trade relations. During the period analyzed, the bloc did not impose sanctions or any other measures against the country during the Ukraine war. Additionally, Graph 3 highlighted the significance of the member countries in absorbing Russian exports of mineral fuels and energy.

Graph 1 – Share of BRICS in Russia's Total Imports 2021-2023 (%)



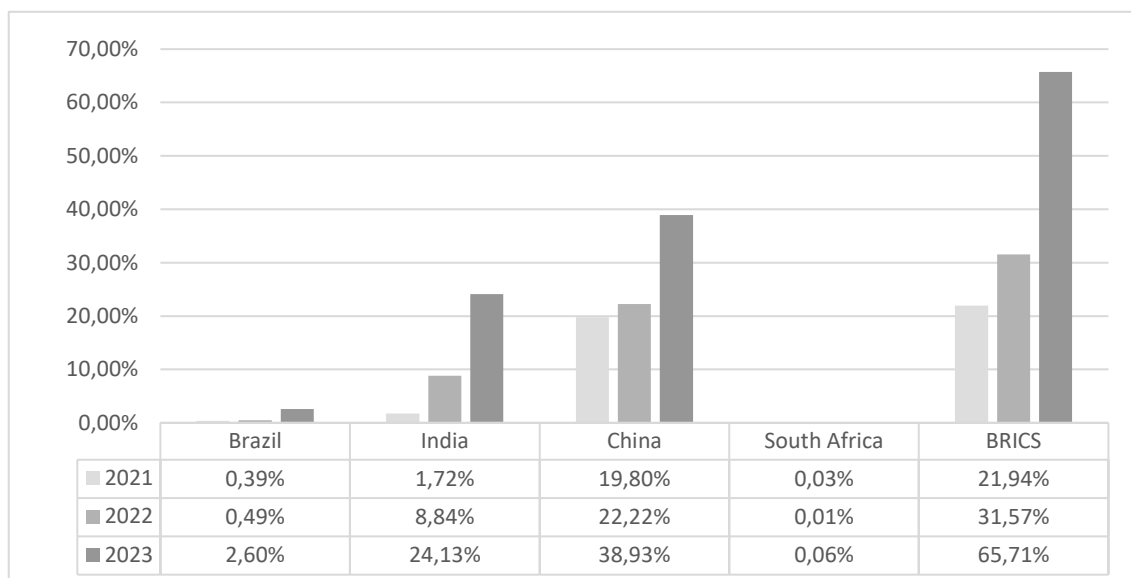
Fonte: ComexStat, 2024; Departament of commerce, 2024; General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China, 2024; UN Comtrade Database, 2024. Own elaboration.

Graph 2 – Share of BRICS in Russia's Total Exports 2021-2023 (%)



Fonte: ComexStat, 2024; Departament of commerce, 2024; General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China, 2024; UN Comtrade Database, 2024. Own elaboration.

Graph 3 – Russian Exports of Mineral Fuels and Their Derivatives to the BRICS in 2021-2023 (%)



Fonte: UN Comtrade Database, 2024. Own elaboration¹⁷.

This dynamic, seen in Graph 3, continues to deepen in 2024, with Brazil, India and China consolidating their position as Russia's biggest buyers of energy products since the economic sanctions imposed by the West. Table 3 below shows the consolidation of these countries as Russia's economic partners in the energy sector.

Table 3 - BRICS Position as Buyers of Russian Energy Products Since Sanctions Began

Country	Coal	Crude oil	Liquefied Natural Gas	Oil products
Brazil	12°	11°	12°	3°
India	2°	2°	7°	6°
China	1°	1°	2°	2°

Fonte: Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, 2024.

