

## INTRODUCTION

It seems that not so long ago, BRICS was just beginning to find its mission. I remember how, at a brainstorming session in Moscow in 2008, we, experts from Russia, China, India and Brazil, tried to look into the future, but even the boldest forecasts were limited by modest models of coordination on financial and economic issues. South Africa's participation was not more than a dotted line, and even then, it was skeptical; we could not even think about the expansion of the participants list. "We are like in a Pirandello play, actors in search of an author» said Ambassador Azambuja, the Brazilian delegate".

*The road will be mastered by the going.* The progressive movement of the BRICS already at the initial stage made it possible to include the "Peace and International Security" basket in the spotlight. Everything that *did not separate* the BRICS participants could become a subject for discussions and, gradually, for strengthening rapprochement and mutual understanding.

Today, under the Russian Chairship, BRICS activities cover an impressive range of issues, including even very specialized ones. But economic and security issues remain the most important. And while the economic agenda is more or less obvious, BRICS cooperation in the field of security raises a whole set of thoughts and questions. Where exactly are the positions of the member countries close? Where can they successfully cooperate without harming the positive, consensual climate that has developed within the association over the years? And what, on the contrary, could become a stumbling block? And should such potential stumbling blocks be removed from the agenda in advance, or retouched, or discussed, but in this case, in what format, in order to comply with the main unspoken commandment of BRICS builders: *do no harm?*

With this report, we do not aim to provide a comprehensive answer to these burning questions. Our task is to provide food for thought by summarizing information on the dynamics of the positions of the member states and comparing these positions. And this way, through comparison, at least part of the questions may

receive a clearer and more qualified answer. And the shape of those areas will begin to emerge where the prospects for security cooperation are obvious, and where they can be hardly seen or do not exist at all.

Thus, in reviewing what is existing, we seek to look ahead. This is all the more interesting and productive because we have already taken into account the *new present* of the Group, namely its expanded membership from January 1, 2024. Each BRICS country pursues its own national interests; each has its own level of development. And this is normal. As noted by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov in an exclusive interview for the unique *Russian Security Index* project implemented by PIR Center & MGIMO, "Today, BRICS is seen as one of the pillars of a new, more equitable world order, which is designed to give all countries equal opportunities, to free the states of the Global South and Global East from the role of obedient suppliers of cheap labor and raw materials that the West imposes on them, and to consolidate the right of all nations for preserving their identity, self-determination, independent domestic and foreign policy, and protection of traditional values".

*Unity in diversity* – this would be an appropriate motto for the BRICS. Take, for example, the issues of nuclear weapons and nuclear nonproliferation. BRICS originally included two official nuclear-weapon states – Russia and China; India, an unofficial member of the nuclear club since 1974, ignoring the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT); South Africa, a state that used to have nuclear weapons but, unlike the previous three, voluntarily gave them up and is now at the forefront of disarmaments; and, finally, Brazil, which aspired to nuclear weapons and seems to have subdued these aspirations over the past quarter century. But now BRICS also includes Iran, which, according to our estimates, could obtain these weapons within five years if it made a political decision to do so; as well as the *near-threshold* UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, each of which may have its own (unrelated to the BRICS) incentives to develop nuclear weapons, as well as incentives to harshly condemn the possession of nuclear weapons by others – primarily, but not only, the states of the region.

Or what about another new BRICS member, Egypt, which is not only not a full-fledged party to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), but has not signed the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) at all? Until this year, the "Five" regularly included biological and chemical weapons issues in their final declarations. The answers to these questions remain to be discovered.

It is worth re-reading all the BRICS declarations to see to what extent the new BRICS members can (or cannot) *fit* into the agenda of the Group. We should look at the positions of the countries in the Preparatory Committee for the NPT Review Conference (of course, those who are parties to the Treaty, i.e. all of them, except India) in three baskets at once: from disarmament to non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. It would also be useful to look at the technical capabilities of countries in the field of military and peaceful nuclear energy. Finally, we can analyze how the BRICS countries view nuclear-weapon-free zones in terms of their own objections or agreements.

Fortunately, you won't have to look for all this separately – PIR Center has already considered everything. And not just considered, but extracted the most important things and visualized them. So, everyone can draw their own conclusions.

As Sergey Lavrov noted, BRICS is "a model of genuine multilateral diplomacy". It certainly has its disagreements, but what distinguishes BRICS from other platforms is the ability to build an equal dialog. China and India are peacefully cooperating in the search for a better future. Now there are five new members in BRICS. No doubt there will be new differences (and that is logical, given Iran, the UAE and Saudi Arabia on one side, and Egypt and Ethiopia on the other), but there will always be an opportunity for compromise. No one imposes anything on each other in BRICS, that is why it is popular with other countries. And enlargement is just a new opportunity to strengthen cooperation, where everyone can share their experience and vision.

Today there is no doubt: international security issues are of common interest to the BRICS countries; they can and should become another link and by no means a zone of division. I am sure that interaction within this basket will be the most

intensive. Now the outlines of the future big interaction in a new format are only being drawn. A new global architecture is taking shape here and now; right before our very eyes.

**Vladimir Orlov**

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*Zvenigorod*