In summary, this section it was argued how Russia, in the case of the Ukraine War, managed to co-opt group members to maximize its capabilities in the conflict without resulting in real gains for the countries, thereby breaking the principle of being a platform for mutual economic gain for nations. Furthermore, there is also a violation of the deliberate principles and precepts of action by these states and, ultimately, the bloc as

¹⁷ Data referring to chapter 27 of the Harmonized System.

a whole, acting in defense of Russia, even in a scenario where there are no benefits in adopting such behavior (Brosig, 2019).

3.2. The Breakdown of the BRICS *Ethos*

From a political science perspective, the support of the BRICS has extended to more abstract elements, closely related to international norms and the statements of political leaders within the bloc. These elements work together to promote greater legitimacy for Russian actions in the conflict and enable the defense of Russian narratives by diminishing the legitimacy of Ukraine's resistance to Moscow's aggression. With that said, it is now necessary to discuss how the BRICS were an organization capable of co-opting their own members in defense of the Russian narrative and promoting an effective platform that incorporates these three elements in *prol* of Moscow in the international community.

Regarding international law, from the outset of the war, there has been a consensus regarding Russia's responsibility for the aggression against Ukraine, becoming a blatant case of disregard for international norms and the principles of the current world order (United Nations, 2022; Kissinger, 2015). However, none of the BRICS states condemned effectively this stance at any point, with some heads of state even announcing their refusal to comply with the International Criminal Court's (ICC) immediate arrest warrants for President Vladimir Putin should he enter their countries' territories (International Criminal Court, 2023).

Now, delving more deeply into the political statements of the heads of state of BRICS member countries, it is possible to identify a systematization of the discourse blaming the West and Ukraine themselves, portraying them as responsible for the outbreak of the war.¹⁸ Regarding the attribution of responsibility to the West, specifically the United States of America (USA), it is recurrent, even among American authors like John Mearsheimer,¹⁹ to recognize the role of these countries in the tension and outbreak

¹⁸ It is striking the statements made by the Brazilian President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, regarding Russia and Ukraine bearing equal responsibility for the outbreak of the conflict.

¹⁹ Mearsheimer is a prominent figure in International Relations for his work on offensive realism, which has become a foundational reference for explaining the outbreak of the Ukraine war. The author posited long before the conflict that the West's expansionist impulses into former Soviet spheres of influence would provoke a similarly intense Russian reaction, aimed at securing its national interests and existential security.

of war in the region (Mearsheimer, 2014; 2023). However, in a less common narrative, the BRICS also adopted a stance attributing the responsibility for the invasion and the continuation of the war to Ukraine's own intransigence, as it refuses to negotiate and make concessions of any kind to end the conflict (Werneck, 2022).

These two elements mentioned (International Law and Political) indeed do not provide a decisive element for the victory of Russia or Ukraine in the war, as seen in the provision of arms, economic assistance, and increases in trade flows regarding either of these belligerent states. However, they are capable of influencing the stance of less developed countries in abstaining from supporting Ukraine (Caballero, 2023).

Furthermore, it is also worth mentioning that these moral impediments imposed in defense of the Ukrainian agenda and the undermining of the legitimacy of Kiev's resistance end up becoming an additional variable to increase the war fatigue of the country and its Western allies in the future. This could become a factor that helps decrease the economic and military aid provided to Ukraine (Caballero, 2023).

From the above, the political support provided to Russia and the absence of criticism from BRICS member countries lend greater unity to Moscow's demands while diminishing the legitimacy of the demands put forward by Ukraine in seeking international assistance and combating the Russian invasion. It is worth noting that the stance of the BRICS in the political and legal spheres, once again, diverges and presents itself as a direct affront to its principles outlined in previous joint declarations, such as respect for international law, pacifism, and defense of the principles of non-intervention (Baumann et al, 2015).

However, more glaring than the contradiction of the BRICS to these fundamental principles is the acceptance of the bloc's states in adopting these stances and positions to defend Russia. Brazil, for example, broke its traditional stance of defending international law when it denied the possibility of complying with the arrest warrant stipulated by the International Criminal Court in the event of President Vladimir Putin's visit to the country (International Criminal Court, 2023)

3.3. The Primacy of Political Power over the Ideal of Multilateralism

The BRICS deliberately failed to act in containing Russia's belligerent actions; moreover, they took significant steps to undermine Ukraine's resistance in the war by providing consistent economic support to Russia and delegitimizing the Ukrainian cause internationally. The aggressor state, Russia, with greater military power than the victim state, combined with the BRICS' omission, contributed to the weakening and potential defeat of Ukraine in the conflict. This passive support inherently leads to a favorable stance toward Russia in achieving its objectives.

This situation blatantly demonstrates the BRICS' rupture concerning its fundamental principles, indicating that political dictates have become more relevant than the bloc's original ideals. Contrary to what might have been imagined, this departure from the group's neutral stance did not in any way affect other nations' interest in joining the BRICS.²⁰

The passive support stance towards conflicts and tensions in defense and security issues by the original BRICS countries has become a common element within the bloc and among states seeking entry into the organization. These states are willing to adopt a progressive resistance to international frameworks that have generally been defined by developed countries and their international institutions, across rhetorical and legal spheres, as well as in economic, geopolitical, and military aspects.

Therefore, it is important to note that for both current members of the bloc and states seeking to join the BRICS, the foundational principles of the bloc are less relevant than the political gains of being part of this organization. This opens the door to a complete distortion of the group, as its principles have been relegated to the realm of rhetoric, with no practical effects.

In summary, the existential contradictions of the original group have been exposed. In this context, it is believed that with the entry of new countries into the BRICS, the problem is likely to deepen, altering the formal nature of the BRICS and the *modus operandi* concerning international security.

²⁰ Even in the midst of the Ukraine war and the shift in historical stances of the BRICS, several nations continue to seek entry into the group, such as Bangladesh, Morocco, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Thailand, Vietnam, Cuba, Venezuela, Honduras, Nigeria, Algeria, and Bahrain (Mendes, 2023).

4. BRICS+ AND THE 'NEW COLD WAR'

The progressive decharacterization of the original *ethos* of the BRICS has led to a growing movement of bloc states to act more directly in the Ukraine War and in opposition to the West. As a result, the inclusion of new countries marks a significant intensification of this process of increased group involvement in defending Russian interests and interfering in the Ukraine War, further highlighting the shift in the BRICS' priorities and setting important precedents, both in the bloc's behavior on the international stage and in the profile of new entrants to the organization.

The entry of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, United Arab Emirates, and Ethiopia into the BRICS in 2024 marks a curious and significant change in the group, promoting an alteration of the historical pattern of bloc action even more deeply than the changes seen during the course of the Ukraine War.

This new arrangement of members (BRICS+) brings new questions and challenges for the bloc, which are likely to result in the intensification of elements that have already changed the entire line of action of the group in various areas, particularly in security and defense issues. Given the BRICS' stance during the war and the historical characteristics of the new members, it is believed that the bloc will adopt a more active stance in support of Russia, exacerbating internal contradictions regarding the bloc's fundamental principles, namely respect for international law, defense of sovereignty, pacifism, and the principle of non-intervention.

These new BRICS members are countries from the former Soviet sphere of influence (Ethiopia and Egypt), which have helped Russia evade Western sanctions through import, smuggling and raise international oil prices by OPEC mechanisms (Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates²¹) and have provided military materials to the country (Iran)²². Iran, in particular, has begun to directly engage in arms sales and cooperation on military projects with Russia, becoming crucial for Moscow during the war.²³ Note the discrepancy: Brazil, India, China, and South Africa supported Russia "without direct

²¹ Faucon and Said (2023); OPEC (2024).

²² Hafezi *et al* (2024)

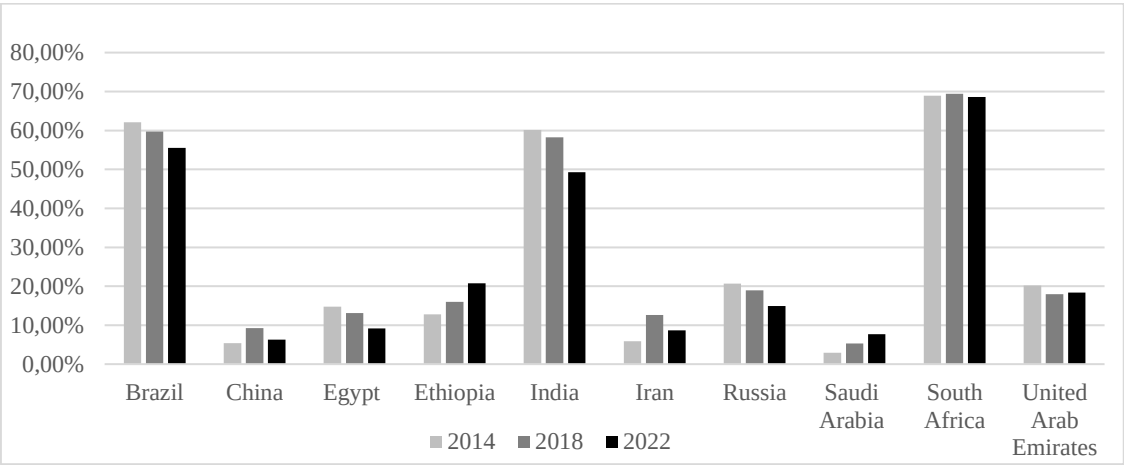
²³ Throughout the war, Iran sold a large quantity of drones to Russia and provided technical assistance for the establishment of a drone factory on Russian soil. Additionally, the country has become notable for more recently supplying ballistic missiles to Russia (Hafezi *et al*, 2024).

involvement," relying only on rhetoric and occasional ruptures on issues considered of lesser importance, such as economic embargoes.

The entry of Saudi Arabia into the group is notable because it is a long-standing ally of the United States that has chosen to economically and energetically support the BRICS, particularly Russia (Faucon and Said, 2023). This fact does not imply a distancing from Washington, but it demonstrates that the bloc is able to attract countries close to the West, ultimately discouraging these countries from antagonizing Russia and China, significantly reducing the West's ability to co-opt them.

The new "BRICS+" aligns much more closely with the political model and posture of maximizing national interests of Russia and China than its original formation, given that the current composition of the bloc has a more bellicose nature. In Graph 4, it is possible to observe this correlation of alignment of political values of the new entrants with Moscow and Beijing. The new members, due to their own internal political and ideological structure, are historically more combative.

Graph 4 - Global Governance Indicators: “Voice and Accountability”²⁴



Fonte: The World Bank, 2024. Own elaboration.

The World Bank data (2024) shows that the new members of BRICS have internal doctrines closer to those of Russia and China than Brazil, India, and South Africa. Limited government transparency and restricted public participation in the internal and external

²⁴ The indicators used are, respectively, the degree of freedom of expression prevailing in society and the transparency and accountability of public agencies and entities.

stances of these countries lead to foreign policies that are less focused on “soft”²⁵ aspects and more directed towards “hard” aspects in terms of international relations, resulting in a change in the fundamental operating principles of the group.

Thus, the entry of these new countries into the bloc show that the BRICS are deliberately moving to change the nature of the group, towards being a more combative formation against the West in rhetorical/ideological, geopolitical, economic, legal, and military spheres, which we refer to as the "New Cold War."

5. THE PILLARS OF THE “NEW COLD WAR”

The formation of this formal economic bloc, more combative in defending national interests on the international stage, poses a new challenge to the world, as these actors may exhibit a more "revolutionary" behavior²⁶, resorting to force to achieve their objectives (Hage, 2013).

Indeed, it can be affirmed that there is a systematic behavior among the main members of the group, particularly Russia and China, towards enhancing their military capabilities through the expansion of their armed forces²⁷ and technological innovations. It should be emphasized that military capacity is not directly related to the willingness to utilize available potentialities in a war, although it can be employed for this purpose.

Russia has actively used its military power as a tool for projection and international engagement, while China has historically maintained a more restrained posture on the international stage (Pautasso, 2011). Recently, these countries have shown a growing interest in extending their armed forces beyond the need for territorial defense, aiming to reclaim former territories and areas of historical influence.

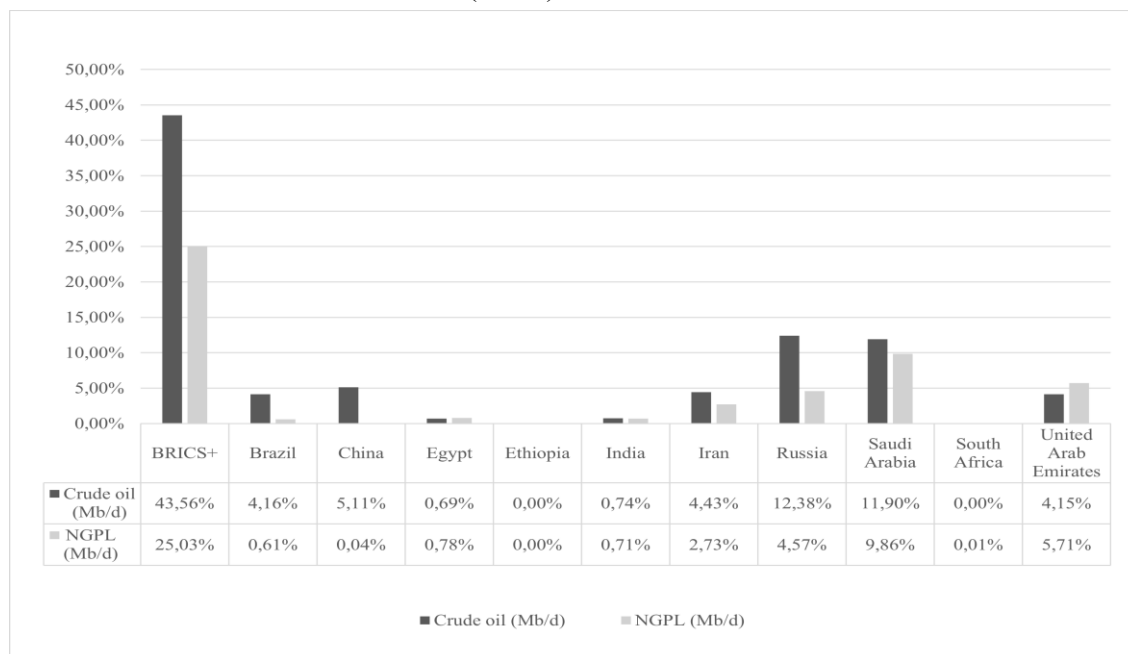
²⁵ The terms Soft and Hard Power, coined by Joseph Nye, represent, respectively, international action through soft means (culture, society, and political systems) and hard means (military and economic capacity).

²⁶ Here, reference is made to the frequent debates held between reformist and revolutionary factions to promote the economic and political integration of peripheral countries on the international stage. While reformists advocate for a more moderate and gradualist approach, revolutionaries believe that only through force can the historical process of Western domination over other countries be reversed.

²⁷ In this context, it is important to emphasize that since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of Vladimir Putin, Russia has actively worked to modernize its armed forces and, in the eyes of its nationals, regain the level of excellence that characterized its military forces during the Soviet regime. As for China, much of its military restructuring is linked to the expansion of its military spending. Even though there are no significant variations in the percentage of GDP spent on these purposes, the pronounced expansion of the country's wealth generation already increases the potential of China's military budget.

With the consolidation of BRICS+ and the efforts of China and Russia to develop an alliance of mutual interests, aspirations, and objectives on the international stage, the issue has become more complex. This eliminates one of the major constraints on economic growth and military expansion in an adverse scenario, which is energy security for projecting force, as can be seen in Graph 5.

Graph 5 – BRICS+: Oil and Natural Gas Production in relation to global production (Mb/d)²⁸ in 2023



Fonte: U.S Energy Information Administration, 2024. Own Elaboration.

Moreover, there is also a willingness among the BRICS to act jointly as a relatively cohesive group, whether through covert co-optation or the identification by member states with the group's geopolitical and economic agendas (Hurrell et al., 2009; Pautasso, 2011; Stuenkel, 2017). This perception of common objectives and values, quantified in the pursuit of power maximization and the strengthening of state sovereignty, is proving to be an element capable of ensuring the bloc's stability and expansion.

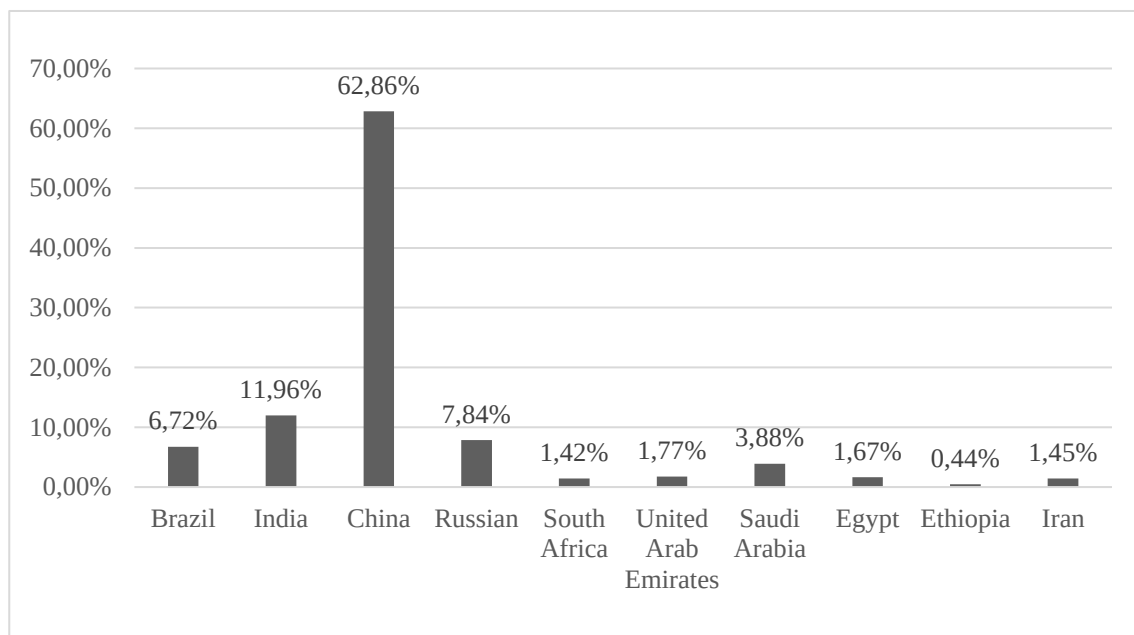
For the aspirations of Russia and China, a declining political power and a rising economic power respectively, the bloc is a fundamental organization in legitimizing their stance as bastions of the defense of developing states (Mearsheimer, 2014). The BRICS is notable for not being under direct Western influence, and for possessing legitimacy and

²⁸ Millions of Barrels Per Day.

the capacity to operate on a global scale, thus becoming a strategic element for asserting their projects on the international stage.

The competence of China²⁹ and, particularly, Russia, in using the BRICS as a catalyst for obtaining support on the international stage is impressive. This element has been intensified by the absence of formal criteria for the entry of new member states into the organization and by the economic and technological weight exerted by both within the bloc.³⁰

Graph 6 – Share of National Economies in Total BRICS GDP in 2023



Fonte: The World Bank, 2024. Own Elaboration.

The reaction of Russia to the expansion of NATO and the European Union in Eastern Europe, as well as the economic rise of China in world trade, make BRICS strategic and a viable platform for containing Western states. Ultimately, even if the bloc proves unable to fully mobilize its members to oppose the West, the organization has

²⁹ Since China also has interests related to the war in Ukraine

³⁰ Despite the relative economic weight of Brazil and India within the bloc, due to their internal political instabilities and their historically pendular policies concerning major powers (essentially Russia, China, and the US), these countries are unable to capitalize on a leadership position in the group, in environments and on topics that are more combative to the foundational interests of the powers on the international stage (Vieira, 2007; Milani et al., 2015). Moreover, even in the unlikely event that these countries gain the ability to exert more influence over the BRICS, their own history of neutrality acts as a counterbalance to the possibility of adopting leadership stances within the bloc that might infringe upon the sovereignty of their peers to any degree (Vieira, 2007; Milani et al., 2015). Therefore, despite these countries having significant economic and consequently political capacities within the BRICS, it is unlikely that they will use them to contest the leadership of the group with Russia or China.

already shown sufficient cohesion to not openly support European and American agendas when juxtaposed with the interests of Moscow and Beijing, as evidenced by Saudi Arabia's stance in the Russo-Ukrainian War. This dynamic cannot be considered from a unilateral perspective, with developing and underdeveloped nations deliberately engaging in adopting these stances (Hurrel et al., 2009; Stuenkel, 2017).

Interestingly, this opposition to the West, unlike the first Cold War, will not be based on the imposition of a political-economic model or a single ideology on a global scale, diverging from any impulse to export a socio-cultural dogma to be disseminated to all nations of the world (Kissinger, 2015). This conflict, which constantly looms over contemporary times, at its core involves the acceptance of local pluralities, which proves to be strategic in avoiding the mistakes made by the US and the USSR in attempts to disseminate socialist and capitalist models during the period 1945-1991.

Thus, the new international dispute will be less damaging in ideological terms but has a greater capacity to cause economic and military harm to the actors involved in this confrontation. Even if the members of BRICS+, as a whole, do not engage militarily in these forthcoming disputes, the group's own capabilities will make it a relevant actor in future international military disputes, as can already be glimpsed in the War in Ukraine.

As much as China is keen to postpone the dispute with the US and maintain the ambiguity of its international impulses (unlike Russia) in order to build up greater capacities for the conflict that is looming in the future, the New Cold War is already underway. Its open outbreak is likely to occur in the Middle East due to geopolitical issues or in the Pacific, result of some Chinese movement in the region (such as in Taiwan), with the BRICS playing a more active role in shaping the new global power structure that will delineate the future of international relations and could culminate in the loss of American hegemony.

Currently, with the new configuration of the economic bloc, it already represents 30% of the world's GDP and 41% of the world's population. In this context, the debate about hegemonic transition in international relations is gaining strength and taking on different contours, based on new pillars: ideological, geopolitical, legal, economic, and military.

In the rhetorical-ideological realm, the conflict will revolve around the growing narrative disputes between developed countries and other members of the international

community, with extensive delegitimization of the parties involved (Brosig, 2019; Hurrel *et al*, 2009; Stuenkel, 2017). Recent aggressions by some countries in the bloc towards others and the implementation of power politics, mainly by Russia and China, apparently have not resulted in a loss of international support. Thus, the New Cold War will be more related to the Global "North-South" than ideological, as Russia and China do not intend to export their political model in the same way as during the First Cold War (Brosig, 2019; Hurrel *et al*, 2009; Stuenkel, 2017; Pautasso, 2011).

In the geopolitical spectrum, the dispute will focus on reclaiming former territories and expanding the area of influence of BRICS member countries, under the leadership of Russia and later China (Stuenkel, 2017; Pautasso, 2017). Moreover, a more proactive stance is expected from these international actors in seeking power for the bloc in the UN Security Council and international financial institutions (Brosig, 2019; Hurrel *et al*, 2009; Stuenkel, 2017; Pautasso, 2011).

In the legal field, in international law, the BRICS would be responsible for progressively relativizing norms considered unjust and replacing the legal basis with one closer to that desired by developing countries, making them more favorable to the impulses of Russia and China, which, due to common interests, would also benefit other bloc members. It is believed that there will be a more direct involvement in the process of delegitimizing international institutions, essential in the strategy of manipulating and co-opting other countries in the global community for their power project.

On the economic side, the New Cold War would present various facets, including competition with Western and global North countries through the construction of an alternative financial system³¹ and the use of a common currency for multilateral trade, to escape the controls and constraints of other nations (Batista Jr, 2023). The economic bias of the New Cold War is also evident in the bloc's use as a means for Russia and China to control the BRICS trade (Stuenkel, 2017; García, 2014).

Finally, the predominance of the bloc's military capacity will be crucial to demonstrate the power of the BRICS and obtain international acquiescence, opening up the possibility of a war outbreak due to the reduced costs of undertaking such an

³¹ In this sense, it is interesting to highlight that with the entry of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the BRICS now include 3 of the 10 most widely used currencies in the international financial system. This has the potential to facilitate the creation, development, and promotion of this alternative financial system due to the significant weight of these countries in the international capital markets.

endeavor³². Moreover, the support or neutrality of the BRICS diminishes the legitimacy of international resistance and facilitates the victory of bloc members if they enter into any conflict. In this sense, the entry of less democratic countries into the bloc and more willing to directly engage in conflicts, with the supply of weapons, technical-military cooperation and economic support, makes the current scenario more complex.

Based on these assumptions, it can be affirmed that a New Cold War is underway, with BRICS+ being crucial at this moment. This phenomenon is happening slowly, more contained in the military sphere than its previous counterpart, but it will cause a profound alteration in the world order, with the bloc attempting to ascend to new positions in international power forums and change the future of international relations.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The article aimed to analyze the changes within BRICS that led to the progressive departure from its foundational principles, as evidenced by recent political decisions and positions of the bloc.

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that there is a clear contradiction between the principles that founded BRICS and the recent joint declarations of these countries, particularly on key concepts of the current world order and the dictates of the international system. The most glaring contradictions to these principles were evident during Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014 and Ukraine in 2022 when member states downplayed the violation of the precepts of non-intervention, pacifism, and respect for international law.

With the outbreak of the Ukraine War, it was observed that BRICS members were unable to restrain Russia, as it managed to exert its influence within the bloc to act in its defense on the international stage. This situation marks a departure from historical individual traditions of the involved countries in not having a complicit stance with international aggressions, besides being induced to take actions in the economic and political realms that often only benefited Russia and, to a lesser extent, China.

This fact marked the onset of the group's departure, which was deepened by the entry of new members into BRICS, namely Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, United Arab

³² Mearsheimer (2014)

Emirates, and Ethiopia, comprised of non-democratic states that disregard many international norms in their global actions. Unlike the original composition, these incoming nations directly supported Russia's invasion.

In light of the above context and the primacy of Russia within the bloc, it is evident that BRICS is solidly moving towards changing its nature of operation in the international arena and promoting a new *modus operandi* to achieve its objectives. Furthermore, it is worth noting that these changes are leading to a greater defiance of the international system by the bloc.

Thus, a "New Cold War" led by BRICS is underway, in which each member has its own interests, whether hidden or not, that have departed from its foundational principles in pursuit of promoting the self-preservation of countries with a more confrontational stance against the West in rhetorical/ideological, geopolitical, legal, economic, and military spheres.

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